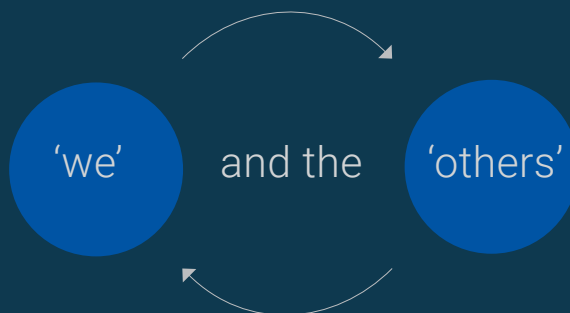




The perception of



1.5

Relations between Roma and Gadjé

Ada I. Engebrigtsen

“Oh yes, you can complain, but what would we Roma do without Gadjé (‘Non-Roma’)?” This was the laconic answer from a Rom Bulibaşa ‘Romani local headman’ to his cousin, who was complaining about the stinginess of Gadjé. Wherever Roma manage to make a living, they do so in often reciprocal dependency with Gadjé. Roma can be said to live in their own world, but this world is inside the Gadjé world, not outside of it.

DIVERSITY

It would be meaningless to talk about the Roma without underlining the great diversity between groups in different countries and regions, and even within countries. The Norwegian Roma who first arrived in the country in the 1860s and have been living there continually since around 1950, have different economic adaptation and relation to Gadjé than, for instance, most of the Roma who live in Transylvanian villages. Depending on past collective experiences and present economic, political and social conditions, each group of Roma adapt in its own unique way to Gadjé society, with a series of common defining traits as outlined in the introduction to Romani culture factsheets. This diversity means that any general information about how the Roma ‘are’ or live should be provided with cautiousness. This text about the relations between Roma and Gadjé is based on the author’s own experience with Romanian and Norwegian Roma, and on experiences published in articles and books. It is not, and should not aspire to be, any exhaustive account about such relations.

EXTERMINATION, PERSECUTION, SLAVERY, DEPORTATION, STIGMATIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION

These concepts describe the basic dramatic and violent relationship between majority rulers and to a certain extent majority populations with Roma throughout history. However, this is not the whole story. The other story is about peaceful coexistence of Romani and non-Romani populations and of exchange, interdependency, and even friendship. Considering these aspects is cru-

cial to prevent the stigmatization of entire majority populations and to avoid seeing Romani history as their destiny or as brought upon themselves (Claps and Vitale 2011). To understand the relationship between Roma and non-Roma one needs to be able to see both sides and to understand how relations evolve over time on the ground in local communities.

SEPARATION, EXCHANGE AND DEPENDENCY

A common trait of Romani communities, as for ethnic groups and nations in general, is the struggle to maintain and develop their cultural heritage. To the Roma this struggle is especially difficult and important as they find themselves in a situation of strong pressure from the majority society and as they have no ‘homeland’ to support them. The cultivation of their own language, social organisation, and cultural practices are thus important to most Romani groups, and it is in this light one may understand why endogamy¹ is considered the ideal marriage. Thus, some degree of segregation from the majority community and a sense of separateness are common traits among Romani groups. However, this is also a trait for most non-Romani communities, and as Roma are stigmatized among the majority populations, it is not easy to determine which group is more responsible for the segregation; the or the Gadjé. Parallel to segregation, most Romani populations subsist by offering services and/or goods in exchange, barter or sales to non-Roma. Thus, most Romani communities are dependent on Gadjé for

1 Marriage between people of same ethnicity

Romani livelihoods: Always dependent on Gadje society

CRAFTS

Romani populations survive on a multitude of livelihoods from wage labour via business and crafts to barter and begging. Crafts performed by different groups throughout history has in many instances given names to different groups such as the Lovara 'horse-breeders and dealers', Kalderara 'coppersmiths', Čuternara 'sewage makers', Čurara 'sieve-makers', Lingurara 'spoonmakers', Kaštale 'woodcarvers', Ursara 'beartrainers', Biznizara 'businesspeople' and many, many more. These names, used by the groups themselves, tie the Romani population to crafts produced for majority populations for centuries in Romania and elsewhere. Their wares were exchanged for money, food or other items.

MUSIC

Music has long been a central trait of Romani communities as well as a central trait of the Roma-Gadje relations. Romani musicians have performed for Gadje audiences in most towns in East and Central Europe up to the present time. They performed at local fairs, weddings, funerals and bap-

tisms. In Hungary 'Gypsy music' inspired several renowned composers, Frantz Liszt being one of them. The music played was often traditional pieces transformed by the special style of Romani performers, where virtuosity, improvisation and melancholy plays important parts. Today what is perceived of as 'Gypsy music' is still perhaps the Roma's most important contribution to understanding and communication between Roma and Gadje lifeworlds.

EXCHANGE, BARTER AND TRADE

Collecting scrap metal and selling it to factories is a widespread economic niche for many Romani populations. All sorts of business ventures may be pursued by different Romani groups, according to the changing availability of goods in the local community. In Romania, in the late 1990s, the groups that sold cheap clothing, the bombakari (after bombak that means 'cotton'), travelled all around the region and sold their goods at local fairs. As tradesmen and women, they had to know their customers well as the trade always involved haggling until they agreed upon a price. In

>

their livelihood and many Gadje communities are dependent on Roma for cheap labour and access to special goods. Romani communities in Europe are often found on the outskirts of villages and towns and their living standards are generally poor, although more affluent, even wealthy segments of Roma exist in most countries. Romani communities are generally based on networks of extended families, often connected through different levels of kinship.

The idea of 'we' the Roma, as culturally different from 'them' the Gadje is strong among most Romani groups and forms a basis for a strong collective identity and an intergroup loyalty that works as an important 'social glue', and at the same time as a mental barrier towards non-Roma.

The most characteristic feature of Romani culture and society is their economic integration into majority society in the sense of dependence on majority society for their livelihood, and their strong sense of cultural specificity and resistance to assimilation. Another common trait of Romani communities is that they are stigmatized and avoided by non-Roma and that individual Roma are discriminated against on a collective basis. In other words, the idea of Roma as 'Other' and inherently different from 'us' is just as strong and in many cases even stronger among Gadje than among the Roma. Stigmatisation and discrimination often coexist with exchange and professional co-operation between Roma and the same Gadje that may look down on them. As was said among ethnic Romanians: *Once a Ţigan (Rom) always a Ţigan*, which translates as 'once a scoundrel, always a scoundrel'. Roma are generally paid much less for their work than non-Roma and are often treated derogatorily. This may be one of the reasons why many

individual Roma and Romani groups avoid regular wage labour when possible. Instead, they prefer doing business, which means that they themselves can more easily determine the conditions. The history of segregation, stigmatization, slavery, deportation, and extermination of Roma has moulded these populations' relationship to Gadje as one of mistrust and even fear. The necessity of sustaining the separation and the necessity of economic exchange run like a double thread through Roma-Gadje relationships. Still, how this relationship is practiced differs strongly between communities.

EXAMPLES OF LIVELIHOODS

The Norwegian Roma who have lived in the country permanently since the 1950s are dependent on business ventures based on door-to-door selling, on different kinds of gardening and groundwork, on property sale and to a certain extent on social welfare. All these activities are dependent on establishing relationships with Gadje, as business partners or as authorities extending social benefits to Romani clients. Such relations are primarily connected to their professional life and less to private friendship. Norwegian Roma consist of about 700 individuals who are heavily exposed to assimilatory actions from government agencies. They are likely to experience a strong need to protect their way of life and community by avoiding close social relations with Gadje.

The Romani community in Transylvania among whom the author of this factsheet provided fieldwork represents one local group of around 200 individuals among a Romani population of at least 600 000 (self-declared as Roma). In the late

<

present-day Norway, Norwegian Roma buy and sell property and cars imported from Sweden or Germany, they also sell carpets on a door-to-door basis. All these ventures require the establishment of a more or less stable and trusting network of clients and relations.

Herding cattle that belongs to non-Roma is a widespread occupation for Romani children as well as for adults in rural areas in Romania, as is 'helping out' during the corn harvest. Among some groups in Transylvania, these services were exchanged for food and among others for money, while this was only one of several economic activities. The exchange of services and goods has already been described for villages in Transylvania, where gifts of clothes from richer parts of Europe are exchanged for food and money.

WAGE LABOUR

In several countries in the former Eastern Europe, such as in Poland, wage-labour is widespread among Roma while in other countries most Roma prefer other livelihoods. Many Romani groups avoid wage labour not because they do not want to work, a common Gadje stereotype, but because they generally are underpaid and badly treated as workers. The ideal activity thus for a Rom is to be a craftsman in his own enterprise or to do business. In spite of this, most Romani groups do engage in wage labour either on a regular basis or as day labourers.

1990s, they subsisted mainly on a range of economic activities; from street begging as the last resort to small business ventures as the most prestigious. The women's main occupation was gathering tours to the nearby town and daily exchange of goods and services with Gadje villagers in their own and neighbouring villages. The men looked after the children when the women were on their exchange and gathering rounds in town, and when possible they worked for local entrepreneurs as day labourers.

What the women scavenged in town they sold or exchanged to villagers. In return, they received money or food. Services could range from weeding and harvesting to fortune telling and exorcism, and the returns were primarily food. Most women had long-standing relationships with some village women. As they often brought their daughters along on these rounds, experience and relations could be handed over from generation to generation. These daily exchanges existed in parallel with a consistent rhetoric from both parties that the other party was not to be trusted (Engebriksen 2007).

When an organisation donated clothes, used or new, to the Roma in this village the clothes entered the exchange chain and intensified it. The Roma sold some of the clothes to villagers right away, while other items served as exchange for food the whole year until the new load of clothes arrived in spring. Romani women were the main dealers and when the clothes were gone, they exchanged food with their exchange partners for the promise to be the first to receive clothes when the lorries arrived next spring. This amplified exchange also amplified the relations between Roma and Romanian villagers.

During the communist era, wage labour in some form was mandatory for Roma, both for men and women, as well as for other groups, but the majority of Roma and many ethnic Romanians were made redundant after the fall of the regimes.

BEGGING AND STEALING

After 2007, when Romania entered the EU, an extensive migration of poor Roma from Romania to the rest of Europe began. Many went seeking work, many went to do whatever they could to make money in order to secure a better life in Romania, while some went to exploit the rich possibilities for petty crime and fraud. Crime is of course an aspect of human life in general. Public and popular attitudes towards Romani beggars are harsh in most countries. At the same time, friendly and emotional relationships have evolved between begging Roma and their 'donors' in cities and villages all over Europe. In Norway, begging Romani women generally have 'regular customers' whom they come to know quite well. Some form lasting relationships where the sending of money to Romania, paying school fees and even building new houses for 'their' Romani family are some of the gifts from Norwegian 'patrons' (Engebriksen 2012). These relationships, although based on very unequal power relations, may develop new understandings of both 'self' and 'other' for both involved parties.

In most countries where Romani populations live, there are large differences between their actual relationships with non-Romani populations: from Roma living in separate Romani villages based on kinship, to Romani nuclear families living in non-Romani neighbourhoods or villages, and still keeping their language and identity as Roma. The terms *Roma Romanizat* 'Romanized Roma, Romanian-like Roma' and *Roma Gadjikane* 'non-Romani Roma, Gadje-like Roma' are quite common among Roma in Romania and often refer to groups living among non-Roma.

Roma in Hungary have been victims of massive assimilation policies that have seriously diminished the number of people that call themselves Roma. One of these groups, the Roma in a Hungarian town studied by the anthropologist Michael Stewart (1997) during the communist era, were all enrolled in wage labour in local factories. Stewart analyses how wage labour, seen as necessary Gadje activities but not as ideal according to Romani values, was paired with activities that were regarded as adhering to Romani values and identity such as gambling, horse-dealing and music. In this way, Stewart argues, the ideal combination of adaptations to Gadje society with the continuation of Romani life was made possible.

During the communist era, wage-labour was mandatory for all (with a few exceptions). After the downfall of communist rule, most Roma together with other Romani groups and poor majority populations were made redundant. Likewise, the new post-communist governments generally discontinued the assimilatory policies. This left huge segments of the populations that had become dependent on wage labour in deep misery and new anti-Romani sentiments and actions developed.

This happened in most post-communist states. In some Czech towns, walls were erected around Romani settlements, with evictions, persecutions and general scapegoating. These actions served to confirm a severe symbolic as well as a physical separation between Roma and Gadje. Such actions probably evoked and reinforced the historical experiences of maltreatment among most Romani groups where Gadje was the perpetrator.

The Italian sociologists and activists Eric Claps and Tommaso Vitale (2011) argue that the feeling of hostility is never an automatic consequence of confrontation between different ethnic groups. Their discussion is concerned with the strong anti-Romani sentiments documented in Italy during the large immigration of Roma from the Balkans. Vitale's argument is that such sentiments are influenced by political and structural features in each society, and he reminds us that relations between Roma and non-Roma have not always been hostile in Italy. On the contrary, the historically peaceful coexistence of Roma and non-Roma all over Italy has been the norm rather than the exception.

RELIGION

In his book about *Ritual Revitalization after Socialism* (2009), the anthropologist László Fosztó examines the religious relationship between ethnic Hungarians and Roma in a village in Transylvania. In this village, dominated by ethnic Hungarians, the overall population irrespective of ethnicity were Calvinist Protestants, here regarded as 'Hungarian religion'. The majority of Roma in this Hungarian village were also Calvinists, while a small percentage was Pentecostals. This stands in contrast to the neighbouring villages dominated by Romanians and Roma of Orthodox Christian faith; regarded as 'Romanian religion'. This is another general trait of Romani populations: they are of the same religious affiliation as the majority population. Thus in Turkey and in Muslim countries in general, the Roma are for the most part Muslims.

Fosztó argues that the villagers were united through belonging to the same denomination, to the Calvinist Church. Furthermore, he argues, their shared religion contributed to

the maintenance of a unified public sphere where ethnicity was downplayed, a sphere dominated by Hungarians. He further notes that Pentecostalism relies more on individual traits and developments of faith and personhood and is less based on cultural or ethnic traits of believers than is the Calvinist Church. Thus, religion may have the force to overcome traditional social and ethnic divisions between Roma and Gadje.

CONCLUSION

The long-lasting, often close relationships between Roma and Gadje communities that have developed through cooperation, exchange and even through conflicts, have had a strong influence on the cultural traits of several Romani groups (see Matras 2015). For instance, most of the Romani speaking groups, whose ancestors lived in Romania for about 6 centuries have adopted and transformed many of the cultural traits of the surrounding Romanian and or Hungarian populations. Such cultural fertilisation can be seen in the marital traditions of Romani groups, in their funeral rites, and not least in language and music (see factsheet about the Gabor of Transylvania). Although cultural transmission generally goes from the most prestigious to the less prestigious group, we may also find several examples of Romani words adopted into majority languages. Examples of such words are, for instance, the Swedish *tjei* 'girl' based on Romani *čei* 'Romani girl', or the Romanian *bafta* from Romani *baxt* 'luck', and many more in different countries. Romani (Vlax) populations generally speak their mother tongue, which is some variant of Romani, as well as at least one of the languages spoken by the groups they live among.

The notion of 'self' and 'other' as pure oppositions is not meaningful for the understanding of the relationship between Roma and Gadje. Seeing oneself as different and accepting one's position as 'other', while simultaneously seeing oneself as superior to Gadje as 'other' means adapting to Gadje circumstances, but transforming them into the Romani way of life. It is perhaps above all this ambivalent process, which forms the basis of the relationships between Roma and Gadje.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Claps, Enrico / Vitale, Tommaso (2011) Not Always the Same Old Story: Spatial Segregation and Feelings of Dislike against Roma and Sinti in Large Cities and Medium-size Towns in Italy. *Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to Romany Studies*, Central European University Press. 228-253.
- Engebriksen, Ada I. (2007) *Exploring Gypsiness. Power, Exchange and Interdependence in a Transylvanian Village*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Fosztó, László (2009) *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism. Community, Personhood, and Conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian Village*. Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- Matras, Yaron (2015) *The Romani Gypsies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Stewart, Michael (1997) *The Time of the Gypsies*. Oxford: Westview Press.