

CHAPTER 1

BECOMING PART OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD



CONFESSIONS OVER A CUP OF COFFEE

My relationship with Bobola,¹ a 63-year-old Gitana who had lived and worked in el Rastro her entire life, started in *el culto*. However, the way we usually met and talked was over a cup of coffee at Bobola's favourite bakery, near her home. More as an exclamation than a question, she would command: '*Tomamos un café!*' ('Let's have a coffee!'). She wanted and perhaps needed to talk about a dispute with her husband or sister, a spiritual dilemma, a financial problem, a health issue or another 'matter of the heart', as she put it. Manuel, Bobola's husband, would likewise invite me to chat by saying '*Tomamos una copa*' ('Let's have a glass of wine'). At times, it felt as though he wanted to check whether I had received the 'messages' of *el culto* in the right way, or in line with his own interpretations. At other times, I wondered if he and Bobola might have been tasked (by the pastor, for instance) with taking care of me. Irrespective of these reflections, Manuel seemed to appreciate that I was a scholar and that we shared many of the same interpretations of the Bible and the pastor's sermons. After our conversations, he would often brag to other Gitanos about the way in which I '*comía la palabra*' ('ate the word'), and I often felt that these boasts would strengthen my social position and acceptance among the *creyentes*. Manuel often disagreed with things the pastor had said the day before, and he found room to air his disagreements with me, an outsider.

In this way, over a cup of coffee or glass of wine, I would discuss with Bobola, Manuel and others matters of *el pueblo Gitano* ('the Gitano people'), including conflicts among elders or pastors; gossip about Gitanos and their families; and matters of marriage, family history, personal finance, morality and health. These reflections typically came to me in the form of utterances such as: 'Oh, Marilena is suffering from depression and hallucinations. She takes too many pills. Once she jumped off a balcony, but thanks to God she survived. She lives under her father's roof, has never had a husband, works only for her father. She works very hard.' Or: 'Oh yes, Concha, that poor woman. She lost her husband three years ago. But she manages quite well. Her daughters support her in everything, and her nephews help her in el Rastro at the market.' Or even: 'Don Felipe, yes, he is a very powerful man, with a lot of respect. He has a big antique shop in el Rastro. His family has had it for three generations. He is a good friend of the pastor and many of the elite people in Madrid.' In some cases, they came as a warning: 'You should not associate with Eduardo. He is a man who has destroyed many marriages. He promises a girl everything in the world, and then, when they have broken off from their husband, he leaves them. He only wants to know you for sex.' Consequently, I would follow their advice, and in the case of Eduardo, I kept my distance.

One time, I met up with Loli for a cup of coffee. We spoke about family, children, love, cooking and Christianity. Our conversation was very smooth, until I started asking her about her work. She suddenly showed great hesitance and asked whether Bobola or Manuel had told me about their own work. I reassured her that this was the case, and she cautiously told me a few things about how she conducted her business – but only things that I was already aware of. This was not the only time I experienced a degree of stonewalling from my interlocutors when the subject of business came up. Talking about matters of the Bible and religion was no problem; in fact, it worked as a communicative bridge between us – in their terms, between *el pueblo Gitano* and *el mundo de los Payos*. Matters of business, on the other hand, met with much more resistance and scepticism. From this, I learned that religiosity worked to not only reinforce the collective of the Gitanos of el Rastro but also to create a bridge with the Payo world, as it provided the legitimate grounds for conversation with Payos. When it came to financial matters, however, I came to realize that the Rastro Gitanos were incredibly protective of the flow of information about their financial strategies, and they did not like to be questioned about them. Thus, I was very careful when pursuing such topics.

BECOMING PART OF GITANO SOCIAL LIFE

La comida, the midday meal, is connected to the emblematic Spanish siesta. Almost daily, Bobola and Manuel would invite me to join them for this meal, and these private dinners generated my most valuable ‘behind the scenes’ or ‘backstage’ empirical material. At these dinner sessions, we would talk about almost anything. I came close to Bobola and Manuel’s family, including their children, nieces and nephews, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, grandparents and a wide range of cousins. In addition to Bobola’s father, and often myself, Bobola and Manuel had at least one extra family member present for *la comida* each day. Often, this was Bobola’s youngest niece, whose mother (Bobola’s sister) struggled to feed her entire family.

For me, Manuel and Bobola’s home served as an entrance to other Gitano homes both in el Rastro and its surroundings *barrios*, and thereby to the social life of the Rastro Gitanos outside the market and *el culto*. During my stay in Madrid, Manuel and Bobola were in fact the only Gitanos to invite me into their home; the way I was able to access other Gitano homes in el Rastro and elsewhere was as *their* guest. Thus, Manuel and Bobola served a critical role in my research as ‘gatekeepers’, perhaps, but more so as gate openers.

Through my visits to several Gitano homes in the centre of Madrid, I gained insight into the ways in which the Gitanos of el Rastro gather for prayer, how families cluster together in specific parts of town, how many people move to smaller apartments in the same *barrio* when living costs become too high, and how family members help each other out – financially, practically and emotionally. I also saw how the Rastro Gitanos prepare for *el culto*. I heard discussions between husbands and wives when negotiating between new shoes for their children or attending that evening’s *culto*. I learned how the Rastro Gitanos avoid payment on the subway in order to afford to bring their entire family to *el culto*. I heard angry couples screaming and quarrelling. I heard young girls practise *las alabanzas* (‘songs of praise’) or dance a few steps of flamenco in honour of the visiting outsider (i.e. myself); usually it was not flamenco song that filled these homes, it was the *alabanzas*. I learned how the Rastro Gitanos nurtured their infants, and I listened to their mothers’ anxieties. I observed how they cared for their elders and how their daughters and sons worried for them and helped and respected them.

Together with the Gitanos of el Rastro, I ate, prayed, held hands, walked children home from school, shopped for groceries, had coffee, laughed, cried, discussed serious and not so serious matters, swam, walked, cooked, showered, did my make-up and dressed for *el culto*. At my last visit to Bobola and Manuel’s house – after having spent almost all of 2013 in Madrid –

they exclaimed: ‘Now you are a Gitana. You are just like us! You even dress like us!’ They laughed and noted with great amusement every time my Gypsiness ‘came out’ and were both happy and pleased with what they saw and heard.

THE ACT OF PRAYING AND THE SPEAKING OF TONGUES

Praying, as practised by the Rastro Gitano *creyentes*, is done either alone or with others. It can follow a liturgical and ritual path, as in *el culto*, or embody more spontaneity – for instance, while sitting on the bus or lying in bed. Furthermore, collective prayer is not only practised in church but also in homes, where several people might gather at one time. These prayer sessions are also called *cultos*. From a Gitano perspective, praying is a way of addressing and making pleas to God. From a theoretical perspective, prayer can also be seen as a social institution, akin to that of language, the family or specific economic practices (Mauss [1909] 2003).

In the literature, speaking in tongues is first and foremost described as a way ritual practitioners address God and only secondly as a way God addresses them (Cabezas 2003a, 2007; Csordas 1990). In the context of el Rastro however, it was explained to me time and again how the speaking in tongues was God’s way of speaking to the *creyentes* through the medium of *el Espíritu Santo*, and also God’s way of addressing the congregation through a particular person ‘touched by the spirit’, who functions as a medium between God and the congregation.

Speaking in tongues is one of the nine ‘gifts of grace’, and it is thought to occur when the *el Espíritu Santo* takes temporary residence of one’s body, referred to in Christian liturgy as ‘baptism in the spirit’. The *creyentes* describe the embodiment of *el Espíritu Santo* as a feeling of ‘fire’ within, as if something is ‘burning’ inside the body, ‘God’s temple’. For the *creyentes*, the fire of *el Espíritu Santo* brings forth a partial loss of bodily, emotional and social control, of which glossolalia is only one expression; other expressions include trembling, shaking and other uncontrolled or semi-controlled movements. I see these expressions as manifestations of a form of ecstatic trance, and in these moments of ecstatic trance, eyes may roll, and all kinds of grimaces may appear across the faces of the *creyentes*.

During my time in el Rastro, I never personally experienced this state, nor did I ever speak in tongues. But I did, over time, increasingly participate in prayer. In *el culto*, prayer could be done in silence or in speech. I was never asked to pray out loud in the collective *culto* sessions, but I was encouraged to verbally contribute to the female-only meetings, which were held once a week in the same church building as the regular sessions. I was

also asked to pray at a private gathering for Bobola's father, in advance of his critical heart surgery. On this occasion, I was terribly nervous about '*levantar mi voz*' ('raising my voice'), as the Gitanos say. The session went as follows:

After some chit-chatting, a period of intense singing and, finally, petitions, it is time for prayer. We all sit on chairs and a sofa that have been arranged in a large circle in Bobola's sister's living room. I sit next to Bobola's father, Tío Carlos, who is the reason why we are all gathering this evening. One at a time, we present our prayers for the old man. Bobola begins, then her elderly aunt, then me, then Tío Carlos, and so on, progressing around the circle. I shake like a leaf, with my heart pounding as I try to gather my thoughts to formulate something sensible, heartfelt and reasonably clear, in more or less correct Spanish, with the highly respected Tío Carlos by my side. We are praying for him, and I feel a deep responsibility to do him justice with my words. The aunt sitting next to me strokes my arm, lovingly. Her husband asks me, '*la hermanica*' ('the little sister'), to say a prayer, and so I do: 'I beg you Father, for Tío Carlos, who is here next to me. I beg you that his surgery will go well, I beg for his health, I also beg for my family and for my husband, I beg for all the people who are gathered here now, for the peace in their homes, for the love, the health ... in the name of Jesus, Amen.'

The other participants respond with a loud 'AMEN!' After the praying session, we all talk for a bit, and the older women smile and invite me to join them for *potaje* ('stew', 'potage') in the upcoming week.

I was not able to really 'think through' how to perform my prayer on that evening; however, to my great surprise, my body appeared to intuitively know how to do it. Hence, I gave in and relied on that part of me that had become 'automated' from all the *culto* sessions I had attended, and it seemed like all of this had helped me embody that which we might call the 'liturgical pattern of a prayer' (e.g. Cabezas 2003a, 2007; Csordas 1990, 1993, 1997). My prayer followed the regular structure, beginning with '*Te ruego padre*' ('I beg you father') and ending with 'Amen!' Furthermore, the prayer began by referencing the concrete occasion for which we were gathered (Tío Carlos) and then moved on to more general matters (health, family, finances, peace), making specific reference to the people present and my own beloved – a more or less typical pattern of prayer. While prayers may of course vary, my own prayer included the most common elements. It also increased in intensity, as is typical. Although not in my particular case, quite

often such prayers also end with an ecstatic state and/or the speaking of tongues. On this and many other occasions on which I was asked to deliver a prayer, I thus gained valuable insight into the Rastro Gitanos' structural, improvisational, spiritual and social aspects of prayer and the act of giving a prayer – that is, the social life of Gitano spirituality and the spirituality of Gitano social life – from the perspective of the Gitanos of el Rastro.

Returning to Tío Carlos, the best surgeons in Madrid had been gathered for his operation. The Gitanos even told me – with great enthusiasm – that one of his surgeons was a Pentecostal. However, equally important, they emphasized, was the intense praying that the entire *pueblo Gitano* was engaging in on his behalf, both in their homes and in church. And Tío Carlos did indeed recover. His surgery went well, and everyone was happy that God had heard the voices of *el pueblo Gitano* and spared the life of this highly respected elder.

BUYING AND SELLING

Although I involved myself heavily in the Rastro Gitanos' social and religious life, there was one arena in which I struggled to 'do as they did', and that was the market. There, I was mostly an overly curious buyer, and they were merchants. I would frequently meet people from the church discussing their clients and the crowds; but they would show little interest in including me in their merchant activities. Frustrating as this was, over time, I more or less accepted my role as an especially involved customer. Several of the *comerciantes* told me that Sunday was their biggest workday; they needed to focus on their clients, and they did not have time to engage with me. So instead of trying to partake in their sales activities, I would speak with them on other days of the week. Also, on the weekdays, I would walk around in el Rastro and casually talk to the antique dealers – both Gitano and non-Gitano.

On some occasions though, I was invited to sit in the back of the *comerciantes'* tents, even on Sundays, while they did their business. Often, several family members would be engaging in the trade, so there would be plenty of people to talk with, even in the back of the market tent. These conversations often revolved around the topic of religiosity and matters that had been brought up in *el culto* the day prior. I also tried to travel with itinerant traders, but these attempts turned out to be even less successful than my attempts to trade in el Rastro. I found greater success in travelling to the Chinese wholesale complex of Fuenlabrada by myself, the place where the Rastro Gitanos buy their goods. Here, I did as they did; I bought goods at wholesale prices, which gave me valuable knowledge about the transformative process these items go through, from stock to trade.

Although I was not able to do exactly as the *comerciantes*, I certainly learned something from my efforts at the Rastro market, even as a wandering, excessively engaged buyer. I observed the manner in which the *comerciantes* ‘worked’ their objects. Also, having followed the *comerciantes’* goods from the Chinese wholesalers to the market stands in el Rastro, I saw how prices, ‘origin’ and meaning changed along the way, as the *comerciantes* moulded their products according to the signs of sociality that they ‘read’ from their potential buyers. For example, a scarf that a *comerciante* had purchased for 40 cents in Fuenlabrada could be sold in el Rastro for 5 euros by downplaying its ‘origin’ and emphasizing its ‘perfect fit’ with the customer: ‘A beautiful scarf for an even more beautiful lady!’

This ‘meaning making’ process – of connecting objects with customers’ sociality and preferences – differed between the world of antiques and the world of cheap Chinese clothes and accessories: the former resembled a personalized bazaar economy (e.g. Geertz 1978) while the latter tended towards a kind of semi-personalized market economy. Because I was unable to participate in the activities of the *comerciantes* fully, I tried to record as many perspectives as possible within the market sphere. In this way, I was able to collect sufficient data to form a relatively clear picture of the *comerciantes’* practices and their underlying cultural and ideological premises.

THE GREAT DIVISION

During my time in el Rastro, I was always open about my reasons for being there; my research interest in the Rastro Gitano community and their social, economic and ritual practices. In public settings, there would always be people around that were not aware of my intentions; however, all of those involved in the study have been thoroughly informed and anonymized.

With that said, a ritual setting like *el culto* raises certain ethical questions and dilemmas for the anthropologist in field, along several dimensions. One has to do with the question of *authenticity* of converts and devotees, regarding their strong spiritual convictions, conceptions and practices. Upon discussing this with colleagues of mine who do research in Charismatic Christian ritual settings and so-called megachurches, they expressed feelings of disgust and despair because of the way they feel that their interlocutors and friends for many decades are now being ‘tricked’ into these congregations – tricked into giving away all their savings, their dignity and even self-autonomy. Potentially, there are a lot of interesting methodological discussions regarding these underlying feelings of anthropologists, discussions that, in my view, do not really fit the current case. As I elaborate and explain in later chapters, I seldom felt at ease during the cultic séances; however, I never

felt that my Gitano companions were being tricked into anything, neither did I feel that they were losing any of their ‘authenticity’. In fact, I think this latter point, the loss of authenticity, might be one important source of some anthropologists’ unease about, for example, the replacement of old traditions of magic and voodoo with a monotheistic God and the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that new religious practices and ideas bring with them new (or even, at times, enforced) social relations in terms of power, hierarchies, distribution of wealth, gender roles and so on. Our task as anthropologists, however, as difficult as this might be, is to seek to understand these transformations from a non-normative, bottom-up perspective, identifying motivations and consequences amongst a variety of social settings.

Another question in this setting is how we reconcile our scientific view as anthropologists with the religious worldview of the devotees within the ethnographic encounter. Highlighting the role of the ethnographer’s ideological position in the study of cultic revival practices, Cantón-Delgado et al. (2019) discuss the role played by hegemonical mass media and state rationale in creating hostile discourses about non-conventional religious forms. On a further note, they argue that such hegemonical discourses might have consequences for the ethnographic encounter; if the researcher carries the notion of a division between ‘the real’ (rational and scientific) and the ‘illusory’ (religious beliefs and practices), religious subjects might become defensive and distrustful. The anthropologist might of course be as much of a devotee as his or her interlocutors or she might adhere to a different, philosophy, religion or ideology, but the important thing here is the potential mutual mistrust between devotees and the researcher. As Cantón-Delgado et al. write,

Let us not forget ..., the suspicion present in the interpretations we make and, thus, the keys in which we interpret and the texts we write. According to secularized common sense representations, religion – the established ones but, above all, emergent ones – embody a return to irrationality, constitute a threat to our ideal of secularism and democratic freedom, restrain free will and impede individuals from participating in the public sphere or in political life. (ibid.: 457)

Tacitly then, the old debate about the irrationality of religions is still alive, and simultaneously, the role of belief or faith in the constitution of, for instance, arts, politics, culture, economy, science and ideology is often forgotten. In the case of ethnographic research on Romani Pentecostalism more specifically, Cantón-Delgado et al. (2019) further suggest an understanding about the possible tacit, ideological bias affecting the argumentative framework of this research, as resting on prejudice against religion and its political originality and the tendency to politicize academic thought. In this rationale, religion is not only irrational but also useless to the public

sphere. Moreover, in its more ‘fundamentalist’ versions, religion, such as Romani Pentecostalism, advocates political demobilization, or perhaps mobilization but in an undesirable direction. This latter aspect – Gitano Pentecostalism understood as advocating undesired political mobilization – was a view I encountered several times during fieldwork amongst Payos working in Gitano NGOs. I also often witnessed quarrels between Payo and Gitano NGO workers over the potential importance and impact of the Gitano Pentecostal movement for the Gitano population in Spain, the Payo representatives advocating a negative view, the Gitanos – who themselves were devotees – a positive view.

The Gitanos’ own view on the political impact of Gitano Pentecostalism resonates with the increasing ethnographic work on Romani Pentecostalism, representing a consensus about the Pentecostal Romani movement as a unifying force that is promoting an unprecedented ethnic-religious *pan-Romani* – escaping ‘the idea of State by generating, from below, versatile and self-sufficient structures’ (Cantón-Delgado, Toyansk and Jiménez-Roy 2019: 458). This latter view has been thoroughly ethnographically investigated and documented by Manuela Cantón-Delgado (2003, 2010, 2017, 2018) (see also, e.g., Cantón-Delgado et al. 2020).

Because of all the prejudices against Gitano Pentecostalism in Spain from non-Gitanos, and because of the potentially vulnerable – and defensive – state of mind and body the ritual participants would be in during a ritual séance, from day one of fieldwork, I felt obliged to participate *genuinely* and in a highly open minded and respectful manner in both regular *culto* sessions and more private gatherings such as the one described above. By ‘genuinely’, I mean that I did not attempt to ‘fake’ or ‘boost’ my scientific worldview or my spiritual engagement in the ritual – that is, I did not seek to put on a performance. Nor did I engage in questioning the reality or rationality of their religious experiences with spiritual forces, entities and happenings. Rather, to the point of complete exhaustion, I really tried to put my heart into seeking common ground in discussions with the *creyentes* about a range of topics – moral, spiritual or social – before, during or after the cultic séances.

For example, when the *creyentes* wanted to discuss the difference between the ‘glorious, healing and fulfilling unconditional love of God’ and, in their view, the highly conditioned love between human beings, I could relate to the discussion in terms of my own view and experiences of unconditional love (from my parents, children or my husband, for instance), as compared to other experiences I have had in life that represented more contingent forms of love relations. The *creyentes* similarly juxtaposed the love of God with the love most parents have for their children, so my way of relating to this topic was not really that far-fetched. Often, the Rastro Gitano *creyentes*

used the Bible to talk about daily issues as well as more abstract existential dilemmas, hence as time passed and I came to know their spiritually motivated way of philosophizing, we came to share some really interesting discussions, and it seemed we had no problem finding common ground regarding speculations about the world and the beyond.

I would not say I ever escaped the ‘great division’ (e.g. Latour 1993) of modernity, between science and religion, the real and the illusory, the rational and the spiritual, and so on; nonetheless, as an epistemological response to this tacitly present divide within me, I immersed myself in the task of engaging ethnographically, autoethnographically and phenomenologically with the social, spiritual and metaphysical *significance* of the *creyentes*’ ritual enactments for Gitano sociality, identity and processes of meaning making – something that I hope this book bears testimony to.

From reflections of a methodological kind, I now move on to present the analytical tools and strategies I apply in this research as well as my ideas about the relationship between ethnography and anthropology.

STRATEGY OF ANALYSIS

I mentioned earlier that this study does not aim at making generalizations about the entire Gitano population in Spain; rather, the conclusions I draw concern 1) the ethnographic particularities of the Gitanos of el Rastro, and 2) the more theoretical assumptions about human ways of creating and managing social life in general. Contrasting *idiographic* and *nomothetic* inquiry, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1952) insisted on drawing an absolute distinction between ethnography and anthropology. Based on this distinction, Tim Ingold (2007) elaborates that anthropology and ethnography are quite different activities: *idiographic* inquiry (ethnography) is the act of documenting the facts of past and present lives; the game of *nomothetic* inquiry (anthropology), on the other hand, is ‘to arrive at general propositions or theoretical statements’ (Ingold 2007: 70). In line with this, he sees the objective of anthropology as ‘to seek a generous, comparative but nevertheless critical understanding of human being and knowing in the one world we all inhabit’ (ibid.: 69). In contrast, the aim of ethnography is ‘to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience’ (ibid.). The two tasks are distinct, yet of equal importance. Drawing on this divide between ethnographic and anthropological endeavours, and taking this divide a step further, I follow four main analytical strategies in this book. It is important here to notice that the order of these four strategies is not linear and causal, but rather, circular, repetitive and explorative.

The first strategy is to *identify* Gitano practices across various social arenas and the main cultural premises underlying those practices – that is, the ways in which various social premises and practices are brought together, related to each other and made mutually constitutive in this context. With ‘cultural premises’, I refer to moral ideas and values, systems of meaning and belief, signs and symbols, and ideological, epistemological, ontological and cosmological ideas and notions (e.g. Larsen 2009). In this regard, the ethnographic material makes a valuable contribution, in itself.

Second, I seek to *anthropologize* my empirical findings – that is, generalize/theorize the identified cultural actions and premises by highlighting their general importance outside the empirical field of the Gitanos of el Rastro and in so doing widen the scope of anthropological knowledge in Roma/Gypsy studies and beyond.

Third, in my ethnographic discussion, I reflect on moments, events, practices and notions that *surprised* me during fieldwork, to bring something ‘new’ into the general anthropological body of knowledge. ‘A discovery must be, by definition, at variance with existing knowledge’, said the Nobel Prize winner in Physiology or Medicine Albert Szent-Györgyi (1972), and Don Kalb (2013) once exclaimed that ‘anthropology should be a tirade against commonsense’. These lines live in me as my personal academic aims and drives. From a social scientific point of view, our ethnographic findings can be understood as the ‘relational cause’ of discourse; therefore, it is necessary for social researchers to look for ‘key relationships’ in their field of study (ibid.). This search for relational causes provides space for researchers to focus on ‘social genesis’ and the reproduction of social life. For Kalb (2013), the ‘key’ – or ‘core relationship’ – within the study context is in fact our ethnographic finding or discovery. A discovery that ideally should, somehow, be at variance with existing knowledge. During my fieldwork, three main surprises eventually led me to my three most central ethnographic findings or discoveries: the Gitanos’ ethos of ‘being one’s own master’ (Part II); their all-encompassing religiosity (Part III); and finally, their ‘ontological simultaneity’ (Part III) – all revolving around the dual nature of the figure of the stranger (e.g. Simmel 1908), descriptive of the key relationship within the context of research.

Fourth, I aim at venturing into ‘the speculative nature of anthropological inquiry’ (Ingold 2017: 21) – that is, I seek to engage with my interlocutors in a process of *co-speculation* about the nature and conditions of human life, in all its facets and nuances – that is, philosophize with people, in the world. In such regard, the study offers the Rastro Gitanos’ lived answers to some of the existential dilemmas we all deal with, such as power, identity, sociality and divinity.

In line with an abductive analytical approach (Tavory and Timmermans 2014), the abovementioned insights have been developed from a constant ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ between my pre-fieldwork knowledge, my empirical ethnographic findings, my co-speculation with my Gitano companions and, finally, my later process of analysing and anthropologizing – that is, generalizing and theorizing – my findings. Thus, the analytical strategy outlined above implies a move back and forth between the particular (the Gitanos of el Rastro) and the general (human practices) (e.g. Ingold 2007). At times, it may seem that this abductive process takes me far from the field. However, my ethnographic findings always work as the cradle for my theorizations. Even so, I would argue that the act of theorizing – drawing general importance and relevance from a specific case – should at times take us far from our initial observations.

METAPHORS AND TROPES AS ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Every science must start with a metaphor.
(Max Black, in Ray 1977: 275–76)

According to Benjamin Ray (1977), Victor Turner was very aware of the basically metaphorical character of his concepts. *Communitas*, for example, was expressed in metaphors of destruction (Turner 1974: 298), and he considered a language rid of metaphors as inadequate to express the mystical experience of *communitas*. What it needed was a mystical rhetoric charged with oxymora and metaphors (ibid.: 291–92). As such, he sets both his own ideas and anthropology in general deliberately against becoming a Kuhnian ‘normal science’. Emboldened by both Black’s assertion and Turner’s insistency, this book embraces metaphors and tropes as its main analytical and conceptual tools.

According to Tord Larsen (2009: 171), all academic disciplines represent specialized domains of rhetorical objectification, and reality appears to us only through the various vocabularies that are meant to shape it – everyday language, journalistic language, political language, language of psychiatry or anthropological language. Moreover, he argues that all such rhetorical paradigms, discourses or domains of objectification contain a certain perspective of the world, and that each perspective is construed with the help of certain tropes and metaphors.

Metaphors and metaphorical stories or narratives invite us to see something as something else, as when Theodore Schwartz (1972: 904–5) saw a striking parallel between the dichotomized attributes and cyclical alternations of Turner’s ritual objects (his symbols) and Nietzsche’s (1872)

characterization of Apollonian and Dionysian phases in ancient Greek culture. In fact, the opposing dual nature of Apollo and Dionysus makes them excellent as metaphors for tensional opposites in general, such as Blake's 'contraries' (1790), Lévi-Strauss' 'binary opposites' (1955) and Turner's structure/anti-structure and 'communitas' (1969; 1974).

In the chapters that follow, I apply a variety of metaphors and tropes in order to create an anthropological language that, in the best possible manner, can reflect the empirical case I seek to describe. To give some examples, one of my arguments has to do with the Rastro Gitanos' ethos of 'being one's own master'. In the book, I explain how this is a metaphor for the historic relatedness between Gypsies and feudal authorities, as explained by, for instance, David Mayall (2004) and Teresa San Román (1997). Another example has to do with the dualism of the stranger trope, with this dualism understood as a combined complete liberation and absolute fixation. Among other things, I treat this dualism as a metaphor for the *creyentes*' ritual acts of simultaneously 'opening up' and 'letting go' of themselves (further explained in Chapters 5–7). Moreover, I treat mercy, market and mercury metaphorically with reference to the Rastro Gitanos' spiritual efforts for salvation (mercy), their constant struggle to re-create a socio-economic niche (market) and the interface between these two spheres of activity (mercury). Furthermore, I use Apollo and Dionysus as metaphors for the part ascetic, part ecstatic and expressive content and form of Rastro Gitano Pentecostalism. When I describe the Rastro Gitanos' acts of moralizing their incomes from the market in the setting of *el culto*, I use the metaphor of 'laundry machine' to highlight the moral 'white washing' aspect of this process. I also use *el duende* – described empirically and in literature as something like a particular creative principle, an artistic state of mind or mode of elevated being – as a central trope (with its metaphors of light and darkness), in my analysis of the *creyentes*' practices and experiences in *el culto*.

Hence, different academic disciplines rest on certain tropes and metaphors, as explained above, as do varying perspectives or sub-disciplines, such as those we find in anthropology. Most of the metaphors and tropes I use are aesthetic ones, positioning my study (although perhaps only partially) within the American Cultural Anthropology tradition and concept of 'culture'. At the foundation of this tradition lies, according to Larsen (2009: 213–17), an *aesthetic* metaphor. This anthropological perspective implies that cultural practice can be understood as a *paradigm* (or social pattern) with recognizable gestalt, and its manifestations are considered variations of this paradigm. When Ruth Benedict (1934) borrows from Nietzsche in order to identify Apollonian and Dionysian cultures amongst North American Indians, she seeks to hermeneutically identify the style or theme

that integrates the various cultural elements. As a scientific approach, the aesthetic metaphor collects inspiration from the interpretative and meaning-making strategy of art theory, literary science and semiotics. Moreover, its holistic or integrative attitude runs back to the idea of *Geist*, which characterizes the intellectual works of an historical epoch or the cultural practices of a people (e.g. *Zeitgeist* and *Volksggeist*). Michell Foucault's (1970) concept of 'historical a priories' similarly reflects the cognitive premises or 'episteme' of thought in a specific historical epoch (Larsen 2009: 215). Although German idealism saw Geist as that which was expressed in an epoch or within a culture, Geist does not exist a priori to its cultural expressions or practice but rather is created through them. It is, in other words, a non-mimetic creativity that characterizes the American Cultural Anthropological concept of culture and its key metaphor of the aesthetic (ibid.). The same holds true for this book, with its aesthetic approach towards Rastro Gitano cultural practice and underlying cultural premises.

STYLE OF WRITING

As already described, I consider both research and writing as combined processes of discovery and speculation. According to Richard Shweder (1997), ethnography is about discovery based on 'creative imagination' and 'disciplined intuition'. He claims that when anthropologists fail to combine these two virtues they let down their studied communities and are unable to make a substantial contribution to the anthropological literature. Moreover, '[b]y engaging in discovery it becomes clear that the predefined grid is terribly misleading' (ibid.: 157). Thus, anthropologists must continuously adjust and extend their 'grid' to incorporate new ethnographic discoveries.

The word 'discovery' in science is often associated with positivistic and even colonial epistemological ideas, implying a search for so far undiscovered universal and objective laws, truths or facts. But, if we can think of discovery in ethnographic research in a non-positivistic and non-colonialist way – that is, as ethnographic *identification* of complex social and cultural patterns – through my writing, I would say that I *rediscover* my field. Hence every speculative (e.g. Ingold 2007) rewriting works as a rediscovery – a further penetration into the cultural complexity of the field of study and a further rearrangement of the existing epistemological 'grid' (e.g. Shweder 1997). Metaphorically, I propose to see reality as existing in layers upon layers, and writing, for me, aims at peeling off these layers to reach a deeper level of complexity regarding the phenomena at hand. Like a collage, the text and my constant rearranging of it takes on a life of its

own, offering continuously fresh contexts and perspectives to episodes and insights described. Furthermore, by interweaving reading into the writing process, my empirical findings are given yet another new background, and the potentialities of these findings are given novel arenas for actualization and theorization, not unlike the abductive research process described by Tavory and Timmermans (2014).

On these grounds, this book must be read as an anthropological monograph and ‘essay’ – a form of writing that implies both an attempt and a test (‘weighing of’), and that also has the capacity to carry what Ingold (2017: 21) calls ‘the speculative nature of anthropological inquiry’ or the combination of ‘creative imagination’ and ‘disciplined intuition’ called for by Shweder (1997). Michel de Montaigne’s original essays (written between 1571–1592) were similarly exploratory and speculative journeys, through which he tested and ‘weighed’ assumed truths. The intention of Montaigne’s essays was not to prove, conclude and enclose but to identify, open, speculate and explore.

In writing this book, I have taken inspiration and support from anthropological works that, in a variety of ways, combine ethnographic inquiry, anthropological speculation, a literary style of writing and an interest in the intersection between ethnography/anthropology, spirituality and art (see Brodersen 2021: 58). Along such lines, with Ingold (2007), we can conceptualize the discipline of anthropology as located somewhere between craft, science and art. The intuition, creativity, imagination and skilful guessing that are required of anthropologists to destabilize assumed truths and create new or unknown realities (e.g. Shweder 1997) tell me that anthropology is, arguably so, an academic discipline on the margins.

STUDYING THE ‘OTHER’

If there weren’t any Gypsies, we would have to invent them.
(Jean-Paul Sartre, in Stewart 1997)

Throughout history, people in various societies have formed positive stories about themselves while often reifying the ‘other’ as Gypsies, Roma – or Gitanos. By invention, these latter peoples have historically and in the present been scapegoated in the role of the negative contrast and the world upside down – a shadow role, representing everything undesirable that ‘we’, the majority, are not (Røyrvik 1998). On these grounds, it is of particular importance for anthropologists to be aware of how we construct our ethnographic ‘object’, which we inevitably do (e.g. Larsen 2009). This process of self-reflection becomes of critical importance when that ‘object’

pertains to a group of people that continues to be subjected to prejudice, myths, discrimination, harassment and persecution. If anthropologists' ethnographic representations are to overturn common prejudices, presumptions and general objectifications (e.g. those found in the media and in myths and stereotypes), we must remain vigilantly aware of how we create our ethnographic objects, their otherness and alterity.

Rollo May (1991) was concerned with modern man's need for myths to understand his life. Without these myths, he warned, we may fall prey to anxiety and addiction. The foreigner (or outsider), May adds, is one who does not share our myths – especially our myths of origin. In somewhat similar veins, both Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre described, in line with Emmanuel Levinas, how the world is *altered* by the appearance of others. In their eyes, such a meeting is not threatening or in need of resolution but is dialectical, with the potential for both parties to learn.

In our meetings with the 'other' – whoever that other is – Baudrillard and Guillaume (2008) have emphasized that we should give 'alterity' primacy above 'otherness' because alterity allows difference to exist as difference in all of its incommensurable form. The present study seeks to honour this ambition. In my fieldwork, I observed that Gitano alterity was produced in many ways – in the Rastro Gitanos' actions as traders, in their religious actions and through their symbolic work and processes of meaning making. Still, I would argue that the hub of their social genesis is the daily trance-producing ritual of *el culto*.

The Gitanos of el Rastro are dependent on their economic and symbolic transactions with the Payos, and their distinctness from the Payos is largely produced in this relation, in what we can call a classic Barthian boundary work (Barth et al. 1969). At the same time, I argue that Rastro Gitano alterity must equally be seen as something completely different from and incommensurable to Payo identity and sociality. This calls for some explanation. If we look upon *el culto* as a vital community-making affair, in the context of *el culto*, then the Payos are definitely important 'others' from a Rastro Gitano perspective. However, in the realm of religiosity, spirituality and existentiality, another 'other' is present that seems vastly important. I am not sure what to call this 'other' – maybe death, nothingness or extinction. At the very least, I am able to say that it pertains to *inexistence* of some sort. The Gitanos of el Rastro make their own existence – culturally, socially, religiously and economically. Due to the precarity of this self-made existence – particularly considering their constant pressure to integrate and assimilate into (low-paid) mainstream work and social relations and cultural and religious affiliations – my observation is that many of my interlocutors fear cultural, social, religious and economic 'death' on a spiritual, embodied level, perhaps even daily. Hence, as my material

shows, they are strongly focused on their own existence as *Gitanos*, and they are equally afraid of their own *inexistence* as such. All of this has made me analyse Rastro Gitano identity, sociality, livelihoods and disarticulation from mainstream society as something created in its own right or on its own terms. Along similar lines, Patrick Williams criticizes the British socio-structuralist approach, as follows:

the Manus [French Roma/Gypsies] live 'in the world of the Gadzos' but not 'in the same world as the Gadzos' ... while coexisting with the Gadzos the Manus detach 'themselves from them ... put ... themselves at a distance, which precisely causes them to become Manus and the Gadzos to become Gadzo'. (Williams [1993] 2003: 29)

Paralleling Williams' insights, I argue in subsequent chapters that – alongside the Rastro Gitanos' economic activities and relations with the Payos (including their conceptualization of *el mundo de los Payos*), as well as their meaning making both inside and outside the church – *el culto* is where Gitano alterity is produced as a simultaneous individual and collective, bodily and spiritual, symbolic and material, sacred and profane, and celestial and earthly experience. It is where the world is made 'theirs'.

NOTE

1. The names and social details of all persons and churches have been changed for the purpose of anonymization.