

CHAPTER 4

THE MERCURIAL MERCHANTS OF EL RASTRO



In this chapter I take a closer look at Rastro Gitano entrepreneurship as based on a kind of management and control of barriers separating the Gitano and Payo worlds or spheres – worlds that the Rastro Gitanos respectively label *el pueblo Gitano* ('the Gitano people') and *el mundo de los Payos* ('the world of the Payos'). With Bohannan and Bohannan (1968: 227–28), we can say that each of these worlds – or spheres – represents 'a different universe of objects. A different set of moral values and different behaviour is to be found in each sphere'. Put simply, and as depicted from a Rastro Gitano cosmological perspective, the Gitano sphere is mainly governed by long-term values – of the moral, relational and spiritual kind – whereas the Payo sphere is future oriented and governed by short-term values, mostly concerning money, and the business networks and social status connected to money. The Gitanos of el Rastro are dependent on managing and controlling the barrier between these worlds on a daily basis, in order to make their living. Hence, they are in continuous contact with a system of values and virtues that are different from – and at times conflict with – their own.

Adding to the discussion is Paul Sillitoe's (2006) understanding of what ethnographers perceive when they categorize spheres of exchange in egalitarian sociopolitical orders. According to him, what is often identified is 'the independent circulation of subsistence items and wealth valuables' (ibid.: 2). He further argues that the separation between the sphere of subsistence and the sphere of wealth 'promotes an egalitarian distribution of livelihood resources for all, inhibiting domination' (ibid.). Hence, in my discussion of spheres and values in el Rastro, I combine Sillitoe's division with Bohannan and Bohannan (1968) and Bloch and Parry (1989), to say

something about the combined socio-economic, religious and political implications of this system.

When we analytically identify two distinct spheres of exchange, as I do in this chapter, there is always the danger of reifying dichotomies, attitudes, values and sentiments to the degree that they become ‘manipulable things’. That is not my intention here, but still the hazard is there. As both present day and historic economic practices of the Gitanos show, these spheres of transaction and exchange are in constant flux and fluctuation, hence the very interface between them is also continuously trans-forming according to the situation and context, and in relation to the people and objects involved. To avoid reification and simplifications, the interface between the two spheres operating amongst the Gitanos of el Rastro – *el mundo de los Payos* (‘the world of the Payos’) and *el pueblo Gitano* (‘the Gitano people’) – can be understood as a constantly transforming ‘threshold’ (Guyer 2004). Jean Guyer (2004), in her landmark study of popular economics in Atlantic Africa, explores the conjunctures and disjunctures of a heterogeneous economic and social landscape, with plural modes of self-valuation, strong ethnic boundaries, vertically ranged moral spheres, a multiplicity of spatio-hierarchical thresholds and strongly situated and constantly changing economic values.

According to Guyer (2004), in such a setting, each moment of transaction involves a threshold, and it is both the directional flow of transactions and the very threshold itself that partakers seek to manipulate and control for purposes of marginal gain. In other words, we need to think that each *moment* of a transactional flow can be understood as a threshold consisting of multiple scales of value, and that each threshold is created through continuous negotiation between stakeholders. Thus, where Barth (1967) sees *barriers* between spheres, Guyer sees thresholds, and not only that, she sees these not at a single point in time but multiple times along the transactional flow. In my subsequent analysis of spheres of value, transaction and exchange amongst the Gitanos of el Rastro, I combine these views by approaching the *comerciantes*’ constant ‘making and breaking’ of spheres and barriers as a kind of threshold activity. Moreover, I believe that the *comerciantes* do not only manipulate and control these thresholds (Guyer 2004) but that they in fact create them.

EXISTENTIAL ENTREPRENEURS

Joseph Schumpeter’s ([1934] 2000) emphasis on the role of the entrepreneur in economic change and development is in Fredrik Barth’s (1967) account given an anthropological ‘costume’, crafted through the language

of ‘spheres’ and ‘barriers’. He understands spheres and barriers as channels for the circular flow of items, and he positions the entrepreneur as an agent of change enabled by the *destruction* of barriers, the *combination* of spheres and the maximization of ‘discrepancies in value’ between two or more spheres. Although I am critical of Barth’s (1967) lack of references to Schumpeter ([1934] 2000) and his hedonistic (utility maximizing) explanations of entrepreneurial activity, I make significant use of the sphere/barrier trope in this chapter part due to the dichotomized nature of the Gitano/Payo relation. Hopefully the ethnographic account will underscore the fruitfulness of the approach. Hence, in the light of the current ethnographic data, it seems fitting to view entrepreneurship as an activity that takes advantage of the discrepancies in value between two or more spheres.¹

Although Schumpeter (1939) emphasized the role of the entrepreneur in all spheres of life, he primarily focused on technological and economic entrepreneurship. The Gitano *comerciantes* of el Rastro certainly demonstrate economic entrepreneurship, as they continuously seek out new economic markets, leveraging their knowledge, relations and networks. For instance, as elaborated in Chapter 3, the Andalusian *tratantes* (‘horse dealers’) exploited their existing client base to enter the new market of Madrid and the new industry of film production. Many also changed from *tratantes* to blacksmiths, making horseshoes and other equipment, and later to antique dealers, selling old agricultural equipment and, eventually, more ornamental items. Gitanos in the textile industry brought their wares to Argentina, where demand was high. The familiarity they gained with the Latin American market was then used in a variety of ways, such as by entering the mining industry in Colombia in the years 2011–2013, when the price of gold reached its 30-year peak. In the Gitano community of el Rastro, examples of entrepreneurial and innovative activities and economic arbitrage are both numerous and varied. Yet, although their entrepreneurial activities have been – and continue to be – economically driven, I would argue that their entrepreneurship is not primarily economic but *existential*. There seems to be a parallel between the continuously precarious² and disarticulated position of the Gitanos of el Rastro and their creation of their very own existence through a kind of ‘existential entrepreneurship’. In this chapter, I provide examples of those entrepreneurial activities that stretch beyond the economic sphere to include those of the more existential kind.

The Rastro Gitanos’ entrepreneurship is evident in their cultural, social and religious practices, which are driven by a locally produced and a very conscious and explicit ethos of ‘tradition breaking’ and what I call ‘continuation through change’. This internally produced ethos of tradition breaking stands in paradoxical relation to common Payo views of the Gitanos as ‘conservative’, ‘backwards’, ‘archaic’ and ‘bearers of tradition’; for instance, as a

community that keeps the performative arts of, for example, flamenco and bullfighting alive. Moreover, the ethos of tradition breaking also contradicts the great importance the Gitanos place on tradition, origins, morality and family; hence, its double paradoxical nature. I will come back to these notions later. But first, a second aspect of the Gitanos' 'existential entrepreneurship' is demonstrated in the way in which they merge practices associated with both mercy and the market (i.e. religion and economy).

MERCURIAL MERCHANTS

Rastro Gitano entrepreneurship can be seen as representative of the ancient (Greek) fusion of economy and spirit. Their practices demonstrate and combine the attributes of Mercury, incorporating commercial and financial know-how and artfulness in speech and communication, both divine and profane, including negotiation and trade and boundary crossing. Integrating into their practices both *market* and *mercy*, the Rastro Gitanos are, in their own words, consumers of both sacred and profane 'bread'. These religious and entrepreneurial middleman traders thus provide fruitful insights into the creation and re-creation of an alternative economic practice and spirit/ethos amid Spanish mainstream neo-capitalist society. In the discussion that follows, I reflect upon the interface (i.e. 'threshold') between *market* and *mercy*, arguing that the space in which these two worlds meet – on a near daily basis – is the religious ritual of *el culto*. Moreover, I argue that much of the exchange, translation and negotiation of values between the Gitano and Payo worlds – in the context of el Rastro – occurs in this religious setting, and that *el culto* can thus be seen as a value conversion generator, translating monetary values (considered volatile) to those of morality and spirituality (considered more stable and eternal). Drawing on Bloch and Parry (1989) and Guyer (2004), I present these multiple value conversions as transformations of short-term market (im)morality into long-term social, cultural and spiritual morality. I also analyse these conversions as simultaneously carrying intentions to inhibit the accumulation of wealth by a few individuals at the expense of the wider community (e.g. Bohannon and Dalton 1965; Sillitoe 2006). Finally, I briefly describe aspects of this practice as something akin to a 'moralization of money'.

SPHERES AND BARRIERS IN EL RASTRO

The concept of 'spheres', as applied by Barth (1967: 164), 'serves to summarize the major structural features of a flow pattern' in a certain economy,

whilst ‘the barriers between spheres, in this view, are barriers to ready transformation, i.e. all the factors that impede the flow of value and restrict people’s freedom to allocate their resources and reverse these allocations’ (ibid.). In the subsequent sections, I will address the following questions: which spheres are critical for the effective functioning of the Rastro Gitano socio-economic niche and for the Rastro Gitanos in general? What barriers protect and channel the flow within and between each sphere? And why and how do the Gitanos of el Rastro maintain and manage these spheres and barriers?

While there is by no means a clear-cut logic to the spheres and barriers in el Rastro, we must nevertheless start our analysis somewhere. Thus, to identify spheres and barriers in this complex urban context marked by more *and* less formalized forms of market economy, I propose to follow social lines of demarcation because, as I see it, discrepancies in value *and* cultural logics often follow such divides (e.g. Guyer 2004). In el Rastro, such social divides vividly highlight the Gitanos’ blend of economic, social, spiritual and cultural entrepreneurship.

For the Gitanos of el Rastro, the most significant social demarcation is that between themselves and the majority Payo population (e.g. Chapter 2). Besides this boundary, another line is drawn between the Gitano Christian converts (Pentecostals) and the non-Christian Gitanos – a line laden with ideas of morality, purity and what it means to be a ‘true Gitano’. Lines of class are also of great importance and often connected to those of place: Andalusian Gitanos see themselves as distinct and above Madridian Gitanos, Rastro Gitanos see themselves as distinct and above Vallecas Gitanos, and so on and so forth. In this context, the classification of ‘Chinese’ (*Chino*) serves as less of a social category and more as a label pertaining to sales and money. The Rastro *Moros* (Arabs) are seen as ‘criminals’, while the Rastro Latin Americans are depicted as similar to the Gitanos of el Rastro: ‘They are “warm”, friendly and social like us.’ And although the Rastro Gitanos practise endogamy, intermarriage between the Gitanos of el Rastro and the Latin Americans does occur.³ Kinship and family lines have traditionally been of utmost importance for the collective life of the Rastro Gitanos, manifested in their high emphasis on the chastity of unmarried girls and women, who are expected to uphold the family’s honour. Although conversion to Pentecostalism has somewhat adjusted the Gitano’s original emphasis on the family (see also Cantón et al. 2004; Cantón-Delgado et al. 2020; San Román 1997), many matters are still determined along family lines, including conflict, financial or social aid and marriage. Finally, gender and age demarcations, as well as those of social status (married/unmarried), are also of great importance to the Rastro Gitanos; indeed, these status markers (e.g. young versus old;

man versus woman; married versus unmarried versus widowed) reflect real social differences. The combinations and implications of the Rastro Gitanos' social boundaries are as deep and wide as they are numerous, and all these divides are, to some degree, protected by moral proclamations and notions of correct conduct and demeanour. Furthermore, they all play a part in what constitutes the transactional threshold between the Gitano and Payo worlds – that is, *el pueblo Gitano* and *el mundo de los Payos*.

From an analytical standpoint, it is worth clarifying the distinction between the Gitano socio-economic niche and the Gitano sphere (and, by extension, the Payo sphere), as this manifests in the context of el Rastro (see Figure 4.1, below). Building on the arguments made in the previous chapter about the three peripatetic strategies of strategic mobility, resourcefulness and occupational flexibility, the Rastro Gitano socio-economic niche can be said to result from the Rastro Gitanos' work to extract profit from the value discrepancies between the Payo and Gitano spheres. In short, the niche is constituted by the continuous breaking and restoration of the barrier between these spheres, or, with Guyer (2004), the management and control of the continuously arising disjunctive thresholds between them. For the *comerciantes* of el Rastro, the point of strongest disjunction is precisely where *el pueblo Gitano* meets *el mundo de los Payos*. For the Rastro Gitanos to profit from the discrepancy between these two worlds, the barrier separating them must be frequently crossed and broken; hence, although it is greatly protected, as a threshold it is also highly permeable and manageable.

From a Rastro Gitano perspective, the two spheres (*el pueblo Gitano* and *el mundo de los Payos*) are determined by not only different cultural logics but also differing cultural values. These disjunctive features are essential to

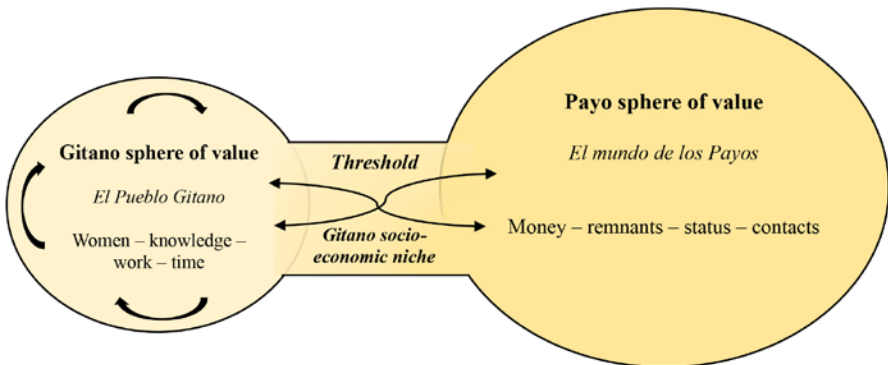


Figure 4.1. El Rastro spheres of exchange. Image by Marianne Brodersen

the formation, dramatization and manipulation of the Gitano–Payo relation. With Bohannan and Bohannan (1968) in mind, we can say that from a Rastro Gitano perspective the Gitano–Payo barrier is firmly established by a range of cultural blocking mechanisms that control the flow of value *from* the Gitano sphere *to* the Payo sphere. Within this value stream, women and knowledge are the most protected, followed by the Gitano notions and practices connected to work and time; in return, money, scrap waste, status and contacts are the most important assets that the Gitanos seek to attain from the Payo sphere. The threshold mediation here has to do with the negotiation of value and exchange between these values of highly differing kinds. In terms of gains, we can say that the Gitanos manoeuvre and shape the sphere barrier to extract profit from the discrepancies in value and underlying cultural logics. At the same time, they use the barrier to control the circular flow of women, knowledge, and what work they put their time and effort into within the Gitano sphere. In the following, with my examination of these distinct spheres and barriers, I develop my analysis of the Gitanos' culturally relevant values, which circle within – and at times beyond – the Gitano sphere.

WOMEN

'Women', as a social value category, must be understood as utmost important within the Gitano sphere, as it is women who are thought to carry the honour, respect and continuity of the family – aspects of Rastro Gitano life that are most 'hidden' from the Payo world. In particular, this value category refers to unmarried women. Traditionally, family and kinship are horizontally defining principles of the Rastro Gitanos' social life, and notions of honour and respect work to stratify and 'verticalize' these lines. Together with other tools of social differentiation, such as gender and age, the moral behaviour and purity of unmarried Gitanas is indicative of an honourable family with capability and respect (Gay y Blasco 1999; San Román 1975). Paradoxically, in flamenco *tablaos* (flamenco 'cafés' or 'shows') in Madrid and elsewhere, for example, young Gitana singers and dancers are put 'on display', so to speak, for Payo customers to enjoy. Here, the myth of *La Gitana* – the seductive Gypsy girl – is played out to produce an authentic, exclusive and exotic-erotic experience for spectators. At the same time, the unattainable quality of *La Gitana* is part of the picture and a resource that the Gitanos of el Rastro utilize to maximize their monetary profits from the Payo sphere while maintaining a protective veil over the unmarried Gitana and the boundary between her and the Payo sphere. The flamenco *tablaos* thus function as disjunctive thresholds between differing cultural logics

and sets of value, managed and controlled by the Gitanos (in relation to the Payo world) to produce what Guyer (2004) would call 'marginal gains'.

To illustrate this distance between the unmarried Rastro Gitanas and the Payos from a different perspective, I will provide another example from my fieldwork. Although I was a young, unmarried woman myself at the time of my research, for a long time I was kept far away from the young Gitanas of marriageable age. In *el culto*, for example, I was placed amongst middle-aged women, both married and unmarried. For an outsider such as myself, the Rastro Gitanos' practice of endogamy and female chastity stood in stark contrast to the sexually provocative way the young Gitanas put themselves publicly on display in *el culto*, with their short skirts, tight blouses, heavy make-up, glittering jewellery and high heels. To fit in with the young Gitanas, I exerted great effort in trying to meet their standards of presentation; however, although my aesthetic attempts were recognized and appreciated by the middle-aged Gitanas, they were not particularly successful. Young Gitanas would approach me only occasionally, with great scepticism and at a significant distance – both physically and in conversation (i.e. they held back). It was only at the end of my first year in el Rastro that the young ladies, still with hesitation, began to converse with me in a more relaxed manner. At this point, the young women would engage in quite intimate discussions with me – for example, criticizing male dominance and patriarchy in *el pueblo Gitano*. In these situations, I would think that we had established a deeper relationship, but their intimacy with me was always a one-time affair, followed by greater distance afterwards. I got the feeling that being associated with me, a Paya, released a fear of social contamination, especially hazardous for the young, unmarried Gitanas.

Even at the end of my fieldwork in el Rastro, older Gitanas needed to 'vouch' for me before younger Gitanas would ease up and speak freely with me; however, when they did, they would share many of their inner thoughts and feelings. Still today, my closest friends among the Gitanos of el Rastro are about thirty years older than me. As I returned to the field following my fieldwork – first as a married woman, then as a pregnant woman and later with my 2-year-old child – my position amongst these middle-aged, married women felt increasingly natural, and I became less of a perceived threat to the younger Gitanas, who started to approach me more easily. All of this is meant to illustrate, for one, the great distance established by the Rastro Gitanos between their young, unmarried women and the potentially harmful *mundo de los Payos*, and second, that they actually take advantage of this distance for 'marginal gains' (i.e. Guyer 2004) as in the flamenco *tablaó* example. I return to some of these details below. But first, I proceed to elaborate the ethics, meaning, valuation and practice of *work* and *time* in the Rastro Gitanos' creation of value from the Gitano–Payo barrier.



Figure 4.2. The slipper stand. Photo by Sunniva Hammerås

WORK AND TIME AS VALUES

In Rastro Gitano economic discourse and practice, *work* and *time* seem shaped and depicted as specific cultural values, metonymic of a particular cultural ethos that value autonomy and freedom over dependence and submission. As values, they point towards certain (economic and otherwise) virtues and ethics. These ethics have to do with the efforts and time you put into economic activities, but it goes beyond that, to include for example the anti-proletarian mastering of one's own time and labour; the idea that neither labour, man nor life itself can (or should) be divided into Khronosian timeslots; and that the modern division of activities (family, religion, work, leisure) into distinct subcategories of life – each with its own logic of time, morality and meaning – does not necessarily hold true for the Gitanos of el Rastro. For the Gitano *comerciantes*, there is no clear divide between work and leisure; although they complain about the long working hours required by regular wage labour, they exert considerable time and effort to ensure that their businesses run properly, perhaps even working more hours than a regular wage labourer. Thus, a significant distinction between the Payo and Gitano spheres is that, for the Gitanos of el Rastro, work is never 'just work' but simultaneously social time spent with their family, kin and friends, or spiritual time spent with their co-believers.

One or more family members may be enlisted to help where there is much work to be done. To give an example, in the hours before *la siesta* ('the midday break' about 2 PM), the streets in upper el Rastro are crowded with old and hunchbacked *viudas* ('widows') in black mourning dresses and headscarves, carrying heavy sacks on their backs filled with newly bought ware from the Chinese wholesalers. A specific licence is required to buy from these wholesalers – a licence that most of the *comerciantes* of el Rastro have; thus, the *comerciantes* work as a link of arbitrage between the sphere of the Chinese merchants and that of the Payo population of Madrid. In this particular example, middle-aged Gitanas are always 'two steps ahead' of the *viudas*, picking out seasonable and fashionable stock in order to optimize sales. The *viudas'* younger male family members drive their rust-speckled white trucks to pick up the *viudas'* heavy loads. This, of course, represents only one part of the workday, as the wares must still be transported and stocked, as well as sold at markets and/or from the backs of trucks. To a large degree, families pool their human resources and skills to make sales, with tasks assigned to each family member according to talent, age and gender. The Gitanos of el Rastro make investments in work, time and social relations (i.e. one's family and business network), as well as their religious practice (underlying so much of the social and economic life of el Rastro), in exchange for monetary and social gain from the Payo sphere.

In contrast to Payos, most of the *comerciantes* rarely make large monetary investments to maximize their financial returns, neither do they seem fixed on monetary accumulation. As a general rule, families with many small children (to feed) need to work harder and make more income than those with fewer children, but when these children grow up and begin to participate in economic life, each member of the household is able to work less and spend more time social networking or doing religious activities. Hence, even though the opportunity for creating and accumulating more wealth is there for families with many able bodied, it might seem like the Rastro Gitanos practise an urban example of what Marshall Sahlins (1974) termed ‘Chayanov’s rule’.

Another Gitano economic strategy that is indicative of the dynamic between the Gitano and Payo spheres in the context of el Rastro is the utilization of junk from the Payo world – that is, the collection of scrap, the purchase of cheap estates following a Payo death and the refurbishment and repair of old items into shimmering antiques. This strategy also showcases the Rastro Gitanos’ particular ability to create ‘marginal gains’ (Guyer 2004) from the discrepancies in what is valued between the two spheres. Many of the antique shops I visited during my fieldwork had a small workshop at the back, where the Rastro Gitanos repaired old items.



Figure 4.3. An emblematic white van belonging to one of the merchants of el Rastro. Photo by Marianne Brodersen

For such items – frequently considered worthless in the Payo sphere – the Rastro Gitanos invested their time and efforts into transforming them into new and desirable objects for Payo customers.

Although work and time – as Gitano cultural values connected to autonomy and freedom – are less protected from the Payo sphere than family values, female virtue, honour and respect (as illustrated by the ways in which these values are differentially ‘put into play’ in the Gitanos’ economic practices), it is nevertheless protected by strong moral notions and cultural logics. For example, as I see it, the Rastro Gitanos’ strongly held ethos of ‘being one’s own master’, emphasizing self-employment, freedom and autonomy in their working practices, serves to protect them from Payo influence and dependence. In fact, taking the ethos of self-employment as an ‘ideology’ (Okely 1983), I locate their culturally defined values concerning work and how they spend their time, which are at the very core of this ideology, as protected by proportional barriers. Hence, at the constantly changing disjunctive ‘threshold’ (Guyer 2004) constitutive of the Rastro Gitanos’ economic niche, we find not only differing cultural logics and sets of values, but also that it represents a disjunctive-conjunctive space for negotiating contrasting ideological practices and perspectives; autonomy and freedom versus dependence and submission.

KNOWLEDGE

In Chapter 3, I touched upon the specific type of knowledge that is required and developed by the Gitanos of el Rastro to manage and manoeuvre within their socio-economic niche as middleman traders. I described this knowledge as a combination of rational, emotional, practical and psychological features, including intuition about the ‘oddities’ of human social nature (e.g. Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1966). This highly valued proficiency is passed down through generations and hidden and protected from the Payo sphere.

The ways in which the Gitanos conduct their business and the details of their work processes (i.e. the where, how and with whom) were never revealed to me in conversation. My questions on this subject were met with either open scepticism and suspicion or the repetition of things I already knew. Magdalena, who sold brassieres in el Rastro, never disclosed any details about her trade, let alone allowed me to accompany her on her *venta ambulante* trips to nearby *pueblos* (‘villages’). Manuel, with whom I became good friends with during my fieldwork, only superficially spoke about his business – usually boasting about his elite clientele. And every time his more spontaneous wife suggested that I might accompany him to meet this high-end clientele, he became notoriously nebulous. Like Magdalena, he

would not take me along with him on his *venta ambulante* travels to the suburbs or to the professional business districts of Madrid, although Bobola asked him on several occasions to bring me along. Raquel almost agreed to show me how she made her *bocadillos* to sell to restaurants and bars in the finer parts of Western Madrid, but ultimately she too followed the protective line. Hence, I had to join all the small bits and pieces of information gathered from my participant observation at the market, in *el culto* and while hanging out with people in their homes or elsewhere to get the whole picture of their economic model and practices.

In relation to their Payo customers, the Rastro Gitanos tended to hide their knowledge of the origins and make of their commodities. For instance, although nothing of a secret – and nothing different from what large brands such as *Zara*, *H&M* or *Mango* do in order to make enormous profits from their sales – the *comerciantes* would generally downplay the fact that the products sold in el Rastro were mass-produced goods of questionable quality bought at extremely low prices from Chinese wholesalers, and then sold to Payo customers as more exclusive and unique items. For instance, a mass-produced blue scarf with yellow flowers on it, bought for 0.20 centimes, could be sold for 5 euros to a young French woman with blue eyes wearing a yellow skirt – a perfect match, in the eyes of both the *comerciante* and the customer! The practice of conceptual – or material – ‘remodelling’



Figure 4.4. Light and colourful ‘silk’ scarves for the summer. Photo by Sunniva Hammerås

the sales object was also applied to the ‘new’ antiques, which were made to appear old but were in fact mass-produced in China or Spain and sold to market vendors in the Chinese wholesale complex of Fuenlabrada. Similarly, the antiques in el Rastro, before being sold as old and valuable objects, may have started at a junkyard, or have come from a deceased Payo estate or simply been bought cheaper somewhere else in Spain or abroad.

Incredible and telling of the global distribution network of goods produced in China: during 2013, I found the exact same type of dress (with the same origin and appearance) in an *H&M* store in Norway being sold by some Gitano friends of mine at the Rastro market and at an open-air market in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. With that said, I did indeed discover that generally the clothes being sold by both the Rastro Gitanos and the big retailers – in Madrid and elsewhere – were all produced in the same place – in China or Bangladesh – and, in this case, distributed to Madrid via the Chinese industrial complex of Fuenlabrada, where they are bought for a tenth or less of the price. Thus, through their process of re-modelling their sales objects, and their creation, management and control of the disjunctive threshold, trash becomes treasure. In other words, the Gitanos succeed in turning items of less or no value into wealth for both customers (the item bought) and themselves (monetary gains).

The re-modelling process of sales objects by the *comerciantes* is illustrative of the threshold processes described by Guyer (2004), where all economic values are situational, relational and contextual, and where ‘naming’ (*signification* in my vocabulary) becomes central. The examples presented so far show that the threshold transactions between customers and *comerciantes* are as much semiotic and symbolic as they are financial, as signs and symbols are readily available for the Rastro Gitanos to shape and mould to produce gains. Interestingly then, we might say that the Rastro Gitanos both produce and re-produce signs that are relatively easily manoeuvred and managed, as in the examples above, to create a ‘perfect match’ between objects and customers. Moreover, they also capitalize on the symbol of the mysterious ‘other’ Gitano, as in the example of the seductive Gitana flamenco artist or the attraction of the *chulo* Gitano *comerciante*. In Chapters 8 and 9, I develop these ideas further, with the vocabulary of *objectification* (i.e. the creation of objects), *signification* (i.e. the creation of signs), *interpretation* and *perception*.

THE MERGING OF MARKET AND MERCY

As shown in the above examples, the Gitano *comerciantes* of el Rastro provide value via the family cooperative (e.g. the working hours of family members) and the artistic skills of certain family members (e.g. flamenco skills)

in exchange for monetary gain from *el mundo de los Payos*.⁴ In my fieldwork, such exchanges seemed generally and morally acceptable to most of the Rastro Gitanos; yet, when some Gitanos flaunted their wealth in *el culto*, others found this unethical and in conflict with Gitano values. Specifically, these latter Rastro Gitanos viewed social status as less dependent on money and more a matter of respect, honour, morality and family ties. This was a traditional ethos, I was told, highlighting the disjunctive sets of values between *el pueblo Gitano* and *el mundo de los Payos*.

These empirical insights align with those made by Bohannan and Dalton (1965) and Bohannan and Bohannan (1968), who observed the need for morally sanctioned barriers in traditional, *egalitarian societies* to prevent the accumulation of wealth by a few individuals at the expense of the wider community. A complementary analytical approach offered by Bloch and Parry (1989) holds that, in *market-based societies*, moral sanctions prevent universal money from being used in the family, kin or 'in-group'; in this way, the long-term social reproduction of the family is not threatened by short-term market relations. In the urban setting of el Rastro, Gitanos, Payos and others live side by side, and although the Gitanos practise endogamy and hold strong moral and ideological ideas about their 'otherness', they are also very much part of mainstream market-based Spanish society. In addition, as merchants they are not only part of the large chain of transactions of postmodern capitalism, but they also deal closely with other non-Gitano wholesalers and customers. Hence, from the perspective of collective social, cultural and family continuity, we can imagine the need to protect certain sets of values from being commodified and capitalized. Paul Sillitoe's (2006) understanding of what spheres of exchange really are sums up these views by arguing that spheres of exchange facilitate the independent circulation of subsistence and wealth valuables, and that this separation promotes an egalitarian distribution of livelihood resources, equality and political non-dominance. In Sillitoe's (ibid.) model, there is a separation between subsistence production and wealth. For the urban Gitano merchants of el Rastro, I find it hard to argue that there is such a classic divide. However, I wonder if there is a divide between *el pueblo Gitano*, as having to do with social subsistence and continuity (the circulation of signs and long-term, non-monetary values), and *el mundo de los Payos*, as representing economic subsistence and continuity and, sporadically, wealth acquisition. Eventually, of course, social and economic subsistence and continuity are connected in a multitude of ways, but as spheres they are also separated, managed and controlled.

Carrying elements of traditional, egalitarian and market-based societies, and with their spheres of exchange, the Gitanos of el Rastro showcase the mechanisms suggested above. For instance, as their market-based revenues

are highly uncertain and their material prospects vary greatly, it is of no wonder that the Rastro Gitanos consider money a shaky and volatile foundation on which to build honour, respect and reputation. Comparatively, the values connected to moral conduct and demeanour, kinship, family and the very way of conducting one's business (*a la manera Gitana*) are seen as more of a long-term kind, and even, to some extent, free of charge.

Thus, I would argue that to prevent universal money and short-term market relations from dominating the social productivity of *el pueblo Gitano* over the long term while simultaneously maintaining the necessary flow of money from the Payo sphere, the Rastro Gitanos exchange their monetary gain from the Payo sphere for religious and social capital. This is mainly done through the Rastro Gitanos' near daily participation in *el culto* and, within this ritual, their considerable contributions to *la ofrenda* ('the offerings').

In the period between the main bulk of my fieldwork (2013) and the Covid-19 pandemic (2020), the financial situation for most *creyentes* radically worsened. Already in 2013 I was told by Rastro Gitanos and others that 'the Spanish middle-class has gone'. Even Gitanos of el Rastro who were getting by well enough at that time were eight years later struggling to pay their rents, put food on the table and provide clothes and school supplies for their children, as well as attend church. Simultaneously, even in 2013, the church itself was struggling to pay rents, utilities and salaries, with the result that *creyentes* came under increased pressure to contribute to *la ofrenda* ('the offerings'). Although the message communicated from the pulpit was that everyone should give according to their own resources – 'be that 1 or 5 euros', as the pastor said – given that *el culto* was held six nights a week, either of these amounts was considerable for many of the congregants.

In 2015, one of my Rastro Gitano companions told me in confidence that he and his wife could only afford to attend *el culto* once or twice a week because they did not have the resources to 'put a euro in the basket' any more frequently. During my fieldwork, I saw several other Gitano families make similar prioritizations; for instance, if a family of five were to take the subway to el Rastro from their house, contribute to *la ofrenda* and buy candy for their children during the *culto* session (as was expected) six nights a week, they would not have anything left for daily necessities.

The Rastro Gitanos' prioritizations between daily necessities and attendance in *el culto* can be seen as acts of balancing moral defaults. Not attending *el culto* to save money for rent, clothes, food and school supplies would arouse suspicion and potentially lead to a loss of moral respectability and social belonging in *el pueblo Gitano*. More so, it would prevent the *creyentes* from moralizing and socializing any monetary income from *el mundo de los Payos*. On the other hand, participating sufficiently in *el culto* but failing to

contribute satisfactorily to *la ofrenda* or to purchase candy could similarly challenge their social status in the community.

Although universal market-money is not the main way for the Rastro Gitanos to gain respect and honour in their community – as such an emphasis would threaten the long-term social reproduction and (ideal) egalitarian structure of *el pueblo Gitano* – when *el culto* becomes a financial burden for people attending, the example above shows that the Rastro Gitanos' non-monetary evaluation measures are challenged in complex ways. The Gitano *creyentes* I met in *el culto* were the more prosperous *comerciantes* of el Rastro, with enough economic resources to uphold or even increase their religious and social respect through frequent ritual acts of 'moralizing' their income. Even when these relatively well-off *comerciantes* experienced a major fall in their economic standing and lacked the money for daily necessities – such as in the years following the financial crisis – they still prioritized their attendance at *el culto* and were always neatly dressed. This demonstrates the great significance of this ritual for the Gitanos of el Rastro – spiritually, socially and culturally – and the way in which 'market' and 'mercy' intermingle in intricate ways.

EL PACTO AND THE MEANING OF 'BREAD'

Another perspective from which to analyse the Rastro Gitanos' complex merging of 'market' and 'mercy' is through the ritual of *el Pacto* ('the Holy Communion'). The holy meal of *el Pacto* operates at the intersection between economic practices and religious ritual, employing the complex symbology of food and eating in the context of *el culto*. When partaking in this sacralised eating, the meaning and symbolism of food becomes embodied and sometimes revealed.

In the context of el Rastro, bread is not just something that is eaten or earned (in Spanish slang 'bread' also means 'money') but can refer to the words of God spoken in *el culto*. Thus, bread is functional both materially and symbolically. A pastor once exclaimed from the pulpit: 'The best things in life are God's word and tortilla, and by the way, I just won 1,000 euros in the lottery. That is a lot of bread!' Another play on the sacred versus profane was provided by another pastor, who stated that 'We shall feed on the words of God, but oh Lord how good it tastes with a juicy hamburger!' The congregation erupted in a great roar of laughter. As the congregants shared candy with each other down to the very last piece of bubblegum, these pastors would play with the distinction between holy 'bread' as a spiritual nutrient (i.e. God's word and the Bible) and bread as food for bodily survival and as money to obtain this food. Their exclamations were

also perhaps comments on life's main two opposing desires, the spiritual desire for the love of God and the carnal desire for, for example, juicy and delicious food or other bodily temptations – often obtained through monetary means.

The link between these concepts is extended in the expression 'our daily bread', which refers to the Christian notion of daily self-nurture with both sacred and profane 'bread'. Furthermore, in the protest marches over cuts to social expenditures following the financial crisis, a common slogan in the streets of Madrid was *No hay pan para tanto chorizo* ('There is not enough bread for all that sausage'). In Spanish, *chorizo* ('sausage') has the secondary meaning of 'crook' or 'thief', thus the slogan was an attempt to communicate something like: 'The thieves [corrupt politicians] are taking away our food and money.' And finally, in Ezekiel 2:8–9 it is written: "Open your mouth and eat what I give you." And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it.' In response to this and other Bible verses, the *creyentes* often commented on the use of the word 'eat' to indicate the ability to incarnate, understand and take God's words to heart. Thus, in this context, 'bread' works as both a spiritual and an economic symbol, representative of both mercy and market.

In el Rastro, *el Pacto* (the Holy Communion) is held on the first Sunday of each month. Sunday is also the day of the big market, and thus a day of festivity for the Gitano *comerciantes* and *creyentes* – a day of hard work and joyful leisure. By beginning each month with *el Pacto* – on the community's most significant market day – the Gitanos of el Rastro effectively merge their identities as *comerciantes* and *creyentes*, integrating the economic and religious aspects of life. The symbol of food is employed in a very direct manner in *el Pacto*, and it works on several levels. Within the Christian tradition, the bread represents the body of Christ. Breaking the bread, Jesus said: 'Take, eat; this is My body' (Matthew 26:26). Similarly, the wine – which in *el culto* is replaced with red juice – is said to represent the blood of Christ. This 'body' and 'blood' is believed to cleanse the *creyentes* of their sins.

For this 'ritual within ritual', a table is placed in front of the pulpit. The choir sings *las alabanzas* ('the songs of praise'), and two 'brothers' of some rank hand out bread and a cup of red juice. First, the pastor asks male congregants to come forth to receive *la Cena Santa* ('the Holy Supper'). The women remain seated until the men finish, at which point two or more teenage boys begin to serve them.

Liturgically, the sacrament of *el Pacto* is meant to remind congregants of the Last Supper and the price paid by Jesus Christ when he sacrificed his life to atone for our sins. When receiving *el Pacto*, the *creyentes* literally 'open up' their bodies (their mouths) to receive the combined material

and symbolic bread and wine. The ritual is both individual and collective. Though, from a Christian liturgy point of view, it is supposed to underscore a lack of hierarchy and division (and to instead emphasize communion), this is only partly the case for the Gitanos, exemplified by how the men are the first to actively receive the sacralised bread and wine, while the women must passively sit and wait for the bread and wine to be passed around. However, eating together also communicates the message that ‘we are one’.

El Pacto has its roots in the Jewish Passover, as illustrated by the meaning of ‘communion’ as remembrance. Within *el culto*, I felt that this ‘remembrance’ of the Holy Communion was not only about the connection between the sacred and the profane but also about the link between commerce and spirituality, individuality and collectivity – all connections that materialize in the multifaceted symbolic meanings of ‘bread’ in this context, as well as through the added emphasis of contributing an extra amount of money to *la ofrenda* on the first Sunday each month. As I interpret it, at *el culto* the *creyentes* act simultaneously as ‘one body’ in their approach to ‘the Lord’s table’ through *el Pacto* and individually in their decision of whether to participate or not. *El Pacto* seems to represent not only a pact between the *creyentes* and Jesus or God but also a pact between each individual Gitano with the Rastro Gitano community, as well as a pact between the figure of the *creyente* (representative of ‘mercy’) and that of the *comerciante* (representing the ‘market’), thereby producing the Rastro Gitano collective (i.e. ‘communitas’) of ‘mercurial merchants’. This holy sacrament of communion, and the way in which *el Pacto* is played out in *el culto*, can therefore be understood as a liturgically strong ritual action rooted in the Christian tradition but ‘brought to the table’, so to speak, *a la manera Gitana* (‘the Gitano way’) in the context of el Rastro.

THE MORALIZATION OF MONEY

To summarize the discussion thus far, the Rastro Gitanos cannot easily transfer monetary profit from *el mundo de los Payos* – with its distinctive cultural logics, moral notions and values – without heavy social sanctioning. Rather than determining status based on money, a more common strategy is to ascribe it in accordance with family ties and moral behaviour and conduct. Respect and honour are thought to emerge from aspects of belonging and behaviour, rather than goods connected with *el mundo de los Payos* (i.e. money). And although displays of wealth manifest in the shape of fancy dressing and jewelleryes, money and financial wealth are to a certain extent considered unclean and socially disruptive.

Therefore, as a disjunctive ‘threshold’ (Guyer 2004), I argue that *el culto* can metaphorically be analysed as a giant ‘laundry machine’ for value conversion between *el mundo de los Payos* and *el pueblo Gitano*, and the subsequent moralization of money. This allows the Gitanos to both maintain a relatively egalitarian social structure and ensure the long-term social reproduction of *el pueblo Gitano*. In sum, I believe that it is through the socio-religious practice of sacrifice that goods from the Payo sphere (i.e. money, scrap, contacts and status) are exchanged within *el culto*. More concretely, in this setting, sacrifice includes daily attendance, *la ofrenda* and *el Pacto*. Sacrifice is further imbued with Rastro Gitano notions of value and morality, linked with honour, respect and family, and corresponding status. Thus, monetary gain is introduced to the Gitano sphere of exchange via ritual attendance and sacrifice, and converted into Rastro Gitano values, morality and social relations.

These transformations of value further imply a conversion from *class* to *status*, from social hierarchization based on financial wealth to social stratification grounded in social prestige and honour. Weber ([1922] 1978) discussed class in the context of social stratification more generally, viewing it as both a dimension of social structure and a determinant of opportunities and status. He further argued that communities are not comprised on the basis of class but in accordance with status groups, which describe common lifestyles and shared social restrictions (e.g. endogamy). He did not hold wealth to be necessarily defining for prestige, though he acknowledged that this could be the case. Similarly, he clarified that while status group distinctions do not necessarily follow ethnic affiliations they might do so in extreme cases, as in the caste system or, I would add, amongst the Gitanos of el Rastro, who use moral, aesthetic and ritual systems to reinforce social distinctions. Finally, he claimed that the esteem of high-status groups is never questioned or doubted, and that esteem is therefore associated with the particular lifestyle, social network and consumption pattern of these groups; low status groups, on the other hand, must find other ways to project a sense of dignity. Such groups often base their worth and self-respect on hopes for salvation. Especially, the afterlife carries a promise of recompense, and it is thus not uncommon for low status groups to enjoy a special relationship with their god(s) (ibid.). As previously described, the Gitanos of el Rastro look upon themselves as avant-garde, middle or upper class, and they put a lot of effort into actuating bodily and aesthetical signs associated with both the bourgeois and anti-bourgeois. However, due to the innate precariousness of the Rastro Gitanos’ economic practices, I would argue that they simultaneously consider the short-term values (i.e. material goods) of high-status groups too volatile; thus, they convert these values into long-term social values (i.e. avant-garde and/or bourgeois values and

manners) and spiritual values, manifested in hopes of salvation, heavenly recompense and an intimate relationship with God.

THE JOY OF CREATION

So far, entrepreneurship has figured in this chapter as an implicit feature in the sphere/barrier/threshold discussions. In the following, I move on to address the entrepreneurial aspects of the *comerciantes*' sphere-barrier/threshold manoeuvring more explicitly, by examining the dialectics they epitomize between old and new, creation and destruction, and tradition and innovation. Joseph Schumpeter ([1934] 2000, 1939) defined entrepreneurship as the act of making 'new combinations' from existing materials and forces – adding that for these new combinations to be actualized something old must be destroyed. He referred to the latter as 'creation through destruction' or 'creative destruction'. Thus, in order to make something new – for example, social patterns – the characteristic task of the entrepreneur is to break with old *traditions* (barriers).

Three non-hedonistic features characterize the entrepreneur, according to Schumpeter ([1946] 1991: 408). The main idea is that money and self-utility are not what primarily motivate the entrepreneur but more so the 'joy of creation'. As such, the figure of the entrepreneur contrasts and challenges the utility-maximizing drive of the 'economic man' (Schumpeter [1934] 2000: 69).

'First of all, there is the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, though not necessarily, also a dynasty ... Its fascination is especially strong for people who have no other chance of achieving social distinction' (ibid.). As I see it, this statement resonates well with the 'cosmological choice' of the Rastro Gitanos and other Gypsy groups, 'understood as a self-defining capacity to determine for oneself a posture vis-à-vis the workings of states, markets, money, bureaucracies, and so on within the modern societies – through which each community seeks to guarantee its continuity' (Brazzabeni, Cunha and Fotta 2016: 2). For the Rastro Gitanos, there are several elements that resonate with such a non-hedonistic 'cosmological choice': their dream and drive to be their own masters, as exemplified by their ideology and practice of self-employment; their resistance to proletarianization and state authoritarianism; and their efforts to protect their general human spiritual creativity from regular wage labour and other enforcing structures, to uphold the Gitano–Payo barrier and protect the long-term social reproduction of *el pueblo Gitano* against the perils of short-term market relations and general purpose money.

The second motivation Schumpeter identifies is ‘the will to conquer: the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself. The financial result is a secondary consideration ... mainly valued as an index of success and as a symptom of victory’ ([1934] 2000: 69). In Rastro Gitano terms, this honour and respect depends on the general capability (*ser capaz*) and strength (*ser fuerte*) of a man, specifically. As writes San Román (1975: 197):

Honour is directly related to virility in its two main forms: a man’s capacity in relation to women, and his capacity in relation to other men ... Honour is a component of prestige, but a man may have honour without the other components of prestige such as wealth. But a man may have prestige by being ‘strong’ and rich without being especially esteemed. A man who has honour is called by the Gypsies ‘a man of respect’ and ‘a man of word’; a man with much prestige but without honour may be only a ‘strong man’.

In el Rastro, I did not come across any derogatory connotations of *ser fuerte*. Rather, *fuerte* was used to describe a person of strong character (*con mucho carácter*) who faced life’s battles with integrity, without straying from his/her basic values or the moral values of the community. A person who was *fuerte* in character was respected for his/her conduct and behaviour. Both *fuerte* and *tener mucho carácter* (‘to have a lot of character’) seemed to represent the highest praise among the Gitanos of el Rastro. The opposite labels included *debil* (weak), *flojo* (loose, floppy) and *incapaz* (incapable, helpless). However, there did exist a divide between Gitanos of el Rastro who had achieved their status position and respect through only financial wealth, and those who had gained it through other means; the former did not enjoy the same esteem as the latter, as they had not gained success *a la manera Gitana* (the Gitano way).

Schumpeter’s third motivation is ([1934] 2000: 69) ‘the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply of exercising one’s energy and ingenuity. Our type seeks out difficulties, changes in order to change, delights in ventures’. As middleman traders who do not separate work/business from family/leisure, the Rastro Gitanos treat all aspects of business as equivalent to living. At the market – as in church – rapture, joy, ecstasy and bliss are prominent expressions. It seems to me that the joy of creating (remembering that this is not a straightforward happy and unburdened affair but one that includes the dark side of creation as well) – that is, triggering possibilities and strengthening and displaying talents – in short, producing existence *per se* – is the main drive behind the Rastro Gitanos’ ethos and working practices. Furthermore, I would argue that it is not only the main *drive* but also the very *medium* through which the Rastro Gitanos live and produce their lives, life worlds and livelihoods.

In this sense, the Gitanos of el Rastro can be seen as participants in an ‘incessant process of self-creation’ (Piasere 1985), akin to my analytical interpretation that they are entangled in a kind of ‘existential entrepreneurship’. However, as I see it, they are involved in not only self-creation but also other-creation, object-creation and context-creation; and all this creation has to do with the very profound creation of *meaning*, by giving social or spiritual values and elevation to, for instance, sales objects, identity questions and the Rastro Gitanos’ own disarticulation from mainstream society. This is a synergistic topic that I explore in further detail in Chapters 8 and 9, but for the present discussion and as briefly mentioned above, it is of importance to underscore that the Rastro Gitanos’ creative power – their joy of creation – should not be mistaken for a straightforward blissful affair. Rather, with Emil Røyrvik (2011: 30), I would stress its innate ‘doubleness’:

The power to create is related to both the joy and pain of the process of creation. A notion captured by the old Hindu conceptions of creation and destruction and introduced to nineteenth-century European discourse as ‘creative destruction’ by Nietzsche, it was brought into economics by Werner Sombart and subsequently made famous by Schumpeter. (Reinert and Reinert 2006)

Hence, especially when existence is at stake, the Rastro Gitanos’ power to create encapsulates the simultaneity of joy and pain, akin to the paradoxical construct of ‘creative destruction’ (Schumpeter [1934] 2000) – a paradox that I will address in the following sections, as well as in Chapters 5–7 (in a ritual context).

BREAKERS OF TRADITION

The empirical and theoretical material presented in this chapter calls for a discussion of the social meaning of the Rastro Gitanos’ economic practices. Inherent in this discussion lies a paradox. As I have shown, the barrier between *el pueblo Gitano* and *el mundo de los Payos* is very fixed, protected by the Rastro Gitanos’ endogamy, information control and sanctions connected Gitano–Payo socialization. At the same time, the Rastro Gitanos continuously destruct the barrier in order to transform their values (i.e. concerning women, knowledge, work and time) into Payo values (i.e. money, status and business contacts). Thus, they paradoxically manipulate the barrier that they deem so critical. I have argued that the Rastro Gitanos’ culturally specific ‘creative destruction’ is recognizable in their broader cosmological and ontological notions. Thus, in the following sections, I try to illustrate how their entrepreneurial ethos or economic spirit of creative

destruction is equally – and perhaps visibly – an underlying cultural, social and spiritual model.

As I have already established, creation through destruction, as identified by Schumpeter ([1934] 2000), can be expressed in Barth's (1967) vocabulary as the breaking of barriers and the (re)combination of spheres. Moreover, the entrepreneur's specific task has been described as consisting of the breaking up of the old and creating new *tradition* (e.g. Schumpeter [1934] 2000). Often, majority populations view the Gitanos in Spain and other Gypsy/Roma communities as conservators of time, traditions and customs – that is, as bearers of tradition. In this respect, the Gitanos have come to be national icons in Spain. This is especially true of the Andalusian Gitanos, with the highly stereotypical ideas about their *fiestas* ('parties' or 'festivals'), emblematic dress, caves, flamenco and bull fighting. Although the Gitanos in Spain communicate some of the same notions about themselves (e.g. when claiming 'ownership' of certain cultural expressions), they actually look upon themselves as tradition *breakers*: 'We believe that traditions hold you down and limit you' was one of the typical phrases I heard in this regard. During my fieldwork, every time a holiday approached – be it Easter, Pentecost or one of the many Spanish feasts of the saints – and I asked if there would be any special ceremony in church, the *creyentes* dismissed this idea, claiming that they did not believe in traditions; they were 'tradition breakers', they said. In practice, it usually did come to pass that a special celebration would be held. On Good Friday, for example, we spent eleven hours in church, interrupted only by a shared meal prepared by the women and a coffee break to stretch sore backs and swollen legs. Furthermore, on Whit Sunday, an intense sermon was delivered about the Holy Spirit and tongues of flame; and on the feasts of the saints – especially in May, when the weather was warmer – the vibrant life of Lavapiés and Embajadores would reach a peak, with equal intensity shown at *el culto*. Thus, on these latter occasions, the Rastro Gitanos not only broke with Catholic traditions but they also re-created and enforced traditions on their own terms, enjoying their own fiestas and celebrations alongside Catholic events.

There are two ways in which I see the Rastro Gitanos break with tradition – with regard to conventions, morals and virtues: the first is that they refashion and accommodate Payo traditions and the second is that they refashion Gitano traditions. Somewhat categorically, we can say that the abovementioned example of how the Rastro Gitanos adapt traditional Catholic fiestas pertains to the former. Moreover, I would argue that neither the Rastro Gitanos' work as self-employed middleman traders nor their distinct social and political organization, endogamy or religious rituals adhere to Spanish mainstream expectations linked to wage labour,

social integration, forced schooling, political submission and Catholic belief. Hence, in my view, the main example of how the Rastro Gitanos break with Payo traditions is represented by their very lifestyle – that is, their lives lived *a la manera Gitana* (the Gitano way).

The second mode of breaking pertains to the Rastro Gitanos' manner of breaking with their own traditions. I have discussed and analysed this in relation to their economic practices and socio-economic niche and their entrepreneurial effort of breaking and making the barrier separating the Gitano and Payo spheres. I have simultaneously argued that the traditions, conventions, moralities and virtues they by necessity break with, are actually their own. Thus, as I see it, it is something of an interesting paradox that their socio-economic practice – and their continuity as a socially distinct group – depends on their ability to disrupt their own traditions. The result of this practice is an alternative way of organizing social, economic and religious life, which ultimately also represents a break with Payo tradition. Moreover, I would argue that the Rastro Gitanos' ethos of tradition breaking – with respect to their own and others' traditions – is equally a practice of securing cultural and social continuity through change and transformation. For example, over time, the Gitanos of el Rastro may alter their traditions, occupations and cultural expressions yet preserve 'the Gitano way', on the basis of consistent moral notions and a particular disarticulation from mainstream society. In this way, they simultaneously secure the long-term social reproduction of *el pueblo Gitano*.

CONTINUATION THROUGH CHANGE

The Rastro Gitanos' entrepreneurial ethos seems partly constituted by their efforts to ensure social, cultural and economic continuity through a process of perpetual transformation, adoption and adaptation. Moreover, the process of value conversion in *el culto*, as just explored, serves as example of how tradition is restored, on a near daily basis, after it has been challenged by the *comerciantes'* engagement with *el mundo de los Payos* in their daily economic endeavours.

I propose the categorical construct of 'continuation through change' to describe the Rastro Gitanos' relation to cultural continuity versus discontinuity. For the Gitanos of el Rastro, when circumstances seem to threaten the original nature of a cultural, social or economic practice, expression, shape or mode, then transformation – or even revolution – is promoted, often by a leading figure in the group, until the phenomenon at hand is finally taken back to not only its original form but to an even 'purer' and more 'authentic' shape, in the eyes of those involved. The prime example of this process,

as I experienced it in my fieldwork, pertains to the elevation of Gypsiness or Gitano identity and collectivity via conversion to Pentecostalism (see also, e.g., Cantón et al. 2004; Cantón-Delgado 2018; Cantón-Delgado et al. 2020; Gay y Blasco 1999, 2001, 2002; San Román 1997). By being of *la raza Gitana* ('the Gitano race'), as the Rastro Gitanos themselves phrase it, a person's Gypsiness is given additional 'purity', depth and authenticity if he or she is also a *creyente* (Pentecost believer). The same is true for the Gitano collective – *el pueblo Gitano* – which is considered more true, pure and morally elevated if it is simultaneously a community that believes – that is, if it is transformed into *el pueblo de Dios* ('God's people') (see also Montañés 2016: 4; Williams 1991: 87). Thus, I would suggest that there is a dialectic relation between the original cultural tradition (Gitano) and the 'new' cultural tradition (Pentecostal), which generates an even 'truer' and more 'pure' expression (Gitano Pentecostal) – in other words, a process of continuation and affirmation through change.

FLAMENCO

The following examples illustrate the Gitanos' creative destruction of cultural practices and expressivity. They were collected from the website of *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* (FSG, the largest and most prominent Gitano NGO in Spain), which presents short biographies of famous Gitanos throughout history. The stories are not directly connected to the locus of el Rastro, but because of their similarity to the cultural patterns of practice among the Rastro Gitanos, I present them here to illustrate more widespread cultural ideas that I recognized in the ethnographic context of el Rastro.

The first biography is of the famous flamenco *bailaora* ('dancer') Carmen Amaya: 'Carmen, who lives the Gitano dance from the very heart of her mother, leaves her instinct and body free without subjecting herself to rules [*normas*]. She revolutionized the dance and transformed it into pure Gitano passion.'²⁵ This description attributes the uniqueness and exceptionality of Carmen Amaya's dancing to her rejection of norms and her ability to revolutionize and transform flamenco dance into something even more genuine and pure. 'Revolution' and 'change' are thus emphasized as essential processes for maintaining the long-term survival of flamenco dance – and even 'pure Gitano passion'.

A second example also comes from the world of flamenco. Together with his Payo guitarist Paco de Lucia, the famous flamenco *cantaor* ('singer') and Gitano El Camarón de la Isla was much criticized by the flamenco 'purists' of the 1960s. In the 1980s, de Lucia was replaced by

Tomatito as Camarón's guitarist, and the new partners initiated a search for new sounds, using instruments and combinations never heard before in the world of flamenco – drums, Fender pianos, keyboards, electric guitars and zithers – taking inspiration from the genres of rock, jazz and Oriental music. In the 1980s, Camarón gained a larger audience than any other flamenco artist before him. We are told that the purists never forgave Camarón's unorthodox attitude and style; they considered it 'a betrayal, selling oneself to the gold of the record companies'.⁶ Sadly, Camarón met a premature death (aged 41) in 1992 in Barcelona, from lung cancer. A great number of Gitanos from Barcelona and the rest of Spain attended his funeral, and his fame lives on to this day.

A 12-year-old Gitano boy in el Rastro whom I came to know as a talented singer was one of many who idolized El Camarón de La Isla. I met him once at the Sunday market in el Rastro, after he had just bought a Camarón banner. 'Why?' I asked. 'He is the greatest ever', the boy replied, and his adult kin standing near us applauded in assent. Camarón was certainly the greatest, they asserted. He revolutionized flamenco and was a true carrier of the Gitano spirit, but he died all too young. In their eyes, Camarón was a tradition breaker and was both applauded and despised for it in his time. In the present day, people see him as the saviour of the *true* flamenco; by changing it, he simultaneously enabled its future existence.

LAS ALABANZAS

Another example of the Rastro Gitanos' internal break with tradition, as well as the logic of 'continuation through change' or cultural 'creative destruction', is provided by the Pentecostal church and the musical expression in *el culto*. To an untrained ear, the *alabanzas* that are played and sung in church may sound like a blend of flamenco or *cante jondo* and fast-rhythm, gospel-like songs of praise. This stylistic link is further confirmed by the Rastro Gitanos themselves, through their *palos* (rhythmic clapping of hands originally used in flamenco) to accompany the music. During my fieldwork, three Pentecostal girls (Payas) were once invited to sing at a *culto* session. After they finished, the congregants agreed that the girls had beautiful voices and that their singing was outstanding – 'like the voice of God', some even said. However, their professional training had made their style smooth – maybe even too smooth. It lacked something, the *creyentes* felt; some authenticity, a nerve that the Gitano Pentecostal singers certainly have, both due to their *lack* of professional training and because they carry *cicatrices* (psychological 'scars') from the Gitanos' history of state suppression, and ethnic discrimination and harassment in the present.

I once interviewed a prominent Payo flamenco guitarist. As a self-proclaimed flamenco ‘purist’, he shook his head when I mentioned the *alabanzas*, asserting that they had nothing to do with flamenco. The Rastro Gitanos who attended *el culto* held a quite different view. They too saw the *alabanzas* as something completely new, but in their view, the clapping, profundity, intensity and talent was the same as for flamenco, as was the training – by practice and socialization. Most importantly, the flamenco of the past fulfilled the same ritual and spiritual role as the *alabanzas* and *el culto* of the present day, they advocated (see Assumma 2005).

A NEW CULTIC SOCIALITY

El culto is not only a place where traditional musical styles are dissolved and merged into new combinations; it is also a place where kinship lines – traditionally drawing the pattern of sociality, morality and power among the Gitanos of el Rastro – are crossed and transgressed through socialization and ritualization. In this way, conflicts are settled and peace is restored; morality is given a new dimension, with a pastor and God present, as well as *los ancianos* (‘the old men of respect’); women, too, are given a new and more prominent place in public life. But, as with the music, new social patterns are only created through the ritual practice of *el culto* by the Schumpeterian process of destroying something old, sometimes in quite radical ways. I explore these dynamics, as they relate to cosmological and ontological aspects, in further detail in Chapter 8.

Although ‘continuation through change’ may seem like a liberal credo, the Rastro Gitanos are, in many ways, conservative. In particular, the Rastro Gitanos of Madridian descent are engaged in a range of customs and conventions pertaining to – for example – the relations between women and men and their ideas of gendered conduct and hierarchy. Moreover, at times, quite a large amount of the Gitano *comerciantes* and *creyentes*, young and old, in el Rastro wear black clothes, adhering to the custom of *el duelo* (‘the mourning period’). Old traditions also include the structure of weddings and funerals, yet especially in weddings both flamenco and the *alabanzas* (‘songs of praise’) are present musical expressions. At the same time, and herein lies the paradoxical crux, the Rastro Gitanos’ continuity as a group of people with distinguishable economic, social and religious practices actually rests on their ability to adapt and change their values and customs. Breaks in the barriers are in fact needed to maintain their socio-economic niche and secure their own survival; the same is true for their longevity as bearers of tradition and a group with distinct social, occupational, political and religious arrangements. I would thus argue that rupture, transformation

and even revolution – that is, the breaking of norms and traditions – as the aforementioned examples show, are at the very foundation of the Rastro Gitanos' continuation as a distinct social, cultural, economic and spiritual group.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE MERCURIAL MERCHANTS OF EL RASTRO

In this chapter, I have presented Gitano entrepreneurship in the context of el Rastro as 'existential' – concerned with not only economic activities but also all aspects of social and ritual life. Based on the explorations and discussion in this chapter, I would argue that the accumulation of goods and capital is not a prime concern for the Gitano *comerciantes* of el Rastro; neither is it considered a reliable source or sign of honour, respect or salvation. Rather, the accumulation of capital and property is considered unreliable over the long term, as it is vulnerable to fluctuating markets, political changes and family affairs. As an exception to this general rule, in my fieldwork, I became aware of a few Gitano families who ran large and successful antique shops that had been passed down through several generations. These families, who had 'large fortunes', enjoyed high social standing in *el pueblo Gitano*; however, the impression I got was that their esteem was mainly due to the *way* in which they had gained their success and the manner in which they comported themselves in the present, and not their financial standing, as such.

As I learned during fieldwork, the Gitanos of el Rastro tend to produce and display *signs* of monetary wealth even when they are experiencing financial vulnerability – for example, by exerting great effort to dress up for *el culto* and by acting and moving in a bourgeois or avantgarde fashion. For the *comerciantes*, financial wealth may come and go, but signs of success can be produced and 'put on display' (e.g. Haynes 2012) for quite some time after a downfall, perhaps long enough to cover themselves until the next period of prosperity. In Chapter 9, I return to these thoughts in relation to my analysis of the Gitano community understood as a 'community of signs'.

While Chapter 3 pertained solely to the economic activities of the Rastro Gitanos, the current chapter has looked more at the interface between the Rastro Gitanos' economic, social and spiritual practices, placing *el culto* at the very centre. After first giving a short introduction to Part III of the study, the following three chapters specifically examine the Rastro Gitanos' ritual and spiritual practices; the inner dynamics of *el culto* and its broader social, cosmological and ontological implications.

NOTES

1. In addition to Barth (1967), see also Malinowski (1922), Firth (1936), Bohannan (1959), Geertz (1963), Bohannan and Dalton (1965), Scott (1967), Bohannan and Bohannan (1968) and Bloch and Parry (1989) for broader anthropological applications of the concepts of 'spheres' and 'barriers' (i.e. not explicitly related to entrepreneurship).
2. I would argue that the situation for the Gitanos of el Rastro (who as a community of course carry a lot of internal variation) can always be described as *precarious* because of their dependence on the fluctuating circumstances of larger economic and state systems. However, although I would say that their situation is always precarious and although they are constantly facing *marginalization*, *discrimination* and *harassment* in, for instance, their encounters with state officials, they cannot always be ethnographically described as *marginal* – that would depend on the circumstances, possibilities and difficulties in which they face at any given moment.
3. I came to know one highly respected married couple where the husband was Gitano and the wife was Latin American. My Gitano friends praised the woman for her 'warmth' and compassion.
4. The commodification of labour and skills is intrinsic to capitalism (Marx [1867] 1996), as such there is nothing special about these examples. Indeed, flamenco has gone through processes of commodification in the last few decades, its form, content and social role having changed radically for the Gitanos. In contrast, because they manage their own family-run businesses, surplus value goes back directly to the Rastro Gitanos themselves. The *comerciantes* also have much power over their everyday working life situation; the way they conduct their business, with whom, when, where and so on and so forth. This makes it a radical ideological brake with regular wage labour. As I see it, it also presents the role of commodification as rather marginal.
5. http://www.gitanos.org/documentos/madrid/paginas/sub_paginas/personas/carmen.html
6. Ibid.