

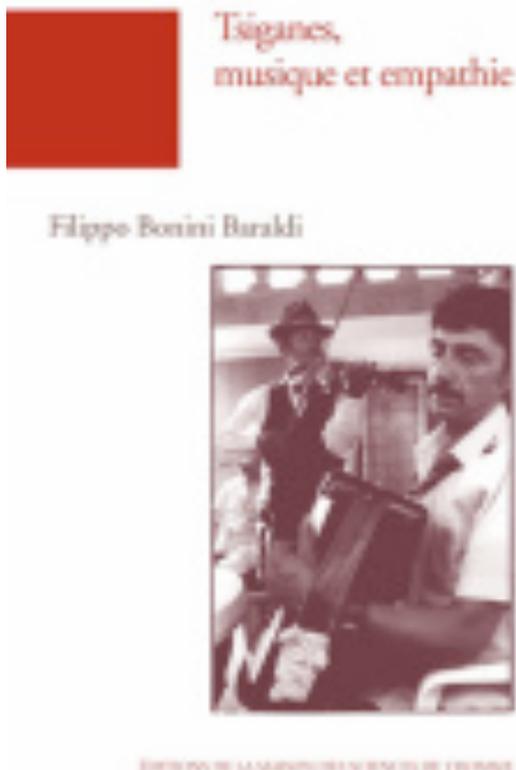
Book Review:

Tsiganes, musique et empathie

Filippo Bonini Baraldi (2013)

Paris: Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme. 357 p. ISBN : 2-7351-1521-6

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This book by Filippo Bonini on musical emotion is quite a new feature in the landscape of anthropology publishing, not so much because of its subject matter as the intensity and depth with which this is treated. With music as a starting point the book sets out to tackle the great anthropological problem of the role of affectivity in human relations, and above all of how this phenomenon can be described and analysed. It is difficult to define, difficult to circumscribe, difficult to approach even, but fundamental to a discipline like anthropology in general and ethnomusicology in particular, which cannot afford to leave it solely to psychology. Indeed, affectivity counts as one of the most fundamental of social and cultural relations and anthropology should be able to explain this phenomenon.

Accordingly, this volume throws itself without hesitation into the task of unravelling the Gordian knot of the anthropology of affections, through a broad, dense ethnographic study of a

particularly intriguing subject: music and musical life among the Gypsies (*tsiganes* in French) of Transylvania (Romania), which the film maker Emir Kusturica has also superbly depicted on screen. Filippo Bonini has certainly not skimped on time devoted to field work – on the contrary, he has spent several years living with the Gypsy musicians, as should be the case when in pursuit of ethnographic excellence. He has "been there" all this time in the only way possible: for the pleasure of being there, living and playing music with them until possibly even forgetting the original purpose for

doing so. The book deals not only with how the music is felt but also how it is shared and treated by the musicians themselves to obtain the emotion they hope to awake in their audience. The author could not be better prepared for this, as he is a musician, a sound engineer, an ethnomusicologist and an anthropology PhD thanks to an earlier version of this book that served as his thesis. In fact, as he himself recounts in the introduction, what leads him to anthropology is a constant search for answers to questions on the relationship between music and emotion that engineering, music theory or learning to play an instrument in a conservatory cannot claim to answer. The book also examines the way in which the affective dimension of music production makes Gypsy identity, not only by the Gypsies themselves but also by their image in the eyes of non-Gypsies – something inevitable whenever we talk about identity, which is always being constructed through a dialogue between the self, others, and those further afield.

Bonini's book seeks to respond simultaneously to two enigmas: on the one hand the enigma of the origins of this people and their peculiar accommodation to present-day European societies; and on the other the enigma of affectivity in the social sciences field, given the methodological tools at its disposal. The solution to both enigmas – and herein lies the splendid audacity of the work – is arrived at by tying them together: the Gypsies are an "affective community" or more specifically an "affective minority", an analytic concept that promises to play a key role in anthropology. In other words, and at the risk of oversimplifying this complex, wide-ranging work, the explanation for the peculiar ways in which the Romanian Gypsies relate to each other and to the society around them lies in the morphology of the affective configurations they have established. To take this idea to its ultimate consequences, Bonini's book, as its title indicates, has to address the relational aspect of affectivity from the very start, and base this on empathy: humans' ability, or even our need, to feel we are able to share an emotion. Empathy is undoubtedly a need, as it is the only possible way out of the solipsism of the subject, social life not being achieved by knowing codes and roles but by the affective attachment that these can generate: something that may be necessary in order stay sane. Bonini places us right from the start, as I said, in this relational dimension made up of our affections and firmly puts aside the intimate, psychologising explanations according to which emotion is an internal experience, even an interoceptive one given that it does not exist without its physiological correlate. Nevertheless he does take an interest in the physiology of the emotions, in the tears that the music invokes in musicians and audience at social events like weddings and funerals, for example. But the physiological expressions of affections, in the way the author includes them in his analysis, do not make up the substrate of a naturalistic determinism subscribed to by a large sector of a biologising anthropology of the emotions, but rather an empirical anchor point for an analysis of the invisible lines that the affections draw on the social landscape. This is what constitutes the major contribution of this work: the affections are not the expression of social ties – they themselves are the social ties.

The book *Tsiganes, musique et empathie* has been published in French in a collection (Chemins de l'ethnologie, CNRS-MSH) regarded as being the most prestigious in the field of social anthropology. This means it has passed through a very detailed quality control process. Just one thing in my opinion could perhaps be criticised. In certain subchapters of the book theories are explained (for example, regarding the notion of "agency", p. 284-290) in a way that is very didactic but possibly wearisome for readers who are not anthropologists and too schoolish for specialist readers, who are no doubt already familiar with Alfred Gell's famous proposal. In

conclusion I would say that the book *Tsiganes, musique et empathie* is of interest in anthropology and ethnomusicology, both for academics and for students, but also to a wider public, given the popularity of Gypsy music.

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