

the complex battles surrounding the closure of carceral enclosures and the labor and care involved therein” (p. 227).

In the last chapter, “Decarcerating through the Courts: Past, Present, and Future of Institutional and Prison Litigation,” Ben-Moshe traces the various cases that led to the closing of institutions and other places of incarceration, including *Halderman v. Pennhurst State School and Hospital*, *Wyatt v. Stickney*, and *Holt v. Sarver*. Ben-Moshe argues how incremental closing and reform do not challenge the “logic of incarceration” (p. 264). She powerfully argues for “anti-prison movements” by engaging with disability justice to “understand disability as an analytic, a lens from which to view the world and not only through ableist frameworks” (p. 266). Likewise, “abolitionist and fugitive knowledges in the prison arena can inform disability rights activism about the dangers of seeking relief through the state, and the need to grapple with state violence” (p. 266). These coalitional efforts can continue to challenge the logics behind incarceration.

*Decarcerating Disability* is an impressive text that powerfully argues for robust coalitional politics to challenge the logic of incarceration. Entire syllabi and reading groups can be structured around this text as Ben-Moshe opens up much to consider, especially how to effectively demand carceral-free futures, while also valuing disability. I am eager to follow how this book will shape and open up new conversations in disability studies. The archive of sources she brings together is also equally impressive. Ben-Moshe seamlessly utilizes queer of color critique, Black feminist writing, disability studies theories, and critical sociology alongside journalist accounts, legal rulings, and documentary film. This type of approach that moves through and beyond assumed disciplinary boundaries makes this text exciting to teach, impactful to read, and certainly something to share with colleagues and comrades committed to abolition and disability justice.

Syracuse University

MIKE GILL

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***Materializing Difference: Consumer Culture, Politics, and Ethnicity among Romanian Roma* by Péter Berta, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019, 390 pages with 34 color photographs.**

Anthropology has a long and dark history in Romania. Not unsurprisingly, Roma communities have felt this darkness directly. In this way, the anthropology of Roma communities lives in the haunting shadows of the history of race science and eugenics, the legacy of modernity’s violence, and the legitimization of state violence.<sup>1</sup> There have also been numerous debates about the limits of anthropology and about the associated changes needed to undo the violent history of the discipline.<sup>2</sup> However, undoing and unhinging

1. See for example Marius Turda, “The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania,” in *Slavic Review*, 66 (3) 2007, 413–441; and Turda, *Eugenism și antropologie rasială în România 1874–1944 [Eugenics and racial anthropology in Romania 1874–1944]*, Cuvântul, 2008.

2. See perhaps most recently R.C. Jobson, “The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019,” *American Anthropologist*, 122 (2) 2020, 259–271.

this legacy from its epistemological and ontological foundations is a difficult task. It is for these reasons that I felt, paradoxically, degrees of both skepticism and relief when coming across Péter Berta's 2019 book, *Materializing Difference: Consumer Culture, Politics, and Ethnicity among Romanian Roma*.

This book is an interdisciplinary project grounded in thirty-three months of ethnographic fieldwork across two decades, drawing upon the fields of sociology and material culture, consumption, museum, ethnicity and post-socialist studies, and, of course, anthropology. This multi-sited ethnography follows the “social lives” of “prestige objects”—beakers and roofed tankards made of antique silver. It represents a compelling inquiry of the relationship between humans and objects, particularly asking how objects enable the creation and management of human social, economic, and political boundaries, hierarchies, and identifications. The book highlights these prestige objects and their associated prestige economy, with a particular focus on their symbolic power and agency in the social, economic, and political lives of Gabor Roma living in Transylvania, Romania. The book's narrative is sustained by an impressive amount of data, stemming from a variety of methods—biographies of prestige objects, family trees, oral history, archival analysis, interviews, as well as fieldnotes and observations from the author's travels and participation in social gatherings. *Materializing Difference* is organized in three parts, with thirteen chapters grounded in the everyday realities of Gabor Roma communities and other members of the prestige economy, social theory, and in-depth analyses of the prestige economy and its associated cultural practices, making for an engaging, quite captivating read. The clarity of writing, and the use of a diverse array of theorists, ranging from Bourdieu to Appadurai and many others, makes the book both eminently accessible and comprehensible to graduate students with no formal training in anthropology, such as myself.

The main argument put forward by Berta is that the already-invoked relationship between “things” and humans is complex, and fuels the construction, maintenance, and (re)negotiation of social, economic, and political identities, boundaries, and differences. This argument is built around a study of the practices and ideologies that Gabor Roma men assert in the “translocal, ethnicized, informal and gendered” consumer subculture that gravitates around silver beakers and roofed tankards. The beakers and tankards are interpreted as ethnicized and gendered prestige objects, and the prestige economy associated with their consumption is presented as constitutive of “the politics of difference” (chapter 1)—practices, ideologies, and strategies used by Gabor Roma (primarily men) to conceptualize, perform, and embody hierarchies and boundaries. Such performances of social hierarchies entail prestige consumption and ownership of prestige objects, marriage politics, and participation in an “ethics of sociability” (chapter 1) that enforces particular cultural norms. Additionally, these prestige objects energize the construction and performances of ethnic identity and belonging, as well as family and patrilineal identity and history. Thus, many themes are explored in the book, including consumer culture and prestige consumption, trade and value systems in prestige economies, alongside ethnicity and ethnic identity formation, and the construction and performance of social differences and hierarchies.

The book unfolds in three parts. The first part sketches aspects of prestige consumption, politics, and the ethics of sociability. It dissects the competition for power and honor in the “symbolic arenas of politics” (chapter 1), but also the practices and ideologies involved in the prestige economy and the consumption of beakers and tankards. Crucially, the prestige objects and their desired characteristics in the Gabor value system are described as well, considering both “symbolic and material patina” (chapter 4): the objects are evaluated through their legacy of elite ownership and through their material properties such as decorations, size, material, and craft. Chapter three in particular captivated my attention, as it described the decontextualization, de-aestheticization, and de-historicization of the objects once they enter the Gabor prestige economy and value system.

Part Two outlines the trade of prestige objects between Gabor and Cărbhar Roma. It tracks the “social life” of these objects not only among Gabor Roma, but also among Cărbhar Roma. It discusses how members of these communities conceptualize authenticity and each other, accounting for stereotypes and moral criticism. The last part, Part Three, reveals a “bigger picture”—theoretical and methodological considerations, but also Romania’s post-1989 transition to capitalism and its impact on this consumer subculture. Chapters 11 and 12 describe the biographies of a beaker and tankard, respectively, in a captivating way, illustrating the anthropology of things-in-motion as an approach to studying material culture. Berta argues that the biographies and agency of things-in-motion are pivotal in understanding the socio-political and cultural dynamics surrounding the objects, and in better comprehending the relationship between objects and subjects. The conclusion of the monograph is a reflection on the transformations of Romania since 1989 from the perspective of this prestige economy. Berta claims that a new prestige goods economy and set of consumer preferences has developed among younger Gabor Roma. The new preference for “postsocialist prestige goods” and the new patterns of consumption compete with the “traditional, patina-based” prestige economy, creating intergenerational tensions regarding value systems and their associated consumption practices.

To someone like me, who is neither a scholar of material culture nor an anthropologist, the book’s main strengths and contributions lie in its example of how to achieve ethical and respectful representation throughout the research process. These ethics and politics of representation are reflected in the book’s epistemology, ontology, and methodology, but also in the writing and dissemination processes, as experienced by the reader. By *not* focusing on identity, but on forms of identification and communities of practice, Berta achieves a fluid and dynamic representation of his interlocutors. He does not present identity as essentialized, easily captured, known, and represented, but instead as shifting, (re)constructed, and (re)negotiated. Thus, he does not homogenize or essentialize Romani communities across Romania, making space for diversity, individuality, conflict, and tension, and, most importantly, complexity. These politics of representation enable Berta’s book to defy the often commodified harmful stereotypes and essentialist representations of Romani people as lacking agency, both in the academy and in popular media and culture. This is a valuable example for non-Roma scholars in Romani Studies, and anyone working across difference.

In addition, in an ever-accelerating academy that demands quantity over quality, Berta shows us how expansive fieldwork can be done, highlighting the promise of research based on a two-decade-long relationship of respect, friendship, and a shared humanity. The ethnographic material is rich, deeply thick in its description, striving ceaselessly to comprehend the logics, ideologies, and cultural practices of Gabor consumer subcultures. Importantly, it thus avoids caricaturizing the people involved in the prestige economy. The ethics and politics of representation and the benefits of long-term engagement become apparent in a note in which Berta mentions analyzing recordings of social gatherings with his Gabor hosts (Notes, p. 314). This was only one example of the epistemic humility he embraced; his voice did not stand in for his interlocutors', but instead represented the ethnographic encounter in an ethical form. Moreover, the long-term ethnographic engagement also allowed Berta to capture the 1990s transition period and the growth of capitalism in the Romanian landscape. Tracking changes brought about by capitalism in the prestige economy offers an insight into a key moment in Romanian history and its associated cultural shifts—what Mignolo might term the Rewesternization of Romania.<sup>3</sup> This prompted introspection; it made me wonder what we might have been losing—or, to put it differently, changing—about ourselves as Romanians by aspiring to, and engaging in, the consumption practices of the West. As one of Berta's collaborators remarked, “this *luxo* [luxury = the set of expensive post-socialist prestige goods] is consuming us” (p.310).

Another related contribution of this book is its approach to anthropology itself. The ethnography of things-in-motion—which Berta argues should be termed a “multi-sited commodity ethnography” (Chapter 11)—troubles anthropology's orientalizing and exoticizing gaze, by focusing not on humans, but on objects and how they affect human lives. Following motion, fluidity, and dynamics, this approach defies any attempt to represent humans statically, or as “frozen in time.” On the other hand, I also felt uneasy, even a little voyeuristic at times, when reading the book; for example, I was troubled by the use and inclusion of particular pictures. Such unease has raised a series of questions about the state of anthropology, but also academic practice and representation more generally: *To what extent has anthropology surpassed or resolved its historical burdens? What entitles us as writers and readers to an insight into people's private and public experiences? What are we doing when we write the lives of others on paper? What happens when groups and individuals are singled out as “interesting” or “special”? What are the detours we take to engage in reflexivity and to resolve the ethical dilemmas our research poses?* For example, one characteristic of this consumer subculture was its subversive nature, challenging the dictatorial pre-1989 Romanian state, through its informality and invisibility to the white institutional gaze. What effects does this exposure and representation in an academic space have on the consumer culture itself and on the participants in this community of practice? The anthropology of things-in-motion may temporarily eschew such questions through its apparently inanimate focus. Yet, these are questions that concern reflexivity

3. Walter Mignolo, “The Roads to the Future: Rewesternization, Dewesternization, and Decoloniality,” in W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011, 27–74.

and representation that social scientists in general may ask of themselves and of our own “communities of practice.”

Considering the book in its totality, two missing pieces of the picture emerged. Firstly, as has already been noted by other reviewers, the role and perspective of women in this prestige economy was not represented and elaborated upon enough.<sup>4</sup> Berta makes it clear that the prestige economy is a male space, yet the politics of difference associated with the economy also involve women, for example in marriage politics. As a young woman myself, I could not help but wonder what the young women and girls felt and thought when their families would pay a “shame payment” (p. 45) when they were married because they were considered to be of lower social rank. Secondly, I would have liked to read more about the practices of recontextualization and re-historicization of the prestige objects when Gabor owners buy them from the European antiquities market. The Gabor men who trade and own the beakers and tankards are little interested in their historical provenience, or in the European antiquities market’s valuation of them; they create their own aesthetics, value system, and histories of such objects. This could be interpreted as a response to the imperial history of Transylvania, a type of epistemic resistance and subversion. Indeed, most of the prestige objects were historically owned by Hungarian or Saxon minorities in Transylvania, who were the “preferred” populations in the Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian Empires. More contextualization of how these objects first appealed to Gabor Roma and why there was such erasure of the non-Roma ownership would be a welcome addition.

In conclusion, Berta’s book sets a high standard for ethnographic fieldwork, showing us the political, methodological, and epistemological grounds that make an anthropology of things-in-motion compelling. He explores the relationship between humans and objects in an engaging way, making his reader reflect on the rich diversity of the themes and sub-themes in the process. This book is very clear for non-specialist audiences, written in ways that provide a window of understanding for outsiders to the field and for students seeking new knowledge on cultural theory, ethnographic methodology, and the state of the field. I recommend the book to anthropologists, scholars of material culture and of practices of consumption, scholars of Romani Studies, and graduate and undergraduate students who wish to deepen their knowledge on material cultures and their associated cultural practices. Ultimately, this book highlights how the personal and the everyday are embedded in power relations in highly nuanced ways, through the lens of “things” in motion.

University of Cambridge (UK)

REVIEW BY SIMINA DRAGOS

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4. A.I. Engebriksen, “Materializing Difference: Consumer Culture, Politics, and Ethnicity among Romanian Roma,” *Ethnos*, 0(0) 2020, 1–3; A. Helbig, “Materializing Difference: Consumer Culture, Politics, and Ethnicity among Romanian Roma by Péter Berta,” *Slavic Review*, 79(2) 2020, 418–420; and A. Schneeweis, “Review: Objects, Status, and Identity: A Review of Péter Berta’s Materializing Difference: Consumer Culture, Politics, and Ethnicity among Romanian Roma.” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, 9(4) 2020, 121–124.