Begging—Between Charity and Profession: Reflections on Romanian Roma's Begging Activities in Italy[1]

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Abstract

Most people associate begging with charity, i.e. getting something for nothing. This chapter proposes that begging is seen by its practitioners as a kind of work which requires the bodily training and attention. I draw this conclusion from my observation and participation in begging activities carried out by a family of Romanian Gypsies in Northern Italy. Firstly, I will give an overview of Romanian Gypsy populations and their mobility to Italy. Then I shall introduce the people of my study, the Cortorari. They hold a specific view of personhood as enmeshed in kinship relationships. Persons live up to a moral code buttressed by idioms of shame and honour. These values underwrite the realms of gender, clothing and economics. A specific dress together with a strict division by gender of the economic activities and certain behaviour towards money lie at the core of the morality of kinship. When they go begging,

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Cortorari renounce their customary dress for worn-out blackish clothing, believed to be characteristic of a generic beggar. By so doing, they symbolically renounce their ethnic identity and almost all moral values embedded in it. Cortorari make a qualitative difference between home and abroad: moral sentiments define the first and economic exchanges, the latter.

This chapter tackles a sensitive issue for the Italians: the so-called "Gypsy problem" which has been sweeping the country in the last decade. More specifically, it makes reference to Romanian Gypsies who have been portrayed as thieves and criminals by the mass media and have been the target of violent assaults over the *campi nomadi* (campgrounds for nomads). The representations we have of these Gypsies are more often than not moulded by journalists' and politicians' discourses, the former policing the distance between them and their subjects by means of the camera lens and written texts, and the latter by means of electoral campaigns. The image of Gypsies that reaches the folk associates this population with ideas of menace to the public order and security, defilement of the urban landscapes and threat to the individual well-being. This is an account of Gypsies that depersonalizes them and turns them into a lump of malevolence floating over us. Moreover, it discourages us from inquiring into the life projects of these people: who are they, where do they come from, and where are they headed to?

Here I do not address all Gypsies together; I focus on a peculiar group of Romanian Gypsies, the Cortorari, whom I have known for a dozen years. I carried out eighteen months of fieldwork among them between 2008 and 2010. I did this by participating in their everyday life and subsequently learning their language. People belonging to this group often travel to Italy with only one purpose: to engage in begging. In 2009, I accompanied one Cortorari family, a husband and wife in their thirties and their fifteen-year-old son, on one of their begging trips to Northern Italy. During our one-month stay in Italy, I myself engaged in begging activities. All of the knowledge I have of begging, upon which this article draws, is derived from the process of learning to beg which I underwent and from the observations I could make both of the family I accompanied and other Cortorari we encountered abroad.

The main question I raise here is: how do the Cortorari conceive of begging? In order to answer it, I shall introduce some of the most important elements of the cultural repertoire of this group. How does it happen that we find Gypsies begging in the streets on our way to school or work? Most of us have walked past them in the streets. Some of us have given them a penny or might have ignored them altogether. We might have felt pity towards them or we might felt annoyed by their presence. Regardless of the different feelings we experienced, we definitely thought that beggars gained their living by other means than working. Our folk understanding opposes begging to work, and an explanatory dictionary of any language will serve to exemplify. The definition found under the entry "work" in the Oxford dictionary states: "be engaged in physical or mental activity in order to achieve a result." Conversely, "to beg" defines as "to ask for food or money as charity" or "as gift." We discriminate between these two activities; we positively conceive of the first as attaining resources through effort, and of the latter, as getting something for nothing. Surprisingly enough, we will see that Gypsies who practice begging equate this activity with work.

Other researchers have advanced similar arguments about Gypsies notions of begging. Tauber (2000, 2006, 2008), who worked with north Italian Sinti, shows that begging is a woman-centered productive activity. She further demonstrates how for Sinti women the meanings of begging go beyond the mere economic exchange and express a way of being-in-the-world. In contradistinction with Tauber's Sinti, the people of my study engage in begging regardless of their gender identity. Moreover, unlike the Sinti women who go begging from and selling to their Italian neighbors, the Cortorari practice begging almost exclusively abroad. Carrying out such an activity at home, where they strive to forge an image of themselves as good traditional Gypsies who derive their livelihoods from copper manufacture, is considered shameful. Piasere (1987) argues that for the Xoraxane Gypsies that he studied in Verona in the late 1970s, begging was a mode of production through gathering. Begging "requires no particular effort, nor sophisticated knowledge" for the Xoraxane Gypsies (idem, p. 114). As opposed to them, the Cortorari consider the art of begging to require specific skills and knowledge and peculiar bodily techniques that people can learn. In a later

article, Piasere (2000) maintains that Gypsies imagine begging as a mercantile activity, and it is in this point that my argument converges with Piasere's. For my demonstration, I shall use some of the data I have already published in Romanian (cf. Tesăr, 2011).

1. Romanian Gypsies: an overview

Romania is the country with the largest concentration of Gypsy population in Europe: it thus hosts a big variety of Gypsies. They do not imagine themselves as one and the same people, and they acknowledge substantial cultural differences among themselves. Some might be closer in their lifestyle to their Romanian neighbors than to other Gypsies. Some live scattered amongst Romanians with whom they might conclude mixed marriages. Still some others live in closed communities and intermarry. For the outsider, Romanian Gypsies fall within two major categories: so-called "traditional" Gypsies, and so-called "assimilated" Gypsies. The former can be distinguished by their outfits, and women stand out with their long, colorful skirts, and long, plaited hair on their backs. "Traditional" Gypsies usually speak among themselves their own language, which is called Romani, in addition to the Romanian language that they learn in school. They are rather adamant about their own cultural repertoire, and I shall discuss elements of their culture later this chapter. The "assimilated" Gypsies resemble Romanians in their appearance, and most of them are not speakers of Romani language. Not even the so-called "traditional" Gypsies are a homogenous population: they belong to a host of communities which customarily had specific occupations. One can thus distinguish between coppersmiths, tinkers, spoon-makers and so on. This diversity is further complicated by the economic status of different Gypsy populations who, similarly to their Romanian neighbors, can either live in extreme poverty or be extremely wealthy. This heterogeneous nature of the Gypsy population is the result of their long and troubled history living in Romanian territory, which is further mapped onto the internal values that fashion self-representations of the Gypsy group one belongs to as culturally superior to another. Through time, on one hand,

they have been influenced by broader political-economic and social changes; on the other hand, they have remained different, in an allegedly paradoxical manner. In the course of history, they have juggled different standings in society, all of them equally marginal. They reached the territory of present-day Romania in the fourteenth century[2], and they immediately became serfs to landlords and monasteries. Once freed as late as the nineteenth century, some of them were forcibly turned into peasant farmers, while others were tolerated as tent-dwellers who provided services for the settled population, within clearly defined areas. Later on, during the Second World War, the latter were sent, along with the Jews, to the deportation camps only to become, upon their return, the target of the communist measures of assimilation. Gypsies' native language, Romani, has several dialects but its speakers can understand each other regardless of the dialect differences. "Romani" is derived from the noun *rom*, which cumulates several meanings: man, husband, married man who has begotten children, and person who belongs to a Gypsy group. In their own language, Gypsies call themselves *roma* (plural of the noun *rom*) which loosely translates as "our own people", or "we, the human beings". They call all non-Gypsies *Gaže*, which means non-Roma, and thus "less than human beings"[3]. The denomination of "Gypsies" was attributed by non-Romani speakers.

2. Contemporary European mobility of Romanian Gypsies

In the last decade, Romanian Gypsies have had a disruptive presence throughout Europe, and Italy was by far the country in which the Gypsies' presence became the most salient. In order to understand why this is so, I shall discuss few structural issues which shape Romanian Gypsies' mobility. First, Gypsy migrations are intimately connected with ethnic Romanians'

2 According to linguistic evidence, Gypsies migrated from India between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries (cf. Matras, 2014).

3 In applying a specific denomination to other people than their own, Gypsies are not unique. An example comes to my mind: the denomination of *Goy* that Jews give to non-Jews.

mobility. Secondly, both ethnic Romanian and Gypsy migrations are intimately related to the transformations of the Romanian state after the fall of Communism.

Until 1989 Romania had a state-planned economy which, though it ensured a high rate of employment, was nonetheless characterized by a shortage of consumer goods. Industry and collective farms were the only fields of employment. The population experienced the rationing of goods produced primarily inside the country. The flow of people over borders was banned and so was the flow of icons of prosperity and affluence. The breakdown of Communism brought about a long privatization process which included the dismantling of factories, thus the ensuing high unemployment, and the liquidation of collective farms, entailing the widespread practice of subsistence agriculture, and a general shortage of money. The service economy started flourishing, yet the ex-workers and collective farm peasants were ill-suited for it. People thought of a resolution to this plight through the crossing of the country borders which had recently opened. At first, Romanians smuggled petty goods, cigarettes, alcohol, jeans and gold—to give only a few examples—from and into the neighboring countries: Turkey, Poland, Hungary, etc. Later on and with more intensity after 1994, Romanians reached the countries of Western Europe, where they looked for jobs. In 2002, when tourist visas were no longer required, even more Romanians arrived in Western Europe. The year of Romania's accession to EU, 2007, brought new migrants in Western Europe. Italy was, along with Spain, amongst the favourite destination countries of Romanian migration for several combined reasons: the Italian language is close to Romanian and easier to learn; there was a high demand of irregular labour tacitly encouraged by the state; Italians entrepreneurs started developing businesses in Romania establishing thus contacts with locals, etc.[4] Romanian Gypsies were part of these mobility trends, and ethnographies of both Romanians and Gypsies migration show how locality might be more important than ethnicity in the decision regarding their destination country. In other words, ethnic Romanians and Gypsies from the same home town or village have

4 For a detailed analysis of Romanian migration to Italy, cf. Cingolani, 2009.

usually migrated to the same country and even locality (cf. Cingolani, 2011). Here, however, Romanians and Gypsies are left with different opportunities for employment or housing. As in Romania, in Italy Gypsies have fewer chances than Romanians to find a job. Moreover, they are more likely to choose to live together in campi nomadi than to spread themselves in flats scattered through a town. They do so because of various reasons, and I shall mention only a few of them. Firstly, most Gypsies place great value on kinship ties and believe that relatives alone can guarantee one's needs of security and comfort. Secondly, they cannot afford to rent flats[5]. The economic activities Gypsies take up in Italy are as varied as the numerous groups to which they belong: some of them practice scrap-metal dealing, others might get involved in informal commerce, and still others might practice begging (cf. idem.). The remainder of this chapter will focus on the practice of begging, as carried out by some of the Cortorari Gypsies.

3. Introducing the Cortorari

Just across the Carpathian Mountains, which cut off the historical region of Walachia from Transylvania, lies a plateau at the geographical heart of Romania. Here, scattered across several villages, lives the population of Cortorari, more often than not in compact neighbourhoods situated on the periphery of the respective villages. Even if they can live as far apart as a three-hour drive—at the most—, the people known as Cortorari by the Romanian inhabitants of the area consider themselves relatives of different degrees of closeness. The majority of my fieldwork was carried out in one specific village. It has the greatest concentration of Cortorari and is regarded as their headquarters. At times I travelled accompanying my Cortorari friends to other villages to visit their relatives, and I spent short periods of time with them. Although the findings of my research rely on close knowledge of Cortorari from one particular village, I do not hesitate to generalize and use these findings to account for all people

5 The kind of housing available in migration countries, as well as the duration of the intended stay could also account for the Gypsies' choices in terms of residence. For example, eastern Slovakian Roma who migrated to the UK live in flats (Grill, 2012).

known as Cortorari. They all share the same conceptions of relatedness and personhood which are central to making Cortorari different from other Gypsies.
The denomination of *Cortorari* derives from the Romanian noun *cort* which translates as tent. Thus *Cortorari* would literally translate as Tent-Dwellers. This is a denomination given by Romanians to the population of Cortorari who used to live in tents until the late 1950s. There is not a word homologous to *Cortorari* in the Cortorari's language. Cortorari call themselves Roma *romane*, which would translate as real Roma or true Roma. Before the advent of Communism in Romania, Cortorari were semi-nomadic. They had their tents set up on the environs of the villages where they reside today. They travelled to the neighbouring villages for economic purposes. Men were coppersmiths, and they used to manufacture copper pots, especially stills, that were needed in peasant households. Women procured produce for daily meals from peasants, through door-to-door visits wisely performed as the offering of services, such as palmistry and card reading, and the beseeching of pity[6]. Additionally, Cortorari kept animals by their tents: women raised pigs and men horses. Cortorari mobility, like that of other itinerant Gypsies, was limited to the area in which they kept their tents set up. Shortly after the Second World War, Cortorari were forcibly sedentarized. The new communist regime thought to improve the welfare of Gypsies by impelling them to buy houses and to take care of their personal hygiene. Old people still remember how men had their hair and beards trimmed and how children were dragged to schools. When this happened, Cortorari had just returned from the deportation camps in Transnistria where they had been taken during the Second World War[7]. Cortorari embraced the forced sedentarization both because, some old people confessed, it gave them the chance to "get in line with the world," and because it could prevent eventual further expulsion into concentration camps[8].

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6 Cortorari gloss these activities specific to women as *ža gavendar*, approx. "to roam the villages (as if aimlessly); to go around villages". Even if such activities resemble begging (*manglimos*), they are not conterminous with it, given that they only provide for subsistence, unlike begging which is carried out for accumulation. Nowadays only rarely does a woman *ža gavendar* as this is seen as rather degrading and contemptible.

7 For the deportation of Romanian Gypsies, cf. Achim, 2004.

8 In Romania, one criterion in the selection of Romany populations which were deported to the concentration camps was their dwelling, i.e. tents as opposed to houses.

No matter how successful Cortorari have been in adjusting their lifestyle to house dwelling, they have nonetheless kept their cultural distinctiveness and have never turned into peasants. They managed to evade Communist assimilationist measures which aimed at including them into the socialist labour force[9], and they tacitly carried on their old economic activities[10], divided by gender, as they were. After the fall of Communism, the demand for copper manufactured objects decreased. Cortorari thus had to look for new economic opportunities, and they found one in begging abroad, in countries of Western Europe. When they are not abroad begging, Cortorari men take great pride in copper manufacture, while women, in pig husbandry. Yet these domestic activities hardly provide for their subsistence.

Fig. 1 – Cortorari man working on a copper still (Photo Eric Roset)

9 See Stewart (1997) for a detailed description of communist assimilationist measures towards Hungarian Gypsies and the latter's resilience.

10 In so doing, they follow the general tendency for self-employment which characterizes Gypsy identity (cf. Okely, 1996, pp. 60ff.).

Cortorari uphold a host of values specific to patriarchal societies: men hold more symbolic importance than women. In public spaces, men's voices take precedence over women's. Women walk behind their men in the streets, their bodies bowing under the loads they carry as they follow the lofty bodies of men, hands in their pockets and hats on their proud heads. It is disrespectful of a woman to pass by a man unless she utters "Turn around." Women are associated with their homes, and men with the space beyond one's home: the pub, the ditches in front of houses, the streets. Here men gather to kill time, while women are expected to be kept busy at home, where they are in charge of domestic chores. The sons are the only ones to inherit the parental house and family valuables. They are responsible for their parents in old age and for arranging their funerals. Upon marriage, women move out of their parental house to live in their husband's domestic units, in which they are gradually incorporated. Cortorari believe that sons alone ensure the continuation of a family which is understood both as biological reproduction and the transmission of prestige and name. Therefore, the lives of both men and women Cortorari are driven by one goal, i.e. to ensure the perpetuation of their family by arranging the marriage of their offspring (cf. Tesăr, 2012).

Cortorari marry exclusively Cortorari; they have never thought of marrying either Romanians or other Gypsies. Here, parents and grandparents arrange their children's and grandchildren's marriage. They do not encourage marriages by free choice and by love, as Western societies do at present. However, the future spouses' opinions matter in the match choices their families make. The conclusion of a marriage does not rely on state or religious authority. Alliances are legitimized by the couple's consummating the marriage and by their extended families' economic exchanges. The wedding publicizes the conclusion of the marriage, which is marked by the deflowering of the bride by the groom. However, the marriage endures only through the birth of offspring to the couple, ideally a son. It entails a series of economic exchanges between the two families, the most noteworthy being the payment of cash dowry by the bride's side to the groom's.

4. What does it mean to be a Cortorari person?

Cortorari believe that identity is transmitted by blood: they assume that only a person born to Cortorari parents can be acknowledged belonging to their people. However, birth alone is not sufficient for qualifying someone as a proper Cortorari. A person is expected to uphold a moral code of conduct in order to be regarded as a complete Cortorari. Expectations of the categories of gender, kinship and age should be observed by one who desires to be acknowledged belonging. Cortorari people should be imagined as an assemblage of moral beings, i.e. persons who follow a behaviour considered to be specific to Cortorari way of doing things, *romanes*, as they call it. The two extreme pillars of moral evaluation are shame (*lajav*) and respect (*pakiv*). In their everyday life, persons may shame themselves in the eyes of the others or may on the contrary command respect from the others, depending on their behaviour. By the same token, they may experience shame as an inner feeling or they may feel pride in regard to their own deeds. What is shameful and what is respectful is continuously negotiated in relation to one's gender and age, and equally to the kinship distance that characterize one's relation with the others. This is so because a person's social identity derives from the qualities of the connections she has with her relatives: a person is conceived as enmeshed in relatedness and at almost no times does one circumvent these relational aspects. One instance in which the idioms of shame and respect are rendered visible, upon which this chapter's discussion ponders, is the realm of clothing.

The Cortorari distinguish themselves from other Gypsies primarily by means of their dress. The typical Cortorari male wears black velvet trousers, flamboyant flowerily shirts and a black velour hat on his head. The typical Cortorari female wears long, colourful, pleated skirts and a headscarf over her long braided hair. Once you get to know Cortorari closer, you understand that their dress bears more meanings than the mere ethnic identification which strikes the outsider. Among the Cortorari, dress—which changes with age—is seminal in the definition of moral persons. I shall exemplify this with women's clothing. Like other Gypsies, the Cortorari consider women's lower body to become polluting once women start menstruating (cf. Okely,

1996; Sutherland, 1986). Menstruation marks for women the transition from girlhood to adulthood. In their early ages, girls wear trousers, the same as boys do. When they approach puberty, girls start wearing the typical Cortorari skirts, which are made in two pieces: an apron (*šurta*) and and a skirt (*rokia*), both vividly colourful, plaited on a string, hanging down to the ankles. The apron is tied in the front and the skirt in the back, around the waist. The apron is thought to keep at bay women's polluting capacities which become active with the first menarche. Once they become sexually active, women should keep not only their lower body covered in clothing, but also their upper body. They should wear long-sleeved blouses that cover the neck well, otherwise they would be accused of a shameful behaviour. It is shameful for women to reveal their legs, ankles or arms in the presence of men in public spaces. Yet this ideal behaviour becomes more relaxed in the private space and in the presence of close relatives. If a thirty-year-old woman would never dare to wear a low-necked blouse when in the street under the public eye, she would carelessly wear such a garment at home, in the presence of her husband (cf. Sutherland, 1986, p. 266). Likewise, when she grows old and reaches menopause, a woman becomes oblivious of the length of her clothing. Men show equally different attitudes with respect to clothing in public and private spaces. The hat a man wears signals his inclusion into manhood: he belongs to the category of men who are married and have either begotten offspring or should do so soon. By wearing the black hat, a Cortorari man shows respect to his Cortorari male peers and equally to older Cortorari women. Furthermore, he commands respect from the others, women included. Yet, when a Cortorari man steps over his home's threshold, he emphatically takes off the hat which makes him sweat under the hot summer sun. By so doing he does not jeopardise his social standing, which would be the case in public spaces.

Being a Cortorari person thus means upholding a set of moral prescriptions in everyday life, and dress counts among the most salient of these. It both distinguishes Cortorari from Gaže and other Gypsies, and marks distinctions of age and kinship distance within the Cortorari world.

Fig. 2 – Cortorari women chatting (Photo Eric Roset)

5. Cortorari on the move: rituals of mobility[11]

If one pays a visit to the Cortorari in their village at any given time of the year except the Orthodox Christmas and Easter holidays, one discovers that the majority of the adult men and women are abroad. Poland, France, Greece, and Germany were among the destination countries, with Italy being the most popular at the time of my fieldwork. There were only mothers with toddlers, young couples without offspring and sick people who stayed at home, plus a few strong men who confessed that they were ashamed of begging. Among them, a pair who once tried the experience of going abroad but could not find their way there, got lost, and reasoned that begging was too demanding a business for them.

The Cortorari leave to go abroad in clusters of about three to eight people related either through birth or marriage. Such clusters of people have their

11 I use here "ritual" in its secular sense, to denote an almost stereotyped sequence of otherwise ordinary activities, which are carried out by any person engaged in mobility, and which symbolically mark the transition from the realm of the home to the realm of the abroad.

own sleeping and begging territories and avoid meeting each other abroad. Even if people do not travel alone, we will see below that begging activities are carried out individually. Moreover, people who leave the village in larger groups do not carry out a communal life abroad. As a general rule, a conjugal family shares a meal and avoids participating in commensality with the others. Back home people participate constantly in commensality: ties between families related by marriage are constructed and cemented through mutual invitations to dinners in the home of one of the parties. Were one of the parties to remove itself from this ritual commensality, the ties between the two families would become loose and the marriage of the young couple would run the risk of being broken off.

Yet abroad all the expectations of the moral behaviour among related people are suspended. Cortorari gloss the place abroad as "[the place where] money is [made]" (*k-al love*) and oppose it, both in their imagination and in their talk, to the home (*kheral*). At home are the good-hearted relatives who participate in each other's lives; abroad is a dehumanized working place where money talks. Abroad, *p al thema*, people's supreme aim is to make money, and they make it by means of begging. The notions of home and abroad which cover spatial dimensions are thus associated with different moralities. Abroad means the suspension of the communitarian life carried out at home whereby persons' behaviour is expected to follow strict norms. Even the denominations used for work at home and abroad respectively are different. Cortorari oppose in their talk *kerel buti* (manual labor)—such as male copper handwork or female pig husbandry—carried out in the confines of the household and primarily for subsistence, to *munca* (the work) of begging (*manglimos*) which allows for the accumulation of wealth.

The transition from the positively, i.e. morally valued, space of the home village to the neutrally valued space of abroad is done through some secular rituals that I will discuss in this section. For their begging enterprises, Cortorari renounce their traditional dress and put on worn-out blackish clothes believed to be typical of a generic beggar. By changing their specific dress with the beggar's shabby clothes, Cortorari symbolically play down a conception of the person as self-enmeshed in relationships, at the expense of bringing to the fore a conception of the person detached from interconnect-

edness. Abroad, not only is the traditional dress renounced, but also a whole moral code upheld at home which place the relational concepts of respectability (*pakiv*) and shame (*lajav*) at the core of personhood.

Even if the Cortorari are always on the move, always coming and going from abroad, I hardly ever saw one dressed up as a beggar throughout my stay in the village. Cortorari put on their beggar outfits before living the village. They arrange with the car driver to pick them up in front of their houses so that can avoid walking dressed up in black from head to toe in the village. The beggar clothing entails the removing of colourful garments, i.e. men's shirts and women's skirts, and their replacement with blackish rags. The Cortorari's appearance in black is transient and quiet. It is perceptible only for the few minutes that a person needs to walk the distance from the doorstep of her house to the car that drives her away.

Changing the so-called "traditional" dress for the begging clothes is a ritual any Cortorari undertakes before leaving for abroad. It is mandatorily accompanied by a washing up of the body. It usually takes place half an hour to one hour before the arranged time of departure. Nobody leaves before washing his body, because in most cases there will be no more baths abroad, irrespective of the length of one's stay. From the family I accompanied begging, I learnt that there are several reasons for not taking a bath abroad. They believed that a stinky body was specific of beggars who would allegedly transmit ideas of homelessness through their odour. To their minds, one's unkempt look attracts money[12]. The family's begging activities lasted from sunrise to dusk. If one took a one-hour break for a bath, one would have been left with less lucrative time. Less time left for begging equates fewer chances to earn good money. Back in the village, cleanliness and a nice body odour are moral standards that people are expected to live up to. Here, dirtiness and any stench are considered the extremes of a wrong conduct. A person who stinks is avoided and is gossiped about. Conversely

12 Not all Cortorari endorse these ideas. We will see later that the performance of begging is highly personalised. It is with this in view that I take at face value the statements of some Cortorari who confided that they maintained a clean and tidy appearance when begging (cf. Okely, 1996, ch. 3). Yet such cases did not belie the ritual of the bath before the departure.

most of the Cortorari abroad appreciate bodily stenches. Cortorari who go begging wash their bodies before leaving for abroad and before leaving to return home. By so doing, they maintain different standards in relation to the personal hygiene at home and abroad. The ritual washing of the body before leaving home is done with the participation of close relatives[13], who come to greet person who goes away.

6. The work of begging

At the time of my fieldwork in Italy, Cortorari used to keep their presence invisible both for local authorities and for other Gypsies. Unlike other Gypsies, they did not live in campi nomadi. They slept in the open, in parks and under bridges, near railways stations and at times, in abandoned houses. Their sleeping places were as transient as their presence in Italy. The Cortorari only became visible, yet undistinguishable from other beggars, in the streets.

A rewarding begging day needed to start early in the morning, because the division of the begging territory was negotiated based on the principle of first come, first served. At 5 a.m. beggars gathered at the railway station of their provisional residential town for their morning coffee. People arrived by turns and briefly greeted those who had already arrived. They quickly turned the topic of their conversation towards their interlocutors' plans for the day. Apparently, it was here at the railway station that the division and distribution of the begging territory was done. Most of the people who arrived early morning at the railway station took a train or bus to the nearby localities where they begged for the day. Yet there were people who came here with no intentions of taking a train or a bus. They gathered for their

13 Cortorari do not have bathrooms built inside their homes because, similarly to other Gypsies, they believe that the discarded scales of the body and its waste such as faeces are potentially polluting (cf. Okely, 1996, p. 68; Stewart, 1997, pp. 207ff.). Their privies are normally located far at the back of their gardens. For washing their bodies, they use strictly separate basins for women and men. When washing, a person retires to an empty room of the house, away from the sight of the relatives clustered in the parlour.

morning coffee, over which they discussed the chosen begging places for the day. The conversations followed the rules of secrecy. Everyone tried to conceal his/her destination for the day. When two or more individuals met at the same begging place, priority was given to the one who had longer experience in the area. Thus rights of ownership over a begging place were laid in direct ratio with the individual's span of frequentation of the area.

The time a person woke up was an assertion of her determination in earning money. Yet industriousness was not the only ingredient that ensured a successful begging day. Knowledge about the economic potential of different places[14] was equally important in determining someone's gains. This kind of knowledge is acquired in time, mainly through personal begging experience in a place. Among the Cortorari, it is transmitted from person to person, usually within the idiom of relatedness. Every newcomer, as it was the case with me and Šomi, the son of the family I accompanied, becomes an apprentice to an experienced beggar. Neither I nor Šomi had any previous begging experience. In the minibus which took us to Italy, Šomi's parents recounted different encounters with Italian donors in front of the "big church" downtown or on the car park ground of a "supermercato" (supermarket). Their stories abounded in details of the locations mapped onto geographies of lived emotions rather than onto external geographies of the space. Eyes and arms wide open, they would persuade us that good money could be made by the enormous church, next to the park where dogs were walked. Such vague indications, which overlook the geographical coordinates of a place, are useless when it comes to finding your bearings. As a matter of fact, all the parks had a special area designated for walking dogs in the Italian city where we resided. Most of the Cortorari are illiterate and, therefore, will not show you the way around a new place by following the sign posts. Mastery of directions can be achieved only through the transmission of knowledge from the guide to the apprentice. During the first week of our stay in Italy, Šomi and I were steered by his parents to different places deemed by them appropriate for begging. Here, we were left to our own devices, which meant

14 For example, knowledge of dates when markets are organized in different towns in an area, knowledge of profiles of the clientele of a supermarket, etc.

that we had to come up with individual ways of approaching donors and of begging, while Šomi's parents retired to places wherefrom they could both keep a watchful eye on us and carry on with their own begging activities. From time to time, one of them would spring out of their corner and approach us to whisper to us a short precept, such as to be more assertive with a passer-by who was well dressed. Or, without warning, one of Šomi's parents would jump at a person who walked past us without giving a penny and coax the person into reaching her wallet. During the first week of our stay in Italy, Šomi's parents took us to different places and kept us under surveillance. Afterwards, both I and Šomi were left on our own to find our way around the town and forge our personal way of begging.

Except for the above-mentioned initiation that requires the transmission of knowledge from one person to the other, it is believed that individual begging skills are specific to every person and are acquired through personal experience. To give you an example, communication in the language of the migration country is an important capital that ensures the beggar's success in his productive activity and only experience in migration can improve language skills. Begging styles were different from one individual to another. Both men and women wore black clothes and took up the appearance of the poor, of the deprived. There were two main ways of performing begging: *te phiren* (walking around, either in commercial streets, or touristy places and persuasively asking for money) or *te bešen* (sitting). The posture of the seated body suggested both humiliation and respect for the donors. It was believed that kneeling while begging can bring more gains.

Back home I could often hear the appreciative saying "nobody can emulate the way that one begs." By way of exemplification, a woman proudly explained to me that she didn't need to bend her body for gaining money. Another woman told me that she needed only to kneel without uttering a word in order to make money come to her. It was not until I went begging in Italy that I understood that the art of begging is intimately related to facts of corporeality. Begging is all about impression management. The person who begs tells a story worth of mercy by means of posture, gestures, words. Yet the strength of one's body is seminal for the success of such a story. Fabrication of a begging body is a process that requires training in putting up with

physical pain and in being in control of one's body. For the kneeling posture, one has to support oneself on one's knees for at least three hours. I only managed to maintain this bodily posture for less than one hour and afterwards I had pain in my legs for one week. I was not the only one suffering. For quite a while, Šomi had been complaining of pains in his arms because of twisting them when begging. On top of that, our bodies were exhausted from the lack of proper sleep.

Crafting of the begging body depends on each person's physical ability, as well as on age and gender. The Cortorari keep the begging body distinct from the non-begging body. Cortorari abroad appreciate humble and bent bodies for their potentials in earning money. At home, straight and healthy bodies are attributes of femininity and masculinity. In order for a person to be morally valued both for the performance of begging and for her conduct at home, one should handle skillfully the transition from a body to the other.

Most donors might associate beggars with Gypsies, therefore "ethnicizing" them. Yet the Cortorari believe that they take up a de-ethnicizing appearance when they practice begging. This situation echoes that of the boxers from a black ghetto in Chicago studied by Wacquant (2004). Here men who train their bodies for prize-fighting spectacles—events which are represented by the mainstream audience as race-specific—, believe to undergo a process of "deracializing bodies." Likewise, Cortorari who give up their traditional dress and put on the beggar costume believe that by doing so, they symbolically renounce their ethnic identity. This idea is also transparent in the realm of gender. Back home, men and women undertake different economic activities. By the same token, they are associated with the public the former and respectively the private space the latter. This gendered division of labour lies at the core of Cortorari ethnic identity. Abroad, both men and women engage in begging activities, and by doing so they reverse a customary way of doing things.

Writing about the English Romanies, Okely (1996, ch. 3) notes the practice of changing one's visible identity on the occasion of economic exchanges with Gaže. The author maintains that Gypsies adapt their economic activities to the changing socio-economic conditions of the surrounding environment on grounds of the extensive knowledge they hold of the non-Gypsies and of the

representations the latter have about Gypsies. Sensitive to the external world and its expectations, Gypsies change their appearance when they interact with the Gaže, in such a way that their true ethnic identity appears exoticized, concealed, degraded or neutralized. Likewise, Cortorari conceal their true identity by changing their appearance abroad. Aware of the widespread racism against Romanian Gypsies in Italy[15], they disguise themselves as de-ethnicized beggars.

7. *K-al love*: where money is made

It was at the beginning of our stay in Italy, before I had embodied both the knowledge and skills necessary for either earning money or handling, showing, hoarding, spending, and speaking about it. At about 7 p.m. I was supposed to meet in the park the Cortorari family I was accompanying on their begging ventures. Exhausted after a long "working day" which had started before the sunrise, I first stopped in an internet café and afterwards rushed into a supermarket to get some food for our shared cold dinner. I was impatient to rejoin "my family" and to listen to their stories. As I was to find out, they were even more curious to learn about my day. They greeted me with a straightforward question that I was to hear every single evening throughout our stay: "How much did you make today?" "15 [euro]", I replied proudly. Not only was I telling them the truth, but I was also content with my gains. Back home, my Cortorari friends had advised me to declare, whenever prompted about daily earnings, around 20 [euro]—a sum which rings plausible for a beginner in the art of begging—while concealing potential bigger earnings.[16] The next question came: "Were you left with 15?" Withholding my confusion, I quickly uttered yes. Other inquiries about my earnings followed, to my mounting consternation. I was challenged to con-

15 It is beyond the scope of this article to tackle issues of discriminatory attitudes towards Gypsies and of their being the reason for a general moral panic in Europe (cf. Picker & Roccheggiani, 2013; Stewart, 2012).

16 A person's earnings range from € 20 per day for a beginner to € 100 per day for a "professional" in the art of begging.

fess whether I had exchanged the sum (from coins into paper currency) or not. I offered a detailed itemization of my expenditures, mentioning money spent on food, coffee, Internet, phone calls, etc. Bewildered that at the end of the day, when gains are counted, I was left with only some insignificant spare change, "my family" scolded me for squandering. They concluded that my thriftless behaviour was rooted in my indifference towards hoarding. They reminded me derisively of the job I was after in Italy: I was much more interested—they claimed—in scrutinizing their activities abroad than in making money. Such fieldwork experiences of a clash between the anthropologist's and the people's under study different representations of the same social facts—in this case the behaviour towards money—are of paramount importance in directing the researcher's attention towards the real concerns of his interlocutors. Only after being repeatedly scolded for wasting money, could I conjecture that the work of begging intimated a peculiar attitude towards money, in addition to the bodily performance and discipline that I described in the previous section.

What struck me the most throughout our stay abroad was the very calculating economic behaviour displayed by the Cortorari. While back home the Cortorari regard money as a plentiful commodity, valued for its properties in circulation rather than for its potential for accumulation—a point made equally by Stewart (1994) in relation to the Hungarian Gypsies—, abroad the Cortorari see money as a scarce commodity that people strain to accumulate. At home, the moral evaluation of persons is done according to their disposition to be generous with others, by offering food and drinks to them. Abroad, it is a person's ability to hoard money that is continuously under evaluation. In Italy, Cortorari engaged in money hoarding at the expense of satisfying primarily body needs such as hunger, sleep, and health. If back home stories that circulate depict abroad (*p-al thema*) as the paradise of cheap fruits and drinks, populated with generous donors, once there, the territory of migration becomes the place where the incentive to earn money rules out eventual prospects of comfort and self-indulgence. Abroad, the Cortorari sleep in the open, scavenge for food and beg for their cigarettes, so that they do not spend a penny of the money they gain. All of it is brought home to be invested on the local marriage market, especially in dowries. Cortorari believe that hoarding behaviour in Italy is peculiar exclusively to them. It is

thus a practice that distinguishes them from other non-Cortorari Gypsies who beg abroad. It is shameful for a Cortorari to spend abroad money gained from begging. Cortorari who stay abroad longer might send parcels with goods for their kinsfolk back home. Yet no money is spent on these parcels, which are usually made from foodstuffs received from charity organizations such as Caritas and electronics and clothes gathered from the garbage bins. Looking at their economic behaviour at home and abroad respectively, one notices that Cortorari make a qualitative distinction between the former and the latter. At home, money contributes to the creation and maintenance of reciprocal relations, based on trust and solidarity—attributes which characterize the morality of kinship. Abroad, money flows across more transitory relations with strangers, with interestedness and anonymity being symptomatic of the weak ties established between beggar and donor, reminiscent of an impersonal market exchange. The two distinct economic behaviours that Cortorari take up at home and abroad, map onto what anthropologists coined as the realm of "community" versus "market" (Gudeman, 2001) or "long term" versus "short term" exchanges (Parry & Bloch, 1989) to distinguish between on the one hand, transactions concerned with the reproduction of relatedness, and on the other hand, transactions concerned with the individual gains that pose a threat to the moral order. As an assertion of their hoarding behaviour, the Cortorari elicit the counter example of the thriftless behaviour taken up by non-Cortorari Gypsies. The latter have become involved in a different form of migration with longer periods spent in Italy. The same as the Cortorari, they mainly practice begging activities abroad. Yet, unlike the Cortorari, most of the time they live in campi nomadi, returning to their home country once or twice a year. The Cortorari believe that the communal life non-Cortorari Gypsies lead abroad prevents them from saving money as they spend it on common meals, men's playing cards and sharing drinks. Because all these activities require money to be squandered, the Cortorari avoid meeting other Cortorari while abroad and thus refrain from a thriftless behaviour. Even kinship ties seemed to be played down at the expense of money hoarding when, for example, members of the same family were contributing equal amounts of money to a common meal, irrespective of their individual earnings.

We have seen that the Cortorari abroad change their attitudes with regard to dress and to the gendered division of labour. They also change their attitudes with regard to money. At home it is part of the morality of kinship to be generous with your relatives. In their home village the Cortorari organized stalls where they sell copper artefacts. The transactions are concluded under the public eye. When one sells an object, his relatives expect him to offer free drinks to celebrate the transaction. Should one not comply with these public expectations, he would be disregarded and excluded from sociality. At home the Cortorari cannot accumulate money, because they are expected to redistribute any earnings among kin. The realm of women's pig husbandry is a case in point. Women strive to raise a few pigs a year in order to sell the meat. If one slaughters a pig to sell it to non-Cortorari, one's Cortorari relatives would boldly ask for meat. Or, if one expected to sell her pig to a Cortorari person, the latter would bargain for a price below the market. In this way, Cortorari women prove unsuccessful in saving the money they would need to invest in their daughters' dowries. Money made at home cannot be accumulated. Conversely, money which is earned abroad is saved. This is made possible by the distribution of the begging territory. When begging, the Cortorari avoid meeting their fellow Cortorari. Money earned from begging on a daily basis, the spare change, glossed as lei[17] or *xurde* (small, by extension: spare change) by the Cortorari has a short-lived existence and is converted in paper currency, euro, at the end of a working day. The paper money saved and voided of any sphere of circulation abroad is brought home where it becomes countable *love* (money) and enters marriage market (cf. Tesăr, 2012).

8. Conclusions

Economic activities abroad revolve around a process of symbolic renunciation of ethnicity. I showed that specific to Cortorari are both their "traditional" dress and the gendered division of domestic economic activities whose yields

17 The Romanian national currency

are redistributed along kinship lines. Abroad, irrespective of their gender, people dress up as beggars and endeavour to accumulate money at the expense of redistribution. Money derived from begging is brought home and invested on the local marriage market. The Cortorari conceive of begging as a profession which provides for the reproduction of their families. Similarly to us, non-Gypsies living by capitalist ethics, who put on smart outfits to go to our jobs, the Cortorari remove their "traditional" dress to go begging. Marx argued that the advent of capitalism brought about the representation of labour as divorced from kinship. In his view moralities that governed the private and domestic domain and the public and economic domain were different (cf. Bloch, 1989, 173). In other words, in the realm of kinship moral sentiments rule whereas in the economic domain pure economic interestedness comes to pre-eminence. The Cortorari's representations of begging seem to follow similar lines. They conceive of begging as labour, which they associate with an "abroad" in which money talks at the expense of moral values. In contradistinction to abroad, the Cortorari invest in their home village where their economic behaviour is associated with ideas of amity, redistribution, respectability, and care for one's relatives. The transition from the realm of domestic morality to the realm of abroad, i.e. interestedness, is performed by the Cortorari by means of some secular rituals related to the physical crossing of borders, such as changing of their dress, posture of the body and its hygiene. Our folk understandings of begging associate this activity to the "pure gift" / "unilateral gift" (Godbout & Caille, 1998)—a thing given willingly to someone without expecting any payment in return. Contrary to this shared belief, the Cortorari conceive of begging as work that requires specific skills (articulated in verbal and bodily communication), and peculiar knowledge (such as a mental mapping of the territory compounded by an intuition of its economic potential), as well as specific behaviour towards hoarding and concealing earnings. These skills and knowledge can be acquired by any person, irrespective of her gender and ethnic belonging.

Šomi's and my experience of initiation into the art of begging is telling. In spite of the fact that I was a Gaže and he was a Cortorari, we both qualified as clean slates in regard to begging when we arrived in Italy. Had it not been for his parents who guided us through the town during the first week of our stay in

Italy, we could not have guessed which the potential places for begging were. Moreover, unaccustomed to sleep deprivation and lacking training in the begging bodily techniques, we both endured physical and at times emotional pain. Over and above, we were both squandering money. Šomi kept his eyes peeled for the most expensive shirts in the shops, while I was spending on phone calls and internet cafes. We both had to forge our own way of begging: Šomi preferred the supermarkets and their car parks, where he would push the customers' trolleys in exchange for small sums of money. In time, he became more daring and talked the customers into giving him larger sums. I chose to sit or stand by churches and on commercial streets holding a written sign, instead of talking to the potential donors. By the end of our stay in Italy, both Šomi and I would lose our bad habit of wasting money and boast, in the evening, about how much "we were left with."

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