

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

THE TWO SIDES OF THE COIN: GYPSY ECONOMIES BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE MARKET

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WORKSHOP ABSTRACTS TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE ESF SITE

PANEL 1

- 1) **ABU GHOSH, Yasar: The money of the poor: spending spree as a meaningful act among Czech Roma**
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Abstract: Contested monies: debt, social welfare and other Romani practices of money exchange

The Roma patterns of spending are subject to public gaze as they are often brought to the fore. In an attempt to target the lavish spending of the „undeserving poor“, economic reformers as well as anthropologists strip Roma economic practices off as the incarnation of economic marginality. In this paper I want to argue for a more nuanced appraisal of the apparently enforced economic behaviour of people depending on social welfare. If systems of social redistribution of wealth presume social solidarity, I will show how this solidarity itself is the unspoken object of contestation. This social „rendez-vous manqué“ between the „generous society“ and the „ungrateful Gypsies“ translates into moral evaluative schemes of various money trajectories on the part of Roma. Consequently distinctions of monies are established on the basis of the quality of relations with exchange partners.

Keywords: money, social welfare, culturalization of poverty

2) DURST, Judit: “If you are short of money, you just get into something...”- The institution of “fair money-lending” and “loansharking” among the Hungarian Gypsies in Borsod, Hungary

Abstract: The paper explores the institution of money-lending in Borsod county, in Hungary and tries to analyse its main characters: the Gypsy money-lenders and their clients. By depicting the portraits of the money-lenders (the ‘mini-bankers’, as the locals call them, who fight for the redistribution of the social welfare), I will show the important roles of not only the Gypsy men but also the women in this recently proliferating informal economic activity in Hungary.

The paper draws attention on the fact that the local public opinion differentiates two distinct types of money-lenders: the “fair” ones, and the “loan sharks”. Reviewing briefly the history of the critics of “usury” in the Western history of Economics, we can learn that this distinction can be tracked throughout all its history at different periods and by different nations. These historical experiences are in accordance with what the Hungarian cases explore: the borderline between the two categories of the Money-lenders is quite blurred and situational.

In this paper I argue that we should rather consider the institution of money-lending as a ‘total social fact’. It means that we can grasp its meaning only by analysing its context: the social, economic and political processes in which it is embedded. Therefore I demonstrate the money-lending activity’s function in a local society through which it is easier to understand why this institution has been blossoming in recent years in the impoverished, marginalized rural Gypsy communities in Hungary.

My research findings are based on several months of extensive fieldwork in a rural Gypsy village in Borsod, and on some semi-structural interviews carried out with Money-lenders working in this region.

Keywords: money-lending, marginalized groups, loan sharks, economic sociology, informal economy, “Gypsy Cleverness”

3) HRUSTIČ, Tomáš: Usury Among The Slovak Roma - Relations Between The Lenders And The Borrowers

Abstract: The vast majority of activities of a segregated Roma settlement are driven by impetus of securing material and financial existence. Financial behavior of people living in excluded environment is obviously motivated by different mechanisms and strategies than of middle class. One of the phenomena linked with financial strategies of impoverished people is debt, lending and borrowing money, often accompanied by various interest rates ranging from lower rates to usury. Usury is often perceived from emotional and moral perspectives. I am trying to explain usury (lending and borrowing money with high interest rate) in broader context as a strategy advantageous for both parts - lenders and borrowers, often similar to patron - client relationship. Based on my long term research in a segregated Roma settlement in Eastern Slovakia I describe mechanisms of money lending and I focus on interpretations of usury by loan sharks and by their clients. I describe how the concept of high interest short-term money lending pervades in whole system of economy. From the victims’ perspective, what looks like an irrational decision for an outsider, leading to vicious cycle of poverty, is rational behavior of securing the means of

existence for short-term period. On the other hand, from the loan sharks' perspective, what looks like criminal activity of usury from the perspective of middle class and state authorities is the way how to secure the power and existence for a long-term period. Moreover, the boundary between money lenders and their victims is no clear. The majority of inhabitants of segregated settlements are at certain point victims and at certain point loan sharks. Lending money on high interest is a common way of short-term investing for the most of people living in conditions of segregated settlements.

Keywords: The Slovak Roma, financial strategies, usury, interest rates, patron-client relations

PANEL 2

1) GRILL, Jan: "Endured labour" and "fixing up" money. Economic strategies and tactics of Slovakian Roma migrants in UK

Abstract: The paper examines different economic strategies and tactics of Slovakian Roma migrants in UK. Classical anthropological studies of Roma groups highlight connections between economic practices and social positions they occupy in relation to state, labour markets and the dominant societies. In the context of Central Eastern Europe, these ethnographies documented Roma responses to governmental efforts at assimilation during socialism, their long-term formal unemployment and engagements in informal economies, and crucially Roma re-appropriation, subversions and ethics of 'taking without giving.' The economic strategies, especially these located outside of the formal markets, were seen as playing a central role in construction of Roma identities in relation to dominant society. The paper analyses development and changing dynamics of income generating strategies of Slovakian Roma in eastern Slovakia and in their British migration destinations. Lacking clearly articulated ideology of Romani butji, this particular network of Roma constantly move between formal forms of employment and various informal tactics. The paper examines oscillations between and social navigation within different economic practices: from exploited and physically gruelling labour alongside other 'Eastern European' migrants and British working-class in food production factories, to skilful adroitness to circumvent various systems through 'snapping an opportunity on the wing' and various tactics of 'fixing up' money at the interstices of state systems.

Keywords: Migration, informal economy, labour, ideologies of work, social navigation, Slovakian Roma, Great Britain

2) PULAY, Gergő: Public space as a resource: street economies in a poor neighborhood of Bucharest

Abstract: In the territorially stigmatized neighborhood of Bucharest, where I've done a long-term field research, inhabitants struggle to pull themselves out of their unfavorable circumstances. Some of the few available assets for this are the proofs of personal worth or the

quality of immediate spaces – such as the household or the street corner – which they inhabit and strive to control. These are crucial resources of getting by in a situation where structural problems accumulated by the wider society are turning into personal problems faced on a daily basis. In order to acquire value and to avoid the unsettling prospect of being absorbed by “worst neighborhood in town”, one has to attend the “school of life” which is defined in opposition to the realm of formal education. In this respect, the main feature of the area is the widespread reliance on informality in everyday conduct. The main protagonists of this presentation are the members of male-dominated hang-out groups who rely on the symbolic and material resources offered by public space – through illegal trading and other forms of barter – in order to generate income, create value and to define their personhood and belonging.

Keywords: territorial stigma, informal economy, exchange, value and virtue

3) SAMA, Sara: Gypsy horse dealers in Alentejo (Portugal): a way of life flowing in the interstices

Abstract: This communication is based on a long-term ethnographic experience (2000-2003) in the region of Alto Alentejo (Southern Portugal) with people who consider and regard themselves as “ciganos” (Gypsies). It will focus on those devoted to the horse trade and who combine this activity with others like clothes dealing, seasonal rural jobs, scavenging materials for recycling, receiving subsidies, etc. matching mobility and permanence in the region and particularly around the capital, Évora. The aim is to describe, firstly, some of the activities, relationships and mobility in space that characterise this people’s subsistence economy. Then, I will show how this economy can be better understood as interstitial. On the one hand, rather than being re-stigmatised as marginal because it develops on the margins of majority society, it takes place in the gaps that majority society does not cover, mainly between the rural and urban spheres. On the other hand, this economy also inhabits the gaps left by other “ciganos” of the region who have exclusive relationships with the territory based on settling in one place for a prolonged period of time, a high concentration of kinship networks, and privileged relations with majority society.

The analysis of this kind of subsistence as interstitial economy shows that there are complex intra- and inter-ethnic relationships that can best be described and understood together with the characteristics of the territory in which they occur.

Keywords: Segregation and exclusion processes in urban spaces; Interethnic relationships in urban spaces; Portuguese Gypsies’ ways of life; street market and horse trade; non-formal economy

4) OLIVERA, Martin: “Kana naj love, naj patjiv”: “No money, no respect” – Economic ethics and domestic mode of production among Roma Gabori: the mechanisms of independence

Abstract: From ethnographic observations focused on the economic practices (ways of production and spending of the resources), this paper aims to highlight the way that the Gabori Roma in Transylvania maintain and develop their material independence and their symbolic autonomy, in close relation with the Gaže. Using in particular the work of Marshall Sahlins on

the Domestic Mode of Production, it is to see how a society drowned in otherness, usually seen as socio-economically marginal and politically dominated, manages to establish a logic of abundance and takes possession of the world (including Gaže), by its economic practices addressed as "total social fact".

Keywords: Gabori Roma, Romania, Domestic Mode of Production, profitability business ethics, autonomy

PANEL 3

1) BRAZZABENI, Micol: Shouts and calls in open-air markets in Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Portuguese Gypsy vendors and the rhetoric of the “national product”

Abstract: In this paper I follow arguments put forward by Richard Bauman (2008) about the existence of a performative economy of open-air markets represented by shouts and calls, oral advertisements of the sellers, negotiations, gestures, and suggesting to consider them as economic phenomena, from both theoretical and methodological point of view. In fact, analyzing shouts and calls could offer an interesting perspective on markets as modern cultural performances and as ritual events that are symbolically highly marked.

Based on my on-going ethnographic fieldwork in four urban periodical open-air markets in Lisbon Metropolitan Area, in this paper I aim, first of all, to recreate the soundscapes of these fairs, and secondly, to analyze callings and shouts as performances of what I call “the rhetoric of the national product”, considering strategic and commercial uses of the economics in the political, social and economic local conjuncture. Portugal has been connoted for a very deep financial crisis which is revealed by its inclusion among the countries called PIIGS by international economic press. In this context moral, political and rhetoric discourses about measures of economic protectionism emerge, that is, the production of discourses that denigrate specifically the bad quality of Chinese products.

These are some of the focus points that stimulate my observation and analysis: shouts and calls are a consistent and constant presence in Gypsy commercial practices; they exhibit a strong performative dimension; Gypsy vendors use shouts and calls to manipulate “strategic essentialism” in a context where power relationships have a different texture; the result of these shouts is to produce a kind of moral economy addressed to consumers.

Keywords: Portuguese Gypsy vendors; Performance; Callings and Shouts; Moral Economic Rhetoric

2) SOLIMENE, Marco: “Ĝav Pála Sastri“ (I Go For Iron). Xoraxané Romá Collecting Scrap Metal In Rome (Italy)

Abstract: This paper discusses the activity of scrap metal collection carried out by some families of Bosnian xoraxané romá living in Rome (Italy). Drawing from my ethnographic materials, I will describe the practices of collection and separation of the metals, and their consequent sale to large collectors. Under the looking glass will be the interactions taking place between the romá and the gaǵé (collectors, local citizens and authorities). I will also inquire into the ambiguous relations the romá develop with other Roma groups (especially Romanian Roma) who also work collecting scrap metal.

“To go for iron“, as the romá call this activity, is a source of income with important symbolical implications. It enables the romá to get familiar with the gaǵikanó space and get appropriated of it; also, it concurs to the construction of the socio-cultural specificity of the romá, in relation to Italian majority society and other Roma groups. Finally, I will explore the idea of recycling associated to “going for iron“, and show that it has little to do with environmental issues and much to do, instead, with the specific way the romá look at the world and live in it.

Keywords: Xoraxané Romá, scrap metal collection, Rome, recycling, identity

3) FERRARI, Florencia: Deceit, syncretism and efficacy: fortune telling among the Calon Gypsies in São Paulo

Abstract: Palm reading has been a major issue in Western imaginary of the Gypsies, conflating fear and fascination. In this paper I approach palm reading ethnographically, as it appears in the daily life of Calon Gypsies in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Calin (Gypsy women) of this region read palms as a regular activity and it constitutes a (secondary) source of livelihood of a nuclear family. It takes place in busy streets and is exclusively addressed towards gaje. My aim here is to portray how the interaction between a Calin and a Gajon/Gajin is constructed, i.e. how meaning is negotiated considering different worldviews acting simultaneously. It is my intention to help to overcome reductionist explanations of the practice as either an “esoteric knowledge” or a mere “deception”, by describing distinct levels of meaning and understandings taking part in it. Inspired by Roy Wagner’s and Viveiros de Castro’s theoretical approaches to questions of cultural misunderstandings, I propose to unravel misunderstandings raised by this experience, trying to trace down assumptions rooted in different “cosmologies”. This investigation leads me to argue that notions such as “shame” and “luck”, together with conceptions of time (“past”, “future”) are conceived by Calon and by Gaje differently, leading to contradictions and misunderstandings about the meaning of fortune telling itself. However, for the same reason palm reading amounts to a rather affectively intense encounter resulting in a potent symbolic efficacy.

Keywords: Gypsies in Brazil, palm reading, meaning, misunderstanding, deceit (or deception)

PANEL 4

1) FOTTA, Martin: Moneylending to brasileiros and unstable hierarchisation among the Calon of Bahia: A Values-Based Analysis

Abstract: In recent decades, a population of Gypsies (Ciganos) living in Bahia, who call themselves Calon, have been specializing in lending money on interest. Behind the development of this specialization is the emergence of new interstices caused about by monetization of daily life and by a rise of a distributional regime that is recognizably neo-liberal. Here Calon moneylending exploits unsettling caused by recent shifts in flows of wealth and sources of value with the state becoming the dominant arbiter. Several recent developments have increased demand for cash in the Bahian interior and small-town life is now characterized by a dense financial net of various credit/debt forms – formal and informal, novel and traditional – stimulated by the state intervention.

Within this context Ciganos-as-moneylenders are one of many existing credit institutions. Moneylending is a masculine activity. It is not only a source of income but a way to reconfigure proper manhood. It also creates a context within which proper relationships towards others are evaluated – although both are interest-bearing, loans among kin are of a different order than those to brasileiros, the non-Gypsies. In case of the latter, the aim is to establish long-term clients, where money-would flow one way; loans among the kin often serve as a way to finance this effort. In lending money to brasileiros Calon manipulate long-standing images of Ciganos in Bahia. But transactions have to be carefully managed as every monetary loan threatens to turn into other sorts of reciprocities while possibilities of enforcement are limited. Since informal moneylending is risky and not all men are equally successful, gains and losses, as objectifications of man's autonomy and acumen, impact his reputation leading to constant recursive rearrangement of social relations.

Keywords: financialisation, regime of value, credit/debt, autonomy and relatedness, Brazilian Calon

2) **MANRIQUE, Nathalie: To be rich, give your money: Wealth, hierarchy and identity among Gypsies of two small andalusian towns (Spain)**

Abstract: Among the Gypsies of Morote and San Juan (south of Spain), the accumulation of goods has no meaning. On the contrary, one's greater or lesser propensity to share his wealth determines its place within living beings. Indeed, statuses but also the Gypsy identity (the higher status you have, the more quantity of "gypsiness" you concentrate) are based on classification criteria that, by the mechanism of gift, orders individuals and groups in several hierarchical categories inherited at birth where givers (thought to be generous) are superior to receivers (thought to be less generous). Here reciprocity is impossible. In this way, human beings are held to be superior to animals, Gypsies to Payos, men to women, etc. Therefore, to accumulate money, is to endanger one's own humanity and "gypsiness".

Within each category, statuses are periodically readjusted by means of reciprocal transactions. This allows a kind of rebalancing of wealth favorable to equality of status among peers.

This lack of capitalization is also true for the transmission of goods: after the death, anything that recalls the dead is "forgotten", burned or buried. Thus, the Gypsies' status and wealth cannot be inherited.

Keywords: Spain, gift, hierarchy, wealth, generosity

3) TESAR, Catalina: Wealth in Houses. Conspicuous Consumption among Romanian Cortorari Gypsies

Abstract: The Romanian Romany-speaking population of Cortorari draws a contrast between two kinds of wealth. On the one hand, people contend that their “wealth” (*averea*) consists of some material items chalices (*taxtaja*) that have a preeminent role in practices and representations of marriage and filiation. On the other hand, people constantly endeavour to raise big houses which are always under construction, given the open competition among owners for increasing the “bigness” of a house. This paper tackles the seemingly competition between chalices, which in people’s talk stand for inherited wealth, and houses, which are represented as present achievement. Money invested in the construction of a house is derived from begging activities in the streets of Western Europe. I will argue that chalices stand for houses in Levi-Strauss’ “house-based society” and are a metaphor for the growth of interconnectedness. Conversely, houses index owners’ economic betterment, by being agentive artefacts in the process of individuation

Keywords: Inalienable possessions, kinship, morality of exchange, money, property