

Engebriksen, Ada I.: Exploring Gypsiness. Power, Exchange, and Interdependence in a Transylvanian Village. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. 217 pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-229-2. Price: \$ 75.00

This book is the revised version of a doctoral dissertation written by the Norwegian anthropologist Ada Engebriksen. It is based on fieldwork conducted some ten years ago in an unnamed Transylvanian community bifurcated into a village, inhabited by ethnic Romanian and Hungarian peasants, and a segregated “hamlet” populated by Gypsies or Roma. The author had firsthand exposure to both parts, and this enables her to offer illuminating insights into the lives and thoughts of the members of both – the majority as well as the minority.

The work has descriptive as well as analytical ambitions. On the descriptive level, Engebriksen provides an interesting sketch of the economy, cosmology, politics, kinship, and gender relations of the Gypsies who live in the local settlement – somewhat oddly named “hamlet Roma.” These people belong to the *Vlach* subgroup of Romanian Gypsies, and their competent description is a significant contribution to ethnography. The social structure of these people is characterized by a strong emphasis on male solidarity and equality, and an acephalous leadership pattern qualified only by a traditionally expected (but not always given) obeisance of women to male authority. Their cosmology is, according to Engebriksen, starkly dualistic and based on the separation of contrasting entities, such as male vs. female, pure vs. impure, dead vs. alive, and Roma vs. *Gadje*. Yet, the daily observance of these principles is subject to practical considerations and needs, often triggered by the ever-present necessity to adjust to the larger universe populated by Romanian neighbours. The ethnographic sketch of the hamlet Roma doesn't provide any radically new insights into the workings of *Vlach* society – the author clearly follows, and acknowledges, the template of Michael Stewart's work with Hungarian *Vlachs* – but that doesn't detract from the value of the ethnography itself.

Engebriksen strikes a more innovative note in her exploration of the local economy and of its role in shaping the relations between Roma and *Gadje*. Not unlike most other Gypsies that have been described by anthropologists, the people of Roma shy away from agriculture, preferring scavenging and trade to the labour intensive and backbreaking peasant mode of life. However, since the purchase of the goods and services offered by the Roma depends on the goodwill of the villagers, the former are obliged to “cultivate” networks of *Gadje* patrons who can be counted on as trading partners or simply dispensers of alms. In a nicely presented argument Engebriksen describes the various components of this cultivation of social relations and how this Gypsy counterpart to the peasant mode of production sustains an essentially complementary or symbiotic coexistence between the Roma and their village neighbours. Although asymmetrical, the ties binding the two clusters of residents are of practical as well as symbolic value to both. The peasants use the Gypsies to explore the forbidden realm of magic, but

also to partake of gossip and to gather information about other villagers. The Gypsies use the *Gadje* as providers of the food which they refuse to cultivate themselves, but also as the local guardians of the manifold boundaries that keep the two groups separate and that enable the Roma to enjoy a significant degree of social and cultural autonomy.

Engebriksen indicates that the process of modernization triggered by the 1989 revolution and accelerated by Romania's integration into “Europe” will have far-reaching consequences for the traditional *modus vivendi* that she observed in the 1990s. For example, she claims that the rise of the country's “Gypsy problem” to national and international prominence has made the coexistence of Roma and *Gadje* more problematic as the latter resent the loss of national prestige in the eyes of the normative West Europeans. In the long run, Engebriksen predicts that the expansion of the “Gypsy agenda” from a local to a national issue (witness the proliferation of NGOs, ethnic politicians, and government policies) will result in the erosion of the locally cultivated relations between Roma and *Gadje* and of the cultural superstructure they prop up.

“Exploring Gypsiness” is a valuable book that makes a significant contribution to the discussion of interethnic relations in Romania and beyond. But it also suffers from a few shortcomings that ought to be mentioned. Its origin in a dissertation is disturbing in the opening sections that place too much emphasis on the enumeration of theoretical issues to be tackled and not enough on the people chosen for study. The reader has to wait until page 40 before the setting of the book is properly introduced. And even then, throughout the ethnographic chapters that constitute the core of the work, the degree of detail is not always sufficient to support the author's theoretical aspirations. A particularly glaring omission is the absence of a more nuanced socioeconomic profile of local Roma. The reader learns nothing about internal differentiation; are there no differences in income or the ability to manage resources, giving rise, in turn, to such widely reported institutions as usury and internal exploitation associated therewith? This is an unfortunate gap in the context of Engebriksen's emphasis (following Michael Stewart) on egalitarianism and the ethos of brotherhood as an important pillar of *Romanimo*. Overall, though, this is a valuable book that addresses a multitude of intriguing questions in a competent manner. David Z. Scheffel

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland: Engaging Anthropology. The Case for a Public Presence. Oxford: Berg, 2006. 148 pp. ISBN 978-1-84520-065-9. Price: £ 14.90

Does anthropology really matter beyond the limits of academia? This old question, often answered emphatically in the most diverse kinds of anthropological literature, generally by making a plea for more public engagement, continues to be reasonable and justifiable in a context of frequent political contestations about the social utilities of humanities. Thomas Eriksen, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo and

currently one of the most renowned European anthropologists, asserts that anthropology has much to say for the general public and presents his plea for its wider public presence in this witty and sometimes polemical essay. His starting point is the assessment of anthropology's increasing tendency for cocooning in the English-speaking world since World War II, nourished by frequent professional reluctance to dialogue with noninitiates.

Eriksen is not worried about any specific kind of anthropological engagement as, for example, in minority rights activism, which he explicitly recognizes as one of many subjects which make an important contribution to pulling the discipline out of academic ivory towers. His concern is more about anthropology's presence in public debates about fundamental issues of contemporary life or, in other words, about its positioning as a universal intellectual discipline. His point is that anthropology is too invisible and too silent in public arenas in spite of its evident wealth in knowledge, and this seemingly has to do with its complicated professional identity. Historically, anthropologists needed a long time to construct their "ethnic frontiers," but by doing so created a variety of mechanisms for external and internal exclusions, which have hampered comprehensive and efficient communication of knowledge and ideas outside the inner circles of initiates.

Eriksen emphasizes that there a real public demand for simple and clear answers to complex questions could be identified, and that the general reading public is far from unable to absorb complexity, as long as it is presented through good writing and straightforward and credible argument. In the first chapter, the author presents some "styles of [public] engagement," which have turned out to be successful so far (as defamiliarization, cultural autocritique, essay, and biography, for example), represented by works like Lévi-Strauss's "Tristes Tropiques" or Mead's "Coming of Age in Samoa," but right away in the next chapter he starts his ironic attacks on what could be called "ivory tower anthropology": a set of recipes for cocooning (academic elitism, hyperspecialization on "my group", hiding oneself behind some nebulous references to complexity, antiscientific visions of anthropology, neglecting narrative in favor of analysis, etc., with the last possibly being the most important one). The rest of the book (five chapters) is a mixture of critiques, suggestions, and recommendations about how to make anthropology better than it is in the field of extra-academic communication.

Well selected examples, especially from Scandinavia, help to understand why the book should not be seen as a formula or recipe, but as a kind of stimulus or suggestion. Eriksen's style is very fluent and eloquent, as he has already demonstrated in other books. Special attention is paid to anthropology's complicated relationships with the media, above all what Eriksen calls the fast media (newspapers, radio and TV programs, the Internet) and to alternative forms of anthropological writing. Readers will appreciate that there are neither endnotes nor footnotes. Although politically correct in grammar and concrete concerns (frequently using, for example, feminine

plural instead of masculine), the author does not spare polemics against political correctness in itself, and what he considers the perniciousness of postmodernism for anthropology's public presence.

One could argue that Eriksen's views are very personal in many parts and that his critiques concentrate largely on English-language anthropology, but he justifies this focus by the fact that English has an almost unchallenged hegemony in contemporary anthropology. This tendency is counterbalanced by a number of Scandinavian examples, but it should be complemented that there are other national "styles of anthropology" (citing Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira), which could serve as excellent alternatives to the portrait of current mainstream anthropology painted by Eriksen. One could cite, for example, the interesting case of Brazilian anthropology, where colleagues like Roberto DaMatta reached national audiences with his books about "Brazilianness" or even conquered the top ten best seller list for many weeks, as is the case of the semifictional but appalling "Elite da Tropa" written by anthropologist Luiz Eduardo Soares jointly with the police officers Andre Batista and Rodrigo Pimentel, which deals with everyday police violence.

"Engaging Anthropology" is an outstanding example of engaged anthropology as proposed by the author. It is one of the most agreeable and sympathetic books in anthropology I have read in the last few years, and can be recommended to all colleagues. Peter Schröder

Erny, Pierre : L'idée de "réincarnation" en Afrique Noire. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2007. 151 pp. ISBN 978-2-296-03228-6. Prix : € 14.50

Il ne s'agit point ici de réincarnation au sens propre, mais de croyances en la migration des âmes hors du contexte où le public pseudo-bouddhiste, pseudo-hindou, shinto ou chine-toqué de notre temps a l'habitude de trouver pâture à son interrogation angoissée sur les fins dernières, en construisant un substitut à la résurrection des morts (dans quel état ?). En Afrique, on ne se réincarne pas généralement dans un baobab, une blatte ou un chameau, mais dans un descendant ou dans un collatéral, masculin ou féminin, d'où le triste sort des célibataires sans progéniture !

P. Erny, ce brillant directeur de l'Institut d'Ethnologie de Strasbourg, fondé en 1960 par Dominique Zahan, a laissé la place au professeur Eric Navet, après sa retraite, tout en vivant son éméritat par l'écriture d'une dizaine d'ouvrages, simplement depuis l'an 2000, consacrés par exemple aux "Contes, mythes et mystères", aux chrétiens de l'antiquité et à leurs rêves, à l'ethnologie de la maison, à l'enseignement au Rwanda. Ses terrains du Burkina, du Rwanda, du Congo et du Zaïre de naguère, lui ont assuré une remarquable expérience africaine qu'il a su exploiter, de manière prolifique et non prolix, dans une trentaine de livres. Je dirai volontiers le parallélisme de nos deux vies : d'abord instituteur, puis professeur de philosophie dans le secondaire, avant de l'être dans les secteurs de sciences humaines au sein des universités africaines. Puis carrière dans une université française,