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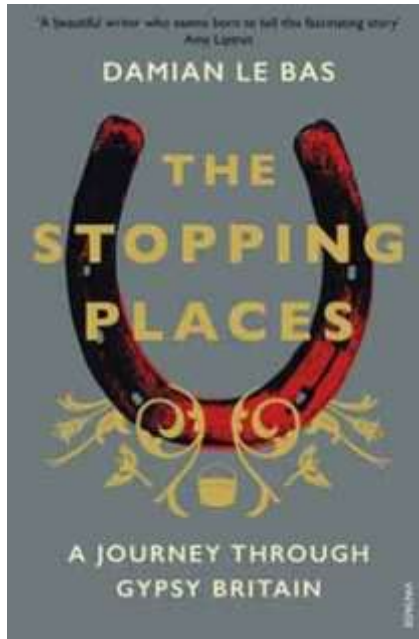
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**THE STOPPING PLACES: A JOURNEY THROUGH GYPSY BRITAIN,
Damian Le Bas, London: Vintage, 2018, 320 S.
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Öz

Damian Le Bas'ın *The Stopping Places: A Journey Through Gypsy Britain* seyahat günlüğü ve anı kitabı, çoklu mirasa sahip bir İngiliz yazarın bu arayışına bir örnektir: Çingene ve Çingene olmayan. La Bas'ın çalışması önemlidir çünkü piyasada Roman ve İrlandalı Gezginlerin uğradıkları yerler hakkında çok az kitap vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Britanya, Çingene, Kimlik, Çok Kültürlü, Romany.

The Stopping Places: A Journey Through Gypsy Britain

Abstract

It is not uncommon for a child of a minority community in Britain to explore their parents' cultural heritage and understand how and where elements of their identity were formed. Often this includes journeying to a place in Britain or overseas to experience a built (home) environment, family network, and family friends that have been spoken about in stories and overheard in family conversations for many years. However, the colourful stories of parents, uncles and aunts about a distant place and the people found there can contrast with reality. Visiting sites and people far away might not be congruent with the parents' stories. Exploring an authentic past or golden age can be problematic in this case. Damian Le Bas's *The Stopping Places: A Journey Through Gypsy Britain* travelogue and memoir is an example of this quest by one British author of multiple heritage: Gypsy and non-Gypsy. La Bas's work is important because there are few books on the market about the stopping places of the Romani and Irish Travellers.

Keywords: Britain, Gypsy, Identity, Multicultural, Romani.

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work is important because there are few books on the market about the stopping places of the Romani and Irish Travellers.

Travelling for one year in a ‘white van’ from southern England to Wales, northern England, to Scotland, and spending time at many sites, the author is on a personal quest connected to the stopping places – ‘*Where are they? Who used to go there before, and who is there now? Why have I always felt it was crucial to remember them? What might we learn from them? What redemption might lie there, in a country that still passes new legislation aimed at ending the Traveller way of life? Is it still possible to live on the road? Was the end of the old Gypsy life a tragedy, or was it a case of good riddance to an irredeemably hard and pitiless life on the edge? Above all, I hoped to resolve the biggest question: the question of myself, whether I could make my peace with Gypsy culture and its love of a clean, stark line*’ (p. 30). Le Bas is well positioned to undertake this journey as he speaks Romani and was raised in a settled Romani family, giving him a unique perspective and the advantage of insider ethnographic knowledge.

The Stopping Places has eleven chapters, each discussing one journey element. Notable themes are the sense of loss for the old Gypsy ways of living and the significance of stopping places. We learn about Romani words in everyday conversations among Gypsies and non-Gypsies in Britain. It shows an intercultural relationship dating back 500 years old between the settled peoples and the Romani travellers.

Le Bas thoughtfully comments on the culture and society of the Gypsies. First, in light of the increasingly settled way of life of contemporary Gypsies and because of the British government’s policy-making, an alternative or nomadic life is increasingly difficult in Britain. The book creates a sense of a lost past. It involves the Romanies painted wagon ‘*that piques memory, nostalgia and pride*’ (p. 16); it was associated with ‘*freedom and colour*’ and became romanticised in mainstream society. Other elements include the extended family networks and the emphasis

placed upon mutual support, the seasonal crop (hops) picking, bender tents, fairground and entertainment work (pp. 39-41), playing the spoons musically (p. 174), and a type of singing called ‘diddling’ (p. 175). Some elements continue in a settled environment, like the horse culture and annual horse fairs (pp. 59-61), folklore, superstitions and cleaning rituals, and death and funerals (pp. 164-65). Nonetheless, even during the old times, the Gypsies acknowledged that living on the road was not without problems. It could be ‘*heaven and hell, there was dark and light*’ (p. 16). The stopping places’ names foster in Le Bas a sense of wonder. Some are known, while others are obscure: Messenger’s Meadow, Hartley Park, Butler’s Down, Shalden Green, Horsmonden, Gipsy Hill, and Appleby.

Second, Romani terms found in the English vernacular include *diddakoi* (so-called ‘*half-Gypsy*’), *dinlo* (a fool), *div* (a fool), *kushti* (good), *minge* (vagina), *mush* (man), and *vonger* or *wonga* (money). General cultural characteristics include entrepreneurial spirit (p. 194), charisma (p. 20), and work as singers, musicians and raconteurs. Conversely, their existence on society’s edges means they are ‘othered’. Historically, Gypsies have been persecuted, demonised, and enslaved in Europe—and targeted by the Nazis. Le Bas explores the marginalisation of the Gypsies and their precarious life throughout the book.

The book clarifies Travellers’ issues and problems regarding their stopping places. Some inter-Gypsy encounters at the stopping places are friendly, some potentially hostile. Some local councils seek to accommodate the Romani and Travellers, while others do not. The book is an education and connects the Gypsy milieu with the wider British society in a way that makes the reader understand better the Gypsy values, norms, and attitudes. Le Bas’s book is a thoughtful and timely antidote to the negative stereotyping and sensationalism aimed at the British and European Gypsies. It also reminds us that Gypsy DNA is probably more dispersed in British, European, Eurasian, American, and Middle Eastern peoples through intermarriages than often acknowledged.

This book is well-researched and contains information that make people think positively about the Romani and Irish Traveller communities. Le Bas writes in a readable and evocative style incorporating well-observed descriptive sections about places and people. It is possible to read *The Stopping Places* in a week; however, the book's content will remain swirling around in one's mind for weeks and months. The study is insightful and vibrant. It is recommended for general readers and students of ethnography and multicultural Britain and Europe.

Source:

Damian Le Bas. (2018). *The Stopping Places: A Journey Through Gypsy Britain*. London: Vintage.