May 2017
Volume: 1, **No**: 1, pp. 85 – 88
ISSN: 2515-3064
tplondon.com/jgs

Book Reviews

Micol Brazzabeni, Manuela Ivone Cunha & Martin Fotta (eds.) (2016). **Gypsy Economy: Romani Livelihoods and Notions of Worth in the 21st Century**. New York: Berghahn Books, (272 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1-78238-879-1).

Gypsy Economy emerged out of a 2012 Exploratory Workshop organized by the European Science Foundation Lisbon, titled "The Two Sides of the Coin: Gypsy Economies between the State and the Market." Interestingly, Keith Hart, who is not a specialist in Gypsy Studies, was invited to give feedback at the conference and consequently wrote the Afterword of the edited volume. In fact, Hart was invited precisely because he is not a "Gypsiologist." As an expert in economic anthropology, his input speaks to the ambition of the editors to challenge the analytical limitations of the discipline within discipline(s) (Gypsy Studies), and to mobilize Gypsy ethnographies as a heuristic to the understanding of the contemporary economic system in particular and a contribution to anthropology in general.

In their volume, Gypsy Economy: Romani Livelihoods and Notions of Worth in the 21st Century, Micol Brazzabeni, Manuela Ivone Cunha and Martin Fotta attempt to move beyond a mere exploration of the economic practices of "people belonging to various Roma and Gypsy populations" into a terrain where Gypsy economy becomes "an interpretative lens through which to investigate how people position themselves in relation to the current economic system and to the changing nature of the roles of states, markets, and finance" (3). A sensitivity to the political potential of anthropology is present as well as a concentrated effort to depart from the NGO-marketed image of the Roma as uniquely passive victims in need of salvation and civilizing.

The contributors to the volume are primarily young anthropologists who share their insights into the topic from their experiences of long-term fieldwork with Roma communities spanning a remarkable geographic range — Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the UK, and Brazil. The compilation covers a diversity of Romani butji [Roma work], from palm-reading and begging to moneylending, and the eleven chapters of the volume are thematically organized along four themes ("monetary flows," "economic strategies and market interactions," "performance," and "understandings of wealth and value").

The issue of moneylending is a theme running through several chapters. Tomáš Hrustič's chapter on usury, however, is primarily descriptive and it remains a challenge to discern the author's main argument. Towards the end of

the chapter, one is left with an uncomfortable sense that poor Gypsies are "fool Gypsies," while ones who profit from others' poverty are somehow better. The boundary between auto-identification and the ethnographer's treatment of the topic remains blurred. Judith Durst, on the other hand, provides a nuanced and sensitive account on the same topic, inquiring into the morals of informal lending practices. She sets out to explore the puzzle of a particular Roma community guided by the principles of equality and solidarity, where people who exploit their fellows through exorbitant rates of interest are nevertheless "considered part of the moral community" (58). From her field, Durst draws significant conclusions on the nature of usurious practices, seeing them as tools for hierarchical redistribution which deepen social inequalities and yet are not equally condemned by borrowers.

This brings me to a significant debate that recurs across chapters — the discussion of the significance of morals and ethics for Gypsy economy and identity formation. Martin Olivera discusses how the economy produces Roma society "while ensuring [its] complete symbolic independence" (147). He analyses Gypsy economy as a "form of ethics," guided by a "logic of abundance" where accumulating money simply does not make sense. Here, money only has use value and a potential to fuel Gypsy sociability. Marco Solimene's ethnographic portrait and multilayered analysis of the "Gypsy Work" of the ferrivecchi, Roma scrap metal collectors in Rome, suggests that it is an example of an economy based on trust and mutual appropriation.

Sara Sama Acedo mobilizes the concept of the "interstice" to analyze the complex social and spatial relations and processes that construct Gypsy niche occupations — in her case, that of a house-dealing Cigano family in Portugal. She also highlights the importance of moral conventions in the processes of Ciganos' economic practices which "follow their own rationale, taking on alternative and sometimes unexpected forms, emerging from a constant rearrangement of relationships, territories, and mobility and settlement requirements. … [and] are related to specific historical circumstances" (83).

In a thought-provoking chapter, Gergő Pulay confronts the myths that equate a poor Roma neighborhood of Bucharest to a hell-like ghetto. Focusing on the everyday management of ambiguity, the author understands this peripheral zone as "an extremely busy intersection between diverse local and transnational networks" (130). Importantly, Pulay draws no sharp distinctions between Roma and non-Roma, which strongly distinguishes his account not only from the rest of the chapters in the book, but also from most writings on the Roma.

Some contributions appear to be only tangentially connected to the research agenda of the editors (e.g., Cătălina Tesăr's and Nathalie Manrique's chapters). Manrique does not avoid falling into the trap of constructing a monolithic Other in the "Gypsies of Two Small Towns in Andalusia, Spain." The author's account is insensitive, making a number of dangerously categorical (not to say judgmental) statements without supporting them with ethnographic material.

All in all, the edited volume is a valuable contribution to "Gypsy Studies" and beyond, especially because the editors and the majority of contributors maintain awareness of the semantic emptiness of the term "ethnic" in reference to the Roma. Martin Oliveira, among others, aims to "'de-Gypsify' our perception of Rom economy" (148). As suggested by Michael Stewart in Multi-disciplinary Approaches to Romany Studies, rich and honest analysis of Romany lives demands that authors transcend the "'ethnic' frame of reference"[1]. I would conclude with Keith Hart's vision of the reinvention of anthropology, in which the study of Gypsy economy can play an important role: "the point of this is to blow up Homo economicus, which is one of the sacred myths of our own version of unequal society" (242).

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Lech Mróz (2015). **Roma-Gypsy Presence in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**, **15th-18th Centuries**. Budapest: Central European University Press (332 pp., e-ISBN-13: 978-963-386-109-7).

Mróz offers an enlightening analysis of 166 original and unpublished documents dated from 1401 to 1765 including some royal decrees, law suits, and registries and records from local governments from a wide geography covering Poland along with Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine. It is a valuable contributions for English readers as documents were in Polish, Latin, German and Ruthenian. Keener readers would find the translations of documents into modern Polish and English helpful along with the originals.

Author understandably struggled and felt discomfort with the use of Gypsy or Roma to refer to this group. As he explained in the introduction, not the best solution but a workable one. Apparently in historic documents, the word Roma almost non-existent but with the political correctness of today, it replaced Gypsy in most accounts. This will remain to be a controversial issue; but if we are to take sides, I think based on the fact that many "Roma"/"Gypsy" people prefer to be called with the traditional name, our decision to title the Journal as it is is justified.

The book comes in ten chapters and unveil the Gypsy history in Eastern Europe in eight analytical chapters based on the official documents. It begins with the Gypsy immigration to Poland and continues with examples and discourse of adaptation, continues onto how they were seen as a threat and hostility towards Gypsies before reaching to the point when Gypsies were criminalised in the 18th Century.

[1] Stewart, M. & M. Rövid (Eds.). 2010. *Multi-disciplinary approaches to Romany studies*. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Mróz's careful and considerate account, on the hand, tells us the story of Gypsy migrations as they become known to Europeans as time passed and more documents mentioned them, and on the other, he is showing that Gypsies have adopted to, or influenced by European cultures as they migled through the history and the routes of Gypsy wanderings.

Perhaps readers will find it amusing to see that Roma/Gypsy populations were well respected settled populations in stark contrast to the stereotypes dominant today. Apparently a shift of views had taken place over the centuries. The book is a good addition to libraries for those who want to understand Roma in contemporary Europe with a historical perspective. At the end of the day, it was a book designed for this purpose: a summary version of the book titled "A History of the Gypsy-Roma Presence in the 15th–18th Centuries" and published in Warsaw in 2002. Author states that a shorter version was needed for international audiences and hence a less detailed revision was produced.

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