

RECENSIONI

Sabrina TOSI CAMBINI | *Altri confini. Storia, mobilità e migrazioni di una rete di famiglie rudari tra la Romania e l'Italia*, Mimesis, Milano, 2021, pp. 274.

Until recently an exotic subject, the study of Rudari populations has become in the last two decades a field of rigorous and accurate academic research. They originated from the current territory of Romania, but are present in all Southeast European states, as in adjacent countries such as Ukraine and Hungary, or Greece. Recently, after 1990, and more intensely after 2007, the year of the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the European Union, the Rudari participate massively in labor migration in the countries of Western and Southern Europe. Many of the controversies surrounding the Rudari regard their origins. Included in the category of Roma populations, the Rudari actually reject this categorization. And indeed, the most plausible and best-argued hypothesis in academic works is that their area of origin is the southwest province of Transylvania in Romania, an area where mining dates back to Roman times.

This long introduction outlines the theme of Sabrina Tosi Cambini's book for a non specialist reader. The choice of this subject was connected to the long experience of Tosi Cambini among the Rudari. She had her first contacts with some Rudari who emigrated to Italy in the early 2000s, but a 2008 internship at the former Luzzi hospital near Florence, abandoned in 2006, prompted her to take the decisive step. It is worth mentioning that Tosi Cambini's engagement was rooted not only to her academic scholarship, but to two social organizations in the Tuscany region, Fondazione Giovanni Michelucci and Movimento di Lotta per la Casa. At Luzzi, she met several Rudari from the southeastern area of Romania, Constanța and Călărași counties, who she befriended in some preliminary interviews. The following year was the first trip to Romania to get a better knowledge of the Rudari she had met in Luzzi. Then some long anthropological fieldwork followed: between 2009 and 2016 Tosi Cambini



lived every year from a few weeks to several months with Rudari families in some villages in Constanța and Călărași, but also on the other side of the Danube, in Bulgaria, near the town of Silistra, where these Rudari had relatives (pp. 11-20). Tosi Cambini's field experience is fascinating, even for anthropologists and ethnographers in Romania and Bulgaria, who rarely get involved in this kind of multi-sited fieldwork.

The structure of the volume is provided by two consistent parts that differ in size, but each with a meaningful place. In the first part, called "Storia e mobilità", Tosi Cambini addresses the stories of several families of Rudari from the villages in the two counties in Romania mentioned above (for reasons of research ethics, Tosi Cambini changed the names of these villages so that they could not be identified). Although shorter (pp. 25-110), this first part is the most interesting, in my opinion, in the context of the existing academic bibliography on the Rudari. The second section of this part, "Spazio genealogico, storico, geografico" (pp. 43-90), is the most significant, in which Tosi Cambini reconstructs, through oral history data the mobility networks of the families of Rudari for a long period starting from 1880, with the withdrawal of the Ottoman administration from Bulgaria and Romania, and the partition of Dobrogea, a region bordering the Black Sea to the west, until the fall of socialist regimes in 1990. There was natural cross-border mobility on both sides of the Danube, which began before 1880, but intensified immediately after this date (as also a natural mobility but within the borders of the same state) in the interwar period when both parts of Dobrogea were included in Romania. However, there was also a forced migration in dramatic contexts, during the Second World War, when Dobrogea was again divided between Romania and Bulgaria, much of the pro-Romanian population, colonized in the 1920s being forced to move back to Romania. The "Bulgarian" Rudari, for the most part, were included in this wave, but many of them were deported by the authoritarian pro-German regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu, along with the Jews and the Roma population. Tosi Cambini uses an interesting methodology for collecting oral history data, namely the reconstruction of genealogical and matrimonial networks as well as the criteria for establishing housing for newlyweds, bringing to light the relations between Lingurari, a particular name given to the Rudari in Romania and Rudari who migrated to Bulgaria.

The second part of the volume follows the migratory trajectory after 1990 of the people from the villages studied in the two counties in Romania. Although these are few villages, the migration area covered by this people is impressive: from the north to the south of Europe (Norway and Great Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Serbia, Greece and Turkey, p. 118).

The migration of the Rudari has peculiarities that Tosi Cambini brings to the fore and approaches analytically (pp. 124-5). Even if the Rudari were also part of the large migration flows from Romania, which took between 4 and 5 million Romanian citizens abroad, they differ in specific practices. First of all, over time, they are building their own networks between Romania and the diaspora, based mainly on family ties. Then, a completely new practice is represented by the migration of the whole family nucleus. The latter practice of the migration of Rudari led to housing issues, through which for the first time Tosi Cambini faced the subject of her research: the former Luzzi hospital, that was the place of residence for most of the Rudari from the Romanian villages studied by Tosi Cambini. In fact, she also calls the former Luzzi hospital *un sat rudar* – a Rudar village (p. 134), even if along with the Rudari in 2009 other people of different ethnicities and citizens lived there (out of the 334 residents, 239 were of Romanian citizenship, Rudari, the rest being from Morocco, Tunisia, an extended Roma family of 26 people from Montenegro and 9 Italians, p. 144). Moreover, the former Luzzi hospital becomes a kind of “home” for the Rudari by restoring family networks as well as a subjectivity reflected in the attachment and responsibility of the *Rudari* towards this building (pp. 135, 139-140 with quotations from Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault). A lot of Luzzi’s Rudari arrived here after a first period of painful migration and remained here calling for their wives and children; others, chose to move away, such as the cases of those who went to Stratford upon Avon in Britain, following a strategy, including the financial one, that Tosi Cambini recounts in detail (pp. 130-133). However, the Luzzi community was perceived by the authorities and presented in the Italian media as a source of crime, so that from 2010 to 2012 all resident families are evacuated. Tosi Cambini recounts this situation in detail, emphasizing the residents’ attempts to reject any accusations and remain in Luzzi. Many of the Rudari worked without documents, in the informal economy, as masons, nurses, janitors, couriers, etc. (pp. 177 ff). Most of the Rudari returned to Romania after the evacuation from Luzzi and started to build a new *acasă* (a new home), the title of the last section of the volume (pp. 203-236). Tosi Cambini is also accurately following this last part, based on the fieldwork done in Romania after 2012. It is about restoring the same subjectivity and attachment to living in a familiar territory (Arjun Appadurai is quoted), which recovers long family histories and kinship networks addressed in the first part of the volume.

Sabrina Tosi Cambini’s book is a fascinating journey. The author pays close attention to theoretical framework concepts, such as subjectivity, housing, migration, family network, the slum, that are connected to an

appropriate bibliography. The great value of the book, however, is the field material brought into the foreground. In fact, Tosi Cambini seems conscious of this and underlines this aspect by interspersing between the sections of analysis and interpretation long ethnographic portraits, “*morceaux ethnografici*”, as she calls them, full of color and substance.

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