

Life and death of a French shantytown.

An anthropology of power.

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Introduction

In August 2010, just as French President Sarkozy had launched a national campaign for the forced repatriation of Romanian Roma (Sallé 2011), the European Roma Rights Center, a Budapest-based NGO, asked me to accompany Costel, a Romanian monitor, on his visit to the shantytowns in the northern Paris suburbs. Together we rushed through a harrowing tour of sites to collect documents and narratives in support of the complaint the ERRC was lodging with the European Commission. At the end of this all-day marathon, we ended up at the Samaritain shantytown in La Courneuve where, upon seeing our defeated expressions, Mihai, the headman, received us with a warm welcome. We sat down under an improvised pergola, appreciatively sipping coffee and sodas, and chatted about this and that with the residents, everyone taking care to avoid the subject of the ongoing evictions.

Such was my first impression of the Samaritain, a lull in a storm of political violence. In the five years that followed, my impression did not waver, and I regularly returned with a certain pleasure to the Samaritain, first in the course of my doctoral work in public law and my job at the European Roma Rights Center, and then, from 2013, as postdoctoral researcher in anthropology with the MigRom project. It was not until the summer of 2015, when the Samaritain was about to be razed, that I realised the exceptional nature of the welcome I had received, the rare stability of this shantytown, both because of its six years of existence and because of the little society that lived there. It was a highly civilised place, whose peaceful, friendly character had struck me on my first visit. The enduring welcome provided optimal conditions for an extended ethnographic field study of the site's inhabitants.

The specificity and the strength of the MigRom project is to have planned for the recruitment of Romani research assistants. In 2013 we hired Florin Nita and Petre Petcut. Together we carried out some sixty biographical interviews in the Romani language in three

different shantytowns. In the Samaritain, we recorded and transcribed 15 interviews, which provided us with precise, comparable details on the interviewees' social and migratory paths. This semi-directive method nevertheless was limited by the formalism required by its implementation. The act of making an appointment, of taking notes or turning on a recorder made our informants feel they needed to watch what they said. This limitation, often pointed out in the literature (Burawoy 2003), of questionnaire-based studies makes them, for Judith Okely:

inappropriate for Gypsies as a non-literate group, used to deviating from outsiders' interrogations. Question asking was associated with interfering officials such as the police, health inspectors and local councillors (Okely 2008: 56).

We would temper this criticism: the questionnaires were very useful for gathering factual information (e.g. date of arrival in France, parents' occupation). They provided a solid foundation that could be enriched by floating observation (Pétonnet 2002) made possible by a deeper anthropological relation with various people on the site, and in particular Mihai, the headman.

This particular relationship was based on the participation of my colleague, Florin, a thirty-something Rom. Although he was a long-time resident of Paris shantytowns, Florin had no relations with the inhabitants of the Samaritain before I introduced him. Our informal discussions with Mihai rapidly turned into three-way conversations in Romani between Mihai, Florin and myself. More accurately, Florin and Mihai talked about anything and everything, and I would sometimes try to break in for an explanation of a point or a word I did not understand. Mihai and Florin have much in common: they are both Romanian Roma who have experienced migration to France and shantytown life. Nevertheless, they would never have known each other and related as equals without the research programme. Mihai was an elder, while Florin was still regarded by his peers as a young man. Florin was a Roma, but he was employed by a French institution whose goals remained hazy for Mihai. And above all, they did not come from the same region: Florin was from Dobrugia, while Mihai, like the other residents of the shantytown, was from northwestern Romania. The relationship between Mihai and Florin was, so to speak, halfway between a relationship between Roma and the classic relationship between anthropologist and informant. Our discussions often involved

what Barth (1969) described as a play on the definition of ethnic borders. The common regional Romanian stereotypes separating the more “civilised”, more “central-European” Transylvania from the old, more “Eastern”, more “Balkan” kingdoms (Botea 2012) were brought into play by Florin and Mihai to distinguish themselves:

Mihai (one day when he was angry): You see, in the south you are always boasting but you aren't serious; us, we're like the Germans, we hold back.

Florin: You, you're more Hungarian, not true Romanians, and true Roma are Romanian...

This distinction makes use of knowledge about Romania but is encompassed in a “*jeu romanes*” (Williams 1988: 381), playing on distancing but also convergence. For instance, in the course of their conversation, Mihai and Florin found a vague family tie between Mihai's son-in-law and Florin, discussed the meaning of a word or punctuated their conversation with “you're a Rom, you understand that too”. Both also wanted to get closer while pushing me away by reassigning me to my role as an outside observer. More broadly than in our relations, this interplay between linguistic and social distancing and convergence guided many of the relationships observed in the Samaritain. The importance of the “*jeu romanes*” underscores the importance of the multi-ethnic (or rather multi-Rom) composition of this shantytown. Usually, studies of Romani migrants in France (Olivera 2011) tend to show that the French shantytown is the imperfect continuation of a village community in Romania. The Samaritain was an exception. The families came from different villages scattered around the historical regions of Crisana and Banat. From the standpoint of identity, most of the families considered themselves to belong to different sub-ethnic groups – *ratse* - such as Caldarari, Lingurari, Ciurari, or Romungri. Affirming their belonging to different *ratse* was a way for these particular different “Roma to represent themselves among the other Roma even as they assert themselves as a closed entity among these perpetually ill-defined groups known as the ‘Roma’” (Olivera 2007: 117). In addition to the Roma, the shantytown included a few families of ethnic Romanians and Hungarians who “shared with the Roma the fact of being seen as gypsies”, as was explained me Gabor, an ethnic Hungarian living on the platz.

For the members of this mixed, temporary-housing community, the Samaritain shantytown was an enclosed, shared space where they could deepen their relationships over

six years. The shantytown space inhabited by Romanian and Bulgarian Roma has been a recurrent configuration in France for the last twenty years. The Roma call it a “Platz”, adopting a term from the first wave of migration, in 1990, in the German Federal Republic. Historically, the German term designated a social space, a city or town square, and by extension the surrounding neighbourhood. In 1930s Paris, the term designated, for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, the predominantly Ashkenazi quarter of the Marais district in Paris (Green 1985). Like the Jewish “pletzl”, the Romani Platz is seen and experienced as a world (Williams 1994) in itself. Nestled within the city, it provides, at first glance despite opposition from the government authorities, newly arrived migrants to Paris with socially cohesive housing (Green 1985). Based on the cohabitation practices there, we might argue that the Platz worked as a limited territory in which the social, economic and religious networks of the Romanian Roma families living there overlapped and merged. In the Samaritain Platz, at the centre of these ties stood the figure of Mihai, who managed to retain his position at the head of the shantytown. How was the original governance of this site created, and, especially, maintained? Mihai’s personal path was not that of a traditional Romani headman, “bulibash” or “baro rom” (Piasere 2005) or “shato” (Lee 1997), as described in the literature, whose power is based on his family’s prestige and strength, Rather, it was that of an outsider from a discredited family that had managed to take advantage of the disruptions occasioned by history and migration. We could draw a parallel here with another go-between: the “development broker” described by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, who, too, “is a marginalized dominated actor in the local political arena. He exercises his brokerage in the service of an internal ascension strategy” (Olivier de Sardan 1995:530). Mihai drew his legitimacy from his material management of everyday life in the shantytown: its sanitation, security and urbanism.

Mihai’s governance at the local level, rooted in contemporary France, presented a symmetrical challenge to city government, which thus appeared to be deprived of its principal functions, leaving it only with the power to destroy. In point of fact, however, above and beyond this dichotomy, the boundary between the headman’s power and the French political system was highly porous and could be breached via numerous intermediaries. But just how are these ways of practicing power related? Unlike non-Western societies, where informal power is a key issue in political and economic anthropology (see for example in postcolonial Africa: Geschiere & Roitman 1997), in Europe, this kind of local, informal and porous power

has received little attention. The fieldwork on the Samaritain appeared to be a good case study in political anthropology by which to conduct a broader investigation of local governance than simply that of Romani shantytowns.

Act one: opening the Platz

Mihai arrived in France in 2002 with his wife, Livia, and their three children. He is a powerful, stocky man with a closely trimmed moustache and is always well dressed. Since his arrival he has gone from one shantytown to the next, driven by forced demolitions and reinstallations, caught up in the constant turnover of the shantytowns which have been targeted for the last 25 years by a systematic evacuation policy (Cousin & Legros 2015). Having been evicted once again in 2009, Mihai decided to found his own platz. Instead of buying a shack from a shantytown owner and setting up house as he had done on previous occasions, he convinced a few families to rally around him and to establish their own settlement. He was 35 at the time, old enough to be credible. He had a few contacts among the local associations and numerous Romani friends whom he had met in the Platz where he had lived. In an industrial zone beside the train tracks in La Courneuve, they spotted a vacant lot. There they built a Pentecostal church and a few shacks; the rest of the lot was settled as a result of encounters, evictions and migrations. In 2010, the 3000 square metres of vacant land were occupied by some 200 persons. They were mainly working-class Romanian Roma, between twenty and fifty years old, couples with their children. This was the case of Danutz, a distant cousin of Mihai, who had been living in the Platz with his wife and their two children since 2014. His “parents had worked in the cooperative”, and he explained himself in this way:

You know, I came to this Platz because I’m really familiar with this place, you can take the RER and in two minutes you’re in Paris or Villepinte. Since I sometimes work at the exhibition complex [in Villepinte], it’s easy. Before I was in Sarcelles, but it’s far from everything.

Residence in the town of La Courneuve provides the inhabitants of the Platz with a base from which to access the centre of Paris, the town in its broad sense, its public transportation network, its financial and social resources. The location of the Platz in an uninhabited space in

an industrial zone in La Courneuve, alongside the tracks, ensures relative invisibility while offering the advantage of being less than five minutes walk from the tramway that serves the northern suburb and ten minutes from the RER B, which takes them to the centre of Paris in a few minutes. The possibilities of easy connections with other Roma in the Paris region, with ironmongers, with begging sites, with French acquaintances or other migrants they have encountered are all resources provided by the city. This is just the opposite of the isolation of the Romanian village. The inhabitants of the Platz can therefore be considered part of a network – the Platz, which is part a bigger network – the city. This is the efficient network of networks (Hannerz & Joseph 1983) that forms the fabric of urban life.

For Danutz, there was nothing definitive about his installation in La Courneuve. When we interviewed him in 2014, he explained that he had come to France for three months, taking advantage of a vacant shack, before trying his luck on a construction site in Italy. A year later we came across him again, moving back into the shantytown when a cousin returned to Romania. A more systematic analysis of the presence of the inhabitants shows this to be a common situation. Between September 2013 and August 2015, we saw numerous departures, but four fifths of the persons present at that time were already there in 2011 and/or in 2013. The Platz served as home base for numerous people who lived intermittently in France. With the ebb and flow of an intense circulation – returns to Romania, migrations to other towns or countries – a shack could be lent or sold, but that did not keep people from coming back. Because of the pressure on the demand for informal housing the opportunities afforded by the shantytown needed to be made available to a maximum of families, and an effort was made to reduce vacancies. A dozen families, often present from the start, formed the heart of this network and provided a stable foundation. At the centre was Mihai's family, whose role was, precisely, to ensure the shantytown's social continuity, as he explained:

I must stay here, always, the others, they go to Italy, to England, they go back to Romania, but, what do you want, I've got to stay here with my family to take care of everything.

Taking care of everything means first of all to enable the shantytown to exist and to organise its space. Mihai gave everyone a space to build their shack and thus, little by little, drew a street a few meters wide running down the centre of the settlement. As head of the

Platz, Mihai provided a general layout, but the inhabitants built their own shack according to their own desire with whatever materials were to hand.

Quick to build and very efficient, such shacks can be put up in a single day and for very little. Appropriation of the living space by the inhabitants involves care taken with the interior. As Certeau *et al.* (1994: 22) noted :

The act of arranging one's home parallels that of arranging the pathways in the neighbourhood urban space, and these two acts found, to the same extent, daily life in the urban environment: to remove one or the other is to destroy the conditions of this life.

The dwelling was the family's private space, the front door was locked when they were away, visitors knocked before entering. Nevertheless it was permeable to noise from outside: people could talk through the walls or could hear a couple fighting. The daily life of the Platz resembled that of the French shantytowns in the 1960s (Pétonnet 2002). Each dwelling had a front stoop, often protected by an awning, with a table and chairs; this space was both private and public. It was a space of sociability, where one sat in front of the door, invited friends for coffee, chatted with passers by.



<FIGURE 1 HERE>

After a few years of cohabitation, many residents who did not know each other before meeting in the shantytown, had gone from formal gatherings among neighbours, to closer relationships. Calin, a resident interviewed in 2014, explained that

Here you don't see Roma people being impolite, here when I get up I go to greet my neighbours, and all the Roma, when they see each other say "te oves baxtalo, mo Phral" ("Hello brother"), things have got better.

Cohabitation provided a feeling of physical but also of symbolic security and bolstered a sense of belonging to the Romani community. This collective feeling meant that children were allowed to roam and play freely, for the Platz was a highly socialised, enclosed space, watched over by the adults. Adolescents coming into adulthood attempted to cultivate both their childhood Platz friends (marriage, business, etc.) and their extant *ratse* ties in their family. Here we touch on the adaptability and dynamism of the Romani worlds. The families transmitted their social-relations capital to new domestic units, which quickly became autonomous. With each generation, the transmission of relational capital integrated both family relations mobilised before migration and those developed in France.. In migration, the

Roma connected with each other through mutual acquaintances and the daily experience of a shantytown more than through *raste* connections. With time, the double Romanian and French geographical anchoring of migrants (Benarrosh-Orsoni 2015) became a double identity anchoring in the Samaritain: one was “Ciurar” or “Lingurar” in Romania and “from the Samaritain” in France.

Kerel Lové: Iron, construction sites and markets

Because of its overall composition – houses and collective space – the shantytown ensures its residents an initial integration in the French economic world. It is its financial viability that guarantees each shantytown’s continuation and the shantytown as a model. The Platz provides the tie between the informal economy and the formal market. This connecting can be observed at two levels: scrap metal collection and access to the building-trade labour market and its services.

The Samaritains Platz was an economic unit based on the recovery of scrap metal. The primary activity of identification and collection was carried out by a fleet of people who had either carts attached to bicycles or small trucks (under 3.5 tons). The scrap metal was first recovered in the street, from rubbish cans, or from public dumpsters. Those who were best equipped (with trucks) were in contact with building contractors who gave or sold them the scrap metal from demolition sites. The scrap metal collected was brought back to the Platz, where it was dismantled, the copper wire stripped off, motor windings removed and the aluminium put on one side. Loaded onto trucks, these materials were resold to major companies in the sector.

The Platz was also a gateway to the building trades or occasional work on exhibitions or fairs. From 2014 and with the end of the transitional measures, several residents who had been engaged in undeclared work setting up exhibition stalls found themselves obliged to negotiate a regularisation of their status. These regularised workers were team leaders and recruiters, and they reproduced the work brigade model (see Asséo, Petcut and Piasere in this volume). They recruited undeclared day labourers from the Platz, the teams being as big as ten or so, and a fleet of small trucks. The Platz acted as a cheap labour pool, with family and

social ties guaranteeing the workers' reliability but also that they would have not reported these practices to the authorities such as the labour inspectorate or the labour tribunal.

The Platz is primarily a market in the first sense, a place of exchange and in particular of economic exchange. At the Samaritain, a few tables in front of the church served as stalls: there were shopping bags with shampoo, chocolates, cakes, which Gadje (non-Roma) delivered from Romania about once a week; the Roma in the Platz sold food in the same place when the opportunity arose (food-aid packages, products past their sell-by date). While not prohibitive, the prices were not rock-bottom, but "it means we don't have to go as far as LIDL". Two Roma from the "Voltaire" Platz went from shack to shack selling skirts and T-shirts with "I Love Paris" embroidered in sequins. From time to time, various Romanian "specialties", such as cabbage, sausage and cakes, arrive with the return of someone from Romania. The market was not really specialised, but depends on the opportunities of each participant. The market was free, the head of the Platz did not control it, no more than he controlled the other economic activities in the Platz. Nevertheless, a small share of this circulation came back to him through his monopoly on the sale of soft drinks and potato chips. As well as providing a little additional income, this monopoly provided him with business relations with the residents. For instance, when talking with the head in his shack, I often observed the deferential attitude of the young people who came to buy a can of soda for a euro. He also saw this relation as a form of new-found prestige, as he explained: "you see, when I was fifteen, I was a bad guy, but now in the Platz people talk politely to me, I have become a respectable man."

The Kashtalo's newfound prestige

Nothing in Mihai's social origins predisposed him to head a Platz. When the communists came to power in 1948, Florian, Mihai's grandfather, produced and sold wooden utensils and tools in a village in the plain near the town of Oradea. He was a Rudar and did not speak Romani. In the 1960s his older son moved 45 kilometers away from there, to the village of Balnaca in the foothills of the Apuseni Mountains, where he married and went to work in the Bratca-Borod mines. He was soon joined by his younger brother Viorel and his brother's wife Lucica, a "tchachi romni" ("true Romani woman") from the judet of Salaj. In response to the

1948 Moscow international conference, Romania switched its agricultural economic policy to mining and the machine-tool industry. In line with national policy, between 1950 and 1962, companies in the Alesd conglomerate stepped up industrialization of the so-called “zonei miniere Borod-Șuncuiuș-Dobrești-Vadu Crișului, județul Bihor” and opened new silicate mines in the Bratca-Borod sector to supply the cement industry. The conglomerate combined mines and small industrial transformation units with a network of small towns and villages. In the rural-industry model, villagers both worked in the mines and engaged in agricultural activity to top up their income (Roger 2002). Viorel, Mihai’s father, for instance, not only worked in the mine but also caught fish and sold the catch in the nearby villages.

Labour requirements in the mines encouraged the local Roma, from different *ratse* and geographical origins, to settle in the village of Balnaca. There they found themselves thrown together in a *țigania* located in a little valley subject to flooding and separated from the rest of the village by the railroad tracks. The diverse origins of the Balnaca Roma led to an extremely complex and continuing personal redefinition, a *jeu romanes*. Today the ethnic identities declared in the village are still nearly as numerous as the inhabitants: Ciurari, Patrinari, Covaci, Romungri, Rudari, Lingurari, German Roma. Mihai was born in 1971, in Balnaca and spent his childhood in this “multi-Rom” village community. His sister repeatedly referred to herself as a “Kashtali”, before switching to the term Lingurar, “because Kashtalo is what other people say to make fun of us”. The adjective “kashtalo” is in principle felt to be highly derogatory by the local Roma, because they form

an antithetical category: Barbarians threatening Romani Civilization [...] unlike the Gaže, they were called to live as Romanes but did not do so: bibaxtale manușe (“accursed men”), without respect (*patjiv*) and without shame (*laža*), dirty (*melale*) and wicked (*žungale*), they are a corrupt humanity (Olivera 2007: 525).

I would tend to relativise this assertion. Mihai did not seem ashamed to call himself a “*Kashtalo*” and used the term in speaking of his family and his origins. He was comfortable with the deprived social position implied by the term from both an ethnic standpoint – “my father did not speak romanes well, I learned it on the streets with the other children, in the Gypsy community” – and a social standpoint – “the village was poor and we were the poorest

in the village”. In 1985 the family moved from Balnaca to a village some fifteen kilometres west of Oradea:

After my father quit work because of black lung, we were starving to death with the Gypsies, so my parents settled with the Gadjé in Gerhis because the slaughterhouses for the whole town of Oradea were there and we could get the leavings for free.

Mihai married a Ciurar woman from the village, against her father’s wishes. His marriage gave him a position in the Roma community of Balnaca but also enabled him to strengthen the previous marriages and ties between the Ciurar and his Kashtalé cousins in Balnaca. The 1989 revolution and the post-communist transition period brought with them the closure, one after the other, of the valley’s mines. In these hard times the Balnaca community eked out a living collecting scrap iron from the old abandoned factories of the conglomerate and gathering mushrooms in the nearby mountains. In Oradea, Mihai also fell victim to the disastrous transition period. Since 1986, he, like his brothers and sisters, had worked in the State factory at Sanandrei that fattened pigs for slaughter. In the 1990s an Italian tannery took over part of the factory’s installations and employees, among whom Mihai, before going bankrupt in 1997. At that point Mihai joined the collaterals of his Balnaca family and took up scrap collecting and mushroom gathering. At the end of the 1990s, Mihai found himself heavily in debt and in 2001 he fell seriously ill “in the last stage before death”.

Although he believed he was lost, he was nevertheless to be reborn. Invited by a friend to attend a Pentecostal church service, he heard a voice urging him to change his ways if he wanted to be healed. He made a promise to God, the miracle happened, the sickness vanished, and he converted to the Pentecostal faith. His conversion story follows the patterns described by Fosztó (2009): personal crisis (in this case a serious illness), promise, and then a supernatural event providing evidence of God’s power, and conversion to Pentecostalism. Mihai’s story also corresponds to another pattern identified by Fosztó: the direct connection between the macro-economic variations during the transition to the market economy and the personal experience of a crisis. “Ritually revitalized” by his conversion, in 2002 Mihai was able to take advantage of the waiving of the visa requirement in the Schengen Area to move to the West and start his new life.

He set out for France, partly by chance, because a smuggler from Arad proposed this destination. He was dropped off in front of the Platz of the headman Costica, on the Rue des Fillettes in the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis. He spent 13 years within a radius of a few kilometres from there. Moving from one shantytown to the next, he became a part of the Romanian Roma community, made his living from scrap collecting, and eventually brought his family to France. In 2005 he moved to the Platz on the Quai Saint-Ouen. This extended shantytown encompasses several Platz run by many headmen. It was there that Mihai established ties with numerous Romani Pentecostals like himself, but also with activists in a number of associations. He built a powerful network of relations, which he activated when he decided to open his own Platz. Following the evacuation of Saint-Ouen in 2008, Mihai followed Costica, who opened a Platz in Argenteuil. Its evacuation a few months later and the political battle he waged alongside activists from the Association pour l'Accueil des Voyageurs (Welcome Association for Travellers) convinced him it was time to establish his own Platz, with himself as headman.

The golden tongue of the Platz headman

When I asked the residents of the Samaritain Platz what a Platz headman does, one of them responded: “he’s a bit like your city police”: a form of territorial power that is emerging in France today because of the need to manage daily life in the community. This is not the modern reinvention of traditional chieftainships that is described in Africa (Perrot & Fauvelle-Aymar 2003). The Roma of the Samaritain Platz had no Romani counter-institutions, neither traditional headmen – the “bulibash”-, neither the often described arbitral justice system - the “kris” - (Marushiakova & Popov 2007), and when the anthropologist naively insists on knowing the names of the Romani counter-institutions, he is referred to the police, the courts and the Gadje mayor. The Platz headman exercised a suspended form of power that stopped at the shantytown gates.

Mihai had neither the family prestige nor the monopoly of domination to exercise this power. As the residents told it, it was legitimate for Mihai to be the headman because he was the one who “opened” the Platz: he found the site, avoided immediate eviction, he was a pioneer. But that was not enough, “the plot doesn’t belong to him” and “he mustn’t overstep

himself”, a man said when Mihai got angry over cars parking in front of the rubbish cans. Whether he was approved or criticized, it was his ready tongue that was stressed by our informants: “He is intelligent, he is well spoken with everyone, including French people”. What mattered was the power of an intelligent man’s speech, as he liked to say of himself.

Mihai traded in “building spots”. He chose new occupants according to moral rather than financial criteria, the ideal choice being “Pentecostal brothers”, or at least quiet people who did not drink or gamble, and especially who did not cause scandal. This choice was particularly appreciated by the other residents, who even made it a prerequisite: “This was a quiet Platz. We wouldn’t have let Mihai let in just anybody, we lived here with our families”, a former resident explained to me after the evacuation. In fact it was to protect the Platz against scandal that he evicted his own collaterals: “My sister’s husband drank, he was violent, he screamed and shouted at night, I asked them to leave”. At least that was how he told it to a group of men on the day after the departure, before stressing the fate of his poor sister, thereby showing he was sacrificing his own family to the group’s interests.

Keeping the public peace was thus the primary function of the headman; he also made sure the Platz was kept clean. This was a major issue. For the first two years, the local authorities did not remove rubbish, and so it piled up in several places, sometimes to a height of several metres. Appealing to Médecins du Monde, Mihai eventually managed to obtain a dozen dumpsters, which were emptied twice a week. This service was barely sufficient since scrap and rag produced much waste. It was therefore necessary to force everyone to keep the alleys in front of their shack clean and to ban emptying dirty water in public spaces. Toilets were also an important issue. Fixed over a hole dug in the rubbish heap, they filled quickly and no one wanted to do the humiliating job of cleaning up, filling the holes and digging new ones. It took the full force of Mihai’s authority, who threatened, paid out and sometimes personally helped with the operation in order to get anywhere. Security was another issue; two threats were identified: fire and malicious intrusions. Fires are common in shantytowns owing to the presence of inflammable materials and the use of candles and wood-burning stoves. The presence of gas bottles and the density of the dwellings make these fires rapid and deadly. Between 2013 and 2015 alone, nine people (among them 6 children) died in Platz fires, one of them, in Bobigny in February of 2014, was a little girl whom Mihai knew. As a precaution, several fire extinguishers were distributed around the Platz, and Mihai organised a nightly

round; the watchman was also responsible for enforcing the curfew, after which all candles and other flames were forbidden. The same watchman looked out for marauding “Roma from Bucharest and Moroccans”. He was assisted by the presence of two large dogs that guarded the entrance to the Platz. These risks of intrusions, whether imagined or real, tell us a lot about the hierarchy of fears and frictions at the Samaritain.

The list of Mihai’s attributes adds up to the classic French legal definition of the mayor’s administrative policing powers: to ensure security, peace and public health (Hauriou 1993). This hijacking of mayoral attributes raises questions about the rivalry and the subsidiary relation between the mayor and Mihai. Mihai’s only regular contact was the deputy mayor responsible for living conditions, who would come calling (usually accompanied by city police officer) with recriminations (neighbours complaining about noise, about the way cars were parked, sanitation workers about providing rubbish bins). On these occasions, Mihai would step outside the shantytown, and the discussion was conducted in front of the gates and not, as was customary in other cases, inside. With the exception of obtaining dumpsters, Mihai never took the initiative of going to the mayor on behalf of the group to request collective access to a service: water, school enrolment, registration on the list of local residents (administrative domiciliation),.

Among the associations, the Samaritain always had the reputation of being easier to work with than other shantytowns. This reputation was the fruit of the special relationship Mihai had built up with Médecins du Monde, the Association de Scolarisation des Enfants (Association for School Enrolment of Children), the European Roma Rights Center, and the Voix des Roms (the Voice of the Roma). In the first place, unlike other headmen, he assumed his place and positioned himself as the negotiator of collective relations with the associations. This made association representatives feel relatively safe and spared them the need to negotiate their presence with him. Furthermore, negotiations turned out to be fairly simple, for Mihai had retained from the experiences of Saint-Ouen and Argenteuil the idea that associations add to the quality of the Platz (and therefore to his own power) by bringing in medical services, help with school enrolment, and legal aid. Once they had checked in with Mihai, these associations’ employees and volunteers were free to come and go, visit families and plan their work. Nevertheless, Mihai remained the headman and decider, refusing, for example, Medecins du Monde permission to park their TB-screening truck on the spot

reserved for unloading scrap. The boundaries of this monopoly over collective interests were constantly subject to renegotiation. For instance, Mihai was unsure of how he should act when an association activist recruited workers for a brigade for the grape harvest in the South without asking him: was this a denial of his monopoly or a simple commercial transaction that was none of his business? In the end he, reluctantly, let the deal go ahead.

Relations with the press were also complicated. Whereas it is hard to report on many shantytowns, since 2010 the number of stories in the news had grown and the Roma took a dim view of journalists who “show the rubbish and say that we are thieves”, Mihai would admit journalists, students, photographers and artists. As much as the presence of associations was appreciated by residents, that of journalists was on the whole rejected, and Mihai’s open-door policy was harshly criticised by the household heads. Mihai was regularly obliged to explain his choices and to argue for their validity, after the fact, at meetings of householders. He discussed practical matters with them: parking, rubbish cans, nightly rounds of the Platz, but also engaging a lawyer when it was a matter of evictions or allowing the presence of medical teams from Médecins du Monde or a journalist. The aim of these meetings was to gain approval for his decisions and to respect the Romani egalitarian ideology (Stewart 1991). As we emphasized earlier, in the Samaritain Platz the Roma did not recognise a Romani headmanship and preferred to turn to the Gadjé institutions. Mihai had power because these institutions did not exercise their functions inside the shantytow; but his legitimacy was fragile, and he was constantly obliged to give the household heads the impression that his decisions were taken collectively in discussions with them.



<FIGURE 2 HERE>

In return for the function of regulation that he assumed, he enjoyed a monopoly over the economic exploitation of the Platz. In addition to the monopoly on the building lots, Mihai demanded a contribution from each household. Attribution of a lot was a one-time fee. Owing to the stability of the inhabitants and the finite size of the site, in a second phase, a contribution of one euro per night and per shack was asked. This was used, among other things, to pay the two men who did the nightly rounds and the person who cleaned the toilets, tasks that turned out to be doled out to family members. This contribution was the source of numerous complaints that indirectly called into question the custodianship of the Platz headman: the toilets were badly cleaned, there was no need to pay the watchmen, and he took too big a commission from the common pot. Nevertheless, this system managed to survive for six years. Mihai's power model was thus based on a contribution in exchange for services. The model was original with respect to other observed models of exploitation (Cousin 2015), for it reinforced the interest of the shantytown's continued existence, whereas the prefecture's policy of systematic eviction reinforced the power and interests of Platz headmen who made their living exclusively from their monopoly on the formation of new shantytowns.

The topography of the shantytown underscored the centrality of power. Mihai lived in

a big four-room shack in a little square in front of the church. This central location enabled him to observe all comings and goings. Around him lived his close friends, members of his family, who were also Pentecostals. Narrow streets of small one-room shacks radiated out from the square. The poorest families were relegated to the periphery of the shantytown, where the rubbish and collective toilets were. The heterogeneous composition of the site's residents, which we underscored in the first part of this paper, is important: Mihai had to manage conflicts between families and groups of different origins; at the same time this heterogeneity enhanced his power as a broker, for it was an indispensable part of his network of acquaintance.

Mihai explained that being a headman is not a comfortable position and that he remained at La Courneuve because of the Samaritan church, which is the "only thing that matters". He was closely involved in the religious life of the Platz. Having built a church, he became its custodian, which meant he could perform certain everyday rituals, but had to invite outside pastors to conduct the weekly services and celebrate certain sacraments. In accordance with the social determinism of Pentecostalism (Garcia-Ruiz 2006), his economic exploitation of the shantytown did not call into question his Pentecostal ethics but on the contrary bolstered his stature. The Samaritan church anchored Mihai in the midst of the Romanian Pentecostal pastors of the Paris region. On their recommendation, he was recognised as a presbyter, in 2012, by a Texas Pentecostal church at a convention in Romania: "I am the priest chosen by God. I can baptise people, give the blessing, heal, I can recommend them to God, celebrate the Lord's Supper". He held two services a week: on Sunday afternoon and on Thursday evening. Everyone in the Platz came. The church was the only collective facility and the only occupation for Orthodox Christians and Pentecostals alike. The church fostered a set social hierarchy, in accordance with the Pentecostal ideology. For Mihai, the only valid baptism was that given to adults, which transforms Man's very essence (Garcia-Ruiz 2006) and makes Orthodox Christians inferior in essence.

In this way Mihai seemed to use his double function as pastor and headman of the Platz to organise his community. In church he would remind people of the moral precepts necessary to live together, but could not exclude those who did not respect them, for in Pentecostalism the priest is in principle not an intercessor. The Bible alone contains God's Word, and the pastor's function is to organize the community's life and to explain the Bible.

The mystical function is filled by the prophets, who “like Samuel have dreams inspired by the Holy Spirit”, on whom people commonly call for advice on their life or their future (Benarrosh-Orsoni 2015:157). Whereas in the Romanian Roma’s version of Pentecostalism, these prophets are generally women, in the Samaritain church, this role was played by Yogi, a 17 year-old boy who spoke 6 languages and sang at church in a still-childlike voice. Initially, Mihai was proud to have a prophet, who boosted the status of his church. Many women consulted the prophet for various reasons, and his power would gradually grow, making him the spokesman for the women and the poor families at the rear of the Platz. One day, while we were discussing the legal future of the Platz with Mihai and a few other men, Yogi arrived, surrounded by a dozen old women, and demanded to know what was going to become of the site in the coming months. Mihai answered politely, although with some irritation, that eviction was not imminent. Little by little relations between Mihai and Yogi became strained, but he nevertheless remained the official soloist and still prophesied. Indeed, he had a place in the balance of power in the Platz; he was the spokesman for the old women and the marginalised, he was a “trickster”, in Balandier’s (1980) sense of the term. His youth and his ambiguous sexuality made him a grotesque counter-power that buttressed what in this case became Mihai’s institutional power. For instance, he attended the deliberative meetings uninvited, whereas they were normally reserved for mature men, and he where came to have his say. When he would leave, the men would agree that “he’s a woman, we can’t trust him”, but they still let him have his say. Nevertheless, it was on this “trickster” that the community and the outside actors ultimately depended in their battle to save the Platz.

A fight to the death with the mayor

The site on which the Platz stood was owned by the municipality. For a long time, the mayor of La Courneuve tolerated the Samaritain (contrary to other shantytowns in the city). But in March 2013, after it had been there for four years, the mayor began legal proceedings to obtain permission to evict the site’s residents. To explain this reversal, the town advanced the deterioration of relations over management of waste and more generally the conditions of coexistence, together with pressure from the prefect who, it was claimed, demanded that the mayor should begin eviction procedures in exchange for his support on other issues. Much later, another much more compelling reason surfaced: an IT company had plans to build a

huge data centre (L.A. 2015) on the site, and the eviction of residents from the Platz was a prerequisite for this installation. The data centre needed to store hundreds of thousands of litres of fuel for back-up generators. A fire nearby could cause a major industrial catastrophe.

After deploying a bailiff and then the health services, the mayor took the residents of the Platz to tribunal. Mihai turned to the associations for help. He needed to hire a lawyer, and to maintain relations between the lawyer and the Platz in order to provide various documents. After a summer and an autumn of uncertainty, and no fewer than three different and contradictory decisions,ⁱ the risk of eviction was held off for another year. During this initial phase of the court battle, Mihai proved to be relatively at ease, discussing legal strategy directly with the association activists. This was his business, and he remained deliberately vague with the other residents about the risks of eviction. As he explained: “When the eviction comes, everyone does whatever they feel like, rubbish bins, thefts, fights.” In other words, he was trying to maintain his position within the system of ordinary governance for as long as possible.

In this initial phase of the procedure, Mihai altered the modalities of the legal struggle. At first he appeared alone at the hearings. But then in December 2013 came the prospect of a crucial hearing. Tensions rose in the Platz, and some of the residents accused Mihai of hiding an imminent eviction. To show that he was doing everything he could, he invited all the residents to attend the hearing. It was in the courtroom that suddenly the exceptional character of the collective dimension of a struggle for the life of a shantytown became clear: When 150 Roma from the Samaritain Platz turned up at the courthouse for the hearing, the proper functioning of admittance to the courtroom suddenly ground to a halt. The guards called the police, and a dozen agents arrived and cordoned off the entrance. The Roma protested that they had been summoned, and produced documents to prove it. The judge then intervened and, confirming the collective summons, admitted them, but, he added, without the children (and therefore without the women). After this first climax, the crisis died down. In early January 2014, the court annulled part of the procedure, thus making eviction impossible. Trust was re-established and Mihai resumed his governance.

The year 2014 was an election year for city officials: the mayor of La Courneuve, Gille Poux, was running for a further mandate. He was the successor to the city’s communist

government, in power since 1959. In the autumn of 2013, the “Leonarda affair” broke, in which government ministers clashed over the deportation of a Romani high-school girl from Kosovo (Guilbert 2015). The mayor of La Courneuve attempted to profit from this media window by addressing an open letter to the President of the Republic (Poux 2013), calling for greater national solidarity, but also (and above all), for a crack-down on the Roma in La Courneuve:

For several years, populations of what are commonly called Roma have been illegally occupying sites in our city, on which they install makeshift shacks. Fleeing their home countries, all of which are European, where they are the victims of unacceptable segregation, these populations live here in human and sanitary conditions that are quite simply unworthy of our century. All of the NGOs and associations working on the site agree that the situation is urgent!

Clearly the presence of veritable shantytowns in the midst of our neighbourhoods creates unbearable strains on the neighbours and weakens the capacity to live together to which the inhabitants of La Courneuve are so attached and leads to a strong sentiment of exasperation coupled with a sense of insecurity.

And he concluded:

The only solution offered today and which we are implementing is to take action to systematically evacuate the camps, whoever the owners, and to await the decision and the cooperation of the police, in the awareness that these groups of persons will merely be pushed a few kilometres along to a neighbouring town and that they will be back in a few months.

That settled it: the city had a problem, it was “commonly called Roma” and had no other solution than to adopt a policy of systematic eviction. The text was posted on bulletin boards around the town. Scapegoating the Roma a few months before the April 2014 municipal elections gave the mayor a decisive advantage over his potential socialist rival. After a few months of hesitation, the Socialists, the Communists and the Independents formed

a coalition in February 2014, thus paving the way for the re-election of Gilles Poux in the first round of voting. His re-election barely masked the political disaffection from which he was suffering: he was elected with 3361 votes, representing 23.41% of those registered and 8.58% of the town's inhabitants. His power was therefore actually based on a tiny majority and he was trapped in a coalition in which his cumbersome socialist allies were present in equal numbers. He therefore continued his anti-Roma policy in the hope of garnering consensus around the theme of security and maintaining what he regarded as his Maghrebinian clientele, which he believed to be fiercely anti-Roma.

The second act of the eviction was triggered by the rejection of the Samaritain residents' appeal in October 2014. The associations working in the Platz took the strategic decision to boost their media visibility and to build local alliances, if possible within the majority and at least with local associations. A name was chosen for the shantytown, which would be "the Samaritain", named after its church. Public interventions increased: a classical music concert, tea at the "citizenship house", a guided tour of the shantytown for the city's inhabitants, the presence of associations and Roma at the neighbourhood dinner were organised and town councillors from the majority party were contacted. Initially, in November 2014, the majority seemed divided, and positive signals went out. The deputy mayor for security and the heads of city services were fiercely opposed to any discussion, while, on the other hand, a few majority councillors (associations and tourism) urged more openness. The mayor was elusive, initially blaming the prefecture for the eviction initiative. During these two months, at the instigation of Médecins du Monde and the Fondation Abbé Pierre, a plan for social intervention in the shantytown was put together. It proposed to maintain the Platz for three years, the time needed to re-house its inhabitants.

Nevertheless, in December, the mayor took back control. He asked the prefecture for police assistance and excluded the councillors more favourable to the shantytown from his entourage. The plan proposed by Médecins du Monde and the Fondation Abbé Pierre was rejected. The head of social services took charge of severing the ties between the Samaritain and the town's associations. Mihai wanted to create an association with a few household heads to defend the community's interests. Since he did not have a legal address, he asked the association headquarters to let him use theirs. In France, the domiciliation of both persons and organisations is a political and juridical tool wielded by municipalities to "politically"

authorise or deny a person or an undesired group access to territory. After initially being accepted, the request was rejected in mid-December following the intervention of the head of the social services. The latter also reproached his services for allowing the residents of the Samaritain to sell crêpes at an association stand at the municipal skating rink, adding that “when it comes to Roms, everything must go through his office”. This retaking of control was meant to prevent the Roma at all costs from emerging as a community with any kind of political weight. This necessity met the needs of the moment: avoiding responsibility for the evacuation of the Samaritain; but it was also a matter of structure: the emergence of a new and large community with voting rights (as European citizens), would endanger the fragile community arrangements within the municipal majority.

The non-recognition was reciprocal. During the initial contact phase, Mihai refused to go to city hall, explaining that “to play the political game means lying and [I don’t] have the right to lie because [I am] a Pentecostal”. What Mihai was refusing to do was to take himself to the seat of power. He left this role to his supporters and to a few people from the Platz, who went to testify about their situation. Yogi was put forward by the moral activists and represented the residents when a public appearance was necessary, such as the Mayor’s New Year’s wishes. That suited Mihai, who kept control of what mattered: on the one hand, the legal follow-up (a new procedure began in January 2015) and, on the other hand, relations with the religious authorities – diocesan priests and the pastor of the neighbouring black Evangelical church.

At the end of June, as the eviction that the court had postponed in February was drawing near, the associations decided out of desperation to alert the media, to “make the mayor pay for the eviction”. In mid-July a press conference was called in the shantytown, the militant media networks were mobilised, and many journalists were present. These mediatisation tactics emphasised “the voice of the residents”, more than the associations’ discourse. Yogi was showcased, and an online petition was “launched” in his name. He told his story, his hope of winning the TV show “The Voice” rather than finding himself in the street. The character appealed to the public and, over the summer, the petition relayed by the media obtained some 40,000 signatures.

All through summer, activists from neighbouring organisations, political personalities and, above all, numerous journalists visited the Samaritain; no fewer than 55 articles were written between the 1st and the 31th of Augustⁱⁱ. Mihai stayed more and more in the background. The increasing pressure from the media and the arrival of new support were destabilising forces that he channelled by putting forward Yogi, who received visitors and gave interviews. His function as spokesman was a continuation of his earlier function in the community.ⁱⁱⁱ One morning in August, the La Courneuve police commissioner arrived to assess the situation. Yogi offered to give him a guided tour of the shantytown. He talked about his gift of second sight, introduced him to his mother, and congratulated him on his haircut; and the commissioner, spellbound, explained that he was sorry but nothing more could be expected from the mobilisation; the shantytown would be subjected to eviction.

Final act: wrecking havoc

The file was no longer in the hands of the mayor; it had been sent to the Government some time before. The media turned the eviction into a national issue. The housing ministry favoured a moratorium on the eviction in order to begin a discussion with the NGOs; the interior ministry maintained its tough stance. Dealing with the Roma at the State level had been a permanent feature of French politics since July 2010. The Prime Minister sided with the Interior Minister and ordered immediate destruction of the Platz on 27 August. This decision, taken at the highest Government levels, was to be effective immediately but did not take into account the situation on the ground. The prefect of the region ordered an assessment of the social situation, which had been going on for two days. A UN delegate was coming to spend a few days on the site, though the police did not alert the residents. The Ombudsman (Toubon 2015) expressed his opinion, writing that he was “surprised by the improvised character of the conditions in which the evacuation seems to have been carried out”. It is important to stress the unbelievable, though ritualised, violence of this act: people were dragged from their homes by several companies of riot police, a bulldozer immediately razed the shantytown in front of the eyes of its inhabitants, reducing the testimony of several years of existence to rubble. That morning Mihai had only one thing to say before leaving for Romania: “they threw us out, worse than dogs”.

The bulldozer flattened everything: shacks, memories and social hierarchies. Mihai's power had been tied to his material governance of the shantytown, and disappeared with it. Having a thorough understanding of the limits of his role, he left. He refused to continue the struggle, to become a political representative for the Roma. At first I found his refusal deeply disappointing. He had seemed to be the only person capable of shoring up the little society of the Samaritain while waiting for better days. I did not want to see the Samaritain disappear simply because I had been happy there. It seemed to me that my role as anthropologist was also to hope that this society would be preserved. But I was wrong about the utopian function of the social sciences. The disappearance of the Samaritain Platz gave rise to other living spaces, other projects, and the most important friendships continued. The inhabitants coped with their loss much more quickly than the visiting anthropologist.

Conclusion

Mihai managed to keep his place as headman of the Samaritain Platz for six years. This longevity is remarkable. Although he was from a Kasthalo family that was looked down upon by the Roma, he established his position through a power grab made possible by the social reorganisation stemming from migration. He was then able to maintain his position because he did not restrict his domination to economic exploitation of the Platz but also held a political power of negotiation and regulation. The primacy of the regulatory function of his power is a new element. This form of political representation, in a segregated Romani quarter, deserves a systematic anthropological study of its own. The literature on the Roma's local political capacities usually singles out two types of political representation:

- a representation rooted in the primacy of identity, in which a spokesman builds his political legitimacy on the community's affirmation of a cause (McGarry 2010, Rövid 2011). These studies do not resolve the ambiguity surrounding the real capacity of local communities to create a system of true internal representation. They describe the "Roma's cause" at national and international levels, but it is not studied at the level of segregated Roma neighbourhoods.

- a distributive power, in which a local broker controls the flow of social and economic resources between inside and outside a segregated community. This model was identified in Rome's "campi nomadi" by Daniele (2011) and then by Maestri and Vitale (Forthcoming). In this case, the broker is both "officially and unofficially" delegated by agents of external order (town, State, tertiary sector) to help maintain order within the community. This power neutralizes the political subjectivization of the neighbourhood's inhabitants.

These two models do not see the field of power from the standpoint of relations between gadge and Roma. They do not conceive (politically or anthropologically?) the existence of a political autonomy for the Roma, for whom relations with the external order are not seen as being necessarily a top priority.

The case study we chose to present shows another form of political order, founded on the need to manage a territory. This form of power appears in the context of a re-reading, applied to the urban margins in Europe, of the political anthropology developed for Africa by Evans-Pritchard and particularly by Balandier. For the latter, power must be seen as "a necessity, with reference to the internal order it maintains" (Balandier 1978: 46). This necessity became obvious to the inhabitants of the Samaritain Platz through the crucial need to live together, to settle everyday, material questions, to manage to construct the stability necessary to the survival of the family unit. In the Samaritain, it was the day-to-day management that founded the legitimacy of Mihai's power. To quote Balandier, in his struggle against the world's entropy, Mihai represented "order and permanence" (ibid., 46), but also the principle of the "ambiguity of power" (ibid., 47). He stood at the heart of the sacred status of power (ibid., 46).

The other contribution made by our study is of a heuristic nature. A Platz, a shanty town or a segregated quarter can be defined as a territory, in Balandier's sense, in other words, as a space with an internal order that offers its occupants a certain degree of stability and which is governed by a political power (Balandier 1978). For several years, the relative safety of the territory allowed the shantytown residents to live out their economic, and especially social, relations in the context of a compact Romani community. Of course, because it was inherently bound up with the existence of the shantytown, this community was only a temporary fixture.

To ensure its permanence and control, Mihai had to deal with other equally territorialised agents, whose authority encompassed the shantytown (mayor, prefect). Navigating between these different levels of authority required a thorough command of the city's topography (where were the vacant spaces, not administered by the city?) and an extensive knowledge of the time frames of French institutions (how much time before eviction?). Here we find what Balandier defines as the second criterion for defining the political character of a power: control of relations with external political organizations (ibid., 46). Indeed, using Balandier's criteria, we identified a form of Romani power that was political, thus making for a more subtle anthropology of the Roma, which usually stresses the non-political character of the power exercised in Romani communities ((Williams 1985, Piasere 1994).

The Roma's political power seems so close to observers' political and institutional habitus that it tends to go unnoticed. Mihai had to ensure the safety, tranquillity and sanitation sought by the inhabitants of the Platz. In this sense, Mihai exercised an administrative police power (Hauriou 1993), like any French or Romanian mayor. This analogy stems from the fact that both Mihai and the mayor of La Courneuve shared a culture forged by the history of municipal power on the Continent.

It is precisely because they were alike that Mihai's authority came into competition with that of the mayor of La Courneuve. If the Platz was initially recognised to some extent by associations and certain State institutions, its illegality ultimately prevailed over every other consideration in the discourse of French public authorities. This political construction of the Platz as an illicit space by definition (and therefore without order) denies any possibility of internal regulation or representation, and therefore of recognising the Platz headman. It denies the possibility of a presence negotiated between public authorities and Roma or their representative, and inexorably leads to the destruction of the Platz and of the territorial and juridical moorings of its inhabitants.

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ⁱ For further informations on the judicial proceeding of the expulsion see the annex document named "Procédures précédant et procédant à l'évacuation du bidonville du Samaritain le 27 Août 2015" published in Cousin (2016), : http://shs.terra-hn-editions.org/Collection/IMG/pdf/procedures_juridiques_samaritain.pdf

ⁱⁱ Source : data-base Europresse with the query « Roms AND Courneuve ». eg of articles : http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/08/27/evacuation-du-plus-vieux-bidonville-rom-de-france-4738466_3224.html OR <http://mobile.lesinrocks.com/2015/08/15/actualite/reportage-a-la-courneuve-dans-le-plus-vieux-bidonville-dile-de-france-11767029/> or <http://www.humanite.fr/gilles-poux-ne-peut-se-contenter-de-pousser-les-roms-toujours-plus-loin-581933>

ⁱⁱⁱ This showcasing of a 17-year-old boy (even if he was consenting) in a major mobilization raises several ethical questions, but it is nonetheless the continuation of an emic function.