

## THE SPANISH GITANOS OF MEXICO CITY: RHYTHMICITY, MIMESIS AND DOMESTICATION OF THE *PAYOS*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This text addresses a tentative approach to groups in Mexico such as the Roma, who remain poorly known. The analysis focuses on problematizing the particular cultural and economic reproduction strategies of an urban group of Gitanos (Calós) in Mexico City. Greater attention is placed particularly on the performance and the mimesis in economic exchange with the Payos (non-Gitanos). The idea is that the processes of cultural identification refer to the basic Caló social universe, which reveals epistemological beliefs and assumptions shared by the group in relation to the Payo universe. The idea is that the Calós construct idealized models of the real world during everyday experience in the ecological context within the community. Instead, it relates to the direct perceptual involvement of subjects in a relational context of shared patterns of daily activities in environments that are experienced. The effect is the domestication of the Payo's world.

**Keywords:** Gitanos culture identity, Mexico, performance.

### THE PRESENCE<sup>2</sup>

It is a truism to note that academic hierarchies and the corpus of anthropology, sociology and history in Mexico ignore the historical role of the Roma in the incomplete process of nation-building. The various Roma groups have historically been devalued in relation to nation-building not only in Mexico but also in the American continent<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the Roma are not even mentioned as part of the national histories and subjects thereof<sup>4</sup>. Mexican scientific literature has not

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of "presence" evokes, in a philosophical sense, the notions of "be in the world", "be present in the history" through the culture (de Martino, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> See Declaración del Pueblo Roma (2000).

<sup>4</sup> The Roma presence in the Americas is attested since the third voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1498 (Torbágyi, 2003) and we have information, but scarce, of various kinds on the history of migration and Roma presence in America (Boyd Bodman, 1985; Prorom, 1999, 2005; Gamboa et al,

constructed a Roma topic<sup>5</sup>. In fact, the denigration of them in the country is a reflection of the difficulties of institutionalizing studies on the Roma who do not fit into pre-established frameworks: To what do they belong? To the folk? To the urban poor? To the ethnic? To the immigrants? (cf. Olivera, 2007:14).

According to Wolf (1993), the continuous historical process of construction and reconstruction of cultures relate to processes operating in the general areas of the ecological environment, the society, the economy and the politics. He also explains that the exercise of power is a crucial factor in the regulation of social relations and in the creation of meaning within the cultural arena so that the power of the culture constitutes the strength and the ability to influence the social domain and its different areas of activity such as the social relations between people (Shoenmakers, 2012).

For the purposes of this text I have chosen one of these spheres of activity as the axis of reflection, namely, the economic environment of the Roma, peddling. With it I intend to provide an understanding in relation to the cultural reproduction of this community, identifying the set of movement and engagement between an “inside”, a concept of the Roma system – without reference to an essentialism – posed by Williams and Piaseke on the basis that, as an almost regularity, cultural reproduction in Roma social terms is blunt, elastic, fluid and refers to historical conditions, and an “outside”: a political, anthropological and historical construction that exists through the staging and representation of Roma through symbolic devices and networks of our knowledge (Asséo, 2008)<sup>6</sup>.

We focus on the performance as a way of hermeneutic understanding and as a significant action in its description of the culture creating process (Turner, 1985: 182-187; Goffman, 1981). In the ethnographic scope of the modes of social interaction within a group of Calós in Mexico City, the performance is addressed first; it is addressed as a poetic invention and a cultural creativity which is embodied in a specific activity and an everyday responsibility of the Calós, peddling (see Conquergood, 1989). As part of the pragmatic dimension of society, the Calós are productive and creative agents in their relationships and practices, confronting the order imposed by the institutions of the nation state (Herzfeld, 2005). The social poetics of everyday interaction constitutes the game through which people try to gain advantages. On one hand, in the commercial transaction, the comparison between a set of identification (cultural affinities) / distance (opposition) and the Payo (“otherness”) is generated. On the other hand, roles of nature foreign to their culture (“mimesis”) are assimilated as a mimetic faculty expressing a decisive role in the culture, establishing a symbolic power (Taussig, 1993). This game is not a mere irrational action due to crisis or cultural stress but an adaptive behavior, which is a

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2000; San Roman, 1986, 1994; Martinez, 2004; in Mexico, see Pickett, 1962, 1970; Salo, 1992; IMEGI, 1995:18; Armendáriz, 1998, 2001, 2005; Pérez Romero, 2001). Estimates, not very reliable, suggest that there may be around 15,000 Roma in Mexico.

<sup>5</sup> At present, there are Kalderash Roma colonies in Mexico City, Puebla, Guadalajara, Michoacán, Querétaro, Oaxaca and Veracruz; Roma Ludar groups in central Mexico (San Luis Potosi, Jalisco) and a small community of Spanish Calos which lives in Mexico City.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication.

reflection of how mimetic activity relates to social practice and interpersonal relationships. The game is particularly described through a concrete, social and historical situation of trading commitments between the “inside” and the “outside” among Calós.

Second, in terms of a radical phenomenology and in relation to a sensible, immediate perception, the Calós do not “trust” the Payos and raise, structurally and persistently, feelings of hostility, hatred, fear and envy (cf. Piasere, 1999, and *Gaze / Roma* schismogenesis processes). In the first place, the commercial transaction represents a regulatory, constitutive ritual in the sense that it guides and regulates a practical activity, referring to the aesthetic style of the activity and the quality of its diacritical features (Tambiah 1995: 144). Peddling creates a practical relationship with the environment<sup>6</sup>. Structured as a constitutive ritual act that is subjected to constitutive rules, it produces an uncertain performative effect (Tambiah, 1995). Such everyday performative acts elicit (in the sense of arousing, inciting) shared meanings and moods – an ethos – (Wagner, 1986). Simultaneously, they symbolically achieve control and power over the Payo world as an unpredictable universe, yielding a power that transcends subjects (Wagner, 1986). On the one hand, the commercial transaction describes an order of interaction in which symbolic constructs relate to the moral values of the group; on the other, it exercises power and domination (Goffman, 1983).

Stewart (1997a: 97) points out that the domination of the Gaze by Hungarian Vlach Roma represented in the horse market transactions is an ideological construct. First, it refers to an image of sufficiency by obtaining Payos’ resources (without establishing a reciprocal relationship with them). Secondly, it refers to equality and the ethos of sharing. Wolf (1999: 3-4) emphasizes how power plays in human relationships of interdependence. He contrasts ideas (mental constructs of the world) with ideologies (unified schemes to manifest power) and notes that both play a crucial role as emblems and instruments to bound people or to separate them in cooperation or in conflict. Wolf’s approach allows an understanding of the link between the material relations and the ideological schemes at the level of the subjects involved in the reproduction of the ideological and instrumental means of ratification of the social organization and the ever-changing pursuit of consistency. Overall, it shows that the construction of meaning is an activity linked to ordinary social life.

With this, we describe a relational perspective of power as constituted through language and everyday practice (Bourdieu, 1991) that is produced and reproduced through the contextual actions and interpretations of social interaction in complex strategic situations (Foucault, 1986: 113). Therefore, cultural identity among the Calós is built into the details of the practice of everyday life while at the same time it takes on an economic, aesthetic and political construction involving the simultaneous formation of both objects and subjects (Comaroff, 1994).

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<sup>6</sup> Houseman (1994:13-14) argues that a general trait among the Roma is precisely their “natural” environment which is composed of partners and representatives of other ethnic groups (Roma, Gaze, living/dead, relatives/non-relatives, etc.), never indifferent.

The idea is that the processes of cultural identification refer to the basic Caló social universe, which reveals epistemological beliefs and assumptions shared by the group in relation to the Payo universe. The idea is that the Calós construct idealized models of the real world during everyday experience in the ecological context within the community. Instead, it relates to the direct perceptual involvement of subjects in a relational context of shared patterns of daily activities in environments that are experienced.

### THE GITANOS OF MEXICO CITY

This section attempts to focus on the specific analysis of a group of Spanish Calós living in Mexico City, from a dialogical and performative culture perspective (Clifford, 1995). The group consists of about 150 individuals who identify themselves as “Spanish Gypsies”<sup>7</sup> and who live in the Zona Rosa, a part of Colonia Juarez, a residential neighborhood of middle and upper-class level. The local community was formed 35 years ago by members who had previously lived in Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina. It is not a closed community. It is a product of immigration that has left a composition of family networks under permanent construction.

The taste for social life is an important aspect in harvesting the social consensus among the Calós and is reflected in the more visible daily practice of the dominion game<sup>8</sup> played by men in cafes and in hotels of the Zona Rosa. One of those patterns also is expressed on the daily practices embodied in the aesthetic and communicative dimension of art. If we complete a phenomenological reading of the corporal kinesthesia, the competence in the sense of movement and position of the body and its parts is revealed in the integration of rhythm as a social pace. One example is the fact that Calós sing and dance at any time and place, which embarrasses any outside observer. Among the Calós, the cultural significance is revealed not only through language but also through verbal actions that act as social catalysts which function as performative operators that the Calós use to explain things in society. So, singing and dancing are the languages of social integration (of the life cycle) and politics (of the gesture, the invitation). The singing and dancing together, in an improvised way, is the most basic form of integration, stressing the importance of social ties and the importance of living in society.

We propose that the performative meaning is a contingent and emergent social process; the latter metaphor indicates that the whole transcends system components, the whole being more than the sum of its parts (Stewart, 2002). This

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<sup>7</sup> Unlike indigenous peoples whose population is surveyed from government surveys on the use of the language and their sense of ethnic belonging there are no official censuses on Roma in Mexico.

<sup>8</sup> Dominoes, like gambling or sports ritual, is a model of culture in their commonality, based on modalities of magical efficiency that in turn generate new myths and rituals (Zulaika, 1990).

reveals the irreducible dimension of social life: man is a self-performative animal (Turner, 2002: 108). In this sense, the Calós can make something out of improvisation, tearing apart a dance or a song to reach the crucial starting point: society, the vaguest thing that exists. Not getting out of this primordial vitality involving basic integration is represented by the half ceremonial, half playful undifferentiated gesture. If we refine this and describe it as “art”, the integration is lost. For the Calós, singing and dancing is not a segregated activity as it is for the majority of society; rejecting to dance is equivalent to rejecting sociability. This is symbolized by the right to own rhythmic expression in the spontaneous expression as well as in the most formal dimension. That which may annoy an outside observer is not the singing or the dancing itself but the spontaneous way in which it is exercised.

The perception of the environment (their “nature”, as says Houseman, 1994) is the experience of the space-time coordinates, understood always in motion. There are constantly movement on the peddling, in the long-distance travel or short-range displacements. Asséo (1994; 2008) identifies a “circulation principle” among the European Roma. As the Eskimos, among Calós, and before that of nomadism, we have to talk about movement based on cyclical and not regular displacements<sup>9</sup>. There is a strong attachment to specific places that are visited repeatedly. Disputes are avoided by existing resources and on share information about them, which do not belong to any group. Places are temporarily occupied by individuals and families. Another individual or family can pass through them, and established with agreement. There is a “go and come” not violent or competitive between space and seasonality. The destination of choice for business transaction can be both prospective and fixed and repetitive. The Calós constantly move and this movement is based on site conditions. This idea of possession of territory is based on constant mobility and freedom culture at local, regional and transnational level; is their lived cultural identity.

In relation to the position in space of the global society, Piasere (2004: 89-96, see also Olivera, 2007: 539) refers favorite location of Roma in the ends, the most fragile of the political organization of the State as a form of a more general strategy of integration into the “*sfassatura*”<sup>10</sup>, the geopolitical, economic and commercial discontinuity of Non-Roma society. As part of a differential perception of risk as a concept-model, Calós are at the margins of the economic system and try to improve their conditions of exploitation of resources at local and regional level, resisting the neoliberal state. The Mexican context is conducive to the informal economy (29% of Mexico's GDP), and Calós, by way of practice, conduct informal economic practices that show great flexibility, frequent successes and cultural creativity,

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<sup>9</sup> A frequent routes part to Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Torreon, Durango, and the return to Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Veracruz, although at present and due to the growing insecurity in the country the routes directed more to the south (Puebla, Chiapas, Oaxaca). The coastal area is also popular as tourist corridor extending from Acapulco to Puerto Vallarta, and the Oaxaca coast.

<sup>10</sup> In the sense of a slit, a notch.

while in Spain productive organization of Calós is more subject to standardization and legal oversight (regulations, taxes)<sup>11</sup>.

The practice of the material life of the Roma, from the occupations to the mode of their “presence” in the territory, is the result of choices and values articulated with the situation, creatively unfolding (Piasere, 1999: 21-35). The economic anchor and circulation of Calós in the territories indicated the relevance of a set of strategies like living in the informal sector, move to exploit economic niches and generally, the symbiotic relationships with local, regional and national levels. The anchor denotes a circulation regime and a mobility knowledge-capital about the intermittent demands of the territory, so that “the principle of circulation” always organizes and offers more opportunities for economic success (Asseo, 2008). The spiral movement on the territory is not the exception but the rule; in this movement resides the group's identity, the rhythmicity. This suggests redefining the movement of those Calós who are rooted in the territory in which circulate freely. This multiple and fine territorialization of Calós is an element that has built up over the years, not only a hold and lived identity, but a whole anthropological and historical system which is a whole cultural, mixing reproduction of mutual relationships with economic integration, being integral to the history and global society.

The main occupation among Calós is peddling. Products offered to potential customers are leather jackets (*chamarras*), accessories (sunglasses, watches, pens, etc.), perfumes, clothes (shirts, pants), silver frames, cutlery, tablecloths, bedspreads and other products. The strategy of the vendor is to provide either an individual product (jacket, accessories) or a set of products in a baggage (*lote*) for a total price<sup>12</sup>. To do this, they go to private homes, markets, public buildings and government enterprises, small and medium businesses, and move to different areas of metropolitan Mexico City and the rest of the country.

According to the circumstances of the sale may be risk individually or in groups, and this indicates that these circumstances are social risk. Among Calós preparing the sale involves the exchange of information, cooperation between family, work groups, etc., and recreate social relations, risking little financially. This is part of this lived world, safer and freer.

### MIMESIS AND PERFORMANCE

In the communication process of economic exchange with the Payos, Mexican Calós resort to gesture, aesthetics, performance and impression management (Goffman, 1981) as inventions of ordinary life, to which are added in the form

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<sup>11</sup> Another question is to ask how the various Calós groups in Spain live the economy, if they are worried by the market taxes. Have they a tax experience or is thought? The economy – expenses, taxes – surpasses them?

<sup>12</sup> The peddling of the *lote* was a type of business strategy driven by Spanish Gitanos from the 50's with the mechanization of the countryside, reaching great importance until the 70's. In the sale of the *lote* the profit margin is higher and the time of sale less than if it were to sell one by one all the products offered.

rationalizations of ideas and beliefs that are part of a hierarchy of values. The peddling is a performative act (Austin, 1990; Tambiah, 1995) and the conviviality that integrates performative and cultural ethos through its effectiveness, its success or failure and their effects. The commercial transaction in front the Payos social space is constructed dialectically through the game of the distance (against social intimacy), supported by the conventionality and formality of the external device (the performance). The expectation of risk in the business transaction (being identified as Gitano) is neutralized by the manipulation of symbolic codes regarding political identification: it makes a positive self-identification, so that Calós hide their identity as Gitanos (negative identification) and present themselves as Spaniards (positive identification) in front of their clients<sup>13</sup>. This is part of the social poetics in which the game of distance and staging to an “outside” is a political, anthropological and historical construction that relies on symbolic devices.

What singles out Mexican Calós is the product of the type of exchange, joint social and historical contingencies (Piasere, 2004) that provide acceptability in Mexican territory. Therefore, knowledge of the other is recognized among Calós as an invisibility strategy based on the next premise: when a difference breaks the panorama of the accepted difference (visibility), invisibility proves to be the most prudent and successful strategy. By presenting themselves as “Spanish”, the stigma-prone Calós are not stigmatized. Through mimesis and identification with an external other, the Calós “survive”<sup>14</sup>.

The manipulation of identity is a strategy followed by other Roma communities in commercial contact with the Gaze (Piasere, 1999)<sup>15</sup>. Obviously, there are scenarios and historical moments in which to be Roma is recognized as relatively safe and advantageous or disadvantageous (Okely, 1997: 228; Piasere, 2004). Lisón (1997) notes that since the arrival of Gypsies on the Iberian Peninsula, they have been perceived as and presented themselves to the Payos through a carnival of pragmatic, legal, religious and symbolic-allegorical masks that appeared and disappeared and were transformed continuously (cf. Silverman, 1988; Okely, 1996). However, the Calós’ combinatory status, the social poetics<sup>16</sup>, is the substratum of cultural creativity. Against this explicit social process, harsh and discriminatory, the Calós play creatively

<sup>13</sup> “Spanish”, in Mexico, is one category less racially discriminated than “Gitano”. This relates to the impression management in Goffman microsociology, since Calós control, through dress, the way they talk, gestures, etc., the symbolic information that adapts more favorably to social expectations for the customers.

<sup>14</sup> The idea of blending into the environment abides by Adorno’s (1984) zoological and biological impulse.

<sup>15</sup> The ethnic “invisibility” among the Rom Kalderas of Paris, according to Patrick Williams, or the “super-communication” of ethnicity among American Rom stated by Matt and Sheila Salo, is a technique also seen by Piasere among Slovenian Roms in northern Italy who act the part of illiterate gypsies in order to glean scrap iron from farmers and repair shops for free or at a low cost for scrap iron present in front peasants and repair as poor illiterate gypsies – “super-communication” – to get free or inexpensive materials (Piasere, 1999:28).

<sup>16</sup> Social poetics is “the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see any action” (Wittgenstein, 1981).

with different labels which in turn are offensive and damaging; the power to manipulate reality consists in shedding a distinctive identification and behavioral label (“Gitano”), which involves specific content (tradition, racism, etc.) Expectations or interpretation schemata (Goffman, 1974) of a problematic social situation (anti-*Gitano* prejudice), linked to cognitive and affective processes, are invigorated by frames and the collective ideas (not reducible to ideologies) that from a sociological point of view refer to dialogic situations of social interaction (Snow and Benford, 2000). The reaction that is expected of the Payo as a subject receiving stimuli and reacting to the information of the “perfect” communicative act (as in the case of G. H. Mead’s symbolic interactionism), is an enthusiastic response and/or submission. Although it is assumed that failure is a natural performance, the desired effect is reached through the transmission of symbolically coded information of the physiological, psychological and social status of the issuer, resorting to impression management and verbal art performance as key elements of persuasion (Bauman, 1975) and, in general, control of the context of action<sup>17</sup>, in turn determined by cultural conventions. Foucault explains that what defines a relationship of power is not act directly and immediately on others, but act upon their actions: action upon an action, or over eventual or current actions, present or future (Foucault, 1988: 14). The Calós power is exercised in marketing, developing persuasive skills they possess to influence someone to buy a product; in other words, the ways that make people behave differently on their own (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1984; Dahl, 1957: 203). One of the strategies most employed to stimulate motivation is imitating roles as clothing importer, journalist, military pensioner or exhibitor of fairs: *I’m an airline pilot and bought these clothes for my children in El Corte Inglés [a mall] in Madrid, but they are too small. These leather jackets are good but I have to get back to Spain and I want to exchange these jackets for bottles of tequila.* Botero describes his work: *This is marketing!*

Calós power lies in their ability to persuade and how they project an illusion<sup>18</sup> in the minds of customers. The imagination of the Payos feeds the artistic ability of the Calós to create these illusions aimed at altering the perception of others in order to sell the product<sup>19</sup>. It is also the illusion of appearing to be someone else, the chameleon-like power, secrecy and invisibility. We refer not only to a performance

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<sup>17</sup> When highly standardized communication patterns are broken, the cybernetic model of communication can lead to failure. Failed communication in interactions can lead, in certain cases, to the oath (swearing on the dead) –as an insult- or to a curse. The challenging behavior of swearing and cursing (both forms of ritual) imply discontinuity on the cyber level (Zulaika, 1990:369). Both are expressions of the power of the verb as warning and punishment, as well as the verbal form of persuasion (sales performance).

<sup>18</sup> Verbal loquacity is important: we sell jackets. A person may be seeing the jacket in the store but we are chatty, we sell things ... and fast because if not they leave ... as well as an understanding of psychology. A young Caló described their sale as “illusion selling” using communicative resources (verbal, gestural, clothes) to entice the buyer: we say that these tablecloths are made by the Carmelite sisters. I believe it. It is all based on you believing it yourself.

<sup>19</sup> In Plato’s Republic the philosopher pointed out how mimetic ability produced appearances and illusions that affected people’s perception and behavior.



of a performance (of the “real” airplane pilot or the New York Times reporter<sup>20</sup>), but a transformative cultural process through physical and bodily acts which build identities, relationships and rules based on otherness, and employing the faculty to copy, to imitate, in order to make models, explore differences, and “become someone else” – not literally – even to the point of taking on the character and power of that other person (Taussig, 1993: xiii). So, having the capacity to imitate is the chameleonic<sup>21</sup> and magical power to copy, forge and mask, and in turn implies the power contained in this capability of representing the world, making this Caló ability like a game of mirrors<sup>22</sup>: a drifting of the power of representation which explains the power of representation of Roma as an object by anthropology. So, when copying and imitating the original model, that is, the representation and objectification of the Payo figure (flight attendant, pilot, journalist and any other role), this implies the subject's appropriation of the character and power of those original figures. In short, instead of observing the performance as a parody or an assimilationist desire to be “like the Payos”, it is best understood as an act of mimetic cultural imagination. The Calós can protect themselves from an uncertain and hostile environment by deleting the biased category of “Gitano”, magically acquiring the essence of the other people in the everyday act of appearances, an art that cultivates the insoluble paradox of essence/appearance (Taussig, 1993: 176).

The interrelationship between the cognitive and sociological aspects builds the dynamic social relationships and cultural ideologies of domestication, power and control over the Payos, and describes the feeling of superiority that the Calós have over the Payos (cf. Stewart, 1997b, and how the Hungarian Vlach view themselves as superiors in words in *la chance*; Piasere, 1991: 213 ff, and the rejection of being made part of the proletariat as in “the internal hegemony” among the Rom of Verona). The effect of domesticating and encapsulating the Payos into objective and practical categories has wider implications because superiority would not be circumstantial but would be built as a social structure in which the Payo ideologically can't start a relationship of reciprocity with the Calós. The efficiency of rejecting the interaction, which is articulated effectively with other kinds of rejections in relation to moral values and associated taboos described in other social spheres (mentioning the deceased, separation of the sexes, etc.), however, is an issue that depends on the contexts of social, economic and historical exchange: *Mexicans here are 'Payos, Payos', we do not have a relationship with them, we sell to them. On the other hand, I have Payo friends in Spain, we have lived together. Here the Mexicans have their rules: 'yes, sir', 'excuse me', 'thank you very much'.* This indicates, first, that the game of distance for the Mexican expresses a

<sup>20</sup> In my ethnography with Catalan Calós an old Cali woman narrated one of the strategies used indoor to door peddling in the 50's in Catalonia: some [men] made the women go into homes, and once inside, she let the man to sell the lot. I did not play that trick. The men said they were French or Italian and that they had imported clothes (Lagunas, 2005:95).

<sup>21</sup> This idea refers to the figure of the European Gypsies as “tricksters”, according to Piasere (2011).

<sup>22</sup> Mimesis does not disrupt the ethnic boundaries that are maintained through strong group endogamy among the Calós.

dimension of diaspora and, second, that the mark of otherness is a specific and contextual construction (cf. Stewart, 1997b, the Hungarian peasant is more “other”).

Intercultural affinity, as incorporated activity and reflexive discourse, is part of the fabrication of the contents of culture, revealing that it is built by n having absorbed, often imperceptibly, elements from other cultures (*we have been like chameleons, adapted to each location. If we have seen anything good in you, we have absorbed it*). This absorption cannot be explained merely as non-conscious mimicry<sup>23</sup>. To study Calós is to understand elements that really are not exclusive; they are imported, and therefore are loans from other contexts (see Williams, 1996).

A business transaction is an aesthetic construction of life that also shows how constructing the Calós’ world of experience depends on fluid types of identity and identification, not on essentials. The Calós teach us that the distinction between the instrumental and the expressive is dissolved. That is, a theatrical model realized exclusively as “fraudulent” in the staging of self would be simplistic and reductionist if compared to the sham inherent in every human being living in society had we not added other dimensions of the person as in this case it would be the cultural affinities. As noted by Joseph (1999: 5), notions of (national) citizenship images are imbued with public, official definitions, the usual practice, informal nostalgic yearnings, accumulated historical memory, material culture, mythologies, and lessons learned from previous rejections. Thus, performance of the (Spanish) national attributes that Calós consistently use in their social life, and that includes both the aesthetic and technical dimensions of the issues at stake, is best understood as a place in which the “person” feels realized in the complex areas of everyday life (Joseph, 1999: 4). In following Benjamin, the basic mimetic impulse offers “similarity”, to become one similar to the other, not a mere imitation (Cahn, 1984: 34).

Therefore, in commercial transactions Calós also state and exhibit culturally marked preferences, national identity elements that are part of their Spanish heritage, and through these seem to suggest intercultural affinities. In this sense, mimesis-imitation is the reflection of the flexibility and porosity of the difference between self and the other, in which the “distance” from what is imitated can always be found (Taussig, 1993: xix). Covering up the differences and affirming what is shared as a situational-adaptation process – that coexists with regulatory processes and broader social coordination – (Turner, 2002: 107) implies that Calós are careful not to be identified as Gitanos, stating that as Spanish people and traders they are expressing economic, social and cultural relationships which complement the Mexicans. This is an element of adaptive culture that tells us how the meaning of consciousness and attribution of meaning to “race”<sup>24</sup> and culture as well as negotiating with outsiders is produced through exchanges and interactions with the

<sup>23</sup> To see something or hear something is to enter into a relationship with that something, establishing a contact. The distinction between the copy and the contact, as well as the nature of this relationship remains obscured and is a source of both imagination and identification, representation and expression, terms that are related to or are conjured up by the notion of mimesis (Taussig, 1993:21).

<sup>24</sup> The Calós view themselves as a “race” that is different from the Payo world. In my relationship and interaction with this group I have treated them, out of respect, “as if they were a race”.

Payos. This would express a particular ethos as well as symbolize conventional distinctions and categories, not static nor uniform, on which Calós build their trade relations. It is not only the instrumentality, usefulness or the characteristics of a meta-language that defines the performance but the expressiveness of it, which is what makes sense as Spaniards and as Calós.

#### NATURALIZATION AND DOMESTICATION

Power comes from three sources: nature, society and, more directly, the power exercised by the people themselves. So, power is a feature of human relationships and indicates the need for one person to partially control others through domestication, the processes of socialization and power (Terradas, 1988: 27). Payos are located at a specific position in the world through classification systems that are cognitive tools and are in fact the product of social-political dynamics and specific social and cultural ideologies whose ultimate cause are logical and formal: establish contrasts of incompatibility based in representation systems that project negative attributes which are presented as being natural. The idea is that human groups “naturalize” cultural differences, and it is also an instrument of domestication, power and control. In reference to the division between nature and culture, Olivera (2007) recently showed that the Rom Gabori see the Gaze as “nature”-humanized, reversing the perception of the Slovenian-Croatian Rom of Gaze as humanity-“nature” (Piasere, 1985: 136-184, 1995: 31).

Performance, and in general the Calós transactional culture, highlights issues of power, ideology and historical processes of dialogue/resistance (Turner, 1986). We are not referring here to specific Calós ideologies (pure blood, ethnicity, honor/dishonor, labor, time management, etc.) that affect several areas of social life, including the construction of a second nature (Taussig, 1993) in the magical-mimetic relationship regarding the Payos.

The worldview reflects a set of integrating principles that provide coherence to the system of knowledge and beliefs, even though as a structure of ideas it is not permanent nor fixed because its imaginings and metaphors are much more changeable than cognitive constructs (Turner, 2002: 111-112). Although people do not necessarily live according to their worldview, their conceptual system, these models are put together with values and feelings, structure consciously and unconsciously as frames (Lakoff, 2006).

However, worldview, unlike cognitive constructions, has to be translated into performances (Turner, 2002: 112). In this sense, the relationship between performance and power would not only be the expression of the culture of the Calós, but the reflexive eye, the creative glance of the Calós at possibly more suitable designs of life (Turner, 1986:24). We refer to the commercial transaction as an everyday event that works as conventional act, ritual, in the sense that 1. it is a culturally built symbolic communication system (whose content is related to a particular ideology) through structured and organized sequences of words and acts,

and whose content is characterized by formality (conventionality), stereotypical aspects (stiffness), condensation (fusion) and redundancy (repetition) (Tambiah 1995: 130), and 2. execution or capability of being performed, the action is a basic condition of what happens as the ritual not only communicates but is “doing something” (Zulaika, 1989). First, we observe absolute formality in dress: suit and tie for the men, with the ritual shoe shine before going out, while women wear discrete, dark, clothes with a combination of skirt, sweater, bag and elegant shoes. The movements are also stylized, emphasizing discretion and elegance in the walking mode, gaze, gestures, the way of sitting. The appearance and body language, the personal front (Goffman, 1981), is key to successful communication since both refer to the choreography of the performance which provides incentives that speak to the potential customer about the status of the performer. The language used is clear, structured, in a refined style, rhetorical, using higher forms of phrases and pronouns, and a bombastic vocabulary (Tambiah, 1995: 140). It is performed with verve and speed. That is, the rules are specified ahead of time in order to proceed with the implementation, and the sequence of events is pre-ordered creating an unpredictable outcome.

It is, then, a kind of “normal” intentional communicative behavior, that Calós manipulate as “ritualized” conventional behavior; the distinction between the two lies in the degree of formalization and stereotyping, which explains the relative distinction in behavior (Tambiah, 1995: 137). This step is accomplished by means of a theatrical stage comprising movements and postures, clothing and execution. In ethnographic observation, the Calós invest much effort in theatrical dramatization of a role in order to achieve an effect. But according to Zulaika (1989), this is a serious drama, it is playing seriously. The paradox is that Calós “have to live the fiction of a representation as though it were pure reality (...) everything that is said or done inside is true, even that which is known to be false despite expressing it with the strictest formality and literalism” (Zulaika, 1995: 137). In this context, participants play at believing in the performance and act ritually, taking the metaphor literally, and experiencing theater as ritual (*you have to believe in it yourself*).

In short, we observe the ritual as drama that plays creatively (ritual emphasizing effectiveness) and as theater that we live out seriously. As stated by Schechner (1994), ordinary peddling relationships among the Calós would be experienced as a clear and explicit performance, which would abide by an implicit social process, not for the Payos who would experience, not theater, but an explicit social process whose performance condition is implicit. Theatre and social process would be interchangeable, with the sublimation of conflicts related to cumulative history of both polyphonic and radical dialogisms.

In this symbolic-aesthetic and ideological construct, the Payos’ cultural representations are present, so that increasing the experiential aspect of the Payo “myth” (as social representation that gives meaning to the construction of the Caló world) is produced through social action. That which has been lived through personally in the trade performance would be identified with what is imagined

socially<sup>25</sup>. In other words, ritualization provides stability and legitimacy to social constructions that operate effectively (Tambiah, 1995: 136), including the figure of the Payo which is excluded from community morality. The peddling performance is a stylized expression of fluidity with respect to the type of representation and categorization there is toward the Payos, in which ritual, gestures and aesthetics are the same<sup>26</sup>. Among Calós, theater, gesture and rhythm (not the semantics) are the main concepts. In short, it represents the manifestation and exercise of Caló power over the Payo universe. Peddling, in such circumstances, is a Caló particular performance compared to peddling in other ethnic contexts.

Selling is as much a political resource as it is persuasion in its ritual format. Apparently, Calós connect and do things mechanically, like a labor discipline. The paradox is that this labor discipline entails liturgical discipline: gestures, words or appearance must be in harmony. This practical knowledge is incorporated since the regulatory rules that guide the performance are of paramount importance. In its dual employment and liturgical dimension, every peddling act connects with another, and it is the weaving of these acts is what forms the nucleus, not the symbolization. In their daily conduct and through commercial transactions between Calós, not only do they strengthen their moral values as a group, but their control and power over the Payos also materializes, establishing a sense of presence and social exchange. Obtaining power through the ritual of the sale would occur upon the transmission of information (communication), and this is then acted upon. Power is not something imaginary nor an implied thing but an object of real experience. This aspect is present in the forms of domestication used by the Calós on the Payos. Put in another way, Payos metaphorically embody a second nature related to a function, that of human beings socially tamed, disciplined and subject to a hierarchical system of moral values.

### CONCLUSION

The meaning and the experience, skills and knowledge of the environment, and overall cultural configuration build transactional cultures in relation to lived environments. The anthropological and historical system of Mexican Calós is a permanent reformulation process, in which they learn, adapt and influence the surrounding environment, recreating a flexible and adaptive culture. The local community is involved in the movement of resources, people and ideas in relation to the networks established with Spain, and processes of construction and

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<sup>25</sup> In the West, some musicians believe that the idea of art is only produced during the process of musical creation, during the performance. These musicians would underline the importance of live performance and not the mere recording of music in the studio. Similarly, cultural signs have to be acted out to be real.

<sup>26</sup> Malinowski (1977) had revealed the importance in Trobriand magic of the rhythm and the way something is said (gestures), not the semantic content.

reconstruction of identity can be observed, as well as processes of belonging and understanding the community, accompanied by strategic interactions in terms of the fluid and mobile cultural adscription (Spanish/Calós).

We are in a position of confrontation against any interpretation that suggests an inertia not accepted by this group. The Calós are vital, make history, do live things, they do not cling to any aspect of their culture because they are inferior, as if they did not know how to absorb from their surroundings. Formal allegiances are absolutely common in many. The Calós manifest a series of principles with which they play and constantly rework; they play with personal conscience.

Throughout the text, we emphasize one aspect of the Calós community in Mexico City, that is, that the simple act of selling is saturated with codes, which symbolically constrain behavior. The face to face with Payos does not question symbolic borders but establishes a functional and utilitarian relationship, and thus does not represent a primary circle for the Calós but a non-emotional and non-camaraderie secondary circle. Peddling condenses a collective and broad sense for the Calós and in this context the verbal art, performance, aesthetics and dramatic effect end up producing an affirmation of unity and social cohesion. It is an exercise of expression and manifestation of the power of appearance and the copy – the mimetic faculty –, in the words of the Calós.

We proposed that the source of this power is in the daily ritual actions performed in a way in which they do not appear as a mere endorsement of a person who is assigned responsibility or is an authority figure, the acquisition of power occurs in the ritual action. The sale, a means to get resources, is seen simultaneously as a goal. It is as if the power acquired by performing during ritual activity came from the ritual need to be invested with the power of Caló men and women over the Payos, despite prior possession of nominal power as Calós. This is a perspective that emphasizes the aspects of performance and external components of peddling and contrasts with the phenomenological reading and psychological stress (internal) in Turner and Van Gennep, who emphasize individual experience and rituals of transit/initiation. Consequently, the performance would not be a psychological process but primarily social: the expression of Calós society.

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