Book Review

Sabrina Tosi Cambini. 2023. *Other Borders: History, Mobility and Migration of Rudari Families between Romania and Italy*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. 248 pp.,
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State interventions in the lives of those often referred to as "Gypsies", as well as ethnographic descriptions of these communities, frequently begin with the fact of settlement. This gestures, as I have argued elsewhere, to a dynamic and complex relationship between sedentarist metaphysics, coercive power, and knowledge.[1] In her book *Other Borders: History, Mobility and Migration of Rudari Families between Romania and Italy*, Sabrina Tosi Cambini navigates this tension with exceptional care and ethnographic sensitivity. She adopts a "pendular", or "moving", gaze (6) to capture the changing mobility patterns of the Romanian Rudari, encompassing the context of voluntary migrations, deportations, forced resettlement, as well as various migration strategies and evictions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The Romanian Rudari are a heterogeneous minority of Romanian-speaking people who are often perceived as "Gypsies" or strategically position themselves as Roma, even though they do not consider themselves as such. The book's starting point and central focus is the gradual eviction of dozens of Rudari Linguari families, some of them related, from the abandoned Luzzi hospital in Florence (as well as other public buildings in Tuscany), where some had lived between 2006 and 2012. Cambini meets them about a year and a half into this occupation. Her ethnographic entry point is her involvement with these families in their struggle against eviction – a relationship that serves as a lens through which to explore who they are, how they arrived at this point, and the possibilities and limitations that the space of the abandoned sanatorium afforded them.

The book is divided into two parts and contains 15 chapters – too many to summarize individually in this short review. The first part examines the history of the group, intertwining genealogical spacetime with external dynamics shaped by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, border formations, deportations, and assimilation policies. The second part explores recent migrations, their meanings, and the ways they have reshaped family organization and notions of belonging.

1 Fotta, Martin. 2019. "Non-Sedentarism, Violence and Politics of Assertive Egalitarianism among Calon Gypsies of Bahia, Brazil." *Ethnos* 84 (5): 806-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1510844.

If I had to pinpoint one central issue that this book tackles, it would be how social orders emerge in relation to territorial spaces and how dimensions of these orders are stabilized over time. Each part revolves around one such phenomenon, gradually shedding light on it before moving on to explore other themes. The aporia of the first part concerns the ethnogenesis of the Rudari Lingurari as a distinct network of "our" families, traced back to an initial generation of "seven sisters". Cambini's careful historical and genealogical reconstruction reveals how this network emerges over time as "composed of spatially localized family groups" (32), which today, unlike in earlier generations, practice endogamous marriages both in Romania and as émigrés in other countries (27).

The key phenomenon examined in the second part is the Luzzi sanatorium as "a portion of the city self-organized by its residents" (112). Cambini discusses how this self-regulation of social life (including weekly meetings and care for the space) shaped the way the Rudari and other immigrants connected with the citizens' "right to housing" movement and engaged with Italian authorities and institutions, including the university. More than this, however, it also related to and enabled shifts in Rudari migration patterns. Distinct from previous periods, when individual men or women migrated (often seasonally) to Italy, Luzzi enabled the imagining of a different migration path involving entire nuclear families and networks. Although the order that characterized the Luzzi sanatorium for a few years eventually collapsed due to the precariousness of the living arrangements, state securitization, evictions, and the arrival of new people, Chapter 10 – one of the book's strongest – demonstrates how this environment and these experiences equipped people with new skills, abilities, and perspectives that would prove central in the months and years to come.

The book reveals that mobility and the associated flexibility have been the main mechanisms through which the Rudari have tackled economic, social, and political hardships over the last century. Kinship is the primary tool organizing this mobility, as it has allowed people "to move in a protected way in a foreign environment" (193) and has helped them navigate and negotiate livelihoods across different national and cultural landscapes. Like many ethnographies before it, the book demonstrates that kinship is not only a source of security and safety but also a set of resources, practices, and values that facilitate movement and help forge reliable histories and meanings.

Other Borders is written with exceptional care, a testament to the deep intimacy that developed between Cambini and the Rudari she has befriended but also to an underlying sense that, in ethnography, feeling and understanding cannot be separated (195). I could sense Cambini's struggle with naming things – her effort not to reify descriptions or turn them into fixed objects – as well as her hesitation about whether to provide the ethnographer's (meta)commentary on her descriptions.

While these issues are probably not entirely resolvable, the solution Cambini adopts sometimes comes at the cost of clarity and places additional demands on the reader. Ethnographic examples often appear without sufficient contextualization, making it difficult to discern who the people are, what their relationships entail, or even why their stories are included. For the same reasons, the inclusion of five short, standalone three-to-five-page ethnographic *morceaux* did not quite work for me, even though some of them – such as Chapter 5 – were insightful.

What disturbed me the most, however, was the use of the terms "we"/ "us"/ "our" throughout the book. While I appreciate different linguistic traditions (and neither the author nor this reviewer are native English speakers), to quote Nicola Jones: "'We' isn't for everyone".[2] Some readers might not share the same perspective as the author and could, in fact, feel excluded from this "we". It is also confusing in combination with Cambini's effort not to present this particular network of Rudari Lingurari as representing all Rudari (let alone all "Gypsies") – partly because they use the first-person plural when distinguishing their network from others. The result is sentences such as this one: "I will try to reflect on the processes that have led to the establishment of the family groups we refer to as *we*…" (5, italics in the original).

Despite these reservations, I have learned a great deal from this ethnography – my copy is filled with marginalia, notes, and marks. *Other Borders* offers a nuanced understanding of Rudari families' transnational experiences and the sociocultural dynamics of their mobility, making it valuable for scholars in migration studies, anthropology, and cultural studies. It is also a significant addition to the growing literature on the Rudari. Moreover, it serves as a meditation on kinship, mobility, and the precarious lives of migrants in urban areas of Western Europe.

2 Nicola Jones. "Why 'We' Isn't for Everyone." *SAPIENS*. 6 April 2020. https://www.sapiens.org/language/problem-with-word-we/ (accessed 8 July 2025).