

CHAPTER 3

LOS COMERCIANTES DEL RASTRO AND THE 'GITANO NICHE'



PRELUDE: *EL DOMINGO DEL RASTRO*

Sunday morning howls, honks, slams, shouts and flaps as the rusty vans and screeching trolleys manoeuvre and dance their way around and down the steep hills of el Rastro. The male drivers bellow at one another to edge their way into position and dump their load. Families erect iron poles and tarpaulin, and arrange their commodities on tables, racks and hangers. Eventually, they sit down to enjoy a short coffee break before the morning customers arrive. It is market day in el Rastro, Madrid.

'Oneeurooneeurooneeurooneeurooooo. Only one euro. Take advantage young laaaadieeee. Only today. One euro. Socks, stockings, brassieres and briefs ... Take advantage young ladies from the offeriiiiings. Only today beautiful ones. One euroooo.' Morning sounds have become midday songs, and the crowd has grown. Juan, a full-chested Gitano in his 40s, dressed in a shiny leather jacket, sings out his offerings: 'Take advantage, ladies, one euro, only today!'

Maria, the grey-haired hunchback viuda ('widow'), dressed in black, nasally sings out her reduced prices on leather jackets, fur coats, elegant hats, fine leather boots and belts: 'Ladies and gentlemen, only today, take advantage now, last day, the best quality, made here in Spain.'

Tomás, a 64-year-old wrinkly and scrawny Gitano, hollers out his inventory of shiny kitchenware: pots and pans, knives and forks, ladles, spoons and scoops. 'Knives, foorks and spoons everybodyyy ... ladies and gentlemen, men and women of all agesssss ... only today, last day of reduce prices, take advantage now, last day, the best qualityyyy.'

And the youth Teresa, a singer from the Gitano Pentecostal church choir, also sings out her bargains from her table of scarves, sunglasses, hair ties and clips: 'Only today you beautiful ones. Last day of reduced prices. Gorgeous women! Take advantage now good-looking woman! Buy one for yourself now beautiful! Only today, the best offerings for attractive ladies!'

Juanita, a petite woman in her 70s with a crooked back, has a small area at the end of her niece's table to sell scarves. As is typical for the Gitano merchant families of el Rastro, she and several family members purchase these scarves in large quantities at the Chinese wholesale-industrial complex of Fuenlabrada, just south of Madrid. There, she might have paid 30 centimes or so for each scarf, which she then sells to customers in el Rastro for 1 euro. Juanita has spent her life married to 'no one but God' and lives by herself in a small one-room apartment in el Rastro. She always serves coffee to her visitors, a token of love and respect for her fellow men and women and a sign of good Christian and Gitano morality.

It is her nephew, who owns a van, who makes the 40-minute trip to the 'Chinatown' of Fuenlabrada to buy the 500 scarves that he then distributes to his family to sell at el Rastro on Sundays. Fuenlabrada is an industrial complex consisting of hundreds of warehouses, all neatly arranged on a grid of broad streets. Most of the warehouses there have Chinese signs and logos. In addition, there are a couple of Chinese restaurants in the area and even a Chinese Pentecostal church, all underscoring the ethnic influence of the place. At Fuenlabrada, trade between Chinese salespersons and the mainly Spanish, Gitano and non-Gitano customers is facilitated by both Chinese- and Spanish-speaking law offices with departments both here and in el Rastro.

If the Sunday market were to be personified, people like Juanita or Loli would come to mind. Together with her sister, Prieta, as well as her daughters, nieces and nephews, Loli sells quite expensive and high-quality shoes at one of the upper plazas of el Rastro. However, upon request, she can easily source a crystal chandelier and other antique luxuries. Loli is a widowed Gitana in her 50s with dark blonde hair, warm features and a constant smile on her face and twinkle in her eyes. She is an itinerant trader, meaning that on other days of the week she and her family travel to



Figure 3.1. Aerial view of El Rastro Market on a busy Sunday morning. Photo by Marianne Brodersen



Figure 3.2. A main street in the Chinese industrial complex of Fuenlabrada, Madrid. Photo by Marianne Brodersen

surrounding villages. Her family was originally from Andalucía, which her dyed blonde hair is meant to communicate. Exemplifying the fate of several of my Gitano friends in el Rastro, six years after my first meeting with her, she told me that her landlord had decided to raise her rent from 400 to 1,200 euros per month. Neoliberal gentrification had reached the *barrio*. Loli and her daughters were unable to pay the rent and ended up 'on the street'. After a year in this situation, Loli, her sister and their families were finally given a social security, low rent apartment on a seven-year lease in the marginalized suburb of Vallecas. Consequently, she had to move from el Rastro, where she was born and raised and where she has her market stand, church and kin.

Together with all the colourful stands, the essence of the Sunday market is well captured by the many antique shops that swell into the streets, with their ornaments, golden-framed mirrors, renaissance paintings, grand chandeliers, mahogany thrones, classical sculptures, limestone columns, brass and copper bowls with iron handles, Persian carpets, Arabic tiles, Chinese porcelain, old Andalusian wooden doors and lattice windows, and books. The books are available in all sizes, colours and genres – from biblical to political and romantic to economic – and from dusty and antique to gleaming and new, illegible to legible, rare to cheap. All of these are available amidst a variety of home goods: bread cutters, knife holders, dish covers, saucepans, graters, kitchen scales, rolling pins and whisks, to name only a few.

Contrasting the loudness and intensity surrounding the tarpaulin stands, the sound that emanates from the antique shops is a firm, muffled and almost mute one. The salesmen of these shops often sit outside, speaking to colleagues or family members in a low and complicit tone, or they walk slowly around the antiquities that are neatly arranged in front of their shops and discuss items with customers in a seemingly half-interested, half-careless tone. These conversations often revolve around the origin and originality of an object, the history and tradition of a certain pattern or the authenticity and quality of a particular material. If a customer makes the unfortunate decision to ask the price of an item, the antique dealer will likely grunt back at him and redirect the customer to the uniqueness and quality of the item.

Most of the antique shops in el Rastro are family run and passed down through generations. Proprietors will travel far to gather objects, with many leaving Spain in search of a good haul. During my fieldwork, I came to know a couple of Gitano brothers who would travel to Turkey to fill their van with Persian carpets that they would then bring back to el Rastro to sell. Once, these brothers even travelled to South America to dig for gold. Between 2012 and 2013, this was not an unfamiliar practice, as the price of gold in Spain reached a high point in 2011 and was still strong one to two years

later; a couple of my Payo friends even used their savings to buy shares in a newly discovered gold mine in Colombia.

However, while many of the vendors at the Sunday market travel abroad to gather their wares, Andalucía seems to be the most common source of goods. In Andalucía, vendors have many contacts and large networks, and they may collect large quantities of antique horse gear: rusty horseshoes and nails, cracked yet polished leather saddles, old yet tenderly waxed stirrups, shiny bridles that have seen the insides of many a horse's mouth, chapped blinders, whips and reins hardened by time yet cared for with gentle and knowing hands, wagon wheels with staggered or straight spokes, half carts of solid wood, and heavy ploughs with dull blades.

The antique dealers of el Rastro are not only used to dealing with foreign tourists and local Madridians – in search of small curios to decorate their living rooms – but many are also in the habit of transacting with aristocrats and bourgeoisie. Only these social elites have the capital, interest and property to buy and display a three-meter-tall statue of a seductive Aphrodite or a life-sized, crawling and sneering Chinese porcelain tiger. Photos displayed behind the counters of these shops advertise the managers' business relationships with Real Madrid football stars, famous actors and singers, prominent politicians and businessmen, Italian fashion celebrities and Spanish royals – all performative and expressive displays of their influential clientele.

At the Sunday market, midday sees a growing crowd of buyers, who teem around the 1,750 stalls in the streets of el Rastro. In this scene, it is as if the merchants' calling out of offers and bargains momentarily transforms objects into sounds, inducing objects with poetic qualities, before they reappear as (reshaped) objects in the hands of the buyer. The meetings between merchants and customers are therefore also the stage where objects become imbued with meaning. On market day, everyday life takes a poetic turn. The abandoned *poligno industrial* (industrial park), as some disparagingly call it, and the empty streets of Embajadores and Lavapiés become the alluring *Domingo del Rastro* (Rastro Sunday), with the Gitano *comerciantes* (merchants) as the key creators of this transformation, alongside Payo, African, Chinese and other salespersons, entertainers and customers.

GITANO ECONOMIC PRACTICES

In the following, I organize the economic practices of the Gitanos of el Rastro into nine summarizing observation points. These will serve as ethnographic points of departure for the subsequent analysis of the Rastro Gitanos' *making of market*.

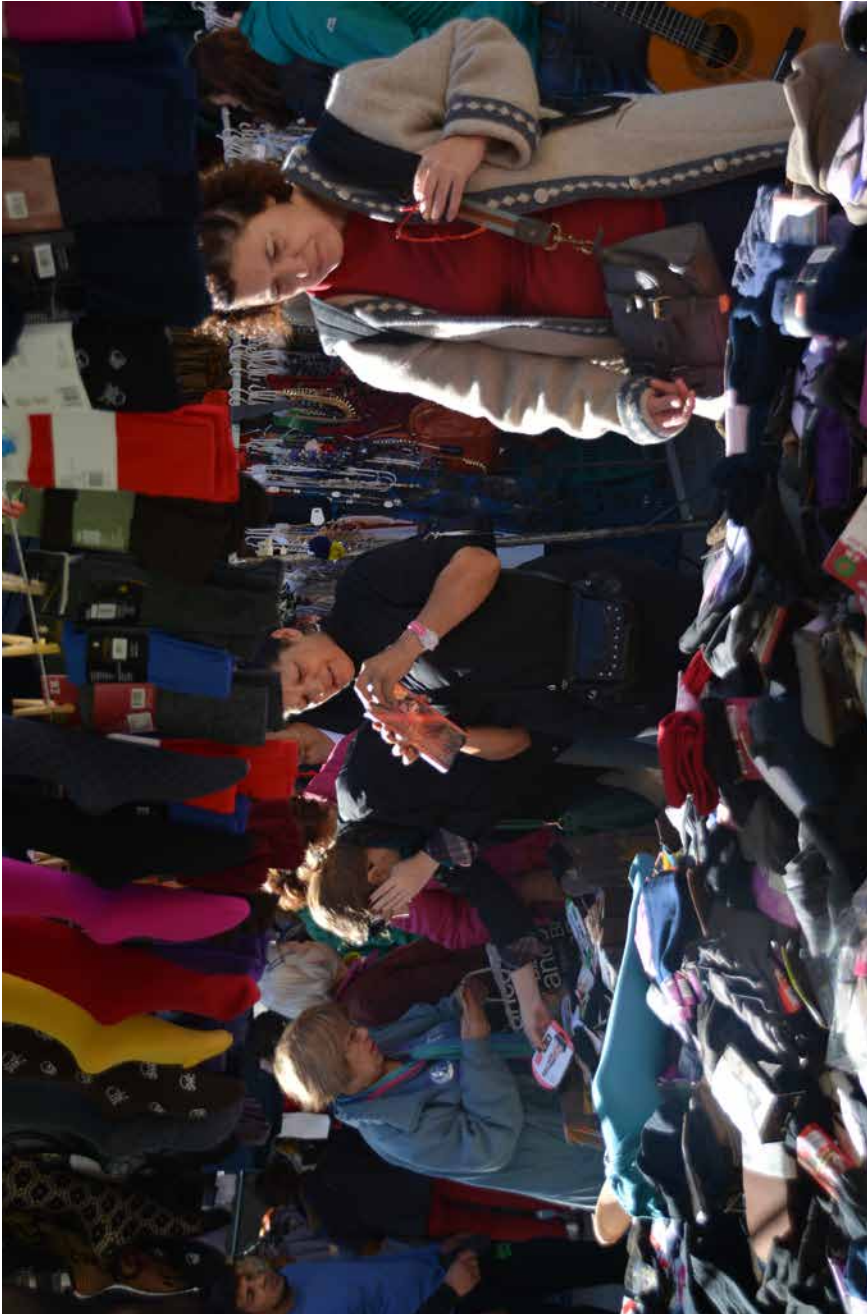


Figure 3.3. Customers looking for a good buy in el Rastro. Photo by Sunniva Hammerås

My first observation pertains to the Rastro Gitanos' ideological rejection of the mainstream division of labour, a modern principle of societal organization that seeks to place them, I argue, at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, where there are only so-called 'dirty jobs' (see also Brodersen and Røyrvik 2021; Karakayali 2006). Although this subject is carefully considered in the Conclusion, some instant details are called for at this point. In short, approximately 70 per cent of the Gitanos of el Rastro are involved in self-employed trade, either as itinerant traders or market vendors. The Gitanos who spoke to me about their attitudes around work repeatedly and consistently expressed a deep scepticism towards the proletarian system of capitalist wage labour. Both analytically and metaphorically, I summarize their ideological rejection as an ethos of 'being one's own master', and in this chapter I will provide empirical examples of these attitudes and their associated practices.

A second ethos underlying the Rastro Gitanos' commercial model is what I like to call an 'entrepreneurial ethos' – that is, a culturally produced ability to actively and creatively break with the normal economic flow by creating something new or combining existing material or immaterial assets. As the ethnographic material indicates, this entrepreneurial practice is exemplified by the Rastro Gitanos' constant (re-)creations of a socio-economic niche and cultural and religious expressions. In Joseph Schumpeter's ([1934] 2000) vocabulary, I analyse these actions as akin to a 'creative destruction'. Further, this ethos relates directly to the breaking of barriers and combining spheres of activity, as debated, for example, by Fredrik Barth (1967), Bohannan and Bohannan (1968), Bloch and Parry (1989), Guyer (2004), Sillitoe (2006) and others.

Third, the Gitanos of el Rastro make no strict distinction between leisure and work. Hence, while the modern divide between economic and other (e.g. social or religious) activities is acknowledged, it is less prevalent in this context. For the Rastro Gitanos, the economy is not isolated as a separate sphere of activity with particular logos but intrinsically part of a larger social universe.

Fourth, the Rastro Gitanos' commercial operations are typically family run. They may be time and people intensive, but they require minimal costs to operate. The success of their ventures depends on strategic mobility, characterized by an ability to find new markets or niches to 'fill', as well as vocational flexibility and resourcefulness. This observation brings to mind descriptions of so-called 'peripatetic peoples' (Berland 1979, 1982, 1983, 1986; Berland and Rao 2004; Rao 1987), but it also resembles ethnographic descriptions of Gypsy/Roma peoples elsewhere (Okely 1983; San Román 1997). Moreover, Chayanov's Rule, formulated by Marshall Sahlins (1974: 87) as 'the greater the relative working capacity of the household, the less

its members work', comes to mind in relation to the seemingly non- or minimal accumulative nature of the Rastro Gitanos' economic model.

Fifth, the Gitano *comerciantes* (and their families) are both managers and entrepreneurs. That is to say, they act simultaneously as investors, day-to-day managers and innovators. The implication of this is that their businesses – and not least their household economy – are highly vulnerable to changes in demand and other economic and societal fluctuations (e.g. Schumpeter [1934] 2000). The life of a *comerciante's* family is thus always, to some extent, conditioned by commercial success or failure – with both material, cosmological and ontological consequences.

The sixth observation pertains to the Rastro Gitanos' model of knowledge and learning. The Gitanos of el Rastro pass knowledge down through generations through shared participation in economic, social and religious activities. While most of the children finish primary school, many of the parents emphasize that the purpose of school is mainly to teach basic reading, writing and mathematics. Once this is achieved, life itself is considered the main arena for knowledge acquisition. The work of a *comerciante* at the market includes a lot of direct buying and selling, in other words, a lot of face-to-face contact with both salespersons and market customers. Hence, because the *comerciantes* deal with a variety of people in a range of different roles daily, a combination of intuition and practical, psychological, emotional and rational knowledge thus becomes highly relevant and important. In other words, both by form, content and way of acquisition knowledge is supposed to be socially 'all-inclusive' – something perceived as hard to achieve in a mere curricular setting.

The seventh observation relates to what I term an 'ontology of simultaneity' – that is, the unification of dichotomies or oppositions that otherwise would be seen as binary – which I argue serves as a conceptual prerequisite to the Rastro Gitanos' economic, social and religious activities. Although the topic is thoroughly addressed in Chapter 8, some immediate explanation is called for here. Socio-economically, the Rastro Gitanos' position as ethnically distinct middleman traders puts them in a specific relation to larger society – arguably akin to that of a Simmelian (1908) stranger, with a simultaneous nearness and remoteness to (for instance) mainstream class hierarchies, moral notions and obligations, as well as the Spanish society and imagined community. As I see it, the Gitanos of el Rastro are not *outsiders* in a strict sense; rather, they are *simultaneously* inside and outside, obliged and not obliged, belonging and not belonging, and so on and so forth. An argument that runs throughout the book, thus, is that it is the Rastro Gitanos' position of *simultaneity* that enables them – to various degrees and with certain limitations – to transgress mainstream hierarchies, notions, obligations and structures of belonging. I furthermore argue

that this ‘ontology of simultaneity’, which is (at least partly) produced by their particular socio-economic position, engenders them with both social mobility and cosmological flexibility – whether they want it or not. Hence, to view the position of class-transgressing middle-to-upper class Gitanos of el Rastro as ‘marginal’ – in terms of their informal economic practices on the ‘margins’ or ‘interstices’ of the mainstream economy – would be to miss the point.

The eighth observation about the Rastro Gitanos’ economic practices pertains to their particular processes of meaning making. At the market – as in church – I explore in this study how meaning and materiality work on one another in a continuous Peircean movement (1992, 1998; Hardwick and Cook 1977), re-creating and regenerating each other through a constant play between the potentialities and actualizations of objects and signs. Based on my findings, I in fact argue that their manipulation, actualization and attribution of meaning to objects and signs are at the very core of the Rastro Gitanos’ economic activities and success as middleman traders. There is a certain amount of flexibility – call it improvisation – attached to their practices, but their success is equally dependent on their ability to ‘know’ the potentiality (or rigidly defined limits) of materiality, people and social relations. These meaning-making practices are discussed in greater depth in Chapters 8 and 9.

The ninth and final observation point of the Rastro Gitanos’ economic practices that I will bring forth here relates to the ‘joy of creation’. For Schumpeter ([1934] 2000), the joy of creation is linked to getting things done and exercising one’s energy and ingenuity. Entrepreneurs, as Schumpeter describes, do not avoid difficulty; on the contrary, they confront it, much as they seek change and delight in venture. As middleman traders, the Gitano *comerciantes* of el Rastro draw no clear demarcation between work and leisure or family and business. There is no doubt that the Rastro Gitanos’ business model fully encompasses their entire way of life. At the market, as in church, rapture, joy, ecstasy and bliss are prominent expressions, as are lament, sorrow and despair. The simultaneous ‘pleasure-pain’ (e.g. Schumpeter [1934] 2000) process of performing, eluding and seducing in order to create new possibilities, develop and showcase talents and – in short – produce existence *per se* is in fact what I view as the main drive behind the Rastro Gitanos’ socio-economic and socio-religious ethos and practices. Furthermore, I would argue that this is not only the main *drive* but also the very medium through which they create their lives, life worlds and livelihoods *a la manera Gitana* (‘the Gitano way’).

Building on the nine ethnographic observations just described and which the attentive reader will find echo throughout this book, in the following section, I will apply the analytical concepts of ‘peripatetic niches’

and ‘peripatetic groups’ (Berland 1979, 1982, 1986; Berland and Rao 2004; Rao 1987) to draw ethnographic comparisons with the Rastro Gitanos’ economic strategies and practices. In doing so, I will prepare the groundwork for Chapter 4, in which I dig deeper into the mechanisms and inner dynamics of the economic practices of the Gitanos of el Rastro.

In the following section, I present an historical account of the middleman traders of el Rastro – the Gitano *comerciantes* (merchants) of el Rastro. The story is one of continuous rises and falls, successes and failures, and fluctuating circumstances and shifting tactics. The economic history of these people stretches well beyond the concrete locus of el Rastro, to include Andalucía, Latin America and China.

The Merchants of El Rastro

The overarching economic, political and social conditions of globalized, neoliberal society extend into the lives of the Gitanos and lay the premises for their existence. Gitanos, Gypsies, Roma and other ‘peripatetic’ groups (Berland and Rao 2004) have always been dependent on the majority populations for their economic subsistence, vulnerable to shifting ecological and climatic conditions and political regimes, and have responded with varying degrees of assimilation, segregation and integration. The following stories reflect the Rastro Gitanos’ innovative and entrepreneurial strategies in response to such fluctuating opportunities and challenges – that is, their ‘occupational flexibility’, know-how and ‘strategic patterns of mobility’ and ‘resourcefulness’ – skills recognized as common peripatetic strategies (e.g. Berland and Rao 2004). In my view, the stories show how these strategies are at the very core of the Rastro Gitanos’ alternative economic model and practices. In fact, if seen from their point of view, I understand their innovative and entrepreneurial drive to comprise the very foundation of their relation to the larger society. I have chosen to centre the stories on my two closest Gitano friends – Manuel and Bobola – they are however highly descriptive of the various life narratives found amongst the Gitanos of el Rastro.

Horses (pre-1950s)

Whenever Bobola told me the story of her grandfather, she always began with her grandfather on the back of a horse. At age 43, he had attended a *feria* (‘fair’) in Andalucía as a *tratante de caballo* (‘horse handler’) near Seville, where he lived. He was unmarried at the time, on the lookout for a bride, and the *feria*, he felt, was the perfect occasion for him to find his future spouse. At the *feria*, Bobola’s grandfather saw a young girl – at the

time only 15 years old – with whom he fell in love. Both of their families disapproved of the marriage because of the great age difference. Yet he asked her to marry him, and she agreed. ‘Then they rode off on a horse all the way to Madrid’, Bobola always laughed; she thought it was the most romantic tale ever. ‘Look how happy they were’, she would say, showing me their photos. ‘They were just such warm and generous people.’

Like many Gitanos at that time (see San Román 1997), both Manuel and Bobola’s grandfathers were *tratantes de caballo* and *chalanés* (‘horse dealers’). The work of a *tratante* included breeding and training horses, buying and selling horses at the *ferias*, attending horse shows and competitions, and using horses to transport goods and work in agriculture. Until the Spanish Civil War of 1936, horses also functioned as public transportation for the urban populace of Madrid, pulling carriages in the manner of modern buses and taxis. The Gitanos either lent out their horses for these and other purposes or rode the animals themselves.

As a side business, the *tratantes* sold horses as meat when the horses became old, sick or otherwise disabled. There was a slaughterhouse near Bobola’s grandparents’ *finca* (‘estate’). This 500-acre (ca. 2km²) *finca*, which stabled 10 to 12 horses, served as a great social meeting point across generations and families. It was situated in what is now known as the urban area of Carabanchel (perhaps of interest, etymologically linked to *caravan*), which, at that time, was a rural area on the other side of the Manzanares River, outside the city centre of Madrid. From there, horse meat was exported to France, where the upper classes – perhaps considering the high protein level – saw it as a delicacy. The Gitanos themselves did not eat the horse meat. Since the appreciation of horse meat was rather more measured in Spain – apart from maybe among the lower classes, who were forced to see beyond cultural notions of pollution and dirt – the Gitanos used their contacts and knowledge of these gastronomic preferences within the upper strata of French society to make financial gains from their horses.

Although the *ferias* still lived on for quite some time, by the 1950s, horses were largely displaced by machinery in most spheres of urban and rural life. Thus, Manuel and Bobola’s grandfathers turned their knowledge of horses and their skills as *jinetes de caballo* (‘horse riders’) to the film industry. Like many other Gitanos at the time, they rented out their horses and engaged in extra or stunt riding in the works of the Hollywood film producer Samuel Bronston, who filmed many of his large productions in Spain; for example, *El Cid* (1961) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964). According to Manuel and Bobola, their grandfathers were fantastic jockeys who filmed the most spectacular riding scenes, including both horse falls and fights on horseback. As mentioned, they were not alone in involving themselves and their horses in the film industry; many of the Gitanos in Spain did the same

thing, seeking to add to their income as, for instance, seasonal agricultural workers (e.g. San Román 1975).

Textiles and Flexible Mobility (1966–1980s)

The horse business came to an end at around the time when Manuel and Bobola's grandfathers passed away. At this time, many of the Gitanos of el Rastro and the surrounding areas turned to *telas* ('textiles') for their livelihoods. Reputedly, the buyers of these textiles were mostly *gente de la alta sociedad* ('high society people'), and, in the years 1966–1980, textiles became a booming business. In 1966, many Gitanos of el Rastro travelled to Argentina to sell their textiles to remote *haciendas* ('estates' or 'farms') and *pueblos* ('villages') that could not otherwise obtain this merchandise. Remarkably, the Gitanos managed to build large fortunes from this economic activity, and many invested their financial gains in Argentinian property. Many also travelled back to el Rastro and established new *negocios* ('businesses') there. Manuel's uncle was one of these persons who made the journey back home. Upon his return to el Rastro in the early 1980s, he in fact managed to put up four new *negocios*, using his earnings from Argentina.

'The Argentinian Revolution' (or military coup) of 1966 began the governing period of Juan Carlos Onganía. Onganía implemented corporatist policies, wage freezes and a 40 per cent devaluation, which weakened the Argentinian economy – in particular the agricultural sector – and favoured foreign capital. In my fieldwork, the Gitanos of el Rastro never mentioned these historical events in their stories about when and why their ancestors had travelled to Argentina in the 1960s. However, they often referenced the year 1966 in their narratives, so I see the link between their migration and the societal and political changes in Argentina as entirely plausible. Adding to this, in Spain at that time, repression against the Gitanos by the Spanish Guardia Civil and the Francoist dictatorship was particularly harsh, and this undoubtedly played a role in driving many Gitanos to leave.

Exile and Textiles

Manuel was once *expulsado* ('banned') from *el pueblo Gitano* of el Rastro. At age 16, he was meant to marry a young Gitana. The deal had been made; they had 'given each other their hand', as the phrase goes, so the engagement was set. However, Manuel was not in love with the girl. He broke off the engagement and was subsequently banned from *el pueblo Gitano* for six years. During this time, he fled the country and spent several years in Latin America, before returning to Spain at the age of 22. At that time, he married a Paya, had two children and lived a life in *el mundo de los Payos* ('the Payo

world'), as he put it, for twenty or so years. He was finally reintroduced to *el pueblo Gitano* after he divorced the Paya and married Bobola, in his 40s. At the time of my fieldwork, he was 65 and still struggling to feel like a worthy member of the Gitano community of el Rastro. However, his marriage to Bobola – a woman other Rastro Gitanos considered a *pura Gitana* ('pure Gitana') from a very good and respectable family – his manner of conducting business as a *comerciante a la manera gitana* ('the gitano way'), his deep spiritual engagement in *el culto* and his overall comportment and demeanour was helping him little-by-little to regain and increase his social standing within the community.

Before, during and after the Francoist era, many Gitanos in Spain migrated to Mexico and other Latin American countries, aside from Argentina. During his time abroad, Manuel worked with his father in Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia, importing textiles from Spain and selling them at a Latin American market where such textiles were in high demand, especially for garments. According to many of the Gitanos of el Rastro that I spoke with, the pre-1978 period was particularly hard for Gitanos in Spain (see also San Román 1997), and many stayed abroad even during Spain's period of economic growth after 1985. My interlocutors told me numerous stories of devastatingly poor Andalusian Gitanos who had not had the resources to leave the country during the dictatorship but who grew very rich very fast during the boom years. Others, I was told, were not able to come back from Latin America to benefit from the economic growth. Because of this, they were said to have missed out on this opportunity, with the consequence that they were prevented from partaking in the later 'golden age' of el Rastro.

Digital Gadgetry (1970-)

In the early 1970s, Madrid was marked by the entry of a great variety of digital gadgetry, including digital watches, alarm clocks and calculators. The Gitanos of el Rastro were at the front of the line when it came to supplying these new in-demand gadgets to Madridian customers, and again, it was *la gente de la alta sociedad* ('high society people') who comprised the majority of buying customers. At the time, such goods were difficult for consumers to obtain without the proper contacts and connections, and the Rastro Gitanos operated as the link between producers/suppliers and buyers. Thus, their business was highly sought after.

Leather and the Golden Age of Antiquities (ca. 1975-1995)

Beginning in 1975, turnover of leather and skins flourished in el Rastro, and combined with the success of the antique market and the general economic

upswing in Spain after the fall of the dictatorship, a significant amount of money came to circulate in el Rastro – particularly, I was told, among the Gitanos. Rastro Gitanos with whom I talked about the matter connected this ‘golden age of antiques’ to the death of General Franco and the fall of the Francoist dictatorship. In that period, many high-standing people lost their privileges, and political, economic and social capital and values exchanged hands rapidly. There is no doubt that the trade of luxury items and expensive antiques consequently flourished. When I asked why so many of my Gitano companions and their ancestors engaged in the business of selling antiques, they answered simply: ‘There was a lot of money to earn in that sector.’ Still today, some of the richest Gitano families that I met in el Rastro run large antique shops with a long list of high-end clients.

Although antique shops have been in el Rastro ‘forever’ (according to some of my interlocutors), or ‘about 70 years’, I was told that the Gitanos of el Rastro did not significantly enter this niche until the fall of Franco. Following this, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Gitanos and others associated with the antique business enjoyed golden years of economic prosperity. This was a time of *mucha vida* in el Rastro, said Maria, who sells brassieres and stockings at the Sunday market. ‘There was much more life before – more family, unity, and much more hustle and bustle. There is of course still some, but not like before.’ Others told similar stories. In the emblematic housing complexes of *Las Corralas*, famous in this area of Madrid, people used to organize parties ‘all the time’. ‘We had a lot of parties back then’, said Bobola. ‘People used to put up, for example, a piano on the patio of the *Corrala*, and they decorated with colourful flags all around. A lot of people came, danced and made music all night long. It is not like that anymore; we live in different times now.’ Several bad things have happened since these golden years, including an increase in drug-related problems amongst the Gitanos – in el Rastro and elsewhere.

DRUGS: ‘THE SILENT GENOCIDE’

My Gitano companions referred to the 1990s and early 2000s as *la época de bonanza* (‘the boom time’), as it was a period in which many Rastro Gitanos invested in houses, new businesses and a range of luxury items. There were a lot of parties, late nights, shiny convertibles and so on and so forth. However, according to a highly pejorative and negatively reifying, self-reflective explanation given by the Rastro Gitanos themselves, the Gitanos did not manage this situation well: ‘Because of our genetics, because of our lack of culture, or because of our history, living from day to day ... before, you know, the Catholic Kings didn’t let us enter the city to conduct our

businesses; we had to do them outside of the city, and like that we have lived forever, from day to day.’ Thus, in their own descriptions, squandering or lavish behaviour during and after this ‘boom time’ – which often (but not always) included substance abuse – was explained as the result of a ‘lack of culture’, ‘genes’ or ‘our way of being or living’. While we might understand this self-flagellation as representative of a Christian moral and after-the-fact response to excessive living during financial heydays, I do not believe that this boom time was significantly to blame for the increased presence of drugs amongst Gitanos in Spain. Although this is a topic that my empirical material says little or nothing about, summarizing other sources we can with large probability assume that it had something to do with the perpetual marginalization of the Gitano population in Spain. As explained elsewhere, this marginalization included the creation of special purpose living districts (Gay y Blasco 2016; Ruiz 2005, 2014), segregated schools (Gay y Blasco 2003), labour market exclusion, increased urbanization and ghettoization in poor areas, making for worsened health conditions and perpetual discrimination and harassment on ethnic, religious and socio-economic grounds (for more on this, see Brodersen and Røyrvik 2021).

This drug epidemic (ca. 1990s) was described as a ‘silent genocide’ by several Gitano NGO representatives, as it destroyed individuals, families and entire communities. Still today, ‘everyone has a drug addict in his family’, according to Manuel, and he continued:

I have it too, my brother is a drug addict, but we don’t take it too hard. With our morality we are supposed to embrace that too. And people [Gitanos] look down on those who cannot take care of or want to marry a drug addict or an alcoholic. They are almost seen as heroes, but you know, living with a drug addict or an alcoholic is the hardest thing a person can do; it is really tough.

Many of the religious *testimonios* (‘testimonies’) I observed in church were stories coming from men who had risen out of a life of misery, involving adultery, wife beating and substance abuse. In present-day el Rastro, I was told that cocaine is of particular concern, especially among those with a lot of money earned from, for example, brothels, striptease clubs or high fashion. According to many of the Rastro Gitanos I spoke to about this matter, such persons looked upon themselves as belonging to a higher economic class than the rest of *el pueblo* – ‘and maybe they do’, some said, ‘but even though they belong to a higher class than us, and even though they come to *el culto*, they are not good people. Many of them are even drug addicts’.

A parallel problematic sphere of living, in the eyes of the Pentecostal Gitano population of el Rastro, is *el mundo de las artistas* (‘the world of the flamenco musicians’) (see Cantón-Delgado et al. 2020 for similar findings).

A young married couple with two kids – she a distinctive singer in the church choir and he a flamenco dancer – received an apartment and licences for four market stands in el Rastro as a wedding gift from the bride's mother. But the 'life of the artists', I was told, and the couple's 'inability to manage a household', led to chaos and financial difficulties, and only a few years later the young couple lived separately – she with their children and he with his parents. For the Pentecostal Gitanos of el Rastro drugs, 'big money' and a dissolute lifestyle still pose a strong challenge and threat to the lives of *el pueblo Gitano*, with a direct impact on personal health and finances and the unity and wellbeing of individual families.

THE FALL

Between the financial crisis of 2008 and the present day, Manuel and Bobola, like several other Gitanos of el Rastro, experienced multiple phases of downward mobility. This long-term decline was experienced in many areas of their life, but first and foremost financially. Before the financial crisis, they had a large apartment in the middle of el Rastro, as well as three expensive cars; Manuel owned three shops; and they had a female Romanian housekeeper to help Bobola with her daily housework. As Bobola had suffered from several health difficulties for decades, this help around the house was both highly needed and greatly appreciated. As the years went by, Bobola's condition worsened, and she was not able to contribute as much to the household income. At one point, in the years after the financial crisis, Manuel lost their shops and they had to sell their three cars and move to a smaller apartment in el Rastro, and they had to let their housekeeper go. In 2013, they moved once more to a one-room apartment in Carabanchel, five metro stops away from el Rastro. What bothered them most about the new apartment was that it did not have a separate bedroom; rather, the bed was separated from the living room by only a curtain, something that made it difficult for them to have dinner guests, they said. However, on the positive side, the move brought them closer to Bobola's sister, brother, father and many of her nieces, nephews and other extended family members. This was the area where Bobola's grandparents had previously had their *finca*, near the horse slaughterhouse. It was where Bobola grew up and where she, in many ways, still had most of her family. In the end, she was quite happy about the move and enjoyed their new shared swimming pool in the courtyard, which was open and free to use all summer.

Towards the end of 2013, Manuel received a cancer diagnosis. At the same time, Bobola's father suffered from a series of heart attacks and underwent several surgeries. By 2015, Manuel and Bobola had moved to yet

another apartment, even smaller than the last one but situated in the same area. Due to his health issues, Manuel was forced to sell their additional two shops in Barcelona and give up his business with his rich clientele in Madrid. He was free from cancer but had undergone several operations on his hips. Bobola's health was precarious, both physically and mentally. Her bad health, along with the many medications she took to manage it, compounded their financial difficulties and had made Bobola severely depressed. When I saw Manuel and Bobola in 2015, neither of them was receiving a pension or social security income. This was like the experience of many other older Gitanos of el Rastro. Two years later, in 2017, both were receiving the minimum amount of pension, approximately 300 euros each, per month. In addition, Manuel had started to work again, in *la venta ambulante* ('peddling' or 'itinerant trade'), selling clothes from the back of his truck on the outskirts of Madrid. On Christmas Eve 2019, they called me and enthusiastically shared the news that they were once again 'back on the horse', redecorating a large social welfare apartment in Vallecas. They were ready to host me and my family whenever we wanted to visit them. The past years had been rough, they told me, but things were looking brighter now. Unfortunately, the beginning of 2020 brought the Covid-19 crisis, with the consequence that their move was postponed, as they could not leave their house for several months. All church, work and social activities were also put on hold. Once again, circumstances of global proportions had reached into their lives and changed their trajectories.

VENTA AMBULANTE

Bobola and Manuel laughed heartedly when they told me that Manuel had started to work in *la venta ambulante*. Many of the Gitanos of el Rastro saw peddling or itinerant trade as something very low on the socio-economic ladder, not quite as low as begging but nevertheless not particularly respectable. Although most of the Rastro traders added to their income by travelling to sell goods in the villages and suburbs surrounding Madrid, they nevertheless saw *la venta ambulante* as an activity of the past, or – as illustrated by Manuel's case – something a Gitano did only after a major economic fall or as a young person just starting his career. The logic held that, in retail, the firmer and more fixed one's shop was, the higher one's status, and vice versa: the more floating and moveable one's shop was, the lower one's status. The exception to this rule was the Sunday market, with its fixed yet moveable stands. Stands in this market were highly valued, and the Gitano *comerciantes* of el Rastro I spoke with would never have exchanged their stand for a brick-and-mortar outlet. One Gitana – a saleswoman in el

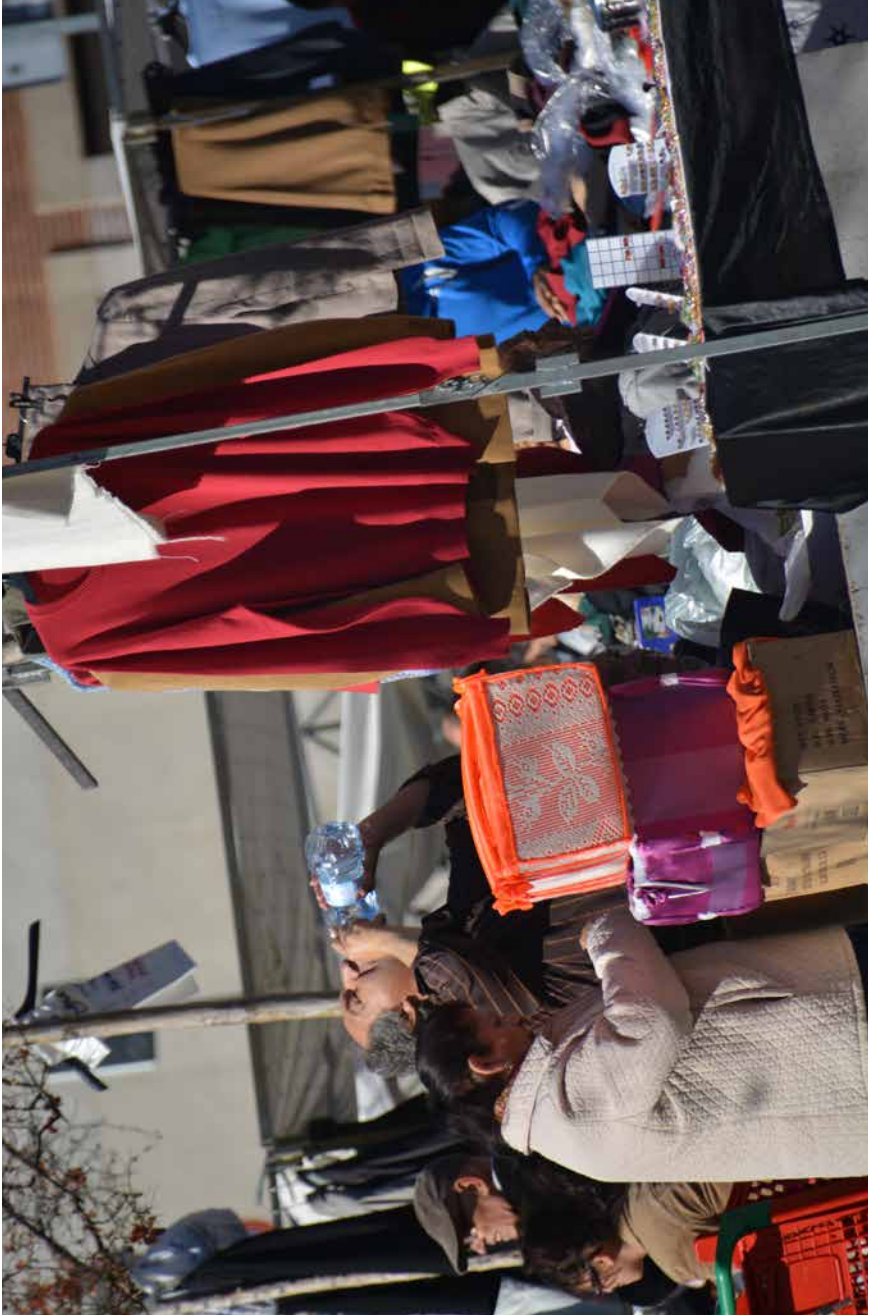


Figure 3.4. Thirst comes to the busy merchants as well. Photo by Sunniva Hammerås

Rastro – spoke very proudly of her business week: she sold clothes at the Sunday market in el Rastro, then, on other days of the week, travelled to the surrounding *villas* and districts of Madrid to sell them.

Manuel and Bobola's heartfelt laugh implied that *venta ambulante* carried within it a suggestion of a romantic past. It certainly reminded Manuel of his wanderings around Latin America with his father in the 1970s, which brought both great fortune and great tragedy. And while the work felt somewhat below their social position, it still fitted with a strategy and provided a highly needed income and promise of a new beginning.

(RE)CREATING A SOCIO-ECONOMIC NICHE

'Peripatetic niches' refers to the economic acts that peripatetic peoples undertake to 'fill the gaps' in mainstream, formalized economic structures (Berland and Rao 2004). As the story shows, neither gaps nor formalized structures are at any time stable or excluded from negotiation for the Gitanos of el Rastro. Rather, we might see them as 'thresholds' between various constantly changing socio-economic spheres, logics or systems (Guyer 2004). To secure their livelihoods and way of living, the Gitanos of el Rastro have manoeuvred these thresholds and adapted to constantly changing socio-economic and political realities, 'boundary-crossing' between the Gitano-Payo worlds. Barth (1964) has likewise noted this ability to 'fill the gap' in his description of the Ghorbati's services to the pastoral Basseri in South Persia. Similarly, Judith Okely pointed to a specific socio-economic niche among Traveller-Gypsies in England, stating that 'it is precisely because the Gypsies' work categories are *not* found in the larger system that they are able to occupy them' (Okely 1983: 50–57, emphasis added).

It was Joseph Berland who first coined the term 'peripatetic groups', a semantically neutral label, in reaction to the variety of derogatory names that had long been applied to them (Berland 1979, 1982). As an analytical construct, it is used to classify a variety of communities (e.g. Gypsy, Traveller, Nawar, Ghajar, Ghorbat, Jat, Halab, Qurbat and Qalander) – primarily in terms of their economic, structural, and organizational activities associated with their specialized niche, as for instance traders, entertainers, artisans, masseurs, prostitutes, beggars or healers. The word 'peripatetic' has roots in the Sanskrit *pârîyâtân* and means 'systematic movement'. It may also be traced back to the Greek language, in which it carries the meaning of 'itinerant' (Berland and Rao 2004).¹ Peripatetic thus seems to embrace the 'reasoned, planned, or deliberate patterns of mobility' (Berland and Rao 2004: 4) that are so important in the adaptive strategies of the groups portrayed. As a categorical construct, it thus constitutes an economic

category and – we might perhaps also add, with Weber ([1922]1978) – a socio-economic *class*. In addition, most ethnographically described peripatetic groups are or have been ethnically endogamous, requiring members to be born into the culture. This is largely the case, for instance, for Gypsies, Nawars and Qalanders (Salo and Salo 1982).

Barth (1984: 78) has emphasized the importance of endogamy in providing intergenerational succession for certain groups, to ensure:

not just parallelisms of individual experience and social category such as may characterize vagabonds or peddlers, but also the continuity of membership that allows comprehensive acculturation into a persisting and adapting culture designed specifically for the peripatetic life.

Seen in this light, the peripatetic life is ‘ideal’ for ethnic maintenance, and perhaps also for ethnogenesis. The latter is particularly true if the separation between contrasting groups prevents strong ties from developing between them – as seems to be the more general picture for the Gitano–Payo relationship.

Historically, as we have seen, the Gitano *comerciantes* of el Rastro have created and maintained a wide variety of positions within their socio-economic niche through occupational flexibility, strategic mobility, resourcefulness and various types of knowledge across a variety of situations and occupations. In the following paragraphs I deal explicitly with these strategies and how they unfold in the empirical context.

OCCUPATIONAL FLEXIBILITY, KNOWLEDGE AND INTUITION

The livelihoods of the Gitanos of el Rastro, throughout history, have been numerous and diverse. While specific trades may be passed through the family for generations, flexibility is required by each inheriting generation. For example, Maria, who sells brassieres and stockings in el Rastro, took over the market licence from her father, who sold antiques from the same stand. Similarly, flexibility may be required in a single generation, when circumstances change. Manuel, for instance, went from selling jewellery at his shops in Barcelona and Madrid to selling clothes from the back of his car. As a young boy, he had often begged on the streets; later, he travelled as a textile merchant with his father in Latin America. Most of the *comerciantes* of el Rastro engage in itinerant trade to supplement their incomes from the Sunday market. Even several Gitano NGO workers (and member of the Spanish parliament, Carla Santiago) whom I came to know supplemented their salaries with either trade at the Sunday market or itinerant trade. In short, my material shows that holding a variety of occupations – both

simultaneously and over the long term – is critical for the Gitanos' economic wellbeing, livelihoods and identity.

Because a majority of the Gitanos of el Rastro do not engage in regular wage labour, their training and skillset stand apart. Schumpeter ([1934] 2000) considered the distinction between the entrepreneur and the capitalist manager equivalent to the difference between practical knowledge (or intuition) and rational knowledge, with the former depicted as 'knowledge of the practical circumstances of time and place' (Hayek [1945] 1972, in Swedberg 2000) or 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983). For a Gitano *comerciante* of el Rastro, rational knowledge is never subordinate to other forms of knowledge; however, to succeed in this market setting, this knowledge has to be blended with emotional and psycho-social forms of knowledge and intuition. Hence, the skills of the Rastro Gitano *comerciantes* are grounded in mixed rational, emotional and psychological competence, and it is not only honed in their social and economic actions and activities but significantly, also, in the bodily-emotional and spiritual ritual practice of *el culto*. In other words, although not adhering to an explicit divide between rational and practical knowledge, because of the significant differences between wage labour and self-employed trading, their knowledge and skills differ from those of a factory worker or service provider. I will give more examples of these differences in subsequent sections.

For the Schumpeterian entrepreneur ([1934] 2000), as opposed to the capitalist manager, many things are uncertain; thus, similar to a 'bricoleur' (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1966; see below), an entrepreneur must foresee and estimate on the basis of *experience*. As Schumpeter ([1934] 2000: 64) described, 'carrying out a new plan and acting according to a customary one are things as different as making a road and walking along it'. In el Rastro, the Gitano *comerciantes* must consider a range of variables to determine where to invest and how to profit most from these investments. Importantly, they must do more than simply respond and react to changing environments; they must also anticipate such changes through a transformation of themselves as *comerciantes* but perhaps also as Gitanos. As Bobola once phrased it with reference to their economic practices, 'for us Gitanos, inner transformation means adaption to outer circumstances, and this adaption to outer circumstances equally means transformation of an inner kind. We need to be constantly aware of our surroundings'. This, I would say, is quite stunning in the way it displays a convincing self-reflective awareness of not only the interconnection between transformations of an inner versus outer kind but also of the intrinsic interdependence between inner and outer qualities; how Gitanos create themselves and their surroundings in response to, and in anticipation of, fluctuating circumstances, which again change according to this novel self-creation. In subsequent chapters, we shall see how these

‘inner transformations’ often run deep as they combine economic, religious and social aspects of their lives.

For an outsider, the Rastro Gitanos’ frequent switching between occupations and economic branches and sub-niches may seem challenging. However, my Gitano friends dismissed the assertion that specified knowledge is required before one can enter a specific sub-niche. This dismissal supports the notion of the bricolage-like nature of the knowledge needed as a *comerciante*. In the family of 54-year-old Magdalena for example, sub-niches have varied from generation to generation. As she put it, ‘I was never interested much in antiques. I was more interested in women’s clothing. So that is what I started up with.’ As a child, Magdalena learned the trade from her father: how to deal with customers, the importance of investing in stock – buying goods from, for example, Chinese wholesalers – and selling the stock at the market. Magdalena’s specific knowledge and interest in womenswear stemmed from her own heart, so to speak, and her daughters and nieces help her keep up with trends and fashions. Similarly, Raquel, a Gitana in her late 40s, had learned how to trade from her father – a *tratante de caballo* (‘horse dealer’) from Cordoba. Her mother had been a strong woman and housewife, she emphasized. Raquel made *bocadillos* (‘baguettes’) in her own kitchen and sold them to bars and restaurants. In her mind, this occupation was the result of the knowledge she had gained from both parents.

My Gitano friends would further argue that it is neither hard nor intellectually demanding to move between sub-niches; rather, they claimed, ‘it lies in our roots, in our genes’. Bobola once declared:

It is all about intuition. We have an intuition for what sells and how to sell it. The kids see how the adults do it from a very early age. As I went with my uncle every single day with the horses on grandfather’s *finca*, I learned everything I needed to learn about horses and about being a *tratante de caballo*.

Bobola never entered the horse business herself. Rather, she ran her own clothing shop for twenty years. Nevertheless, she had embodied the life and learning of the *tratantes*, a teaching obviously applicable and generalizable to her chosen sub-niche.

Claude Lévi-Strauss ([1962] 1966) contrasted the science of the bricoleur to that of the engineer. As I see it, this parallels a divide the Gitanos of el Rastro accentuated between the knowledge gained in formal educational settings and the knowledge gained through an ethos of ‘learning-by-doing’, in a family setting. In the eyes of many *comerciantes*, any schooling beyond the point at which basic reading, writing and mathematics have been learnt prepares students for the life of a wage labourer and a citizen of the nation state; children who accompany their parents and kin to the market, on the other hand, learn what they need *a la manera Gitana*, to become

comerciantes. Likewise, while formal flamenco dancing and singing lessons are thought to shape children into performers in theatres, concert halls and other grand settings, practice in a family setting is thought to develop a musicality and rhythm that is directly applicable to internally created ritual settings – *el culto*, funerals, weddings, flamenco gatherings and other collectively important social events.

Judith Okely (1983) produced similar findings in relation to her interlocutors' differentiation between formal education and the 'traveller's craft' – learned by children as they shadow their parents and other adults at work. The travellers' craft was thought to include all the skills needed to succeed in various traveller professions, including knowledge about the local economy, knowledge about the local people, context-specific opportunism and ingenuity, occupational flexibility, salesmanship, flexibility in role playing, manual dexterity and mechanical ingenuity, bargaining skills, a good memory, and physical strength and stamina.

Remembering the exclusion and discrimination Gitanos in Spain meet in the labour market, one might convincingly argue that their articulation of a preference for unformalized learning above formal schooling or teaching, as with their preference for self-employment above wage labour, could be ascribed to a highly rational fear of the less than positive prospects their children would face after ending their formal education. However, although I fully acknowledge that such fears are part of their legitimization of the unformal learning setting and preference for self-employment, I would still argue, as they do, that it does not explain the whole picture. For instance, that there are certain values in the unformal learning settings that are lost in the formal ones; values connected to the continuity and maintenance of family, kin and community ties, the embodiment of knowledge, emotions and spirituality that only practical efforts can provide, and the strengthening of identity, belonging and loyalty to *el pueblo Gitano*. Conclusively, there is a correspondence here between how the *comerciantes* manoeuvre, control and create continuously arising 'thresholds' between the Gitano and Payo spheres of value (e.g. Guyer 2004) on the one hand, and their ways of acknowledging, uniting and combining different 'branches of knowledge' (Barth 2002) on the other. As I see it, the threshold is where these different branches of knowledge meet, intermingle and mix, and where they are continuously being contested, challenged and changed.

Strategic Mobility

As the historical narrative shows, the second main tactic used regarding the Rastro Gitano socio-economic niche has been, and still is, that of strategic mobility. For the *comerciantes* of el Rastro, mobility is a key ingredient in

their economic strategy – something thoroughly illustrated by their various trips to Latin America, Andalucía, Turkey and the *villas* surrounding Madrid. Emphasis here lies on understanding their mobility pattern as an economic strategy rather than the result of ‘wanderlust’ or ‘restlessness’, as perhaps romanticized versions of the stereotype about them will have it. Although not dismissing the notion of American Roma communities’ psychological need to travel, and empirically finding such feelings among her interlocutors, Anne Sutherland (1975) was equally preoccupied with these communities’ religious reasons to travel, as well as their many social motivations: to maintain social cohesion, to resolve conflict and to escape pressure from the authorities for enforced schooling, labour or vocational training. In my own material, Manuel’s expulsion from the Gitano community at the age of sixteen due to his break-up with his Gitana fiancée provides a telling example of such socially driven strategic mobility.

Resonating with the empirical material presented in this chapter about strategic mobility – or what she calls ‘nomadism’ – Marlene Sway (1988: 27) argues that ‘one chief feature of middleman minorities is that they tend to be self-employed in “portable” occupations and professions’. The primary motivation for the frequent movement of the Gypsies she studied was their drive to exploit new markets for their skills and services once current markets were depleted. I will come back to this point in just a short while; but first, in studying temporary migration among the Spanish Gitanos, San Román (1975) analytically divided her interlocutors into those who went to southern France for harvest, those who travelled to villages in Castille for seasonal agriculture work, and those who migrated to Central and South America, typically for a period of 3–24 months. San Román’s (1975) Gitano interlocutors – the urban dwellers of La Alegría (near el Rastro) – referred to their destination countries in Central or South America indiscriminately, as ‘Piru’ (Peru). In Piru, family networks assisted the newcomers in settling in and introduced them to the ways of selling in the new country. ‘When they return, they may buy a good flat or a small house, a car for business purposes, and especially an initial stock of cloth, iron, watches, etc. to sell in favourable markets in Spain’ (ibid.). The Gitanos’ main reasons for travelling to Piru was, according to San Román, the lure of quick money to improve their living conditions in Spain.

As shown in the empirical descriptions in this chapter, strategic geographical mobility has been – and still is – one of the great advantages of the Gitanos of el Rastro, as well as a necessary tactic for achieving success in their economic niche, or when escaping internal conflict or state oppression and marginalization. This is true regardless of whether the mobility takes them all the way to Latin America or simply to the surrounding *villas* of Madrid. As we have now firmly established, most of the Gitanos of el Rastro

are self-employed traders of some sort. Accompanying their economic practice as self-employed traders, I found strong moral and ideological notions among the *comerciantes*, connected to the question of autonomy; of not subordinating themselves to the patron–client relationships of low-paid, ‘dirty’ wage labour.

‘Being One’s Own Master’

The phrase ‘being one’s own master’ is meant to capture the Rastro Gitanos’ relation to mainstream Payo society and their resistance towards submission to Payo hierarchical structures – that is, class hierarchies, work relations, church hierarchies or, for instance, *clientelism* produced by either state or NGO systems. Moreover, this ethos is not necessarily a lived reality. Under Feudal law, it was thought that everyone should either be a master or belong to a master, suggesting groups like the Rastro Gitanos’ struggle for autonomy (Mayall 2004). San Román (1997) similarly remarks on Feudal Spain and how the Gitano population was forced to submit themselves to a *señor* (‘master’). Thus, the phrase ‘being one’s own master’ is a metaphor for the historic relatedness between Gypsies/Gitanos and Feudal or State authorities, and it is meant to say something about collective Rastro Gitano autonomy today. With the phrase, I thus seek to describe and explore Gitano–Payo relations rather than internal Gitano relations (where we of course also find hierarchical structures and power relations).

Time and again, the need for the ‘sustainable integration of minorities in the labour market’ (EURoma 2010: 6) has been cited in various EU reports to justify the increased interest in Roma issues over the past few decades. Finance mogul and Roma beneficiary George Soros wrote in *The Guardian* newspaper that ‘Roma represent more than 20% of new entrants into the labour force in the European Union’s newest member states ... A lasting solution requires Europe to build a Roma working class’ (Soros 2013). This entreaty on behalf of Roma communities was no doubt motivated by good intentions. However, the aim of integrating European Roma populations into mainstream society through formal education, vocational training and wage labour is little more than a disguised attempt at proletarianization.

In the following, I argue that ‘proletarianization – the loss of control over the planning, organization, and completion of one’s own work’ (Kaprow 1982: 403) – stands in complete contrast to the Rastro Gitanos’ ethos of ‘being one’s own master’ (see also Brodersen and Røyrvik 2021). According to Weber ([1922] 1978), proletarianization aims at the creation of substitutable labour. Through this process, skilled individuals are steadily transformed into interchangeable workers. Following Weber, and

also Charles Tilly (1979), Miriam Lee Kaprow (1982: 414) connects this to politics – that is, ideology:

Today, political economists call this phase of proletarianization deskilling ... Deskilling, as we know, has nothing to do with diminishing expertise. Rather, it is a political act, one that forces people to become substitutable workers despite their specialized skills.

As I see it, the Gitanos of el Rastro possess specialized skills as middleman traders, and (due to a combination of necessity and desire) through their economic, social and religious practices, they actively defy proletarianization. As already mentioned, rates of self-employment among the Gitanos in Spain are significant (61 per cent, within wholesale or retail sectors) and much higher in the market context of el Rastro (FSG 2011: 51). At a national level, 46 per cent of the Gitanos' retail work is performed through either peddling (*la venta ambulante*) or selling at small-scale markets (*ibid.*). Again, in the context of el Rastro, these numbers will be considerably higher. For the majority population, the percentage of those involved in wholesale, retail or small-scale market selling is significantly lower.

Part of the moral and ideological ideal of being one's own master is the fact that wage labour is looked upon as *deshonroso* ('dishonourable') – as a final solution when all other options are exhausted. Furthermore, I was told that if a Rastro Gitano was to take on salaried work, the compensation had to be quite high. These findings are supported by others such as Okely (1983: 53), who says that 'the Gypsies' history is also the history of their refusal to be proletarianized'. Likewise, Kaprow (1978, 1982, 1984) emphasizes the Gitanos' anti-proletarian, anti-bourgeois and even anarchistic attitudes and livelihoods. This idea of self-employment as 'ideology' (Okely 1983) or underlying ethos provides, in my view, an alternate and complementary understanding of the Gypsy, Roma and Gitano way of living, ethnographically and analytically contrasting dominant views that such groups have simply been rejected from the regular wage labour market and thus have had to find a way to survive. I am not saying that such views are wrong; on the contrary, in most cases marginalization and exclusion of these groups have brought no option but to get by with the little one can scrape together. But is it really beyond belief that some people might prefer self-employment above wage-labour? And on a further note, could it not be so that an ethos or ideology of self-employment can exist side by side with marginalization and exclusion from the labour market? Is it not possible to imagine such a co-existence? After all, in this latter argument we could support ourselves with Pierre Bourdieu's social analysis of cultural and social practice as 'necessity made into a virtue' (1977: 77).

Of course, it is true that many Gitanos and Roma/Gypsies face discrimination and marginalization from the mainstream job market. Some of the Gitanos of el Rastro, for example, explained to me that they could often get far in a job application process, but as soon as the hiring manager found out they were a Gitano (usually by their surname), the process would abruptly come to an end. Nevertheless, among the Rastro Gitanos, the majority would be able to secure low paid, regular work, but they instead chose differently. Raquel, for example, who sells homemade *bocadillos* (baguettes) to local restaurants, received several offers for a fixed arrangement as a professional chef, but she refused them all. She preferred the flexibility and value of being her own boss, she said. The same goes for Manuel. When, due to his own and his wife's poor health, he had to sell his business, he could have taken on a regular, low paid job, but instead he started selling clothes from the back of his truck, preferring the flexibility that accompanies itinerant trade.

My material indicates that, in Gitano terms, the ethos of 'being one's own master' is about capability (*ser capaz*), honour, respect (*respeto*) and strength (*fuerte*). Weak (*debil*), infirm (*flojo*) and incapable/helpless (*incapaz*) behaviour represents the negation of these virtues. As shown, these emic terms of social differentiation are highly related to local understandings of the skills, intuition, combined rational, practical and emotional knowledge, and the conduct and morality needed to manoeuvre, manage and succeed as middleman traders *a la manera Gitana* in the context of el Rastro. The terms are also connected to the vivid contrast between the Rastro Gitanos' ethos of 'being one's own master' and the ideology underlying vocational training, wage labour and the associated cultural values, logic and practices of *el mundo de los Payos* ('the world of the Payos'). Moreover, the values and virtues related to the ethos of 'being one's own master' also form the backbone of Gitano identity, as distinct from and in contrast to Payo identity. From a Gitano perspective, taking on wage labour implies becoming more Payo and less Gitano, hence the Rastro Gitanos put great effort into avoiding that scenario.

As a final point, Okely (1983: 65) opined that her interlocutors' resistance to either forced or guided vocation and wage labour was completely appropriate, considering the massive increase in unemployment in Britain in the 1980s. A similar story can be told of the Gitanos in Spain during the time of the main bulk of my fieldwork (2013), when the country had a nearly 30 per cent unemployment rate, following the financial crisis (with figures approaching 50 per cent in Lavapies and Embajadores). In her study of the Gitanos of Zaragoza in the late 1970s, Kaprow (1982: 406) equally emphasized the Gitanos' ability to ride the wave of inflation and unemployment due to their mode of subsistence.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE MERCHANTS OF EL RASTRO

In this chapter, I have analysed the Rastro Gitanos' economic practices and strategies, applying the concepts of peripatetic niches and peripatetic peoples (Berland 1979, 1982, 1986; Berland and Rao 2004; Rao 1987). I have structured the discussion around nine ethnographic observations about the Rastro Gitanos' economic practices in their socio-economic niche, emblemized by the Rastro Sunday market, and the strategies they apply and develop to perpetually create and re-create this niche. These reflections lay the groundwork for my analysis in Chapter 4, where I delve deeper into the inner social, psychological and religious mechanisms of the Gitanos' economic practices and the broader consequences of these practices for their lives and relation to Payo society.

NOTE

1. The word 'peripatetic' has somewhat problematically been used synonymously with a nomadic lifestyle – that is, as the opposite of a sedentary lifestyle. My usage of 'peripatetic' is theoretically inspired by the works of Clastres (1977), Deleuze and Guattari (1986) and Engebriksen (2017) as containing a form of metaphorical *nomadism*, as something contrasting the *stasis* of fixed state formations. It is not, therefore, in any manner meant as a reference to a nomadic lifestyle.