

GYPSY ECONOMY: ROMANI LIVELIHOODS AND NOTIONS OF WORTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY, EDITED BY MICOL BRAZZABENI, MANUELA IVONE CUNHA AND MARTIN FOTTA (1ST EDITION. NEW YORK, BERGHAHN BOOKS, 2016)

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The gypsy economy is fully embedded into the market. This is the initial remark of *Gypsy Economy*. The book was edited by Micol Brazzabeni, Manuela Ivone Cunha and Martin Fotta, and the afterword to the book was written by Keith Hart (Centennial Professor of Economic Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science). The volume originated in discussions that took place during a 2012 Exploratory Workshop supported by the European Research Foundation (ESF), the Center for Research in Anthropology (CRIA), and the Lisbon University Institute (IUL).

We all know about states that organize societies within territorial boundaries and apply laws and punishments, but what happens the outside these boundaries? This volume is a fine ethnographic collection, and the chapters provide a number of case studies about a variety of contemporary economic practices from different regions and countries (e.g. Slovakia, Portugal, Bucharest, Brazil, etc.). Most of the contributors to this book discuss societies without specifically mentioning the state, but they argue that the actors in these societies (Gypsies) do interact with states in a specific way, and that the activities of these actors are embedded in markets. The aim of the book is to enrich our understanding of the changing interrelations between the market and the state by anthropologically examining the economic practices of gypsy populations. The chapters of *Gypsy Economy* are based on intensive fieldwork that was conducted over the past decade. The main research questions that guide this volume are the following: Which creative economic strategies (formal and informal) do Gypsies employ to make a living? In which aspects of existence do they invest? How do they

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mobilize social, cultural, and economic resources in the context of vulnerability, indebtedness, and financial volatility?

The chapters of this book focus on the forms of social action to which Gypsies subscribe. Some of them describe the economic strategies of people living in such segregated communities and the dynamics of debt at the interface of state welfare and poverty, but they do not limit themselves to describing these topics as the inevitable by-products of discrimination. The chapters always take into account the contextual dimensions and the historical context of the different Roma and gypsy populations.

The volume loosely revolves around four important themes concerning the economic activities of gypsy people. The first theme is money transfers (such as usury, begging, loans, and state grants). The second theme reflects on the historical dynamics that gave rise to specific economic strategies and forms of market interactions. The third theme describes economic performance, and the last one concerns the gypsy understanding of wealth and value in different forms.

The first two chapters in this volume focus on flows of money among Slovakian and Hungarian Gypsies. The author of the first chapter (Tomáš Hrustič) focuses on usury (the lending of money at excessive interest rates) as a strategy advantageous to both lenders and borrowers among the Tabori Roma who live in segregated settlements in peripheral regions of east Slovakia. Usury is considered criminal activity by mainstream society and state authorities, but the author argues that usury among the Taboris is viewed as a natural and effective means of investing money and escaping poverty. All usurers are aware of the fact that their business is illegal, but they see themselves as possessing an important virtue: the ability to think ahead. The Taboris are ambivalent about usury: on the one hand they appreciate the fact that usurers are the only people who are willing to lend money (Taboris are typically not able to obtain bank loans), but on the other they have a strong sense of injustice because of the high interest rates. The author addresses an important problem; namely, it is not possible to draw a dividing line between lenders and borrowers: Tabori Roma are at a certain times borrowers, and at other times moneylenders. In this way, the system of credit influences social relations according to who possesses money, and these new relations affect the concepts of identity.

In the second chapter, Judit Durst also analyses informal moneylending in its social context to show its social function. The author's intention is to contribute to our understanding of the moral grounds and economic logic of informal moneylending in rural gypsy communities in Hungary. In parallel with the findings of the first chapter, Durst also claims that usury is one of the rare opportunities for the unemployed to obtain badly needed income and

demonstrate social mobility. The author emphasizes that we need to regard informal moneylending as a form of hierarchical redistribution, not a simple debt relationship, and that moneylenders may be seen as a part of the moral community due to their willingness to provide loans to marginalized people when they are most in need.

The following main topic of this volume reflects on the historic dynamics that gave rise to specific economic activities. In Chapter 3, Sara Sama Acedo discusses how economic interests are created and maintained by travelling and horse-trading among Portuguese Ciganos. The author argues that two sets of relationships must be examined in order to understand this way of life: first, intra-ethnic spatialities and forms of territorial exclusiveness that are maintained over time and regulate access to the spaces of economic activities, and second, the problematic relationship between Ciganos and civil administration. The economic activities of horse-trading Ciganos can best be approached as interstitial. They keep traditional trade alive, yet respond to new economic and bureaucratic requirements regarding horse breeding and trading. Chapters 4 and 5 provide detailed descriptions of the economic strategies of Gypsies in migration contexts. Jan Grill, the author of the fourth chapter, examines the oscillation between two economic strategies that occurs in networks of Slovak Roma migrants to the UK and Slovakia; namely, 'fixing up' money and 'hard work'. 'Fixing up' money refers to having knowledge of state systems, including how to apply for the various support schemes and benefits to which the Gypsies are entitled. This knowledge is connected not only to income-generating strategies, but also to degrees of social intelligence. 'Hard work' refers to menial, unstable factory labor. Grill argues that these two modes of survival often coexist in time and space. In the eyes of the Slovakian Gypsies, the 'great poverty' of the past decades has been replaced by the relative wealth of the present thanks to migration. The case study also provides a historical overview of the economic activities of the Tarkovce Roma. The author explains that these 'fixing up' financial activities already existed in the past, but these practices have been adjusted as inventive responses to a changing socio-economic context.

Marco Solimene presents a case study that explores the practical and symbolic implications of scrap metal collection ('going for iron') carried out by some Bosnian Xoraxané gypsy families living in the metropolitan area of Rome. The author shows how this activity contributes to the negotiation of group identity in relation to both the Roma and non-Roma, and demonstrates how collecting scrap metal responds perfectly to the ambiguities and contradictions of the Italian socio-economic system. The chapter evolves around the expression *Romani butji* ('Romani occupation') which represents an important and distinguishing marker between the non-Roma and the recently migrated Romanian Roma.

Gypsies consider scrap-metal collection to be a proper job, unlike other 'gypsy activities' such as begging and stealing. Collecting scrap-metal is an entrepreneurial activity that involves turning waste into value and circumventing bureaucratic strictures and legal impediments. The most important remark from this study is that collecting scrap-metal does not merely involve adapting to the opportunities offered by the wider socio-economic context. It fits the Italian social, political and economic landscape.

The third major theme of the volume is performance. The chapters that belong to this theme closely examine how gypsy people interact with each other (and with non-Gypsies). The first chapter in this section was written by Gergő Pulay, who describes how Spoitori Roma live on the streets in the most notorious ghetto in Bucharest. The Gypsies who are described in this chapter take advantage of the numerous resources and opportunities offered by the street, and strive to become entrepreneurs or 'businessmen' in an uncertain and constantly changing economic environment. They do so by gaining material and symbolic value from managing traffic.

Martin Olivera discusses how the economy among the Gabori Roma in Transylvania creates Roma society, while also ensuring complete symbolic independence. The author argues that the economy is not simply a part of the reproduction of social order, but is actively involved in the production of society. From this perspective, according to Olivera, we must look at the economy not only as a process of production, but also a form of ethics, and consider how Roma produce resources as well as how they spend them. Drawing on Shalin's model of domestic modes of production (DMP), the author describes the dynamics through which Gabori Roma manage to establish a logic of abundance and take possession of the world. Olivera elaborates that the incomes of Gabori households are of two kinds: money earned from Rom work (*Romani butji*) and income from other activities. *Romani butji* is considered men's work and this has consequences for Gabori conceptions about money. Unlike money from women's work, which is associated with daily subsistence and the buying of food or new clothes, money from men's work is not treated as a means of exchange, but appreciated for its use value. In the Gabori ideology, women's work ensures the continuity of Roma society (i.e. ensures that members have enough to eat), while male labor maintains the place of the household in society: it helps motivate the development of relationships with other domestic groups. Money in this sense is the fuel for the engine of Rom sociability.

While this earlier chapter mainly focused on male moneymaking, in the next chapter Florencia Ferrari explores female moneymaking activities among the Calon Gypsies in Brazil. She concentrates on ethnographically illustrating the

relationship between Calon Gypsies and non-gypsy Brazilians in the streets by examining palm reading as an economic activity. The author argues that notions such as shame and luck and conceptions of time are different between Calon Gypsies and non-gypsy Brazilians, which leads to tension and misunderstanding about the meaning of fortune telling itself.

The remaining three chapters revolve around the topic of wealth and value. In Chapter 9, Catalina Tesar writes about conspicuous consumption and the values of Romanian Cortorari Gypsy youth. She discusses the meanings and representations of consumption behavior in the light of the local conceptions about reproduction. Unlike Chapters 4 and 5, which provide descriptions of the economic strategies of Gypsies in a migration context, Tesar focuses on forms of investment in the home country. The consumption behavior of Cortorari can be best expressed by describing the symbolism of their houses. In the eyes of this gypsy community, large, visible and expensive houses represent the prosperity and well-being of the family. Houses are associated with the youth, the most economically active generation. The author argues that Cortorari consumption behavior accords with the model of conspicuous consumption developed by Veblen.

Martin Fotta examines the activity of the Calon men of Bahia in Brazil and the meaning of this activity, exploring how values arise from social relations and contribute to social reproduction. Unlike the Central European Roma of the opening chapters, the Calon of Bahia make money primarily through lending money to non-gypsies. The author shows that there are two major sources of social value among these gypsy communities: 'shame or honor'. All Calon 'posses' these, and such values embody their history as social persons, and 'strength or capability to manage an unstable environment'. The Calon attain the attributes of social persons in relation to these values through creating self-other relations that are constantly materialized in the movement of money, persons, households, and so on. By reinterpreting the specific content of their key values, Calon are able to assimilate and reflect broader socio-economic changes while remaining Calon.

The last chapter on the topic (and in the volume) continues with the theme of internal circulation and notions of personal worth. Nathalie Manrique, the author of this chapter, provides an interpretation of Spanish Gitano Gypsy society as structured by the logic of gifts. She elaborates that the identity of the Spanish Gypsy is bit different from other societal identities elsewhere in Europe. As Gitanos have never fitted easily into a strongly hierarchical Spanish society, gypsy identity is constructed from mobility; most importantly, the ability to accumulate goods, or to transmit the symbols of power and wealth. The author argues that interactions within the idiom of giving and receiving

continuously confirm the ordering of individuals and groups into hierarchical categories. Gifting is the main way of controlling situations and initiating all interactions: to give is start or renew relations. When a Gitano Gypsy becomes a receiver, this means that he or she has become indebted. Accordingly, givers are seen as superior to receivers. Through this system of value dynamics, wealth is rebalanced and undermines any individual attempts to accumulate money.

In conclusion, the contributors of this volume have tried to understand, analyze and interpret the economic activities of gypsies in their own context and using their own terms. It is obvious that the economic arrangements of gypsies are complex and closely related to and embedded in local social positions. The authors' intention was to explore these complexities by focusing on how economic activities and performance are embedded in markets. Gypsy societies are not the same. This volume attests to the diversity that arises from different ideas about economic issues, such as the meaning of work, the relationship between formality and informality, the nature of ethnic relations, ways of economic strategizing, understanding wealth and value, and so on. The chapters in this volume cover a manifold set of themes about the economy of the gypsies, and can be seen as pieces of a big puzzle. Each and every case study contributes to widening our knowledge about the economic activities of gypsies. However, as we can see, these activities are multifarious, and perhaps it is impossible to see the whole picture; the whole 'Gypsy Economy'. But one thing is common to the chapters in the book: each suggests that the economic activity of gypsy people in all the observed countries does not involve passive adaptation but active responses to the wider socio-economic systems within which they are embedded, and to which they contribute. I specifically recommend this book to those who are interested in anthropology, ethnography, or in the everyday lives of Roma in general. However, those who are interested in unusual economic processes will find this volume interesting too.