



To Whom God Speaks: Struggles for Authority Through Religious Reflexivity and Performativity Within a Gypsy Pentecostal Church

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Abstract

By limiting Gypsy Travellers' mobility, the state has restricted their subjectivities and their mobile lifestyles. In this context, Pentecostalism, an egalitarian doctrine based on the privatization of relations with God, creates new spaces for Gypsy Travellers' self-expression, and further premises for their ethnic and cultural revivalism. Through a symbolic interactionist approach, this paper argues that Gypsy Travellers obtain individual authority through religious reflexivity and performativity. It examines ethnographically the inter- and intra-personal religious conversations among believers in a Gypsy Pentecostal church in Edinburgh, UK. It shows the ways in which Gypsy Travellers use internal dialogues with God and symbolic interactions with significant others in the church as means of self-expression. God is the relational conversational partner and facilitates the believer's self-mediation. It is the symbolic interface and signifier who can delegate authority to believers or preachers. Through the process of self-mastery, the practitioners of religious reflexivity gain control over themselves and perform authority in front of others. Thus, internal dialogues and symbolic interactions become the important experiential domains of a complex dramaturgy of Gypsy believers' struggles for individual and collective authority.

Keywords: Authority, Gypsy Travellers, Pentecostalism, Internal Dialogues, Religious Reflexivity, Self-Mastery, Webs of Interlocution

Introduction

1.1 Gypsy Travellers can be seen as 'modern nomads' who travel and live off travelling. On the other hand, 'nomadism' is an imposed label of "non-attachment to space", "a habitus into which the grouping is confined" (Drakakis-Smith 2007: 468) for a deterritorialized status with fewer territorial rights to be claimed. Negative discourses about 'nomadism' and 'gypsiness' have been deeply rooted in a 'sedentarist' ideology, which "normalize[d] and reproduce[d] sedentary modes of existence" (McVeigh 1997: 9). Nowadays, it constitutes a powerful discourse (Kabachink 2009), deeply embedded in individual consciousness and institutional practice. In this discursive context, Gypsy Travellers have been perceived as a rootless culture, a threat to stability and legality (Molloy 1998). Local media discourses have used 'nomadism' and 'gypsiness' as labelling categories (Powell 2008) and transformed the Gypsies' social problems into self-acting identities (Morgan and McDonald 1999). On the other hand, art and civic organisations have come to develop, support and encourage cultural and artistic manifestations among Gypsy Traveller communities^[1]. The general increased interest in their culture has counterbalanced the dominant stigmatising discourse and constructed an artistic, romanticised image of Gypsy Travellers and their art production (music, theatre, film). However, their 'mobile life' has been always a source of exclusion.

1.2 Although Gypsy Travellers have the right to travel (Niner 2004), their mobility is tolerated and disciplined by the local state through restrictive measures imposed upon their camping activities (Molloy 1998; Cowan and Lomax 2003). Through consecutive Caravan Site Acts - 1960, 1967, 1968 - (Gmelch and Gmelch 1976; Kearns 1977; Okely 1992; Sandland 1996) aimed at providing legal camping, the state has progressively controlled Gypsy Travellers' scope of mobility. However, the 1968 Caravan Site Act did not apply to Scotland and the Scottish local authorities were not allocated funds to organize legal camping sites until the 1980s.

1.3 Although most of these governmental acts have been aimed at facilitating the Gypsy Travellers' territorial movement, they have rather enforced severe camping restrictions. While the Highways Act 1959 made camping on the margins of highways illegal, the Caravan Site Act, 1960 and 1963 (Northern Ireland) restricted the organization of privately owned caravans (Bancroft 2005) and forced Gypsy Travellers to roam across the country with no destination. As Bancroft (2005) suggests, these governmental acts made

the situation unbearable "to the point where it was impossible to live as a Gypsy and stay within the law" (p. 84). In addition, through the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order (CJPO) Act, Gypsy Travellers' private camping was criminalized and restricted (Drakakis-Smith 2007). Gypsy Travellers' mobile lifestyles became largely dependent on the local authorities' willingness to offer camping sites and local populations' willingness to accept them (Powell 2008; Niner and Brown 2009).

1.4 By passing from "outsider' cultural groups struggling with authority for a place to be" (Drakakis-Smith 2007: 466) to "groups in waiting" (ibid) to be accepted and integrated in the larger society, Gypsy Travellers have experienced a state of liminal unprocessed identity (by the state and wider society) in which the politics of tolerance acted as a mechanism of exclusion.

1.5 Gypsy Pentecostal Evangelism is an example of a religious movement that challenges these forms of exclusion through "modern processes of ethnogenesis" (Delgado 2010: 256), which generally promote cultural and ethnic revivalism. As Delgado (2010) suggests for the Spanish Gypsy converts, Pentecostal organizations bring agency to individuals and strengthen their sense of belonging to global Gypsy culture and identity. Furthermore, Pentecostal and Evangelical movements are said to assume egalitarian ideologies, claiming that the Holy Spirit can be personally experienced by every believer who is religiously active in the church (McGuire 1975; Wilson, Clow 1981; Robbins 2004; Willems 1967). However, it is not only the organizational aspect of Pentecostalism that brings individual empowerment, but also the religious practices, such as speaking in tongues, the Holy Spirit's gifts and conversations with God, which have not been sufficiently explored in their aspects of individual agency and authority (Wilson, Clow 1981; Robbins 2004). In other words, sociological investigations of Pentecostalism have been oriented to develop understandings of the religious, organizational practices and rituals, rather than the believers' relationships and conversations with God as a form of self-reflexivity. In addition, the importance the Pentecostal Gypsy Travellers' religious reflexivity holds for challenging their social statuses and everyday existence has been almost entirely neglected in both Romani and religious studies.

1.6 In an attempt to fill this research gap, the paper explores the religious discourses and performances within a Scottish Pentecostal Gypsy Church in Edinburgh. It aims to show the ways in which religious practices and internal conversations with God/Jesus become sources of self-expression for the Travellers. Gypsy believers are not only subjects of the religious authority: they are also active actors, negotiating the overall church hierarchy and their positions within it. As the title "to whom God speaks" suggests, the paper is an exploration of the relationships and conversations Gypsy believers have with God in their struggles for individual authority.

1.7 In the following section, a theoretical discussion of critical ideas of Pentecostalism, self-reflexivity and authority is provided. Other parts of the paper are concerned with the data collection methodology and the ethnography of social and religious inner experiences. In the final sections, I develop a discussion about the ways in which the Gypsy converts' experiences with God become sources for disputed authority between pastors and believers.

Methodology and research field site

2.1 The idea of exploring the Travellers'^[2] religiosity came from the Gypsies themselves. In January 2009, on my first research visit at their caravan site in Edinburgh, I planned to talk about their relations with the local authorities. However, the discussion turned into a conversation about God and religion and ended with an invitation to attend their church services.

2.2 The Gypsy Traveller church in Edinburgh is part of a large Evangelical Gypsy movement called 'Life and Light', which has been present in the area since the early 1980s and is also active in France, Spain and other European countries with large populations of Gypsy Travellers. The church services are attended by Gypsies from all around the city - Dalkeith and Craigmillar caravan sites, Glasgow and Falkirk High. They are usually conducted by a Gypsy pastor (Pastor Alain), whose organizational powers are subordinated to two national committees formed by trustees and ministers.

2.3 Following my first visit, I attended their church services every week within a five-month period. From the beginning, I explained to everyone, including the pastor, that I would be present in the church not as a believer^[3] but as a researcher^[4]. They accepted my proposal and were very interested in my intention to write an article about their Evangelical experience. They considered that my work would make Gypsy Travellers' religious voice heard and would reveal positive issues about their life, as compared to the negative ones (drug addiction, alcohol use and illegal camping) usually portrayed in the media.

2.4 During the services, I was no more than a simple participant, listening to preaching, prayers, testimonies and songs. Although Gypsy Travellers were not open to recorded interviews, before and after the services I was able to have informal conversations with the participants, pastor and preachers (approximately twenty people). The pastor was the only one to agree to a recorded interview at his house. In this paper, the names of those with whom I had conversations have been changed in order to ensure confidentiality.

2.5 In terms of methodology, my research is based on a symbolic interactionist approach, which "is required to employ methods that capture the actor's point of view and that enable him or her to speak for him- or herself" (Lal 1995: 421). Sociological ethnography is one of these methods (Hammersley 1989) I have used in my research to collect data about individuals' interactions and discourses. At its basis, participant observation is a data collection technique that can be more or less obtrusive (Denzin 1978) in relation to those observed. In the context of my research, the religious performances within the church followed a ritualized model that was not affected by my presence. Denzin (1978) suggests that an unobtrusive method is "any method of observation that directly removes the observer from the set of interactions or events being studied" (p. 256), or does not produce important reactions from the subjects studied. My ethnography followed the "unobtrusive strategy of time analysis (...) nonreactive observation of what persons do over a specified time period" (Denzin 1978: 275). During a period of five months, I followed my subjects' interactions and discourses in the church primarily as an observer and less as a

participant. The impressions and observations I made inside the church about the believers' symbolic interactions were shared and validated by one of my friends, an anthropology student who joined me at the church services several times. We were usually approached as common visitors to the church and the reactive impact of our participation in the services was minimal. The presence of a different observer guaranteed the *observer triangulation* recommended by Denzin (1978) as an unobtrusive measure that "removes the potential bias that comes from a single person and ensures a greater reliability in observations" (p. 297).

2.6 On the other hand, symbolic interactionism, used here as a theoretical and methodological framework, is a modality of empowerment of those studied and a way of blurring boundaries of race and ethnicity by looking at social and cultural transformations in the processuality of individual interactions (Lal 1995). Similarly, my study seeks to go beyond media and academic discourses about Gypsies' marginalization and exclusion and give voice to their beliefs and cultural values. In my research, I prioritised themes that the Gypsy Travellers considered actual and important in their lives. Religion and their identity as Born-Again believers were raised as central issues in their narratives. Therefore, I consider that the Travellers' religious practice and belief warrant attention and need to be explored in connection with general issues of authority and self-reflexivity, which have almost entirely been neglected in Romani studies so far. In the following sections I mainly make use of field notes^[5] to present an ethnographic analysis of interactions and performances inside the church

Theoretical articulations of Pentecostalism, authority and self

3.1 In the past decade research on Pentecostal movements has been substantially developed, constituting a distinct field of study. Social scientists have concentrated their attention on Latin America and Africa, where the movement has had the greatest impact^[6]. In spite of its various adaptations, Pentecostal Christianity is a global phenomenon with roots in the Western Protestant Evangelical movement of the 18th century, which saw rapid development across the globe in the 20th and 21st centuries. Researchers have sought to understand the Pentecostal movement as a global process with a high degree of adaptation to the local (Robbins 2004). The general doctrine makes claims of egalitarianism based on individuals' spiritual rewordings and the equal opportunity for everyone to evangelise, irrespective of educational backgrounds (Willems 1967; McGuire 1975; Wilson, Clow 1981; Noll 2001; Robbins 2004). Global Pentecostalism is considered a 'decentralised, segmentary, and reticulate' movement with no central control or power over the local churches. It is rather enmeshed in a 'web-like structure of personal connections' (Gerlach, Hine 1970; Robbins 2004). It promotes a symbolic discontinuity in the lives of its believers, who are expected to leave the past behind and follow the 'Godly ways', usually expressed through moral codes of practice that forbid drinking and drug abuse, aggressive actions, extramarital sexuality and partying in general (Brodwin 2003; Wacker 2001). However, the emphasis on actions that are considered wrong varies from one congregation to another.

3.2 Duality of past and present life is asserted through the Church's tendencies to be at the same time 'radically antisyncretic' and 'profoundly localized' (De Bernardi 1999: 77), "addressing local issues in locally comprehensible terms" (Robbins 2004: 129). Believers are involved in numerous events organized by the Pentecostal church^[7] and receive formal or informal roles within the church^[8]. Authority within the church thus comes from both organization and manipulation of formal positions - institutional authority - and the ways in which believers themselves experience God - inspirational authority (Corten 1999; Cucchiari 1990; Ireland 1991; Robbins 2004; Willems 1967). In my paper, I concentrate my attention on the latter as a form of believers' self-expression.

3.3 Starting with Weber (Gerth and Mills 1948), the theme and conceptual variations of 'authority' have been central to the constitution of sociology. Weber developed three ideal types of authority: traditional, legal and charismatic. The latter was associated with the pastoral aspect fostered by Protestantism (Weber 1958, 1964). Blau (1963) criticised Weber for the 'unexplained' paradox of authority as presupposing both voluntary submission and imperative control, which brings together ideologies of voluntarism and authoritarianism. Nevertheless, this paradox seems to lie at the core of Pentecostalism and to produce 'empowerment through submission' to new forms of authority and morality (Wanner 2007). It consolidates a new set of meanings "by introducing an auto-biographical template and a framework for repositioning oneself in the world, in a particular community, and in a relationship with the divine" (p. 159).

3.4 Authority as a form of power is also given by performances of the self and interactional orders. Although Goffman (1959) has never spoken in precise terms about power, he has paid attention to the relationship between inequality and social interactions. In interaction, persons attempt to control and project specific self-images for others to see (Branaman 2003). Those who are successful in conveying their desired self-image to the audience become more powerful than the rest (Rogers 1979; Branaman 2003; Jenkins 2008). On the other hand, the self is the result of various performances that are ultimately assumed by the performer (Branaman 2003). Goffman has been criticised for over-emphasizing the reproduction of fixed hierarchies without looking at the ways in which positions and roles change through negotiations. Also, he has not paid attention to internal processes of self-creation, which, from his point of view, are produced in social interactions in public spaces only (Wrong 1998; Williams 2000; Archer 2000; Manning 2003). In contrast to Goffman, Mead's symbolic interactionism takes account of both psychological and social worlds in which the self is both subject (I) and object (Me) of interpretation of meaning (Dunn 1997).

3.5 More clearly stated by Mead, the self is created and recreated through symbolic interaction, through which the subject internalises role-taking behaviour. Internalisation is based on the reflexive capacity of individuals to objectify their experiences, as well as the others'. It is a process of self-reflexivity, supported and structured through language without being subordinated by it. Therefore, the self is not necessarily a consistent rational ego, but a production of both the process of self-reflexivity and social interaction "that generate the conditions of both normative reproducibility and instability" (Dunn 1997: 700). As Mead (1934) argued, self is a social process that can only be enacted in conversations with other selves (Bakker 2005) - me and I - in which individuals can use their emotions as guidelines for reflexive explorations (Holmes 2010). Following Archer's (2003) discussion of internal conversations, Holmes (2010) argues that reflexivity is more than a cognitive process - it is an emotional examination of

individual experiences which can produce, in their turn, emotionality.

3.6 On the other hand, in the experience with the world and in everyday social interactions, the individual seeks to gain control. The outcome is usually generated through the self-management of individual practices and emotions. In the analysis of love relationships in Ancient Greece, Foucault (1990) argued that those who are able to carry out a dialogue with themselves and practice 'mastery of their desires' become the 'masters of truth', the ones to teach about love and seduce others. Hence, self-reflexivity can be perceived as a form of 'self-mediation' or 'self-mastery' through which individuals become masters of themselves, able to exercise power over others and express their individual authority. It is a dialogue with self and others and most of the time it is the expression of an intrapersonal communication that is "engendered by symbolic interaction and arises from a mental foundation of inner speech" (Vocate 1994:4). Most of the time intrapersonal communication takes the form of self-talk and contributes to the process of construction of the self. The latter takes the form of self-talk and contributes to the process of construction of the self (Mead 1934), in which the individual becomes a "collaborator for oneself" (Vygotsky 1986, cited in Vocate 1994).

3.7 For both Mead (1934) and Blumer (1972), meaning is produced through a "process of self interaction" (Blumer 1972: 404) and social interaction. However, as Vocate (1994) suggests, the intrapersonal level is the richest source of meaning and self-creation. In the process of reflexivity, the self becomes an object that undergoes transformations in conversation between 'I' and 'Me'. Moreover, as psychoanalysis and object-relation theory state, individuals experience interactions with other elements of the world, objects of their self-reflection and interpretations (Ballis 1995). Divinity is often an object of internal conversations and self-reflection (Gurney and Rogers 2007) and spirituality the individual experience in relation with a divine entity (God, Jesus etc). In this context, Pentecostal conversion could be interpreted as a subject-object relation through which the individual develops a strong relationship with the Holy Spirit (Paul 1999).

3.8 However, object-relation theory and symbolic interaction do not share the same understanding of the idea of 'object'. While for symbolic interactionists the object is a human construction produced in conversations with the self and others (Blumer 1969), for object-relation theorists it is just a self-existing external entity (Carpenter 2006). Nevertheless, from a phenomenological perspective, subject and object coexist in experience and communication with the world (Merleau Ponty 1962). In this line of thought, the subject and object are not clearly distinguished in the individual experience of divinity. They are conversational elements in the process of self-mediation and management of everyday social experience. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, or God, is neither an external nor an internal object, but a part of a dialogical process of self-creation.

3.9 Following these interpretations, the phenomenological approach becomes useful in the understanding of religiosity as an individual experience, leaving space for the inquiry into the conversational aspect of religion. The latter is hereby explored through the use of a symbolic interactionist analysis that focuses on both internal and external aspects of religious interactions and conversations of the self. Although the two theoretical approaches - symbolic interactionism and phenomenology - might not fit all the time, the use of both in the analysis of the religious conversations and interactions ensures a theoretical triangulation which lessens the effects of *obtrusiveness* in the participatory research. In addition, psychoanalytical interpretations strengthen the analysis of believers' relations and internal conversations with God.

3.10 Denzin (1978) argues that theoretical triangulation, with its role of testing, exploiting contradictory propositions and generating original directions in the study of the same social reality, "encourages systematic continuity in theory and research" (p. 301). Therefore, my analysis, buttressed by different theoretical understandings - symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and psychoanalysis - enhances the originality of this research on religious reflexivity and overpasses the explanatory limits imposed by different philosophical traditions in the understanding of the relationship between subject and object. In addition, the hybrid theoretical framework is able to release and conflate different methodological stances, centered on practices, interactions or internal conversations, into a complete methodological approach that overcomes the weakness of a single analytical focus. The next section is an examination of individual and relational experiences with divinity: an ethnography of the religious and social dramaturgy of the Born-Again Gypsies' relationships with God.

Relations with God: preaching and testimonies as performances in the church

4.1 Pentecostal attempts at egalitarianism are based on the assumption that every believer can receive spiritual gifts and experience a direct relationship with the Holy Spirit. Both Gypsy preachers and believers claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus, generally expressed in religious speech (Willems 1967; McGuire 1975; Wilson, Clow 1981). In the following sections, in order to understand the relationship between subject and object in the experience of the divine, I look at individuals' preaching discourses and testimonies performed during the church services.

a. Preaching and negotiation of authority



Picture 1. Gypsy Traveller church service - Pastor preaching (photograph taken by the author)

4.2 At the Gypsy 'Life and Light' church, preaching is usually given by Pastor Alain and his colleague, Preacher Brown, who follows training sessions every two weeks. However, there are several monthly occasions when pastors or preachers from other Scottish or English 'Life and Light' churches visit the Edinburgh church and give speeches. In their activity, preachers and pastors usually use biblical stories as starting points. As Pastor Alain told me, the Bible is only read for inspiration. The entire preaching is a form of prayer to God, a gospel sent to him and his attendants. In the following lines I offer an example of the way in which the preachers use biblical verses in order to convey the God's care and control over the believers' lives:

Pastor Kevin read and commented loudly on a paragraph from Luke 19, conveying the moment in which Jesus had met Zacchaeus, a tax collector, portrayed as a despised man with whom nobody was content. During his meeting with Jesus, he became a right and fair person, ready to be accepted by his community. Jesus expressed his will to sleep overnight at his house, and Zacchaeus, visibly overwhelmed by such an honour, declared that he would engage in acts of charity for the poor to the value of four times the money he had taken from the tax payers.

After he had finished the reading, the pastor from Darlington started looking insistently at the people gathered. He then said that just as Jesus knew the name of Zacchaeus and called him, 'God knows where you [all] are! God knows your name and knows exactly your situation!' Afterwards, he went on to explain the imperative of coming to Jesus: 'Today! There is no tomorrow for salvation!' In the end, he added: 'Jesus is a gentleman; he will never force you to come to him' (Fieldnotes, 22 February 2009).

4.3 What follows from this preaching discourse is the dual instantiation of Jesus in religious performances and narratives: 'Jesus as gentleman' who would not force any Gypsy to convert, and Jesus as a source of surveillance for the Travellers' lives. The theme of control was consistently present in preaching and reiterated at almost every church service I attended. As Wilson and Clow (1981) suggest, the control of the self in Pentecostalism is realised by the individual but also by God or Jesus^[9]. Preachers' discourses frequently produced the effect of a panopticon in which God could hear and see whatever believers did or said:

'God knows everything...God takes care of your children and finances...Even if you don't realise, God knows all your sorrows'. Interestingly, he mentioned that 'I cannot myself take care of your lives. It's sometimes hard for me to control my own life, but God does' (Pastor Alain, Fieldnotes, 25 January 2009).

4.4 However, in the same discursive line, Preacher Brown indicated in one of his sermons that coming to Jesus is the very act of coming to the church service, praying, listening to and opening the heart to Jesus. Pastor Alain and one of the other members of the church - John - also emphasised the importance

of attending church services. Moreover, Preacher Brown contrasted the relationship between Jesus and the believer, the covenant established and defined as a trust relationship, to that of a formal contract in which the parties concerned lack confidence: "I sign it [the contract] because I do not trust you". Nevertheless, the preachers' discourses on individual relations with God are performed in a very persuasive way, emphasising the underlying threat that can be faced by those resistant to the God's authority:

In his discourse, Preacher Brown stated: 'we love to sin and cheat...we are natural sinners'. He then went on to say: 'but the Lord makes them pay for their sins to death...The Bible says the punishment for sinners is death...Death is the wage of sin'. At the end, he added (and repeated several times during his preaching) 'I don't want to frighten you; I'm just preaching the gospel' and 'There is no other saviour but Jesus; He is the only one who can set you free tonight' (Fieldnotes, 29 March 2009).

4.5 Generally, believers are advised to be obedient and practice the religious morality preached by pastors:

"We can become the fallacy. We do not practice what we know. If you don't practise what you have heard, we deceive ourselves...You know if you plant a tree upside down you do not have a tree in the end ...Obedience spreads the law, it is better than sacrifice. You need to start practice. How many times have you said 'I need to do that and that'... But you need to put them into action. To apply God to your life" (Preacher Paul, Fieldnotes, 12 April 2009).

4.6 The preachers' discourses, targeting both non-converts and converts, suggest that the acceptance or the return to God is also the acceptance of God's authority and the internalisation of a certain discipline that has to be followed for spiritual gifts to be received. Believers and pastors are presented as the recipients of God's voice and power.

"God, I'm showing the world that you are my witness, faithful witness, that you have a relationship with me. God is working through you! God is using you! I do not want to shock you this morning, but I have my problems, I fight with my wife. No matter how bad the preacher is, God speaks to you this morning. Not me! I'm doing what God tells me to do. It is the word of God" (Pastor Alain, Fieldnotes, 19 April 2009).

4.7 In the preachers' discursive logic, Jesus or God becomes a delegated form of authority used by the pastors to express their control over believers' social and religious practices. On the other hand, every believer is presented as being in a personalised relationship with God through which s/he can receive the Holy Spirit. In the latter context, the source of control is not located in the relationship with the church and the pastor, but in the private sphere of the individual, who has the capacity to be in dialogue with God. In the next section, I concentrate my attention on the believers' testimonies, given in the church as expressions of their representations and experiences of God.

b. Testimonies, self-reflexivity and control

4.8 In contrast to the preacher's discourses, the believers' testimonies come to show that Jesus speaks to and heals everyone who is in a personal spiritual relationship with God. In almost every single church service I witnessed, there were two or three testimonies, given by men and women, mainly related to healing experiences but also to more or less recent experiences of conversion. One of the most interesting conversations I had about testimonies was with a Gypsy woman, 24 years old, who had been attending religious services intermittently for the last seven years and who had never given a testimony in the church. Her story of conversion was similar to the other testimonies I witnessed in the church. She mainly referred to the bad habits (drinking, partying) she had had before becoming a Born-Again Christian. She had formerly been a Catholic, but she had never been a committed practitioner. The first time she attended a Gypsy Pentecostal service was with her friends, as they were all curious, and she personally was impressed by the ways in which everybody seemed to participate in the service. She told me that on her first attendance, she had thought that she would have loved to feel as good as Pentecostal believers seemed to.

4.9 To my question of how Jesus speaks to her, she answered:

"For example, as we are sitting and talking to each other now, Jesus can speak to me through you, and in this way he can make me foresee solutions to the problems I have in mind" (Fieldnotes, 8 March, 2009).

4.10 This was a very relational statement to me. Jesus was conceived in her life as a source of inspiration and creativity. Her account can be read as the capacity of the believer to objectify herself and others in her conversation with God. The conversation appeared as a form of inter-subjectivity in which meaning was created through her self thinking back to herself and others.

4.11 The Pentecostal Gypsy self, as a Reflexive Self – similar to the 'I' proposed by Mead - is engaged in conversation with the 'Me' or the 'Other', and is able to interpret and act (Callero 2003). God as a 'significant other' (Carpenter 2006) was revealed in her conversation with me and with herself. In this context, God is not an illusion, but "represents the reality of religious belief" (Meissner 2009: 226) that is produced 'intrapsychically' and 'extrapsychically' by the believer (Meissner 2009; Rizzuto 1979, 1996). As Carlson and Erikson (2000) have explored in psychotherapy, "God is often one of the most significant people in a religious/spiritual person's life [and] this relationship has a very powerful constitutive effect" (p. 70). Through a dialogue with God, a believer is able to be reflexive and find a solution to her/his own problems. In Bataille's terms, this religious reflexivity is an 'inner experience' in which the relationship with God is the exploration "of the unknown: of a presence which is no longer in any way distinct from an absence" (Bataille 1988: 5). In his conversion story, Pastor Alain confirmed the similitude:

C: Do you remember that night when you became a Born Again Christian?

A: Yes. God spoke, not as a voice but in myself. And it said 'Stop, you won't drink again' (Interview with Pastor Alain).

4.12 The statement is also a clear illustration of Foucault's (1990) concept of self-mastery in religious practice, which usually implies struggle and resistance to desires and pleasures (drinking, partying, and sexuality), which can eventually lessen the individual's prestige in front of others. Yet, mediation is performed through the Holy Spirit's voice. Nevertheless, God is both object and subject of interpersonal and intrapersonal conversations, and speaks through individuals and interactions between selves. My informants never made clear differentiations between self-talk and internal conversations with God. In their discourses, the process of self-reflexivity appeared as a dialogical relationship between a subject and an object (Archer 2003; Bakker 2005), which converged in the same inner experience. Insofar as God's voice or advice comes 'through' themselves, God cannot be considered an external entity in their lives. It becomes a part of individual selves, a medium of conversation in which the self and images of God are entangled and strongly connected. Therefore, God's mediation of the believer's behaviour confounds with the believer's self-mediation that brings more control to the practitioner of religious reflexivity in relation to herself/himself. Nevertheless, the process of authority endowment is not yet complete.

4.13 The religious 'I' is shaped in conversation with a 'representational system' and an 'interpretant community' (Bakker 2005) produced by the Pentecostal doctrine, congregational practice and believers' performances. As other Gypsy-Traveller believers have stated, God can speak to them through other persons, including the pastor, in the form of advice or a supportive attitude. In Taylor's (1989) words, these multiple participatory selves form 'webs of interlocation' in which the self-existence is determined by its position in relation to other selves and "in relation with certain interlocutors" (p. 36). Language is the medium of relationality through which believers "remain related to partners of discourse either in real, live exchanges, or indirect confrontations" (p. 38). The discursive 'webs of interlocation' help the person to orientate within the religious and social space. Interestingly, the conversation I had with the Pentecostal woman believer was conceived as a religious performance to which I was expected to respond through my approval, confirmation or denial. This experience reminded me that, at the end of each service, people asked me whether I had liked their testimonies, the church services and prayers. It was every time an invitation to validate their personal performances in the church.

4.14 Nevertheless, when questioning their relationships with other believers, Gypsy Travellers invariably stressed the importance of the self, rather than God. For example, I asked John, a Gypsy Traveller believer, whether he might hear Lord in matters concerning other people. He confidently told me that it is possible, but the decision to take action is always left with the person in question, as s/he is the only one to decide whether God's will should be followed or not. In this context, as Carpenter (2006) argues for the case of women believers, the relationship with God manifests in the space of prayers as internal dialogues, which have the power to source individual authority or self-esteem. It is not God that speaks through the pastor or church fellows that is the most important, but the God's voice that comes through themselves.

4.15 The rhetoric of the personal relationship with God resonates very well with the sphere of social interaction, where testimonies are public displays of inner dialogues. In Goffman's terms, testimonies act as frontstage performances, which need to be validated by an audience - the pastor and believers in the church. However, the way believers can attain both healing and authority over others comes through the private relationship with God.

4.16 From the perspective of the testimonial performances, the authority belongs to the individual, rather than to the pastor. Pentecostal doctrine gives believers permission to search and uncover their own spiritual 'truth', 'reality' and 'experience' according to what is relevant to their lives (Hunt 2002). Through a reflexive process, the individual can have a certain degree of autonomy in relation to general religious doctrine (Comaroff, Comaroff 1992). As a recipient of the Holy Spirit, the believer attains 'power over himself' (Wilson, Clow 1981) and becomes the main interpreter of religious symbols and meanings.

4.17 Comaroff and Comaroff's analysis (2003) of the process of 'civilising' South African Tswana shows that local populations resisted Christian missionaries' practices of religious colonization by claiming that they had their own power to hear and interpret the God's voice. The act of hearing the God's voice gives way to a space of contestations and struggles for authority between believers and pastors. For believers, God is not only an image, a representation, an object of conversation, but a dynamic relationship (Hall, Brokaw, Edwards, Pike 1998) in their struggles for authority. Furthermore, the internal conversations with God are a preparatory stage for the believer's interactions with relevant others who can contest, through the same mechanism, her/his authority. Hence, internal dialogues can lead to self-transformation and autonomy (Rizutto 1996; Archer 2003) only through the externalisation and negotiation of individual religious meanings. Following Goffmanian logic, believers who are able to give remarkable and convincing testimonies will have higher authority in the church (Rogers 1979; Branaman 2003; Jenkins 2008). Yet these performances are not confined to the church service: they go beyond, into the everyday. Pastor Alain suggested that a good testimony is given by those who display 'good' behaviour in everyday life, a performance that needs to be confirmed by himself and by other Gypsy believers.

4.18 The everyday social interactions will inevitably influence the ways in which the pastor will appoint that person to give testimonies or hold other roles in the church, such as singing, playing instruments, reading the Bible or collecting cash contributions. A strong 'relationship of consistency' is expected between the 'facts' of life themselves and the testimonies presented in the church. The connections construed individually and in social interaction are either confirmed or disapproved by the pastor. While those who have consistent testimonies are referred to by the pastor as 'genuine' Christians, the others are named 'hypocrites'. The latter would not be accepted as main actors (preachers, testimony givers) in the church.

4.19 Nevertheless, the pastor's religious authority is weaker than his social and organizational control capacities. As he asserted, as a pastor, he is mainly charged with the organization of religious services, and he is the one who sets the local rules in the church. From this multiplied view, authority seems to be balanced between pastor and believers, between performances and symbolic interactions inside and

outside the church. These different spheres of interaction - internal and external conversations, inside and outside church relations – engage individuals' 'disruptive selves' as sources of creativity (Asad 2008) in everyday life struggles for authority. However, the believing self in relation to Jesus, as well as to other believing selves, is not merely a moment of inspiration and creativity, but a connection that produces actions with practical and material outcomes. As explored in the following section, people can attain or lose authority over others, and consequently gain or lose positions and roles within the church.

Negotiations of authority: interstitialities of social and religious performances

5.1 As already mentioned, the Pentecostal church proposes a model of egalitarianism "by rejecting hierarchical ordering of social relationships and by placing the strongest possible emphasis on the priesthood of the laity" (Willems 1967: 255; Dodson 1997) and on the individual experience with the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, symbolic interactions and performances show divisions and struggles between pastors and believers. Those claiming that God speaks through them seek to attain more authority and display their claims of power over the others. On the other hand, when I asked believers about their individual choices, they invariably responded "Only God knows" or "Only God could give an answer".

5.2 For example, John, one of my friends at the church, told me that once had some health problems, which suddenly disappeared after two weeks. He accounted for this dramatic change by saying that 'God wanted it so' but he did not mention anything about the God's healing signs, or the way the dialogue between him and God had been established. The reflexive dialogue seems to be concealed at some moments, permitting secrecy for private and more intimate matters.

5.3 References to internal conversations with God become more salient when they relate and compare with other converts. Self-reflexivity is completed through social and symbolic interaction in the believers' attempts to manifest individual expression and authority. On the other hand, the pastors' discourses emphasize God's control over the believers' lives. As Pastors Alain and Kevin suggested, hearing God's voice is a question of learning and his voice can be heard by believers through listening to the pastor's voice as well:

C: Do you hear voices?

A: After a while you get used to the voice of God in your heart and in your mind (Interview with Pastor Alain).

5.4 Gypsy Travellers pastors and preachers indicated the process of learning religion as a way of becoming reflexive and, even more, committed to church activities through fellowship, attendance and participation. During the church services I attended, the preachers attempted to display their authority by claiming that they hear the God's voice and preach the gospel. Nevertheless, believers have always expressed subtle contestations not only in the form of testimonies, but also in their nonverbal behaviour as part of the audience. The following ethnographic snapshots serve to present fragments of the dramaturgy of these struggles for authority between preachers themselves and between preachers and testimony-givers.

Brown spoke much longer than the visiting preacher from England. He was exaggeratedly long, and many people in the room, including the guests, looked bored and agitated. Interestingly, at the end of the service, John, who had already given a testimony and was visibly irritated by Pastor Brown's speech, grabbed a guitar and started to play it loudly, gathering some enthusiastic children around him. It seemed to me that John was quite frustrated and really wanted to strengthen his own performance, even if the church service seemed to be over (Fieldnotes, 8 March 2009).

5.5 The observations show the offstage element of an intense struggle and competition in which the main actors, through their performances, attempt to take prominence and precedence over the audience. Some of them seemed to have fulfilled their performances, while others did not. What seemed to unleash this sense of struggle was the length of the preacher's discourse, its incisiveness, and, at times, the believers' hopelessness as presupposed sinners. I remember Pastor Brown saying:

"I know you can stand here praying without accepting Jesus in your hearts, which sets the sin going", and "If you are to accept Jesus in your life, you first need to accept me, because Jesus speaks through me".

Another interesting illustration comes from a Gypsy Traveller woman believer who confessed that she felt frustrated that men were given more power during the church services and women did not have opportunities to affirm themselves and perform roles within the church. It is important to mention that at a previous church service the woman had an interesting and unexpected performance during a moment of prayer. While standing at the back of the audience, she started singing alone, loudly, drowning out the preacher's voice. It was a moment of self-affirmation and contestation of the men's discursive authority in the church (Fieldnotes, Sunday 19 April 2009).

5.6 As Bataille (1988) argues in his writing about inner experience, this play of performances and discourses reveals a struggle for authority and a specific dramaturgy that is essential for any form of religion. In internal dialogues, Jesus is a relational other, object and subject of the believers' conversations (Gurney and Rogers 2007): a complete dramatization, in Bataille's (1988) terms. In social symbolic interactions, Jesus acts as a symbolic interface/signifier, a delegated authority for both preachers and believers, who attempt to have control over the audience and respectively strengthen their ability of self-expression.

5.7 Nevertheless, the stage and rules of performances (testimony-giving, choir-singing, volunteering for preaching etc.) are set up by the local organization of the church. Every Gypsy believer who aims to become a preacher is expected to meet several criteria: he has to be "legally married; the wife must be converted and of good character; be known and presented by at least two ministers; must spend four

months out of every year training with a minister appointed by the executive. Wife must be free from addictions before the candidate can be accepted to full ministry status; only men accepted as candidates" (Locke 1997: 145). The pastor is the first to give good or bad recommendations regarding a believer and his family. During my fieldwork, many believers seemed interested in having a role in the church: treasurer, choir singer, preacher. Inevitably, they needed to be on good terms with the local pastor, who claimed to be the second authority in the church after Jesus. However, in their private lives, believers contested the pastor's authority. As they told me, they had good relationships with him but did not feel the need to follow his word in every possible matter. For instance, Grammy - the treasurer - and John confessed that during their travels over the summer, they had rejected the pastor's advice to camp legally on special private sites. Thus, Gypsy Travellers' religious self-reflexivity is a source of contestation not only of the pastor's authority but also local state-imposed constraints and administrative rules.

5.8 Although the organizational aspect of the 'Light and Life' church does not give much power to the common believer, the Pentecostal egalitarian doctrine based on the privatization of the relationship with God leaves room for struggle, contestation and affirmation of authority. As Droogers (2003) suggests, the 'visible world' of social interactions and organization and the 'invisible' one articulated by faith and reflexivity of the self are inter-connected in a single 'experienced reality'. Entanglements of religious and social dramaturgies give expression to the Gypsy Travellers' struggles for individual authority.

Conclusion

6.1 The article showed the way Pentecostal performances and interactions create opportunities for the Travellers' self-expression and individual struggles for authority. The question of authority - 'To whom God speaks' - is negotiated through internal dialogues and 'webs of interlocutions' in which Jesus/God serves as a symbolic interface. God speaks through believers and their interactions and becomes both object and subject in intra- and inter-personal communications. It is a delegated authority claimed by pastors, preachers and believers, and a source for both supplying and contesting authority. In addition, the Holy Spirit is a relational partner in a process of self-mastery through which believers gain control over themselves and over relations with others - 'what God speaks'. Although authority is to a certain degree regulated by power relations and hierarchies within the church, the Gypsy Travellers' selves are "defined by the reflexive process, the universal human experience of self-objectification" (Callero 2003: 128), and by symbolic interactions with significant Others.

6.2 Gypsy Pentecostalism brings adaptations to local practices (Slavkova 2003; Ries 2004) and an "ethnic reaffirmation by means of cultural reinvention" (Delgado 2010: 256). For example, it has encouraged links between Gitanos and non-Gypsies in Madrid (Gay y Blasco 2000a, 2000b). Similarly, Delgado (2010) confirms the advantages of Gypsy Pentecostalism in developing a stronger global ethnic identity for the Spanish Gypsies, who are no longer "associated with: violence in any form (...) the use of intravenous drugs (especially heroin), school absenteeism, isolation, employment problems, the subordination of women to male authority, social exclusion and stigma" (p. 259).

6.3 Gypsy Travellers, as well as Romanian Gypsies^[10] and North American Gypsies (Sutherland 1975), usually avoid state mechanisms of identification that can challenge and even endanger the coherence of their 'culture' and lifestyles. In the case of Gypsies in the United States, Sutherland (1975) suggests that their identification by the state (welfare and police departments) can become a source of discrimination and assimilation into the American 'culture'. The isolation practiced by American Gypsies in relation to institutions has been seen as a strategy for cultural preservation, while "[i]lliteracy may be useful in some instances for maintaining isolation" (Sutherland 1975: 290). Similarly, the Scottish Gypsy Travellers I talked to confirmed this practiced institutional isolation. They consider the state-offered education useless for their cultural and informal economic practices^[11]. On the other hand, children are encouraged to attend the Pentecostal church services and special religious workshops. Compared with the more official forms of learning, the Pentecostal religion is an alternative form of education considered more appropriate for their cultural needs. Organized among and by Gypsy Travellers themselves, the religious learning process becomes an internalized source of cultural emancipation and preservation and a way of strengthening ties with members of the Gypsy Traveller group at home and abroad. Following Barth's (1969) well-known thesis of ethnic identity formation, isolationism from state institutions could be interpreted as a strategy of boundary maintenance, a mode of differentiation from Others, including state institutions which, through repetitive Caravan Site Acts, have posed threats to Gypsy Travellers' mobile lifestyles and cultural manifestations. Furthermore, in the same theoretical understanding, through opposing other forms of cultural and social organization, the Pentecostal religion and religiosity constitute the source of the group's internal cohesion and coherence, a binding sense of Gypsy Travellers' ethnic identity.

6.4 These interpretations are strengthened by their self-identification discourses, which emphasize ascriptions usually stigmatized by 'Gorgios' (the Others): school non-attendance and self-employment. The latter is opposed to wage labour and is more than an identity marker. It is a practical source of independence and autonomy in relation to outside groups (Okely 1979). Nevertheless, Gypsy Travellers' informal economic practices - *traded stereotypes*, in Okely's terms - are associated with a mobile lifestyle that has for a long time been under rigid and sometimes severe restrictions.

6.5 While the state has repressed Gypsy Travellers' spatial subjectivities (Bancroft 2001), Pentecostalism enhanced their capacities of self-expression and authority in relation to Others. In my field research, Scottish Gypsy Travellers have always showed their pride in being and experiencing Pentecostalism as a new form of belonging and identity expression. Nevertheless, Pentecostalism does not situate Gypsy Travellers in an antagonistic relation with the state, but rather encourages their self-determination and authority in the negotiation of their social and cultural status in society. In addition, Pentecostalism should not be perceived as an opposition to state governing institutions, but a source of support for the Gypsy Travellers' self-expression.

6.6 State institutions and related agencies have advanced research and launched programs in order to meet the Gypsy Travellers' cultural and social living needs^[12]. However, the state's aims of providing equal social services (health, education, housing) are not always correlated with their essential need for

travelling as "a way of thinking about the world as much as a way of living through it" (Shubin 2011: 921). As the authors of the BEMIS^[13] report (2011) stress, Gypsy Travellers' mobility-related existence "has to be understood outside the framework of sedentary discourses" (p. 19) and explored within its continuously reformulated space of cultural expression. Pentecostalism, as a cultural practice, meets the requirement of the latter. Therefore, the religious performativity and reflexivity, often ignored by social research (Droogers 2003), but very important for the believers' lives, is essential for the understanding of the Travellers' cultural reaffirmation of their identities.

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Notes

¹For illustration, I mention several civic organizations which usually organize cultural events for Gypsy Traveller performers: the Romani Cultural and Arts Company (<http://www.romaniarts.co.uk>) in collaboration with Urban Circle Productions (<http://www.urbancircle.co.uk>); Arts Extend Worcestershire (<http://www.arts-extend.com>), Soft Touch Arts (<http://www.soft-touch.org.uk>) etc.

²During my fieldwork, 'Gypsy Travellers' was the name used by the Scottish Gypsies to identify themselves and to create a sense of unity as Born-Again Christians.

³I would like to mention that I have never been a member of the Pentecostal church and I consider myself as having no religious belonging.

⁴My empirical research followed the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association in assuring professional integrity, anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.

⁵Field notes cover informal conversations I had in the church, fragments of preaching performances and observations I made during each church service.

⁶See, for example, Annis (1987), Bastian (1993), Bowen (1996), Burdick (1998), Chesnut (2003), Cleary and Stewart-Gambino (1997), Comaroff and Comaroff (2003), Corten (1997), D'Epinay (1969), Dodson (1997), Freston (2001), Robbins (2004).

⁷For instance, on the 'Life and Light' Methodist church's webpage, there are seven events and meeting groups listed for the members to attend: Easter Days, Men of Valour, Gospel Choir, Annual Celebration, Monthly specials, Bible School and Wellspring. Source: <http://lightandlife.co.uk>.

⁸A relevant example comes from Chesnut (1997), who studied a Brazilian Pentecostal church in which almost all the believers interviewed (79.5%) held formal or informal roles in the church.

⁹God and Jesus are not always clearly distinguished and can both be addressed as Lord (Droogers 2003: 271).

¹⁰The evidence and the explanation for the Romanian Gypsies looking for membership but escaping belonging to the state structures are detailed in my unpublished PhD thesis entitled "Modernity without Modernization. Historical Geographies of Power among the Roma in Romania", Department of Sociology, University of Edinburgh, UK.

¹¹Many of the Scottish Gypsy Travellers I talked to suggested that they do not encourage children to go to school because they would not learn about the important issues they need to deal with in their informal economic practices and would not be able to exploit the state educational endowment for a source of living.

¹²The Scottish Government (People and Society-Equality- Gypsies/Travellers: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/gypsiestravellers>) and Scottish Governmental Agencies such as the Scottish Housing Regulator finance research and launch programs for the social integration of Scottish Gypsy Travellers. Concerning the Gypsy Travellers' social and cultural life, the general governmental strategy is to raise the levels of equality between mobile and settled populations and facilitate good relations with the locals.

¹³Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) is an infrastructure organization based on a developed network of ethnic minority organizations aiming at reducing inequalities among ethnic residents of Scotland- <<http://www.bemis.org.uk>>. The report cited here is produced by BEMIS (2011) and entitled "Gypsy Travellers in Contemporary Scotland. The 2001 Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies: Ten Years On".

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