

# After Barth: The Mexican Calós's lived identity

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## Abstract

The reasons for adopting a problem in terms of the survival of a Roma anthropological and historical system are not factual, but theoretical. This text analyses some dimensions of this system in relation to cultural identity, an idea that is close but not identical to the concept of ethnic identity of Fredrik F. Barth. The ethnography with the Gitanos of Mexico City dialogues with previous ethnographies and inquiries about the lived identity. The memory of the life of the Calós are constructed subjectively and through sociability are objectified in a cultural identity, opposed to the legal-political identification. The discourse on modernity, the economic activities, the social rhythms and practices of the place, as well as the transnational and diasporic dimension are the object of reflection.

KEYWORDS: Gitanos, identity, culture, comparison, Mexico

## Introduction

The question of ethnicity, the form of identification and sense of belonging of a community, has historically shifted; above all, between primordialist theories (ethnicity as a natural phenomenon) and constructivist theories (ethnicity as a social construction). The essentialists consider that the identity flows from an identical shared nature; and the constructionists consider that the identity is artificially constructed in the social interaction. We can find essentialist and constructionist tendencies in the studies of gender identity, ethnic identity, race identity, class identity and national identity, which are the main topics of identity studies in the social sciences (Lomnitz 2002).

Probably, one of the most important concepts is the boundary approach in the sense of Barth (1976). It is about the idea that the best use of ethnicity is that of a concept of social organization that allows describing the boundaries and relationships of social groups in terms of cultural contrasts, highly selective and which are used in an emblematic way to organize identities and interactions. This leads to the analysis of differentiation policies in a specific niche and to the idea that a social system exists, not in social facts, but in the representation systems of its members (Stewart 2013: 419).

For Barth (1976: 15) ethnicity is defined as the social organization of cultural difference. But However, it is not the cultural contents of identity that define ethnicity,

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but rather the strategic interaction that employs a cultural repertoire in a selective way, maintaining or reconfiguring collective boundaries. Borders unite because they separate, in the manner of Simmel; they are a bridge and a door. With this formal framework, it is not intended to answer the question of what is the ethnic fact or the nature of ethnicity but rather to discover the ethnic fact with its interpretive biases. For Barth, the ethnic group is a set of individuals who claim common historical, linguistic, and cultural origins defined by the actors themselves. Thus, it is not necessary to study the ethnic group from the point of view of cultural diversity, but from the point of view of the practical and symbolic dynamics that such groups produce in order to establish the boundaries between themselves and others (Fabietti 1995).

It is very significant that Barth studied the Tattare, a Norwegian itinerant group, before writing *The Ethnic Groups and their Boundaries*. The contribution of Barth is to inaugurate the change of focus: since there is a project to be done, human groups recognize their differences, that is, they do not recognize themselves as others because they are different, but because they have their own political project. Between the common elements and the differential elements, one or the other is emphasized in the function of the historical conjunctures which in turn will depend on the projects: sometimes it consists in emphasizing the difference, from inside or outside (e.g., ghettos,..). Therefore, ethnic boundaries obey more to projects than to real differences. The fact that people share similar experiences or occupations, gender or skin color, does not make them a community. It requires a shared sense of ideological or cultural belonging; or a sense of common project. So, communities of any kind are never natural, but built and their existence requires work. And moreover, like everything, they are contingent, malleable, and often unstable.

Usually, it is considered that the feelings of ethnic belonging of the individuals indicate that the ethnic group exists: the people who share a language, a history, a set of cultural practices, and who possess a shared memory of these elements (Fabietti, 1995). The instrumentalist character of identity, according to Pujadas (1993), is another dimension that refers not so much to a being that shares different traits that would be sought in history, geography, culture or kinship, but rather to social representation through the subjects define their own identities and think what they are because they supposedly share some features. The diacritical features that are meant to symbolize cultural differences are those perceived as the most distant from those traits they share with other groups. The independent variable in the collective analysis are not the diacritic features such as baggage or cultural heritage, but the existence of shared interests and the existence of a collective project which is held in common, grievances or historical claims. The interests and collective projects enjoy high consensus as part of the process of the construction of reality, which finally leads to these features being shared. Therefore, reality conforms to the representation of what is said about it. In other words, it is the self-fulfilling prophecy of Williams I. Thomas: the definitions of reality are true, at least in their consequences.

In the case of Romani studies, the romology (Piasere 2006: 75) exists; and the theoretical, philosophical, and epistemological problems posed by the Roma invite to comparison. From the outside, coherence is put in danger within the communities; from the inside, the visions are partial, and a typical-ideal Roma is built (the vulgarizations

of Clébert or Bloch). The authors do not agree and the Roma do not agree either. What has been said so far raises the consideration of Roma from “styles” of culture revealed in very comprehensive ethnographies (Piasere 1985; Williams 1984; Stewart 1997); of cultural creativity that dialogues with anthropology, sociology and philosophy (see Williams 1996); of consideration of populations, some marginal, others with greater balance with respect to the global society (Piasere 2011; Fraser 2005); and also of the discovery of the internal critic (Leblon 1992) and of the agents of history: Roma actors are creators of their own history, they build societies with history and have the capacity to make changes (Lagunas 2014a).

Williams's works, as well as Okely (1983), Piasere (1985) and Stewart (1997), express the centripetal tendency, as opposed to the centrifugal tendency (the paradigm of the peripatetic groups) within the Roma studies and they all frequently deal with the theme of identity and its reproduction. They privilege the concentration in a singular community and the analysis of its practices and concepts, underlining the articulation between the ideologically-highly creative construction of the local community and the conditions of existence, resulting in mutable social structures. The resulting identity is relational, not substantial, with a flexible ethnic taxonomy (Piasere) and a modulated personal identity (Williams). The resulting coherence between economic practice and the construction of the world (Piasere, Williams, Okely) is subject to analysis, as well as, in other cases, the relationship between conditions of existence and the ideology of the community (Stewart) (Piasere 1999: 50-51).

Methodologically, the study of the Roma is a part of the need to develop strong ethnographies based on methodological interactionism. Local units, networks of families and “groups” are not the victims, but adapt to the more global contexts of society thanks to the work they perform within the power relations that are established with the State and the market. It is important to emphasize that it is in social and historical contexts where the historical results of confrontation, conflicts, social changes and inertia responses to the emergence of difference; and the play of influences – more or less balanced – are usually constructed between the Roma and their surroundings. The comparison starts from this observation. From this perspective, the Roma system – without referring to an essentialism – raised by Williams (1984) and Piasere (1985, 2011), emerges at two levels: a) the cultural reproduction in Roma terms is social, fluid and elastic; and refers to historical conditions; b) the representation and constant staging, the symbolic and real devices that form the whole of our knowledge and the historical permanence; or, how the countries with the presence of the Roma treasuring something of their own. This second dimension refers to the construction of the social organization that is carried out with respect to other Roma and Gaje that live in the same place, which reflects the type of permanent reformulation, not in isolation, but in relation to the global society that puts into practice each community.

Analysing how the community is built as a singular social object is a dynamic and changing process over the years. Piasere (2016) affirms that Roma communities are born, develop and also die in this permanent reformulation. The principle of Roma articulation between cultural reproduction, economic reproduction and the opposition Roma /

Gaje has been acquiring the form of a modulated anthropological system and variable in relation to the historical destiny and the political situation of each group (Williams 2011: 19). But however, the problem persists, that is, the mental impossibility of understanding the opposition between the social definition of the Roma and the appreciation of the interiority of this civilization.

Matras (2013) indicates that the Roma are a social group difficult to conceptualize realistically, and the debate continues about whether the Roma constitute an ethnic minority or a diverse set of populations that share cultural styles. Matras (Friedman & Friedman 2015) states that, although not all European nations and peoples show the same symmetric set of identifiers, flexible definitions are necessary, underlining the existence of important markers of ethnicity, such as the Romani language. Piasere (2011) points out that the Roma constitute a polythetic cultural category, with an air of family, whose history shows quasi-regularities: immersion / dispersion, Roma system, network of families, cultural engineering and the art of exploiting imperfections. So, “Roma” is an external term, a construct difficult to define, with a vague and imprecise meaning based on linguistic, geographical, or historical criteria; and it is the socio-political context that determines whether it is possible to refer to an ethnic group or a social class (Piasere 1995). Stewart (1995, 2013) points out that Barth posits a transactionalist connotation of social organization as a result of a process, not a structure, whose limit is its own conception of ethnic group. This conception presents two problems: the global political economy is blurred in the face of the claim that forming an ethnic group is a value in itself; and it uses a single label to indicate different types of identity. Likewise, Stewart (2010: 5–7) is sceptical and argues that, despite the popularity of concepts such as “ethnicity” or “ethnic relations”, its application adds nothing to social analysis. In the same volume, Durst (2010: 13–14) considers that ethnicity cannot be conceived as a cultural mechanism, as an ethnic group sharing the same culture (as Barth), but as a relational variable being the result, not only of the interrelation of diverse variables and factors (social status, cultural practices), but more concretely of the social context that defines the implantation of the ethnic groups.

The case of Spain is very interesting – just to mention the fact that one of the most repeated phrases among the various Gitano groups is that “the others are not true Gitanos”, referring to those from other neighborhoods, cities or towns with whom they do not maintain networks of interaction. The question then is: does a Gitano society exist?; or alternatively: does an Iberian Gitano society exist? Gay y Blasco (1999) emphasizes the metonymic bonds between the individual and society when in her ethnography she asks the Gitanos of Madrid: “Who are Gitano?”; and they respond in unison: “Gitano is me!”, in the idea of a type of Gitano identity that is performative. Common descent, common history, and common homeland are core elements of the ethnicity (Green, 2006), but extremely changing and malleable.

Having exposed all of the above, my attempt is, instead of deepening the debate about whether the Roma are an ethnic group or not, or if they are a group (Brubaker style), to focus on a particular community around the idea of “lived identity”, the memories of life that are subjectively constructed and are objectified in a cultural identity through sociability (Terradas 2004: 63). This cultural identity is opposed, therefore,

to the legal-political identification, which is typical of mass psychology, is militant and politicizes history, language and differences; and that is also characterized by being explicit and static, a type of lifeless and limiting classification for cultural evolution. The consequences are dehumanization, exclusion, and alienation. The patriotic feeling, the stigmatization of the other or the national identity document would be examples of this legal-political identification.

Cultural identity is not in a pure state and without interference. This cultural identity is implicit, in the sense of a spirit and feeling; and coincides with the idea of the idiomatic attitude, this habitus of being Roma, as Williams mentions (1996). Of course, it is dynamic because it changes with life, customs and the memories of the past; and it is creative since it encompasses the continuous search for solutions to problems. The consequences are the exchange, the social meeting and, in general, the fluidity of life, as in the case of the Mexican Calós that I am going to analyze.

## **Two countries, three Caló communities**

Ethnography is essential to providing first-hand knowledge and escaping from uncritical generalizations. Malinowski was already in charge of warning that reality is deeper than philosophical thought and vaster than the method could encompass. Therefore, it should be prudent to work in which there is an excess of abstract concepts instead of precise descriptions. A good monograph should not show epistemological differences with respect to the different monographs, not differing with the previous ethnographies. In other words, the best guarantee of a good ethnography is its reiteration and objectivity against any pamphlet approach (Lagunas 2018). In fact, Piasere (1996) warned more than two decades ago that the lack of direct experience and the miserable experience itself had generated thousands of pages in numerous studies on Roma of dubious quality; and how knowledge based on repetition had been built: most scholars did not do research, but they thought they knew everything about the Roma.

Starting from the idea of Roma “presence”, in a philosophical sense, and the notions of being in the world, being present in history through culture (de Martino, 1977), I would like to expose some key questions based on ethnography – in construction – with the Spanish Gitanos (Calós) of Mexico City (Lagunas, 2014b, 2017a, 2017b), which follows a line of continuity with the ethnographies made with other Gitano communities: the Catalan Calós of Mataró (Lagunas 2005) and the Andalusian Calós (*caseros*) of La Mina (Lagunas 2010). These ethnographies, in fact, have not ended since the ethnographic experience has been a type of commitment throughout life (Piasere 1999: 83) and also in the personal sphere (Budilová & Jakoubek 2009).

This choice, on the other hand, arises from the premise that to build the ethnography of the Roma, as Williams (1994) warns, we must make tabula rasa with each local community; and, consequently, be critics regarding generalizations and extrapolations with respect to other Roma groups. I think that, in a transcendental way, the study of these Gitano communities in diverse historical, geographic, political, and socioeconomic contexts is a prototype for the theoretical development of both methodological and theoretical problems, as well as extra-disciplinary ones that are related.

The question and axis of this investigation is to try to translate those possible elements of the Caló universe with the intention of producing a coherent representation and thus make the Calós interesting and intelligible. This choice is determined by the type of cultural creativity of these groups and if that creativity is able to dialogue with ethnographies. I am interested in emphasizing the difference and originality of the cultural reproduction of the Mexican Calós in relation to a series of aspects, which also appear in other ethnographies about the Roma. And in a significative way these are dimensions linked to the notion of modernity and cultural creativity that dialogue with anthropology.

To address this issue, I must make a brief mention of the two previous ethnographies that I made with the Calós in Catalonia. In the first place, the ethnography with the Catalan Calós of Mataró in a “time” – from 1994 to 1998 – and their “times” – their routines and daily rituals at the bar, the market, playing cards or dominoes, at weddings or funerals. These were the immediate and close relationships that, since Morgan’s time, anthropology has maintained with the local populations. Methodologically, the ethnography about the Catalan Calós tried attempted to respond to the problem of creativity, that is, to speak of a known thing that does not give any surprise for its universality and standarization: they are middle class Gitanos, with peaceful relations to their environments and inhabiting the city center. With them, I tried to introduce a productive and at the same time challenging topic: how to introduce the notion of modernity in studies about Gitanos. The opinions I presented in the ethnography with the Catalan Calós, who called themselves *Gitanos modernos*, were very different from those expressed in previous ethnographies about Gitanos in Spain, in which Gitano groups do not see themselves as particularly “modern”; although similar motifs can be found in these ethnographies, paradoxically in relation to the problematic conceptualization of how Gitanos are located in non-Gitano (modern?) society. The self-designation of “modern Gypsies” interested me as Gitano speech (emic model), since the theoretical question about whether they are really more integrated in modernity with respect to other Roma groups (ethical model) or their aptitude for receiving and resignifying the new is more or less significant with respect to these other groups. But it presents an added problem: did it mean that the Calós had committed to modernity in more radical ways than other Gitano groups? Could only interest modernity as a speech of the Calós? Is modernity a scientific, social category or an auto-ascribed identity?

The Calós, in fact, exhibited two different styles or labels to reject an essentialist conception of Gipsyness (*Gitaneidad*). They trafficked explicitly, sometimes boisterously, with popular stereotypes (e.g. musical tastes like Cuban salsa and rumba) with the purpose of showing that they were not in fact Gitanos. In fact, on one occasion, one of the men of respect (*tío*) among the Calós pointed out that they should be called “Catalan descendants of Gitanos”. This catalanity questioned the projections and topics of the academic world regarding the Gitanos and Roma as stateless, without territory, without nation or without religion.

The Calós, affirming and exhibiting preferences marked culturally by others, such as Catalan rumba music, seemed to point out intercultural affinities. At other times, they were careful not to raise their voice too much in situations of contact with Payos,

showing that they were ordinary people, as a rhetorical way of diminishing their Gipsy-ness. For example, when women were going to sell clothes for the town they hid their Gitano origin to avoid ethnic discrimination and the failure of a possible sale. This responds to the idea of negative ethnic identity. The underlying idea is that the meaning of culture and its negotiation with the outside is produced situationally and incarnated in conventional distinctions and categories, not static or uniform.

The Calós of Mataró and other Gitano communities of Barcelona were the musical stars invited at to the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, an eloquent reference of modernity. The most authentic, the spirit of Barcelona shown to the world, had been incarnated in the Catalan Calós as the representatives of a genuine musical style: the Catalan rumba. The national and state political power used the aesthetics and music of the Calós, fetishized and commercialized through television and other mass media, to spectacularize the culture of the Gitanos, converted into a national culture; and, at the same time, reaffirm and culminate the incorporation of Barcelona and Spain in modernity. All of this, in short, indicated that the Catalan Calós were culturally creative and alternated different criteria in their social relationships to better deal with social complexities. Therefore, they did not dialogue with what they expected, but their system came into relation with a system as complex as the non-Roma expressing their freedom of choice.

The second ethnography developed intermittently throughout the 1990s is another paradigmatic example of the multiple modernities that surround the life of the Gitanos. The Andalusian Calós, who liked to define themselves as *caseros* (“from home”, as opposed to the itinerant Gitanos in Andalusia – *canasteros*), were installed in Catalonia from the 1950s and 1960s of the last century. They had to face a situation of urban segregation in the neighborhood of La Mina, on the border with Barcelona, operated by the political power of late-Franquism (1970-1974). The neighborhood was built to relocate families from the slums of Barcelona, including a non-Gitano proletarian majority and lumpenproletariat. The Andalusian Calós were located in a racialized social space, excluded and segregated resulting from the economic imbalance and differential access to the housing market that seriously affected the shantytown (*barraquistas*) groups in the Barcelona metropolitan area at the end of the 1960s. He inscribed in a wider reality of heterotopic and plural nature, the imagined Barcelona, which had generated its silenced counter-places like La Mina. The construction of the other by the popular imagination and the political elites led to the stigmatization of the residents of La Mina.

However, the social segregation operated did not lead to self-destruction and it did not entail a confinement of the Gitanos, but rather a social and cultural reconstruction. For example, the Andalusian Calós organized a Cante Flamenco Competition every year in the neighborhood, promoting cultural exchange at the metropolitan level and linking the neighborhood to state and global artistic networks. This granted a status of cultural space to the neighborhood. For a time, the Competition was part of the programming of the Grec Festival of Barcelona, a prestigious annual cultural and artistic event. The Grec represented the diversity of the city of Barcelona and the metropolitan area through the arts, a multicultural identity policy aimed at creating representative spaces for ethnic and

traditional minorities around a modern center centre that was celebrated and cultivated, the Great Barcelona, the ultimate object of celebration and worship. Over the years, the Grec had been highly attractive to the urban middle class when it came to represent the city as part of a project that imbricated geography, culture and the arts. The Grec was a form of production of the city staging urban cultural performances. So, the culture, mobilized from a political, economic and cultural center as Barcelona, was read as a disciplinary power mechanism, not only from the municipal sphere, but also from the autonomic and state power. In contrast, when viewed from the side of the Andalusian Calós, it was perceived as an alternative arena of resistance and activism, as a cultural production that represented the distinction of the Andalusian Calós; and as a politics of identity that reinforced the heritage of the flamenco tradition as a counter-discourse of resistance against the domination of the majority society. Indeed, through flamenco singing and dancing, a key space could be observed in which inclusion and exclusion in the Spanish State was were produced and disseminated.

In this way, in the last two decades, the Andalusian Calós carried out a process of ethnogenesis, through which they essentialized a series of cultural symbols, such as flamenco, craftsmanship and gastronomy - vague symbols in their definition, but enormously flexible and adaptable to their interests -, which ended up emerging as incontestable and genuine facts. The recreation of a mythical history of flamenco that gave meaning to its migration, the management of identity as Gitanos in a more cosmopolitan urban environment, and historical consciousness were built with the association, the Centro Cultural Gitano (“the oldest Gitano association in Spain”, they said), exercising as a cultural broker. The representation of a Gitano-Andalusian culture, reified in intercultural transactions such as the Flamenco Competition and involved in a self-conscious invention of the history and culture of the Gitanos, was the expression of a hegemonic and resistant form of nostalgia, which recreated a strong, distinctive, self-attributed regional identity and its use for specific purposes. In short, the Andalusian Calós developed this set of strategies both in discursive spaces and in the practices that made them effective, balancing their commitment to history and open possibilities, as well as their commitment to modernity, but in different ways and at the same time common with the Catalan Calós.

And furthermore, already entering fully into the present ethnography, since 2010 and intermittently I have worked in the field with a community of Calós of Spanish origin in Mexico City, who live in a quiet area (like the Catalan Calós) near to the historic center and known as the “Zona Rosa”, a residential area of the upper-middle class with an intense offer of entertainment, nightlife, as well as commercial and financial services.

It should be noted that the image of the Calós in Mexico is not as clear as that of other Roma groups (Rom, Ludar) that have circulated around the country with a greater degree of visibility. The phenomenon of migration to Mexico has suffered some invisibility, and the Calós are actually a drop in a sea of immigrants from other countries; their participation in history has been eclipsed. Much more visible has been, for example, the immigration of Republican exiles to Mexico after the Spanish Civil War and the social relevance of their contribution to recent history. This historical forgetfulness of the Calós, and of the Roma in general, is also explained by the projection of a stigmatized image.



The popular image of the Roma is a mythical image of the traditional and of great inheritances of the past, as well as of a nomadic tradition.

Seeing how effective this image is a double-sided coin. On the one hand, it means analyze what the present of the Calós means outside the distorted image of what the Roma are. This implies questioning the thinking about the way of seeing the reality of the Calós, as if it were a tradition, an archaism, and a hindrance for material and social progress. Their perception of the world, respect for the past is different: and the attempt to incorporate new elements is an important dimension of the Calós's universe. In the ethnography emerges not a paralytic, rheumatic or immobile world, but a world of articulation, of one group with respect to another and of extreme flexibility. Although the Calós possess community schemes that operate as bumpers and limit individual freedom, alchemy is achieved through a combination of traditionalism and individualism. Among the Calós, individualistic thinking, but also the strengthening of their traditions, penetrates in their hierarchical forms and their ways of thinking. So, the Calós welcome the variety, the trajectory of time and their perspectives of the future from the point of view of cultural creativity.

## **The Calós from Mexico City**

The idea of a transatlantic culture of Paul Gilroy, who refers to a black Atlantic culture, which is not African, British, American or Caribbean, but a mixture of all of them that transcends ethnicity and nationality, is an interesting heuristic concept. But however, beyond its scope and generalization, I am interested in highlighting the singularity of the presence of the Calós in Mexico City and its overlap with a type of appropriation of the discourse of modernity.

The form and physiology of this transnational community are reticular and flexible, following the logic of an informal transnational network (Vanderlick, 2004: 56) thus creating a transnational, reticular, and flexible migratory community (*ibid.*, p. 57). In this way, the Calós of Mexico City form a non-closed community, produced by transnational migration processes that have left a composition of family networks (Tauber, 2008: 156) in permanent construction and permeabilizing the entire social structure of such society. For the past four decades, the family and friendship networks in the community are built and reformulated permanently through a continuum of migration patterns that range from a few months in the country and the subsequent return to Spain, to a more stable pattern of residence since four decades ago.

The global and local currencies of the overlapping Gitanos are an open field for comparison. And the analysis is enriched when we situate ourselves in the intricate dilemmas created by the intersection of different criteria of belonging and identity, discourses, and social practices of strategic importance that represent a way for the insertion of the Gitanos in modernity. Because the societies, the powers, the subjects, construct diverse notions of modernity when describing their identities, the notion of modernity should be conceptualized as part of a language game, according to Wittgenstein, instead of an objective reality, since that functions as a general concept (as an image) that conditions the explanation of reality, once the common aspects of these phenomena are selected

(societies, powers, subjects).

In the case of the Calós, this commitment to modernity began when arrived – as they explain – the first Calós to America and carried out the first prospections. They were three men who came from the Canary Islands to Brazil and Mexico and formed the nucleus of origin that later cemented the success of the migration.

*Tío* Eulogio, one of the elderly people in the community, points out:

In 1958 three men arrived. The men travelled alone from the Canary Islands. Life is easier in the Canary Islands than in Castilla or Madrid. It is not cold. They arrived in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, which was New York. Spain was ‘a corral of cows’ with Franco. There was police repression. They bothered you. The Guardia Civil and the secret police. Spain was a country of uncivilized people, innocent of the police. The commissar accused you without evidence: “You stole a car from here”. And based on blows. Neither judges, nor judgments. The judicial system was prepared for repression.

The Calós prefer to call themselves “American Calós”. They usually add the “American” geographic identifier to underscore its rooting in the American continent as a sign of progress and modernity. However, as Piasere (2011, 2016) says, this is the consequence of the interrelationships and the type of relationships that are established with the non-Roma, in this case, the Mexican Payos. The structural flexibility of the community creates a new ethnic category, and the group changed the ethnic taxonomy by which it is recognized over the course of two generations, since the 1950’s. Although the relations with its neighbours are few, they affirm their cultural identity, not in political terms abroad, but in their daily work. So, they are self-represented in terms of cosmopolitanism and superior economic status against the provincialism of the Spanish Calós and Payos:

In the 60’s, we went to Argentina and Peru. I returned in 1979, and I saw Spain a little backward, although the Gitanos had a good standard of living, more than before. I went to Gerona, and I had to adapt with very closed people. They were amazed, and we were spreading our progress in Catalonia, Madrid ... Barcelona and Madrid are more cosmopolitan and open people. The American Gitanos have another culture. We are different. We live well. In Spain, there are Neanderthals, Payos and Gitanos (*tío* Manolo)

In the ethnography on the Catalan Calós, I had tried attempted to show how they represented themselves as modern Gypsies, self-ascribed to modernity. The discourse on modernity is not an exclusive feature of the Catalan Calós, since among the Calós of Mexico City a similar discourse appears close to the notions of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism (Hannerz 1998: 166 ff; Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013), which constitutes an improved way of distinction with respect to cultural others.

This historical awareness supports the contrast with the country of origin, Spain, to which is added a different concept of democracy from the arrival to Mexico:

In '78, they arrived. Mexico is the country of freedom, the expression of the word. Nobody bothers you. In Spain, there is a problem of mentality. I was born in Madrid. As the official tells me that 'you cannot do the procedure'; they always ask you for something, a paper ... Not here. 'Well, if you do not have this document, make a photocopy of your passport'. Mexicans seek a solution. Nobody bothers. Mexico is the only democratic country. In Latin America, not all countries are democratic, but they do not practice it (tío Luis).

*Tío Venardi*, also, expresses himself vehemently when referring to the freedom they find in Mexico: "¡Viva Mexico! Here you settle with the police. In Mexico, they do not humiliate you, and they help you". It is not strange this constant reference to the repression in Franco's Spain (San Román, 1994), which recapitulates the migrations of Gitanos to the Americas, spontaneous or forced, occurred since the sixteenth century and resisting the systems of control and coercion imposed by the Spanish power over the Gitanos (Lignier 2012: 12–3).

Migrations based on inputs / outputs, returns or pendular movements reflect the reproduction mechanisms of the group, delineating very complex cartographies that relate to time and space – always in motion – of the Calós that contradict the homogeneity and the legal-political identification that the Mexican and Spanish states promote. The acceptability of the Gitanos in Mexican society is achieved despite the discrimination. They are tolerated, on the margin, but accepted through the compromises between the outside, the external devices and their way of presenting themselves to the outside; and the inside, the cultural and economic reproduction in its interior. Playing with this acceptability means that there is complementarity. And the Calós play with moral acceptability in the economic activities focused on street vending, presenting themselves to their potential clients as Spaniards and hiding, at the same time, their identity as Gitanos. This form of presentation constitutes a social classification that they use as a persuasive method to sell their merchandise. By presenting themselves as Spaniards to their clients, the expectation of risk in the commercial transaction is neutralized through the play and manipulation of the symbolic codes in relation to legal-political identification: a positive self-identification is made, in a way that the Calós hide their identity as Gitanos (negative identification) and present themselves to the client as Spaniards (positive identification).

This is part of the social poetics in which the game of distance and staging towards an outside is a Roma political, anthropological and historical construction based on symbolic devices. What distinguishes the Calós is the product of the type of exchange, social conjunctures and historical contingencies that provide the acceptability in the Mexican territory. Therefore, the strategy of invisibility starts from the following premise: when a difference breaks the panorama of the accepted difference (visibility), invisibility turns out to be the most prudent and successful strategy. This system of mental representation of the Mexican Calós is recreated and circulates among those represented. Unlike Andalusian and Catalan Gitanos does not result in a political identification that generates actions, positive or negative. That is to say, in the current conjuncture, that the Calós are

not interested in politicking or becoming visible as a group of interest in front the State, as in Spain.

One of the dimension of the lived identity that I would like to underline among the Mexican Calós are kinship relations on the one hand, which include consanguinity, affinity and filiation; and on the other, the community identity of residence, the place where one lives, and family networks in a more permanent way, unlike others whose transnational movement is intense. This social network is the core (Piasere 2016) of the family network of the first Calós that arrived in the 1970s, including some family that had accumulated economic capital and destabilizing the community ideology of equality (cf. Piasere 2011). Around this nucleus, we will find exchange, solidarity, and neighbourhood, as well as the first circle of conflicts. The ideology of equality, coupled with a principle of non-interference, builds a society of egos of a bilateral nature. The local community is characterized by the importance of men of respect (*tíos*), who concentrate prestige and authority because of their age and their role as men of peace (Piasere, 1991: 43-50). The community is organized as a society of egos, androcentric, in a structure of fluid relations, in which decisions are non-collegiate, even if they are tacit. In short, this ideology of equality is articulated with a principle of authority based on the categories of age and gender, in a society structured by the bonds of kinship, affinity, and friendship. Communalism is added, the identity that confers the place of residence, which implies that the point of reference is more or less constant. The fact of living in a community in Mexico City and friendship relations makes everyone a little related to each other, not being related in a strict genealogical sense. This identity of locality is based on the idea of co-residence and co-existence. The fluctuating and concrete frequency of coincidence and the sense of community feeds the desire “to be” and “do things” together. Individuals and families are fluidly associated creating a general unit – the only social association rule – that builds the Caló society.

The Calós often repeat a key phrase: ‘the land of the Gypsy is the land that gives him food.’ Piasere (1991: 138) records a similar expression among the Italian Roma and translates it as a way of expressing two fundamental intentions of the Roma: survive as a *Manuša*, as human beings, but live as Roma. The practice of the material life of the Roma groups, from the occupations to the modality of their presence in the territory, is the result of elections and valuations articulated with the conjuncture, unfolding in a creative way (Piasere 1999: 21–35). The main occupation among the Calós is street vending, a non-salaried job. A minority of them are engaged to managing their own businesses (dry cleaners, bar, etc.); others are flamenco artists and others are dedicated to the rental of properties real estate properties. Most are dedicated to selling leather jackets (*chamaras*), which can be complemented with perfumes. The sales strategy of the Calós is to offer the customer a set of products (*lote*) for a total price. To do this, they go to private homes, markets, public, and government buildings, businesses or small and medium businesses, and move in vehicles to various areas of Mexico City, its metropolitan area and the rest of the country. The trade of jackets is important for the Calós, since it is a product that generates profits quickly since the price that the buyer is willing to pay is very uncertain (very high or very low) and is based on the skills of interaction of the seller and performance (see Okely 1983: 58).

Cultural regularities make up a very fluid system in its transnational dimension. Among the Calós, the memory of the land of origin is constantly invoked in the conversations of free time: “Spain until I die! I am a Spanish Gitano! For us, the most important places are those of Spain. And the order and respect, be at home, of your family” (*tío Falero*). The feeling of nostalgia for the land is very marked. The memory, the image and the myth of the homeland of origin are also a diasporic dimension, as are transnational social networks and the awareness of discrimination as Gitanos.

The current separation between Mexican society and the Caló community is revealed in the preservation of linguistic, economic, social, and cultural borders that protect the intimate space of social relationship (Barth 1976). The zone of residence of the Zona Rosa in which the family and social networks are reproduced is, on the one hand, a space of relative separation, since the Calós do not live apart from their Payo neighbors, but live in a situation of immersion (Williams 1994), at a good distance. On the other hand, space is reticular in the sense that it constitutes an assembly of a transnational social space in which the community social networks are articulated with the family nodes of Spain, also in Argentina. The bonds of transnational friendship and kinship are not eroded, but are a key element in the reproduction of social life in the transnational social space. This maintains the sense of community in a situation of dispersion at a planetary level with the support of the power of the media (Piasere 2012: 49–50) and in general of technology: the telephone (WhatsApp), Skype and Internet (Facebook). And, moreover, through a mesh of kinship networks, fluid and flexible, a mesh of friendship relations is superimposed.

The identity is constantly reformulated and is built mainly through the practices of the place. And it is the space, as a place, where relationships are established. This refers to Lefebvre (1976) and his idea of urban space as a meeting place, a potentiality. A privileged area that emerges in ethnography is the co-presence of the Calós in the physical and symbolic spaces in the Juárez neighborhood of the city. It is the space of proximity where Calós men and women meet on the street, in the square, in the cafeteria, in the bar or in the restaurant. In these interactions, you can hear stories and narrations from the past and the present, a vivid memory of the life of the Calós in the Payo universe of years ago, of the previous week, of yesterday or of the morning of the current day, so that the past and the present merge in a continuous event, a “today” (Tauber 2008: 165). These interactions also function as an informal information chain through devices that link people through words and trust. It does not matter what happened in that place or at that time, but the use that is made of it when organizing the memory structures in a meaningful story. In fact, one of the favorite pastimes of this collective remembrance is to narrate the misunderstandings in their interrelation with the Payos or ridiculing the absurd behavior of the Payos (*ibid.*: 157). This memory, like everyday customs and routines, has a high symbolic value.

And, moreover, it is in everyday life that cultural consensus is built in consonance with social consensus, so that social practices recreate the cultural ethos. The latter has in its conceptual nucleus the idea of sociality, both in relation to kinship relations and in relation to the values of respect towards the group and the deceased ancestors. And, of course, the rejection of Payo, equated to otherness in terms of Barth: the opposition between subjects of different nature and incompatible.

These interrelationships in the urban space of proximity are also connected with what Kaprow (1994) pointed out about the Gitanos of Zaragoza. These seemed to manifest an escape from the structure, like a *communitas*, a continuous process embedded in everyday activities (daily fights, games of chance, etc.) without social complications. The guideline was the effervescence, the impetus and the vigor, the meeting in the square, the vivacity, the joy of living and the intensification of everything. Indeed, these daily rituals of social encounter of the Calós are symbolic, as special acts that lead people in their daily occupations and purposes to a special way of being and feeling together with others: having breakfast together in the cafeteria, going to sell, play dominoes at the bar, chat in the square, dine at the McDonald's fast food restaurant, etc. These routines are not one-dimensional or symbolic, but are symbolic actions that have multiple meanings (Houseman 1994) and fulfill several functions, including the legitimization of order and the status quo that guides behavior, ideologically expressing values and ideas that restore the balance and channel highly emotional experiences among the Calós.

More deeply, I think that one of the most specifically singular dimensions of cultural identity among the Calós consists in the articulation of elements of their social rhythms (playful, economic, etc.). This social rhythmicity is connected to endogenous rhythms common to human populations and which Mauss had warned among Eskimos, similar to how biologists identify endogenous (circadian) rhythms among living organisms. These rhythms respond to an internal need for oscillation of society (Carbonell 2008: 31; Terradas 1997) and build a taste for social life, this being a key aspect of the cultivation of social consensus among the Calós. And, moreover, the daily activity cycle has a culminating moment: the nocturnal reunion of families at the MacDonal'd's fast food.

Thus, Mexican Calós have created a society that has been thought very well. The building of their community -and that of other Gitano communities- is not economic but social, since they create and cultivate social relations. In fact, it is not very common to find individuals who are alone, and this individuality can be a voluntary marginalization or imposed by the family or the community.

## **Conclusion**

It is a truism to remember that cultures are hybrid or *mestizas* (Amselle & M'Bokolo 1985), since there are more contact areas than essences so that the interrelationships build fluid and mobile types of a "we", like "to speak Gitano", "Gitano name" or "Gitano feeling". Of course, the richest culture is the one with the most options, and in fact border cultures will be the richest. Barth's idea is that identity is not static; it is a process based on strategies that emphasize difference and commonality. In the manner of Ferdinand de Saussure and Durkheim, it finds a parallelism in linguistics: the sign exists in terms of its relationship with others, such as a society of signs and a society of relationships. Moved to the identity, Barth would affirm that "a Gitano is one who is not Payo" and "a Payo is one who is not a Gitano" so that the self-ascription and the ascription projected by others is the foundation of the contrast. Just like Goffman would say that what exists is the symbolic interaction: there is interaction of symbols between the subjects, and that produces the existence and the social community; there is no more. Barth proposed an

emphasis on maintenance of ethnic boundaries through social interaction, rather than on the objective or essential features of particular cultures or societies and, often, the use of terms like group, category or boundary connote an actual entity; and Barth's concern with maintenance tends to reify it all the more (Cohen 1978; Rack, 2005: 15–6).

We could ask ourselves if the limit in identity has a territorial character. If a positive answer is given to the question, we come to the initial idea that the globalization, which is a form of deterritorialization, leads to the end of the identity (and the community) or threatens to do so seriously. This idea leads us to an ecological approach: identity emanates from the territory defended by ethnic groups that see their cultural identity threatened by globalization. The fading of the boundaries would cause a kind of cultural schizophrenia, a loss of the boundaries of the ethnic self, exposed to the transit of infinity of influences and constantly submitted to the pillage and the impudent looks of everyone. It is not the case of the Calós. The sense of place of origin is not lost because of the territory is not only a geographical space, but also a symbolic space of a social and cultural nature.

The Calós ethnography also puts us on alerts about the relevance of the concept of ethnicity if it is not considering its political meaning in origin and avoiding the reification of the groups and cultures involved. Therefore, the approach to this topic must be cautious and prudent before any substantial definition of the ethnic identity. Barth shows that ethnic identity is both imperative and situational, so it is possible to negotiate strategically over definitions of situations, and to choose the situations one enters into carefully, so that ethnic identity becomes more or less irrelevant (Eriksen 2004: 161). Gitano and Roma's identity – like all identity – is not natural, but social, cultural and historical; it cannot be anything other than invented and constructed (Delgado 1998).

The concept of identity that I have been working on is that of a lived identity, the very life of the Mexican Calós, the love of their time and space; and the respect to their ancestors. This memory of life that is usually expressed implicitly and is connected with the construction of one's own sense and the establishment of its presence in the world. This lived identity comprises a set of elements, such as values, tradition, beliefs, biological self-perpetuation, or feeling of belonging, which are connected to Barth's ethnic identity –but it is not the same– and as an opposition to colonialism, the abuse of power or the repressive State. There are numerous examples of this lived identity, and we find them in traditional or exotic societies, in the Melanesian Kula, the Gisaro among the Kaluli of New Guinea, the generic love of the land or the landscape, even in the invocation of the Gypsy filmmaker Tony Gatlif to the freedom and mobility of the Gypsies.

Barth (1976: 39) refers in the introduction in *The Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* to the Gypsies as marginalized pariahs. Instead, I have tried to connect the Calós cultural identity with the way in which different Calós groups construct different notions of modernity, which represent an improved way for their insertion into different societies. Because the contexts where modernity is enunciated are disparate, the temporal unity that is proposed when the Catalan Calós speak of “being modern”, the Andalusian Calós of “being authentic” or the Mexican Calós refer to what they became, in his American epic, in a group “more advanced” with respect to the Gitanos and the Payos of a backward *fran-*

*quista* state and democratic Spain should not be taken for granted. The real and pragmatic practices, of complex negotiations and crossings borders, much more non-systematic unlike the generative model of Barth, that this community of Gitanos put into play reflects their commitment with history and open possibilities; and above all, its commitment to modernity. But, however, it also represents the evidence of this other compromise between the “inside” and the “outside” that seems to be structural. The Andalusian Calós, the Catalan Calós, and the Mexican Calós must face the same problem: to manage the practical visibility and the internal and external way of presenting themselves as Gitanos. How do they do that? The Andalusian Calós making themselves visible and committing themselves to the social struggle and their cultural and historical rights; the Catalan Calós distinguishing themselves as modern Gitanos; the Mexican Calós presenting themselves as cultured and travelled people, who have seen the world, distinguishing themselves from the rest of Spaniards. These practical visibilities feed the representation of themselves and others in particular negotiation junctures, when different elements of contact and condensation, as Foucault stated, are found.

Finally, I wanted to emphasize that none of this would be possible without the reproduction of the social unit social among the Mexican Calós, which is a potential that is cultivated every day through reciprocal relationships. It is the idea of being together, meeting and re-meeting, the fluctuating frequency of coincidence and recurrence, which also builds cultural identity. And, moreover, it is the sense of community, not an objective reality, that is captured. The desire to be together and do things together – a very vague but applicable idea – build the foundations of Caló society. The great importance of this idea is seen in the relevance of social rhythmicity, which converts everyday routines into symbolic activities of culture and whose active language interprets other activities: underlining the importance of social bonds and encouraging people to perform actions to reinforce the idea of the importance of living in society. This is the culmination of society and the extent to which it is carried out and creates sociability, as Durkheim assets. This highlights the importance of symbolic processes mediated by the cultural context in which they occur: living in society and the existential and experiential recognition of the need to be part of society.

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## Povzetek

Razlogi za obravnavanje problema v smislu ohranitve romskega antropološkega in zgodovinskega sistema niso dejanski, temveč teoretični. V besedilu so analizirane nekatere dimenzije tega sistema v povezavi s kulturno identiteto, idejo, ki je blizu, vendar ni identična pojmu etnične identitete Fredrika F. Bartha. Etnografija Gitanosov iz Mexico Cityja je soočena s prejšnjimi etnografijami in poizvedbami o živeči identiteti. Spomin na življenje Calósov je zgrajen subjektivno in je z družabnostjo objektiviziran v kulturno identiteto, ki nasprotuje pravno-politični identifikaciji. Predmet premisleka sta diskurz o sodobnosti, gospodarskih dejavnostih, družbenih ritmih in praksah kraja ter nadnacionalni in diasporni dimenziji.

Ključne besede: Gitanos, identiteta, kultura, primerjava, Mehika

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