Economic Habitus and Management of Needs: The Example of the Gypsies

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From its very beginnings economic anthropology had to tackle a major obstacle: the very nature of its object of study. What in fact is meant by the use of the term 'economics' or its corresponding adjective? Does 'economics' refer to a specific relationship between ends and means, as some think, or is it defined, more prosaically, as the satisfaction of material needs? Is it a category of specific facts or a praxeology of goal-oriented action? Some interesting debates on the matter, which have brought formalist, substantivist, and Marxist writers into conflict, have revealed marked ideological distortions, some reductionism, and finally epistemological positions that were difficult to reconcile.

In the following pages I shall summarize these debates in order to introduce a new approach to economic phenomena that highlights the cultural management of needs. This viewpoint starts from the observation that the satisfaction of the various needs felt by the individual proceeds of necessity from transaction, either with the surrounding society or with the natural environment (very often, in the latter case, through the mediation of spiritual entities that control access to resources). And these transactions vary in their modalities from one society to another, just as the character and range of needs also change. Far from being left to chance or arising from opportunist strategies, such transactions are codified in accordance with cultural norms. These norms contribute to the socialization process through the education of needs, which profoundly moulds the child's experiences and attitudes. So the hypothesis is that this aspect of upbringing reflects an economic relationship with the wider collective world that tends to be perpetuated in the form of systems of tendencies, or *habitus*,[1] internalized by individuals.

The research problem flowing from these premises is to examine a wide range of interactions, internal to the group or characteristic of its relations with the outside world, in order to deduce from their recurrence and coherence, not only *habitus*, but also how widespread they are in practice and consequently what structuring effect they have. In this way, by including not only socialization, but also subsistence occupations and transactional aspects from religious and political areas, the approach I am advocating can be differentiated from the materialism inherent in substantivist and Marxist theories. In addition, by interpreting the expression and satisfaction of needs by reference to culturally codified social norms, it also differs from the subjectivism of the formalists' methods, since they focus on the psychology of an assumed 'rational individual'. This article explains the new theory and demonstrates the relevant methodology using the example of the gypsies.

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The 'economic' revisited

The criticisms formulated with regard to formalism, the oldest theory in economic anthropology, are well known. In brief, the substantivists (Polanyi, 1957: 245–50; Dalton, 1961: 146–48) or neo-substantivists (Sahlins, 1972) have criticized its followers for projecting on to non-capitalist societies a marginalist or neo-classical definition of economics – the allocation of scarce resources to alternative ends – that was developed from an analysis of the market system and is shot through with liberal values. Indeed, by implicit reference to the modern ideal of 'free individuals', controllers of their actions and destiny, formal theory focuses on individuals, separate from their socio-cultural context, whose modes of behaviour are assumed to coincide with those of the perfect *homo rationalis*. Thus formalist writers confer on hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads, or peasants from pre-capitalist societies a margin of choice, a sense of calculation, and a propensity to maximize their satisfactions that are more the exception than the rule, even in capitalist societies.

By reducing the 'economic' to a succession of 'ideal' acts carried out with full awareness and resulting from complete control of situations, formalists entirely ignore both the everyday need for compromise in social interaction and the strength of habits that tends to prevail amid the routine of daily life. They implicitly suggest that a number of alternatives are available to individuals related to a constant flow of technological innovations. Indeed this context by itself goes part of the way to explain the decisive role they assign to individual choices. However, this context is characteristic of capitalist societies, where intense competition imposes the need for rising productivity and rapid updating of production methods.

Another criticism, connected with the first, relates to the fact that this theory, by tying the decision-making process closely to individuals, plays down the socio-cultural constraints that condition their choices, or assumes a perfect match between their behaviour and group norms. In this latter case society is seen as the social extension of the 'rational individual': a Super Agent that always lays down its laws, customs, and modes of adaptation in the most efficient and consensual way possible. Thus, according to D.M. Goodfellow (1939: 10), one of the earliest formalists, "Custom is simply another name for behaviour"; while in the view of M. Herskovits (1940: 53), "Culture is behaviour in the widest sense of the word", and this author deduces the stability of societies from a learning process whose integrative effect he overstates. Naturally, such a view masks differences of interest, social conflicts, crises, adaptive difficulties, or structural contradictions and consequently fails to follow the dynamic process that societies undergo.

Another fault inherent in the formalists' approach is their refusal to accept that the intentional rationality of individual or group behaviour is a reflection of a more fundamental logic structuring social relationships, whose characteristics are neither intended nor necessarily known to economic agents. They therefore prove unable to identify the structural characteristics of social relationships, and also the socio-historical conditions in which they emerged, which were passed on from generation to generation and developed (Godelier, 1973: 58–59).

Finally, formalist theory seems too general to be truly operational. As M. Godelier (1969: 135) has rightly pointed out, by considering as economic every action that uses scarce resources in order to achieve the best possible satisfaction of personal ends, and by

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assigning the same status to activities connected with subsistence, pleasure, power, or salvation, this theory dissolves the very object of economic anthropology into a praxeology of goal-oriented action, whose validity is assumed since it cannot be proved. Indeed, when ethnographers of the formalist persuasion are confronted in the field with the diversity of human experience, they more often than not restrict their research to the satisfaction of material needs, in accordance with economists' classic field of investigation. Furthermore, when in non-capitalist societies they come across a mix of behaviours and institutions that do not conform to their general theory of action, they too easily conclude they are 'irrrational', or else they arbitrarily exclude them from their description. The ethnocentrism of this position is baldly identified by L. Robbins (1932: 19), when he writes that the neo-marginalist analysis "has most utility in the exchange economy. It is unnecessary in the isolated economy. It is debarred from any but the simplest generalizations by the very *raison d'être* of a strictly communist society. But where independent initiative in social relationships is permitted to the individual, there economic analysis comes into its own."

Like formalism, substantive theory in economic anthropology idealizes the working of societies, particularly societies that are still hardly affected by the market economy. In this case its assumptions are not those of liberalism, but instead stem from the utopian socialism that had already inspired some of the discipline's founding fathers, such as H.L. Morgan or M. Mauss. Thus K. Polanyi, the leader of this second stream, emphasizes the propensity for altruism and mutual help that, in his view, typified the members of pre-capitalist societies. And he also keeps repeating, in *The Great Transformation* (1944), that the market economy has led to the moral deterioration of the human race and brought social and political chaos by making self-interest, opportunism, and the exploitation of others the highest values.

This ideological bias results in a focus that is the reverse of the formalists', who ignore the cultural codes and social constraints, with which individuals are forced to compromise, in favour of motives that are assumed to be innate in all people, and in the last resort determine the logic of their goal-oriented actions. On the other hand, the substantivists dismiss the individual dimension of their object of study and take an almost exclusive interest in group institutions.

In this context, one of the epistemological problems thrown up by the substantive approach originates from the fact that Polanyi, Dalton, and their disciples are not interested in the socio-historical genesis of the institutions they meet when they study a particular cultural environment. Similarly, they do not attempt to identify the factors and processes that have brought these institutions to the more or less central position they occupy in the societal complex under consideration. Dealing with these aspects would imply raising questions about the nature of the relationships between individual and society, and examining the fumbling efforts, the conflicts and crises that affect the emergence, stability, or disappearance of these institutions in every society. Instead they explain the unity and stability of socio-economic systems by means of a small number of resource-allocation models, whose integrative capacity is assumed rather than demonstrated, and whose distinctiveness loses a considerable amount of its heuristic value, because it is not previously used to shed light on their mode of articulation.

The typology of *forms of integration* that substantivists identify (reciprocity, redistribution, market exchange) only classifies the visible aspects of socio-economic systems into superficial categories, to paraphrase Godelier (1973: 63), who points out that notions of

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reciprocity, redistribution, and even market exchange can be used for very different content from one society to another.

In addition, as Scott Cook notes (1966: 328–9), the norm of reciprocity is not incompatible with self-interest and aggressiveness, since the principle of generosity in an economy based on that norm is not necessarily integrative. It may either contribute to group solidarity or give rise to conflicts, for instance when one of the partners does not conform to the agreed conditions for the exchange. The reason why substantivists are accused of idealizing and simplifying reality is partly because they ignore these nuances, but also because they think of forms of integration as pieces of a puzzle and their combination as sufficient to define the nature of economic systems. In order to construct their typology, they start from the ideologically dominant position of one of these forms of integration and assume that what determines the reproduction of the socio-cultural complex is the same as what apparently controls its functioning. This explains the accusation of empiricism levelled at them by Marxists.

More fundamentally for our purpose, formalists and Marxists have criticized the definition of 'economic' put forward by this stream's theoreticians. Thus, in Dalton's view (1961: 5), the substantive meaning of economy "refers to the supply of material goods that satisfy biological and social needs". However, the problem, as underlined by E. Leclair (1962: 1182–3), is that this definition, which focuses on production, distribution, and consumption of material goods, excludes from the economic field all provision of services, which do play a very important part in the subsistence and perpetuation of human groups.

In order to avoid this reductionism and also the bankruptcy of a formal conception of the 'economic' unable to grasp its object, the French Marxist anthropologist Godelier has suggested a definition that combines aspects of earlier formulations, while claiming to be exhaustive and pragmatic. Thus the 'economic' is seen as:

> the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. It is both an area of specific activities (production, allocation, consumption of material goods: tools, musical instruments, books, temples, etc.) and a specific aspect of all human activities that do not belong to this area *per se* but whose *functioning involves the exchange and use* of material resources. (1969, II: 139–140)

To illustrate his thesis Godelier takes the example of a singer's performance. In his view, the economic aspect of his recital does not lie in the opera he performs, or in the beauty of his voice, or in the pleasure he provides for his audience, or in the prestige he gains from this, but in the fact that the audience had to pay to hear him and he receives a proportion of the money. The author adds that when a professional singer performs at his brother's wedding, purely for the guests' pleasure, then his recital has no economic dimension; on the other hand, if he sings at a charity concert and forgoes his fee, his behaviour is economic (1969, II: 138–9).

As we can see from this example, Godelier thinks a service has an economic dimension only if it partakes of a commercial relationship and thereby requires immediate or almost immediate payment, in cash or kind, real or potential (the case of the charity concert when the singer generously forgoes the fee he ought theoretically to receive). So he excludes from the question, on the one hand, exchange of services (today I help you harvest the crops in your field or build your house and in return you will help me some other time, if need be, with similar tasks), and on the other hand, gifts that could be classified as

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what M. Sahlins (1972: 193–4) calls *generalized reciprocity*, whose return is indeterminate in time as well as in quantity and quality. But not to take account of these forms of exchange seriously undermines the economic analysis, because they are frequent in non-industrial societies, where they make up a large proportion of transactions.

Is it truly realistic to say, as Godelier does, that a professional singer's unpaid performance at a wedding to which he is invited totally lacks any economic dimension? As a matter of fact, this is a gift, viewed as such by the other guests, and its value is all the more appreciated because in a commercial context they would have to pay to be present.

In Godelier's view the definition of the 'economic' can be criticized because it hovers between two contradictory conceptions. Whereas the economic character of material goods, according to Marxist theory, comes from the fact that they are produced through the combination of productive forces and relationships of production, services, on the other hand, owe their economic character to the fact that they are appropriate to a particular form of exchange. Furthermore, in this definition the author remains bound to the quasi-metaphysical theory of value proposed by Marx. According to this theory, use value and exchange value are the opposite of one another and operate in alternating mode, with exchange value resulting from the extent to which productive forces are invested. Consequently Godelier does not take account of the principle of marginal use, one of whose merits is to show that a commodity's quality and relative scarcity (whether good or service) have a direct effect on its rate of exchange. If one accepts the validity of this principle, one cannot say there is no relationship between the price paid for a singer's performance and the beauty of his voice, the quality of the recital and his reputation. All these criteria influence supply and demand, and thus the cost of the performance. Therefore they do have economic repercussions.

Over and above this criticism of Godelier's view, the methodology of historical materialism, as Marx formulated it, cannot be transposed to the study of non-capitalist societies without throwing up serious epistemological problems. M. Sahlins (1976: 127) has clearly shown that according to Marx human beings are creatures of needs. So they are motivated by the ontological requirement to produce and transform the world; and in return they are transformed in their being and in their relationship with others. This thesis leads Marx to think that the social order and modes of thought emanate from the practical teleology of production. Hence the hierarchy of functions he sets up, within the production mode, within the processes of production and distribution, or between infra and superstructures.

Most Marxist anthropologists follow this line mechanically. Most of them are unable to question its heuristic application in the case of non-capitalist societies, where there are no economic institutions in the strict sense of the word. They do not consider that, though the 'economic' is an 'ultimate determiner', it is also, as I. Mészáros (1972: 115) reminds us, a 'determined determiner': it does not exist outside the historically changing complex of concrete mediations, which includes the most 'spiritual' ones.

Most Marxist anthropologists' rigid, mechanical fidelity to this hierarchy of functions has negative methodological implications, since it leads them to focus on the study of relationships that they see as the most determining, at the expense of 'subordinate' aspects of social life. Thus they emphasize production processes as against forms of exchange or consumption and, on the superstructure level, they highlight political aspects but ignore religious factors.

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Another criticism that can be made of the Marxist analysis relates to its narrowly institutionalist nature. It uses abstract concepts like 'productive forces', 'production relations', 'modes of production', or 'economic systems', within a hypothetico-deductive approach that is essentially holistic, but at the same time ignores individuals or plays down their role as agents in the historico-cultural process. Let us not forget that for Marx it is not people's conscious ideas that control their productive activities, but the reverse; the mode of production of material life conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life. Consequently the emergence, reproduction, or evolution of economic systems is dependent on an unintentional rationality that is inherent in the 'objective' properties of social relations.

Godelier is one of the few Marxist anthropologists to have tackled the relationship between individual and society in his book *L'idéel et le matériel*. However, he gives only two functions to individuals, or more precisely to the conscious portion of their mental activity: first, identifying short-term adaptive strategies and secondly, acting as an important focus for the process of children's learning about social relations (1984: 223).

In this respect, P. Bourdieu's critique of Marxism is extremely hard-hitting. In *Le sens pratique* (1980: 70) he states that ignoring the dialectic between objective and internalized structures that is played out in every action is a weakness common to both Marxism and structuralism. This weakness, he writes, consists of: "falling into a fetishism for social laws"; and the French sociologist goes on:

> to convert into transcendent entities . . . the constructions that science needs to use in order to account for the structured rational systems produced by the accumulation of countless historical actions is to reduce history to a 'subject-less process' and simply to replace the 'creative subject' of subjectivism with an automaton enthralled by the dead laws of a history of nature. This emanatist vision which turns the structure, be it Capital or Mode of production, into an *entelekheia* that develops independently in a process of self-realization, reduces historical agents to the role of 'media' . . . for the structure and their actions to mere epiphenomenal manifestations of the power the structure has to evolve according to its own laws.

Finally, to round off this rapid critical overview of Marxist theory, we need to return to its notion that economic rationality emerges from a 'natural' need for production. This notion leads to the assumed universal logic of work, which turns out to be unsuitable for discovering the psycho-affective origins and normative referents of production outside the specific context of industrialized societies. In this area a prudent relativism is in order and we can agree with M. Sahlins when he writes: "Selecting its material means and ends among all possible ones, as well as the relations under which they are combined, it is society which sets the productive intentions and intensities" (1976: 164).

Although research in economic anthropology has continued beyond Marxism, this theory was nevertheless the last to explore the content and limits we should assign to the 'economic'. More recent research has conformed to the decidedly minimalist, but also reductive, definition proposed by the substantivist faction (the 'economic' as production, distribution, and consumption of material goods). Reacting against the Marxist near-exclusive interest in the productive sphere, this research has developed in two main directions: first, study of demand, modes of consumption, and their cultural encoding (see Sahlins, 1976; Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Appadurai, 1986); secondly, study of

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exchange phenomena, with a very marked renewal of interest in this area in the field of gifts and debates, logically articulated around the famous essay by M. Mauss on this question (see Gregory, 1982; Guidiéri, 1984, 1997; Strathern, 1988; Bloch and Parry, 1989; Weiner, 1992; Godelier, 1996). In some ways the theory I am proposing here, because it is oriented towards transactional structures, is part of the second research direction, though it does not *a priori* stress the gift/return gift at the expense of other forms of exchange.

Towards a transactional approach to economic phenomena

The above exploration of the various definitions of the 'economic' anthropologists use shows that they are too restrictive or, on the other hand, too broad and always tinged with ethnocentrism. But, bearing in mind their inadequacies, is it possible to suggest a more appropriate definition?

Formalist, substantivist, or Marxist authors differ as to the nature of the needs to be included in the economic field and as to the relationship between ends and means that is the condition of their satisfaction. When they consider only the needs satisfied by material goods or commercial services, substantivists and Marxists both seem too reductive and ethnocentric. Not only can they not discover by this method the range of needs, both material and spiritual, that each society considers essential for its perpetuation, but what is more, they arbitrarily exclude transactions, such as exchange of services, which are no less important for being informal. Formalists escape this kind of criticism, but they make 'economic' satisfaction of needs conform to a Western logic based on the idea of scarce resources, rational choice, and maximization. And so they sacrifice analysis of the social dimension of the relationship between ends and means, as it is variably defined from one cultural context to another, in favour of an ethnocentric model of action centred on individuals and their assumed psychological motives.

In order to bypass these restrictions and ideological distortions, I am proposing the following definition of 'economic':

'Economic' is applied to ways of satisfying needs that involve the production and/or exchange of material goods and services. Exchange can, in accordance with M. Sahlins's typology, take the form of generalized reciprocity (sharing, hospitality, unsolicited giving, assistance, generosity), balanced reciprocity (purchase-sale, payments, symmetrical and simultaneous exchange of presents), or negative reciprocity (haggling, barter, trickery, gambling games, theft, and other kinds of improper gain).

Following on from this definition, a wide range of activities is included in the economic field, such as breastfeeding babies, offering a meal to relatives or friends, services performed at weddings and funerals, various forms of religious devotion, involvement in gambling games, or even raids on enemies.

Of course one of the risks inherent in this way of looking at things is that of losing in analytical depth what one gains in broadening the research field. In order to avoid the substantivists' empiricism as well as the criticism levelled at the formalists of dissolving the object of economic anthropology, the definition above must be linked to a research effort that aims to identify the structural schemata masked by the formal diversity and sometimes the apparently contingent nature of social phenomena.

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This task starts out from Mauss's observation that exchange in its varied forms is the very essence of social life, since it is at the root of the circulation of people, goods, and ideas. Indeed, the need for exchange in human societies transcends the categories 'production', 'distribution', or 'consumption' into which analysts traditionally divide the economic process. Thus, regardless of the society, the allocation of a portion or even the whole of the means of production depends on forms of reciprocity (from generalized to negative reciprocity) and consequently the Marxists' *relations of production* inevitably have a transactional dimension. Exchange not only cuts across the normal categories of economic analysis, but also conditions the affective tone and *modus operandi* of the many forms of social interaction between individuals and groups. It is inherent in the principle of socialization as a direct result of children's psychological and material dependence, but, more generally, it determines links between relatives of different generations (including ancestors). It is also constitutive of interactions with other members of society, between insiders and outsiders, as well as between people and gods or spirits.

It emerges from these considerations that exchange is an essential *social means* of satisfying individual needs. Taking these premises as a starting-point, one of the aims of my enquiry is to decipher underlying schemata for action that, when a certain social context is studied, structure the norms for exchange and mould behaviour through the force of habit. So the hypothesis is that transactions designed to satisfy material, social, or spiritual needs may imply common structural schemata that are internalized by individuals in the form of *habitus.* At this point in the exposé it is necessary to stress that these economic habitus, far from being universal, are culturally determined options, and the social loci of their practical projection, rather than being arbitrarily defined, must flow from a minute study of the frequency and modes of their objectivization.

According to one of the definitions given by Bourdieu (1980: 88), habitus are

> durable, transposable systems of arrangements . . . , principles generating and organizing practices and representations that may be objectively adapted to their goal without assuming that goals are consciously targeted and the operations necessary for their achievement are securely mastered.

This concept has the advantage of linking the individual intellectually with society, as well as the past with the present, since the arrangements making up a system are of course culturally defined and collectively shared, but are also passed on from one generation to another and are thoroughly but implicitly internalized, in and through practice, by means of the gradual process of inculcation.

The study of habitus assumes the exploration of a sector of activity relatively ignored by anthropologists, a sector whose epistemological importance Lévi-Strauss (1950: XI) highlighted in his introduction to the work of Mauss, who had been the first to transpose to the field of anthropological research the old scholastic notion of *habitus.* The sector of activity concerned is the mode of socialization of individuals. Indeed, it is in this relational environment first and foremost that habitus are inculcated.

Once the origin of habitus is recognized through the study of the process of socialization, it is impossible to reject the care of babies, as critics of formalism do, claiming that it has no economic dimension. Indeed, the education of needs finds its first expression, among the mother's other actions, in the modes and duration of breastfeeding babies. The issue

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is rather to what extent the mother's attitude to the early years of life is consistent with other norm-determined behaviour regarding management of needs and allocation of resources, whether these norms relate to eating meals, organizing rest, sharing out the means of production and products, or even interactions with gods, ancestors, and spirits.

One might formulate the enquiry within which this comparison is developed in the following way: as far as their transactional aspects are concerned, are the relationships between representatives of succeeding generations, between group members and outsiders, between humans and supernatural entities, or between living and dead, based on the same structural schemata in the case of society *x* or society *y*? And if it seems possible to identify such structural schemata, how far do they reproduce the objective conditions of their existence in the evolving context of the relations the society has with its natural and human environment?

This enquiry offers certain similarities to the formalist approach, since in both cases the materialism typical of the substantivist and Marxist positions is avoided. Thus it is a question not of describing the subsistence activities and production of material goods that characterize the society under investigation, but rather of covering a wide range of social relations and practices in order to tease out the logic that underlies socially accepted modes of satisfying needs, whatever their nature (material or immaterial).

But at the same time it is easy to see in what respect our project differs from the formalists'. In the first place, the relation between ends and means it brings to light makes no claim to universality, but relates instead to specific cultural contexts. Secondly, it focuses on the social, or transactional, aspects of this relationship, even though it cannot be understood on the basis of intrinsic psychological tendencies, such as an 'innate' sense of calculation or a no less natural propensity to maximize satisfactions. Finally, it proceeds from an inductive methodology that starts by observing phenomena, whereas the formalist approach, being deductive, is similar to Marxism.

Despite the difference in method that has been highlighted above, the transactional mode of action I am proposing is nevertheless analogous to Marxism in its general objectives. In both cases the analysis goes beyond formal appearances to bring out the underlying logic of actions, and also attempts to take into account the dynamic nature of societies. However, where Marxism marshals its arguments within abstract relational categories and plays down *a priori* the importance of social agents, instead I examine the dialectical relationship at the articulation of individual behaviour and group norms through the study of practices and habitus. In addition, Marxist anthropologists carry across into the analysis of non-Western societies a hierarchy of structures and functions that was first identified by the study of the capitalist context, whereas, by advocating an inductive approach, I do not privilege *a priori* one level of reality above others.

To conclude, and in order to demonstrate the possible applications of the theory whose main lines have been set out above, let us take the case of the Gypsies, whom I studied in the south of France in the early 1980s (Formoso, 1986, 1989, 1994).

Gypsies and the habitus of demanding solicitude

The term 'Gypsy' is an exonym encompassing a wide range of nomadic groups of Indian or European origin. These people can be broken down into many categories: some call

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themselves Rom, others Manush, Kale, Taters, Tinkers, Yenish, etc. And within these groups there are numerous subdivisions based on various criteria, the chief being the regions where they travel and certain forms of manual occupation. For instance, within the Rom group some call themselves *Kalderash* ('tinkers') and among them there are *Serbijaja* ('Serbs'), *Rusurja* ('Russians'), *Amerikanurja* ('Americans'), etc. Despite the very great ethnic diversity indicated by these many names, the idea of *Gypsy* remains relevant because it is the counterpart of *Ga(d)jo* (variants: *Georgio, Payo*), by which the Rom, Manush, Kale, etc. generally designate non-gypsies, regardless of their traditions and nationality. *Ga(d)jo* means a 'peasant' or 'sedentary person', and since the term *Gypsy* applies to the opposite, that is nomadic peoples, the reciprocal use of the two ideas clearly expresses the opposition between the two ways of life.

Because they do not meet them frequently, those around them perceive the 'Gypsy' way of life through their subsistence occupations. Indeed, these occupations, which are of necessity targeted at sedentary populations because Gypsy groups are small and widely dispersed, are the main opportunity for interethnic contact in a context of very marked social and cultural antagonism (Okely, 1983; Formoso, 1986).

Gypsies' subsistence occupations are extraordinarily diverse, indicating their considerable adaptability to external conditions. They are, for example, dealers in horses or cars, smiths, tinkers, knife-grinders, fortune-tellers, scrap-metal dealers, musicians, bear-tamers, or self-employed asphalters (Gropper, 1975; Sutherland, 1975; Piasere, 1980; Formoso, 1986). However, despite this diversity, their occupations rest on three principles: 1) mobility; 2) independence; 3) door-to-door prospecting and bargaining.

The principles of mobility and independence are deeply rooted in the gypsy way of life. The upbringing of children still incorporates these principles, even in families that have been sedentary for two generations or more. The Rom and Manush, whom I studied in the south-east of France and who live in shanty-towns or on housing estates, allow their children great freedom of movement within the community area. These children move about freely between the inside and outside of the houses, where the outside space is ethnically homogeneous and their activities and movements can be discreetly supervised by parents and neighbours. As a consequence of the individualistic tendencies transmitted, the children find it extremely hard to stay still for hours in the enclosed space of the classroom and also have difficulty in accepting the personal authority of the *ga(d)jo* teacher.

The detailed description of the system of practices on which gypsies' mobility and autonomy is based would require more extensive explication. But I would rather deal here with the third principle – the direct search for customers through door-to-door trading and bargaining – since as a transaction model it fits my thesis more closely. Before interpreting this mode of action with reference to the education of needs as it is organized among Gypsies, we should note that, when they talk about their economic activities, the Rom, Manush, Yenish, and others use in an extremely significant way the following phrase: "I'm going to ask!", "I'm going to do business!", "I'm going to look for something!", or "I'm going to do a deal!", thus stressing their mobility and the search inherent in these occupations.

The ethnography of the various groups is in agreement in describing a Gypsy mother as very solicitous as regards her baby's physiological needs. She usually breastfeeds her child as soon as it cries, day or night, and for this reason the baby shares its parents' bed.

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Weaning, which is very gradual, occurs only after several years' breastfeeding on demand, well after the child has begun to take solid food. Indeed, it is as if the mother was trying to avoid the baby feeling the least bit frustrated in its primary needs. Other observations show that all those around the child share this concern, which determines many arrangements, among them the organization of rest-times and mealtimes. In fact, both adult Gypsies and children, men and women, eat and sleep when they wish, and there are no set places or times, except for feasts, when the presence of the whole household is compulsory and the head of the family takes precedence.

But although children are cared for by all those around and are attended to by them as regards needs that are considered primary (food, clothing, protection, and mobility), in return they are encouraged to be helpful and generous. Apart from being repeatedly exhorted to do so, they are also conditioned by the norms of adult behaviour. Most observers have noted that hospitality, generosity, and solidarity, expressed in various ways, are among the most widely shared of Gypsy values.

To summarize, gypsy children's upbringing accustoms them to expressing their basic needs unhesitatingly, while encouraging them to respond generously to similar needs expressed by others. Thus they are taught both to be generous and to make demands. Through the actions of their immediate entourage these two tendencies are mutually reinforced to create a habitus of *demanding solicitude*. Thus, as children and then as adults, Gypsies are all the more ready to make requests because they have been encouraged to do so by their family's normally positive responses, and similarly they are all the more likely to be generous because they know generosity is usually returned in their community. This propensity to make requests, which is completely cultural, should be set alongside the value Gypsies give to frankness. Indeed, among them it is accepted that adults and children should express their opinions or feelings openly, as they do their basic needs.

When we consider the social coverage of transactions arising out of demanding solicitude, we realize that this economic habitus is not reducible to strategies based on, for example, an ethnicity criterion. Similarly, it challenges the universality of the sociological model for exchange proposed by Sahlins (1972). Of course it is between Gypsies that the dialectical relationship of request and generosity is most frequent and so most structuring. Between close relatives and members of the same encampment generalized reciprocity is intense and takes on many forms, such the mutual gift of food and clothes, free loan of tools, cars, or vans, and the sharing of work with comrades less fortunate in business. Hospitality is also part of these forms of generalized reciprocity. It helps considerably to reactivate family and friendship bonds between members of a wider ethnic community, as do family celebrations which, in addition, bestow upon their organiser a prestige proportionate to the generosity shown.

However, the fact that generosity and hospitality find their most frequent expression within the home group does not mean that needy outsiders are excluded. It is true that the opportunity seldom arises, since contacts between Gypsy and non-Gypsy usually occur at the former's instigation and with clearly utilitarian aims in mind; most non-Gypsies cannot imagine making a request of people who seem to them to be paupers. Still, those who mix with Gypsies know that the hospitality rule is applied equally to family and outsiders and that Gypsies have no hesitation in assisting non-Gypsies when the latter show openly that they need help. These facts call into question Sahlins' sugges-

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tion (1972: 196) that social distance is the most important factor determining the mode of exchange. In fact other variables connected with cultural values play a key role in this area. In the Gypsies' case a particular sensitivity to a certain type of need, passed on to individuals by their upbringing, leads to altruistic behaviour, even towards outsiders, who should be the target for a negative type of reciprocity, if we follow Sahlins's model.

However, the above remarks do not mean that no limits are placed on solicitude or the spontaneous expression of needs among Gypsies. So avoidance takes precedence over hospitality when the material gap between families is too great, when they look down on each other because of strongly contrasting 'traditions', or if there are conflicts that have irretrievably damaged their relationship. In addition, even between close relatives or families linked by strong affinities, certain requests are not automatically satisfied. This is so when needs are not considered essential for life. For example, when children ask for toys, pocket-money, or entertainments on *ga(d)jo* territory, then their demands are subject to serious conditions: to secure their parents' consent they have to put forward strong arguments.

In similar circumstances the fact that they rely on the arguments deployed by the children has a didactic value in the eyes of the parents, who often explain that, by 'making fun' of the children, even if they are favourably disposed to them, they are training them in perseverance, as well as the ability to persuade, thus preparing them to overcome the apathy, or even antipathy, of *ga(d)je* faced with requests from Gypsies. In this regard it should be explained that, in perfect consonance with their sensitivity to basic needs, parents prefer to persuade rather than threaten to deprive them to get their children to obey.

The limits Gypsies place on solicitude relate certain of the children's demands, and also all transactions involving valuable objects (jewellery, cars, caravans, horses in the past). These commodities are sometimes given as gifts between close relations, but more often than not their transfer within the Gypsy community is an exchange based on hard bargaining, similar in tone to commercial transactions with openly utilitarian objectives carried out with non-Gypsies. Apart from material profit, one of the most obvious aims of this type of internal exchange is the prestige gained by demonstrating the skill and cunning that make a good dealer. The practice of this form of negative reciprocity between relatives or travelling companions proves the reverse of Sahlins's thesis: the nature of the goods exchanged is just as important in determining the transaction's content as the social distance between the protagonists. What is more, Gypsies disprove Sahlins's model in another respect: their lack of the principle of balanced reciprocity as a middle term in the spectrum of exchange. In their eyes, there is no room for strict balance where the service returned would be "the culturally defined equivalent to the thing received" (Sahlins, 1972: 194). Depending on the needs to be satisfied, reciprocity is generalized or negative. In fact it is in the case of loans of money that the distinction between 'essential' and 'non-essential' needs is finest and social distance, as well as personal affinity, most decisive.

Another great obstacle to the expression and immediate satisfaction of needs relates to sexuality. Restrictions in this area vary greatly, however, according to the age of the person desired. Young children are normally the objects of very demonstrative affection, being frequently caressed, kissed all over (including the genital area), and spoken to in metaphors from cannibalistic love such as "I'll eat you!" or "I'm hungry for you!". On the

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other hand, suppression of public signs of affection and avoidance are the rule among adults. These arrangements affect dress. Thus, among the Gypsies in the south-east of France I have studied, men never wear shorts or swimwear in front of women, while the women wear long skirts down to their feet, which they keep on to bathe in the sea with men from their group. Furthermore, with regard to avoidance, once boys and girls reach the age of puberty, they eat separately, sleep in different places, and girls cannot be found alone with boys of the same age. Crushes have to remain secret and more generally hugs, caresses, or other evidence of love are forbidden except in private, even where married couples are concerned. It is clear that we are far from the so-called 'sexual licence' that is part of the stereotypical image of Gypsies.

Marriage forms also reflect these restrictions. In most Gypsy groups marriage boils down to abduction by consent. The contradiction that exists between the norm forbidding the public expression of loving feelings and the need for social reproduction is thus overcome by defying the older generation's authority. This defiance, which could be called 'founding' since it starts off married life, is particularly deserving of forgiveness and easy to forgive because it takes the form of an open demonstration of desire experienced as need, and so is assimilated to the Gypsy norm whereby every expression of a need essential to life should be met with solicitude.

Among some Rom groups abductions are giving way to marriages arranged between heads of families, culminating in the ceremony of the '*mangimos*' ('request [for a daughter-in-law]'). Despite its name, this ceremony is entirely consistent with the gypsy taboo relating to the public expression of sexuality. Thus the request is always formulated indirectly, by means of metaphors, and it is the exhaustion of the speakers and the growing pressure from the onlookers that finally secure the gift of the daughter-in-law after hours of verbal jousting (see Williams, 1984). This ceremony sets forth showily values such as hospitality, the fraternity between Rom, perseverance, the ability to persuade, and the oratory of the dealer. But, on the other hand, it demonstrates that the circulation of objects and women could not be equivalent in the Gypsy ethos, for at least two reasons. First, because, with regard to the donors' emotional motives, the loss of a daughter is presented, and often in fact experienced in many cases, as an incomparably stronger wrench than the loss of any material goods. Then, because among Gypsies, as we have seen above, feelings of love cannot be expressed in public and a father acting as recipient for his son would break this principle by suggesting amorous desire in an open, direct request. Highly significantly, the future couple's parents, though present at the *mangimos*, keep out of the negotiations. And, even when marriages are not arranged without the young people's knowledge, they cannot attend the ceremony and their feelings for each other are never used as arguments in the discussions.

After this brief account relating to the Gypsies, it emerges that in their case transactions are linked to two structural schemata, depending on the nature of the needs or desires to be satisfied. First, 'basic' needs involving food, rest, protection, or individual mobility require immediate expression and call forth the greatest possible solicitude; secondly, access to valuable goods and women, because it goes against personal interest, family attachment, or social conventions, assumes the use of qualities such as perseverance, persuasion or cunning in order to achieve it. By operating as norms for exchange in their community and structuring their entire process of socialization, these two schemata are internalized by individuals in the form of habitus: one of *demanding solicitude* and another

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that could be called *propensity to bargain*. The playing out of these habitus leads to antithetical forms of exchange: generalized reciprocity versus a negative one. It may also give rise to social tensions between Gypsies, since the border between the areas where these arrangements are applied is sometimes hazy. Thus, given an equivalent family status or affinity, the loan of a sum of money may or may not involve charging interest, depending on the potential lender's subjective assessment, resulting in gratitude or, on the other hand, resentment on the part of the borrower.

However, these systems of arrangements tend to merge into one another in practice when subsistence tasks are underway. Because the general care provided by their community from their earliest years encourages them to express their needs for food directly, Gypsies are in fact inclined to transpose this attitude into their subsistence occupations and demand generosity from non-Gypsies. But this behaviour most often comes up against considerable resistance from *Ga(d)je* and in order to achieve their aims they have to transpose to the field of interethnic relations the propensity to bargain, which comes into the category of perseverance, persuasion, and cunning, giving access to valuable goods in their milieu.

Not all Gypsies are equally inclined to door-to-door work and dealing. Depending on their personalities, upbringing, and other parameters in the continuum of their specific experiences, they are more or less successful at their subsistence occupations. However, it is possible to suggest that parents are particularly likely to reproduce, in their normative behaviour towards their children, demanding solicitude and a tendency to bargain, because they apply both these transactional modes effectively to the conduct of their business. In other words, the objectivication of these habitus in the area of socialization or subsistence activities emanates from a dialectical relationship, and 'Gypsy' identity depends on this dialectic as well as the solidarity within the group. And this solidarity reduces the negative effects of lack of success in business, both through the material assistance provided for the unfortunate, and by the acceptance by the group of responsibility for raising the children.

The successful adaptation of the habitus of demanding solitude and tendency to bargain to subsistence occupations has other effects on attitudes. First, it leads Gypsies to transpose to non-Gypsy gods and saints, whose worship they have adopted, the same transactional methods as they apply to the human environment, and this transposition takes the form of pilgrimages and intense votive activity. Secondly, it results in a prodigality and relative lack of concern for the future that ethnographers studying the Gypsies have highlighted and that makes these people similar to groups of hunter-gatherers. Indeed, just as hunter-gatherers see nature as a generous Mother, experienced Gypsy dealers think of the *ga(d)jo* population in the same way. It is true that they favour other ways of getting a living, for instance dealing and salvage (hunting, fishing, and gathering, though very much enjoyed, most often make a minor contribution), but it is nevertheless the case that Gypsies and hunter-gatherers seem to share similar outlooks regarding their relationship with the world.

To conclude, this case study confirms the hypothesis that various needs (material or non-material) experienced in a given socio-cultural context can depend for their social satisfaction on similar structural schemata internalized by individuals. As I suggested during the theoretical discussion, deciphering such schemata and their modes of objectivication is of the greatest interest, not only in order to get beyond the arbitrary limits

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set for economic anthropology and establish connections between a wide range of behaviours, strategies, customs, and institutions relevant to different points of life in society, but also in order to understand how a society sees its relationship with the world, and identify the main ways in which it perpetuates itself.

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Note

1. The term *habitus* is an ancient one. First used to translate the Stoics' *technè*, it was later taken up by medieval scholasticism. William of Ockham, in his *Commentaire des sentences* (fourteenth century) applied it, for example, to faith and charity, tendencies that are definitely acquired but are profoundly interiorized, owned as part of the individual. In modern times E. Durkheim re-used the idea in his *Evolution pédagogique en France*, as did M. Mauss in his *Essai sur les techniques du corps*. I will adopt the definition given by P. Bourdieu in his sociology of practice, a definition that will be made clearer in the latter part of the text.

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