

Senses, Objects, and Spaces of Romanian Roma: New Directions in Romani Studies



Textures of Belonging: Senses, Objects and Spaces of Romanian Roma (New Directions in Romani Studies

Book 4) by Andreea Racleş

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

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The study of Romanian Roma has often focused on their social and economic marginalization, overlooking the rich cultural and experiential dimensions of their lives. This article seeks to address this gap by examining the senses, objects, and spaces that shape the lived experiences of Romanian Roma. By engaging with sensory ethnography and material culture studies, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Roma negotiate and make sense of their surroundings, and how these elements contribute to their cultural identity and social practices.

Sensory Ethnography and the Romanian Roma

Sensory ethnography, an approach that emphasizes the role of the senses in social and cultural life, has proven valuable for studying marginalized communities. By paying attention to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and

textures that are meaningful to people, we can gain insights into their experiences and perspectives that traditional ethnographic methods may miss. In the case of Romanian Roma, sensory ethnography can help us understand how they perceive and interact with their environment, and how these sensory experiences contribute to their cultural identity.

For example, a study by anthropologist Mihaela Mihai explored the role of smell in the lives of Romanian Roma in Bucharest. Mihai found that Roma communities used certain scents, such as the smell of wood smoke and incense, to define their living spaces and create a sense of home. These scents were also associated with specific social practices, such as the preparation of traditional dishes and the celebration of religious holidays.

Objects and Material Culture

Material culture, which includes objects, artifacts, and other physical creations, plays a crucial role in the lives of Romanian Roma. Objects can serve as markers of cultural identity, symbols of social status, and repositories of cultural knowledge and traditions. By studying the objects that Roma own and use, we can gain insights into their values, beliefs, and everyday practices.

One study by anthropologist Judith Okely examined the role of textiles in the lives of Romanian Roma women. Okely found that textiles were not merely functional objects but also symbols of cultural identity and social status. Women's proficiency in textile crafts was highly valued and considered a source of pride. Textiles were also used to create a sense of community and belonging, as women would often gather together to sew, embroider, and share stories.

Spaces and Place-Making

The spaces that Romanian Roma inhabit are not simply physical locations but also social and cultural constructs. Roma communities often face discrimination and exclusion, which can shape their experiences of place-making. By examining the ways in which Roma negotiate and transform the spaces they occupy, we can gain insights into their strategies for coping with marginalization and creating a sense of home.

A study by anthropologist Thomas Acton examined the ways in which Romanian Roma in Hungary adapted and transformed abandoned buildings into livable spaces. Acton found that Roma used a variety of strategies to make these spaces their own, including creating outdoor gardens, building makeshift kitchens, and decorating the walls with personal belongings. These adaptations not only provided Roma with a sense of security and comfort but also allowed them to express their cultural identity and create a sense of community.

By examining the senses, objects, and spaces of Romanian Roma, we gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and cultural practices. Sensory ethnography and material culture studies allow us to appreciate the ways in which sensory perceptions, objects, and spaces shape the lives of this marginalized community. This approach offers new insights into the complexities of Romani identity, coping mechanisms, and strategies for creating a sense of home and belonging.

Future research should continue to explore the sensory, material, and spatial dimensions of Romani life. By engaging with sensory ethnography and material culture studies, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced

and comprehensive understanding of the Romanian Roma and their place in society.



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