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‘Evangelical Gitanos are a good catch’: masculinity, churches, and *roneos*⋆

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This article explores Christian principles, imagery, and ideas shaping the (re)making of masculine ideals, behaviour, and identities among Pentecostal Gitanos in Spain. Scholarship on Pentecostal masculinities emphasizes that in cultural settings dominated by ‘macho’ and other chauvinistic principles, men find it challenging to comply with Pentecostal standards of manhood, and those who do convert often lose standing before non-converted men as they are accorded an aura of effeminacy. Whereas many converted Gitanos struggle to meet Pentecostal moral standards too, Gitano believers attempt to reform their masculinity following dominant and highly valued ethnic ideals. The connection between masculine pathways of conversion, moral/spiritual commitment, and cultural prestige has significant implications for the ways in which Gitano male believers are perceived and appreciated as potential partners in Gitano cultural and communitarian milieus. The article argues that Pentecostal Christianity’s gendered ideas about how men should behave defines ideals of masculinity, ethical expectations, and couple-making practices among Gitano communities. The article also provides an ethnographic account of the mechanisms involved in generating, reproducing, and sustaining discursive, social, and communitarian frameworks and courting practices (known as *roneos*) in which Pentecostal Gitano ideals and aspirations about manhood become meaningful and appealing.

> Thank God, We, Gitanos, are finally learning to treat our women properly. The Bible says the Lord made Eve not from Adam’s head to rule over him; not from his feet to be trampled underfoot by him; but from his rib, near his heart, so that they might love and cherish each other. I was very reluctant to attend Gitano churches until, one day, my wife encouraged me to visit a *culto* [church]. Honestly, I used to cheat on my wife with other *paya* [non-Gitana] women, drink heavily every day, and, occasionally, this is very painful to admit, beat up my dear wife when I got home. Despite the fact I spent most of my time partying and having fun, I felt miserable. However, my home has been a haven of peace

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> since I converted five years ago. I do not fight with my dear wife any more. We talk and laugh and go to our Gitano church together. I am a new man, Antonio, a truly happy one. My children are happier than ever before, too. They have a better father now. Only God can transform human lives, men, and homes so radically!

The Spanish Roma – known as Gitanos – are one of Spain's most prominent and historically influential cultural groups. While Gitanos, like any other social group, are internally diverse, a highly significant number of them suffer from intense pressure to assimilate into the non-Gitano majority and face stigma, substantial economic hardship, and severe discrimination. Lolo, whose testimony is featured above, is a Gitano street vendor in his mid-thirties. His life narrative regarding a drastic shift in behaviour and how he sees himself as a changed and better Gitano man resembles many other conversion stories and testimonies from Gitano men I heard and gathered in my fieldwork. Throughout my fieldwork, I spent most of my time with other men[1] in Pentecostal Gitano churches. Religious tales about Gitano men's manhood, urban life, and relationships with women were often shared between them, and with me.

Spanish people hold deep-seated negative stereotypes about Gitanos. One of the most persistent stereotypes in contemporary Spain depicts Gitano males as extremely chauvinist, dismissive partners who treat women poorly. However, many Gitano Pentecostal believers, both men and women, engage with deep-rooted assumptions about Gitano males as abusive partners and strive to promote counter-images of Gitanos as good God-fearing spouses. Based on a long-term ethnography in the south of Madrid (Spain), this article explores biblical principles, imagery, and ideas shaping the (re)construction of masculine behaviour and identities among Pentecostal Gitano communities. Pentecostalism reached Gitanos around half a century ago. The Iglesia Evangelica de Filadelfia (IEF), a Pentecostal institution known as 'the Gitano church', holds powerful sway over Gitanos' identity, cosmologies, and culture. Its influence over the gendered aspects of Gitano men's lives is far superior to Spanish-dominant Catholicism or the feminist movement. It also underlines the fundamental role of Gitano pastors and religious leaders in defining domestic spaces, interactions, and relationships as critical areas to showcase commitment and obedience to God. Here, I will primarily feature men from a specific segment of the Gitano Pentecostal community, one that is profoundly and steadily committed to living according to church principles and has found meaning in showing to themselves and other Gitanos that manhood is a permanent terrain of conquest for God.

Masculinity, a critical gender dimension, is usually defined as the socially constructed roles, behaviours, and attributes considered suitable and appropriate for men in a given sociocultural and historical setting. Spanish masculinities (Brandes 1980) and, more broadly, gendered views in the Mediterranean area (Péristiany 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1963) have caught anthropologists' attention in the history of the discipline. More recently, Spanish ethnographers have paid attention to Gitano masculinities, arguing that Gitanos' gendered views about themselves reclaim and uphold decaying cultural notions of honour, shame, and respect to create a sense of moral distinction and difference vis-à-vis a rapidly changing Spanish society (Gay y Blasco 1999; San Román 1997).

The study of masculinity among Pentecostal Gitanos strikes a chord with a growing academic interest in analysing the interface between Charismatic Pentecostalism and masculinities (Dawley 2018; Eriksen 2012; Fesenmyer 2018; Lindhardt 2015; Thornton 2018; van Klinken 2013) as well as conversations concerning the role of religion in

producing alternative and morally grounded models of manhood in explicit contrast with perceptions of local and toxic masculinities in conservative religious traditions and settings (Dawley & Thornton 2018: 6; Khan 2018; Soothill 2007: 21; Thornton 2016). Ideally, conversion to Pentecostal Christianity requires men to change their ways, giving up on some sinful masculinized practices such as drinking, gambling, engaging with violence, or refusing to be held accountable. They must instead comply with moral standards regarding behaviour towards family and women (Brusco 1995; Montecino 2002). Scholarship on Pentecostal masculinities emphasizes that in cultural settings dominated by 'macho' and other chauvinistic ideals, many men find it challenging to comply with Pentecostal standards of manhood and lose face and prestige before non-converted men as they are accorded an aura of effeminacy. Austin-Broos (1997: 123) noted that men who become Pentecostals in Jamaica pursue institutional leadership roles within the church to mitigate the threat of others' perceptions of their masculinity associated with conversion. Lindhardt also noted that in Tanzania, men who convert gain social standing vis-à-vis non-believing men. This is achieved by convincing others that they are winners bound for success who possess spiritual power over the forces of darkness (Lindhardt 2015: 264). Nevertheless, and despite converted men's efforts to make up for their loss of reputation and recover their masculine standing, clashes between cultural/local masculine expectations and sense of honour and the Evangelical/Pentecostal church's demands of men are repeatedly presented by scholars as one of the main factors disengaging men from Pentecostal religious services and communities (Austin-Broos 1997; Brusco 1995; Dawley 2018; Lindhardt 2015).

Whereas many converted Gitanos struggle to meet Pentecostal standards of manhood too, established ideals of religious masculinity among Gitanos disrupt this well-studied and common pattern of masculine devaluation, as Gitano men strive to reform their masculinity following dominant and highly valued cultural ideals (Gay y Blasco 2000). The connection between masculine pathways of conversion, moral/spiritual commitment, and cultural prestige have significant implications for the ways in which Gitano male believers are perceived and appreciated as potential partners in Gitano cultural and communitarian milieus. This article makes a case for considering Pentecostal Christianity's gendered ideas of how men should act and behave as a key defining factor for understanding masculinity, ethical expectations, and couple-making practices among Gitano communities. Notably, it also provides an ethnographic account of the mechanisms involved in generating, reproducing, and sustaining discursive, social, and communitarian frameworks and courting practices (known as *roneos*) in which Pentecostal Gitano ideals and aspirations about manhood become meaningful, relevant, and appealing. For Gitanos, such mechanisms are still distinctly shaped by kin structures, expectations, and values. Therefore, by shedding light on how Pentecostalism reshapes Gitano masculinities, my material engages, albeit tangentially, with anthropological work on kinship and marriage patterns among Gitano people.

Additionally, by focusing on the study of masculinity among Pentecostal Gitano communities, I revisit academic debates regarding the complex and ambiguous role of Pentecostalism in reinforcing, negotiating, or challenging gendered power structures (Brusco 1995; Cucchiari 1990; Martin 2001; Woodhead 2001). Gitano Pentecostal churches attempt to educate men – through workshops, men-only meetings, sermons, and so on – to become good family men, husbands and fathers following conservative biblical teachings. Indeed, Gitana women often claim that substantial changes in

the way men handle relationships act as one of the key factors attracting women in significant numbers to Gitano churches (Gay y Blasco 1999; Montañés Jimenez 2016). Yet, methodologically speaking, men's conversion testimonies and religious life-changing stories revolving around the reformation of masculinity may seriously challenge researchers' naïvety. I am convinced that most of my male interlocutors are driven by a genuine moral and spiritual desire to become better men according to their Pentecostal standards. Nonetheless, I am also aware that religious stories are assembled with the firm intention of evangelizing others and demonstrating the transformative power of God. Additionally, converted Gitanos often reconstruct their sense of self and events in their past following archetypical and pre-scripted life narratives: from a sinful past shaped by violence and antisocial behaviour to a holy present informed by Christian idioms of redemption, repentance, and atonement. Notably, I do not intend to assess Pentecostalism's 'positive' impact on men. Instead, I look at how such 'positive' impact is understood, narrated, and shared with others, and the repercussions across Gitano communities arising from the assumption that such positive change is real, radical, and faith-driven.

Men in La Pequeña Villa: leadership, authority, and gendered experiences in church

The IEF is one of the largest Evangelical churches in Spain and has established over 1,600 places of worship and more than 6,000 male ministries (Cantón Delgado 2018: 2). I visited many IEF churches in Madrid (and occasionally Barcelona), but most of my fieldwork was conducted in Villaverde, a low-income working-class area located in the south of the city, where I was born and raised. There, I joined a Gitano church led by Pastor Pablo known as 'La Pequeña Villa' (the little church in Villaverde) and built a friendship and strong rapport with around thirty men. Most of my material and reflections for this article originate from my fieldwork in this church and the time I spent with these Gitanos.

Pastor Pablo founded La Pequeña Villa in the late 2000s, when he was in his mid-twenties. La Pequeña Villa's regular attendance is between 100 and 125 people, reaching peaks of 200 some weekends. Believers who worship at La Pequeña Villa are mostly Gitanos or *payo* neighbours linked by marriage with Gitano individuals. Regular economic activities from congregation members include scavenging and selling goods on the street and at flea markets. Local kin communities are the backbone of La Pequeña Villa. Pastor Pablo's relatives make up a significant portion of the congregation, as do other Gitano families in the neighbourhood. Gitanos' broad and robust kin networks thus operate as powerful channels for evangelization, and La Pequeña Villa functions as a prominent meeting space for relatives.

Pastor Pablo often preaches that church members are undifferentiated children in the eyes of God. In the seating arrangement of La Pequeña Villa, men and women are located equidistantly from the pulpit where he delivers sermons. The fact that male and female members of the church approach each other using the terms 'brother' and 'sister', with an undertone of equal position vis-à-vis shared progenitors, shows this lack of distinctiveness in the religious creed of La Pequeña Villa. However, common spiritual parentage and a subordinated position towards God do not confer the same status between genders. Hierarchies among men and women are emphasized through space in some dramatic ways. Like Romanian Roma (Engebrigtsen 2007: 66), Gitana women show respect by relinquishing the public sphere to men. Unlike their male counterparts,

Gitana singers cannot step onto the pulpit platform that functions as the stage. While male musicians face the congregation, Gitana women perform with their backs turned to the congregation.

La Pequeña Villa's church attendance is strongly feminized. In a typical religious service, women outnumber men two to one. However, La Pequeña Villa reflects patriarchal hierarchies and favours male headship. The IEF's doctrine embraces traditional and heteronormative values and vigorously defends the view that sex and gender are God-given attributes which define roles and behaviours. Becoming a pastor and being involved in relevant decision-making in the church is strictly a male privilege. Gitanas are barred from all categories of formal ministry recognized by the IEF and widely excluded from formal leadership.

Most Pentecostal churches stipulate that only men can be leaders (van Klinken 2012). Ritual practices also often incorporate gendered aspects of conversion. In urban Vanuatu (Melanesia), Eriksen shows that women and men engage with the Holy Spirit differently in charismatic spaces. Men receive the Spirit in ways that foster their status and individual capacities for institutional leadership, while women do so in possession episodes that embed them in relational networks (Eriksen 2014: 266). Gitano churches make important gender distinctions, too. Many Gitano pastors, including Pablo, understand male ministry as a cornerstone of the IEF. According to the IEF teachings, as Eve's descendants, women are the first sinners, so they are to be held responsible for the fall of humanity since they tempted Adam to break the sacred taboo and eat of the Tree of Knowledge. By disobeying God's orders and acting on their own without a man's consent, women opened the door for sin and death to enter the world and triggered the events that led to humanity's ejection from the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, Pastor Pablo often refers to the 1 Timothy 2:12 New Testament passage, traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul, 'But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence', to underpin the official church position of denying Gitana women ministry opportunities. By grounding males' source of authority in the divine Bible, Pastor Pablo reinforces and blends Pentecostal and some dominant Gitano gendered worldviews.

While women's presence in Pentecostal leadership positions is still rare, it has slowly increased over recent decades in Spain (Cazarin & Griera 2018). Pastor Pablo believes Gitano churches must not follow that path. One compelling reason for this is that male leadership in the church resonates with what many believers consider 'La ley Gitana' (The Gitano Law): the core of Gitanos' cultural identity. The reified distinction of gender worldviews between Gitano churches and others qualifies Pastor Pablo to draw a moral division, bestowing a sense of excellence on the Gitano church compared to a morally damaged external world.

Social and generational change, especially in urban settings, has transformed Gitanos' traditional kin-based forms of masculine authority over recent decades. Prominent male figures such as Pentecostal Gitano pastors have emerged as dominant and influential leaders. Gay y Blasco's early work (1999; 2000) focused on the public sphere of political relations among patrigroups and, more specifically, the role of men in shaping such relations. As she points out, elderly Gitano men, or *tios*, greatly influence their extended families. 'Men of respect' distinguish themselves from other *tios*, gaining prestige and therefore 'respect' from others by displaying *conocimiento* (knowledge), an ability to differentiate between proper and improper behaviour according to Gitano law or ways, and *formalidad* (formality/responsibility), an attribute closely associated

with decency, righteousness, decorum, and especially the capacity to exert control over one's behaviour, particularly in the face of conflict vis-à-vis other non-related Gitano groups. According to Gay y Blasco, the principles of religious hierarchies do not emerge in opposition to, but following, traditional and cultural sources of masculine prestige. Converted men 'struggle to present themselves as respectable, the elite of the Gitano community, by disassociating both knowledge and respect from their age context, and by emphasising their achieved rather than their ascribed component' (Gay y Blasco 2000: 14). Gay y Blasco elaborates further on the striking similarities between both figures as follows:

> As happens with the 'men of respect', the influence of Evangelical ministers extends beyond their kin group and the area where they live. And, just as in the case of the Gitano elders who mediate in feuds and conflicts, the ministers' authority depends on the acquiescence of those who call them to settle confrontations: congregations are enthusiastic about new ministers for a couple of months when they start putting pressure on them until they get them to leave. Lastly, ministers, no matter their age, are the recipients of deference in much the same way as older men are: they are given the best places to sit and the best food to eat and are served the first ones by the women (Gay y Blasco 2000: 13).

Notwithstanding, barring ministry opportunities to Gitana women does not deter male pastors from capitalizing on Gitana women's skills to build up their churches. Some influential women – known as *pastoras* (female pastors) – occupy high-ranking positions in IEF congregations. The position of *pastoras* is not ministerial but honorific, only attainable when women are married to pastors. *Pastoras* are expected to lead and promote the women's section of the church and listen carefully to other women's concerns in women-only gatherings that take place fortnightly. Pastor Pablo vindicates the existence of this unrecognized ministry for women out of practicality. This practicality is grounded, in turn, on the very existence of the gender divide. According to Pastor Pablo:

> My wife Elena gets access more easily to Gitana women's intimacy, and they feel more comfortable and open in a more significant fashion with a woman. Gitana women would not open up to me as they do to *pastoras*. I would say that my wife's workload is the same as, or even more significant than, mine.

Despite likening his wife's pastoral workload to his own, Pastor Pablo boldly distinguishes between their responsibilities. Regardless of the social relevance of his wife Elena's religious work, her role as a confidante for the congregation's women does not entitle her to advise on spiritual issues because, according to IEF doctrine, women are not judged to interpret the scriptures correctly, or meant to teach others. In an informal conversation, Elena herself made it vehemently clear to me that Pastor Pablo has the last word regarding any potential advice or counsel from her. The act of downplaying women's roles, status, and influence in leadership matters aligns with the male domination of public spaces in the church. Gitana women in La Pequeña Villa are aware that one of their roles is preserving males' reputations in the church and showing deference to them, particularly before other men.

Reassured by the IEF doctrine of their rightful place as head of the church, men's sense of self-worth is protected and reinforced. The performance of masculinity and pair recognition are, thus, critical matters. The pre-ceremonial time is one moment when masculinity becomes more clearly ritualized. Male believers devote much of their time to waving and shaking hands with their religious peers. Leaving someone out of this male ritual is equivalent to belittling their worth as a Gitano brother. On some

occasions, I witnessed male believers becoming visibly upset when someone skipped them in the greeting round. As time passed, I realized I was progressively included in this male ritual, too. By the end of my stay in La Pequeña Villa, it took me a very long time to advance from the back row to my seat because of the impressive number of greetings I had to reciprocate.

La Pequeña Villa church is a social space defined by the politics of manly honour. Interactions between men and women are kept to the bare minimum and conducted most discreetly. Within religious services themselves, the central aisle leading from the entrance to the pulpit marks a gender divide. Men invariably sit to the right and women, together with children, to the left, and this pattern is jealously guarded even in the event of full attendance. Therefore, despite equal spacing relative to the pastor, male and female Gitanos worship alongside each other but separately.

Pastor Pablo explains this rigid separation:

> Like the Israeli people, Gitano men cannot talk to Gitana women freely face-to-face. If Gitano men spoke to women alone, it would show a lack of respect for Gitana women, and it is contrary to your testimony. According to Gitano culture, you cannot be seen talking to [unrelated] women in the streets or sitting next to a Gitana woman. That potential scenario is not as big of an outrage nowadays as before, yet it is better if that situation does not arise.

Pastor Pablo's reference to the Israeli people is meaningful in the Gitano context. Many Gitano pastors and believers claim that the Gitano people are descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. The development of these narratives about the past has captured Gitano believers' imaginations and spurred lively debates among Pentecostal Gitano communities (Montañés Jimenez forthcoming). Critically, Pastor Pablo links the ways Gitanos interact in La Pequeña Villa to the patriarchal culture of the Israelites as described in the Old Testament, implying that Gitano believers act according to biblical teachings.

By preventing sexual impropriety within the congregation, Gitano men and women respect each other and abide by what they consider proper behaviour. Proving sexual respectability in the church is so significant that only children, as not yet fully developed sexual beings, can cross that divide. Children's role as messengers is prominent in communicating between men and women in La Pequeña Villa. They are often commissioned to send messages from the male or female section of the congregation to the opposite side.

The politics of manly honour extends to every member of La Pequeña Villa, including myself. During my fieldwork, my moral qualities were assessed by Gitano churchgoers. On one occasion, I overheard Gitana women discussing my actual intentions toward the congregation, wondering whether I was looking for a 'hook-up'. Likewise, a few young and middle-aged Gitano men in the congregation would tease me by offering to act as matchmakers and pair me up with some unmarried young Gitana, picking up on the ground tension stemming from my unmarried status. Young Gitanas, aware of my marital status, seldom approached me in public lest they tarnished their sexual reputation. Social interactions with women in La Pequeña Villa were restricted to formal greetings and small talk, and in the latter instances, women were always accompanied by male relatives. La Pequeña Villa is a space where one's adherence to strict gender-related moral principles is not taken for granted but must always be performed and displayed by both genders.

Masculinities and the good domestic life: conversion, reformation, and struggles

La Pequeña Villa's doctrine of gender relies heavily upon traditional Christian family ideals and marks these as the central component of the social and moral order. In opposition to broader Spanish society, which is becoming increasingly liberal and accepting of non-traditional forms of marriage and sexual orientation, and where divorce ratios are high, Pastor Pablo holds to patriarchal, heterosexual, and monogamous principles. He usually preaches that the traditional family is a divine and indissoluble institution that must be preserved before advancing liberal agendas led by demonic forces.

La Pequeña Villa not only stands up for family values; its structure is reminiscent of a traditional and patriarchal family, too. Like traditional families, where males are the head of the household, Gitano males are the head of the church. Another aspect where La Pequeña Villa is reminiscent of traditional households is in the division of labour. Pastor Pablo often claims believers must take care of the church's physical space as if it were their own home. For Gitana women, the metaphorical comparison has practical, real-life consequences. Mimicking the division of labour in the homes of members of La Pequeña Villa, they are expected to undertake housekeeping chores, which Pastor Pablo assigns on a rotating schedule. So that he is not accused of being biased towards his wife, Elena often leads by example and volunteers herself for the cleaning rota weekly. The strong presence of children in the congregation further underpins how La Pequeña Villa is modelled on traditional family ideals. Children socialized in the Church their entire lives are expected to grow into full-fledged members. In this regard, Pastor Pablo often affirms that bringing children to church is highly advisable since exposure to the church's message encourages the future integration of Gitano children into the congregation.

In line with Protestant reform principles, priestly celibacy is not part of IEF doctrine, so Gitano pastors are free to engage in marriage. Regardless of qualifications and skills, marriage for pastors is an essential requirement. Men must first be married, preferably with children, to become pastors. Pastor Pablo got married before founding La Pequeña Villa, which was widely considered as evidence of a good testimony and his being a righteous man within his congregation. In his sermons, he often depicts gender-related violence or spouses' unfaithfulness as characteristic of non-Pentecostal marriages.

Gitano men are expected to act as the spiritual and dominant heads of the household, wake up early in the morning to pray, ensure members of their family go to church, and comply with the various obligations linked to their leading position. Pastor Pablo once described to me the IEF's gender doctrine as 'complementarianism'. Complementarianism is a Christian theological view advocating different but complementary roles and responsibilities for men and women in marriage, family life, and religious leadership. The doctrine of complementarianism is best captured by the portrayal of God in La Pequeña Villa. Like Sicilian Pentecostal churches (Cucchiari 1990: 690), Pastor Pablo portrays complex cross-gender images of God. Although God is indisputable and referred to as a man, His attributes are traditionally fatherly (strong, severe, righteous, avid for respect, potentially violent if betrayed) and motherly (caring, warm, loving, forgiving, affective, consolatory). Rather than opposing qualities, Pastor Pablo depicts traditional fatherly and motherly attributes as mutually implicating. Unlike God, whose infinite power enables Him to become one thing and its opposite, Pastor Pablo portrays human beings as naturally incomplete and unable to embody both

sets of attributes. Christian marriage, as a partnership created in the image and likeness of God, brings together the best of both genders and makes for a perfect union. Believers thus link Pentecostal Gitano marriages to an idea of gender integrity (Cucchiari 1990), understanding it as a partnership that enables the possibility of experiencing the spiritual gendered self as a good woman and a good man (Martin 2001: 55).

As Pastor Pablo often preaches in his sermons, the key to understanding how a happy marriage works lies in the idea of respect. Respect is an ethical disposition which alludes to obedience or deference expected from an individual in their relationships with individuals of a higher status. Respect is also a key concept in Gitanos' cultural repertoire, one shaping the interactions between elders and young as well as men and women (see Gay y Blasco 1999). According to Pastor Pablo, the notion of respect can be found in biblical principles. When discussing the topic, he quoted the epistle of Paul to the Colossians in the New Testament, which, according to him, encapsulates the essence of marital and family relationships: 'Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children obey their parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter their children, or they will become discouraged' (Colossians 3: 18-21). As the quote above shows, Gitano Pentecostal doctrine romanticizes female subordination to males since submitting to one's husband is equated to submitting to God's will (Mate 2002: 557). Pastor Pablo often preaches that to achieve genuine happiness, both spouses should surrender to God's will and fulfil their roles within the family (see Smilde 1997). This union morally implicates both sexes, so instilling ideals of mutual responsibility, interdependence, and harmonious relationships between spouses is central to his pastoral work.

Pentecostal churches are recurrently portrayed as religious institutions with the capacity to reform masculinity in the private and domestic realm by limiting men's oppressive behaviour towards women (Martin 2001; Woodhead 2001) and offering a way for men to distance themselves from the burdensome traditional norms of masculinity (Lindhardt 2015: 258). In her pioneering study of Colombian Pentecostalism, Brusco (1995) notes that Pentecostal churches benefit women by 'domesticating men' and urging them to give up violence and chauvinistic patterns of consumption, such as drinking, gambling, or womanizing (see also Stoll 1990: 319; van Klinken 2012). In a similar vein, Martin popularized the concept of 'the Pentecostal gender paradox'. Even though Pentecostal churches rarely challenge traditional gender hierarchies, Martin argues, conversion to Pentecostalism attracts women because the conversion of males benefits them. By adhering to these religious principles, women can exercise considerable influence over domestic and family matters, find important arenas of religious expression, and even achieve a surprising measure of individual autonomy (Martin 2001: 53). A typical point that believers make when they try to evangelize Gitana women is that '*la conversión trae la felicidad a tu hogar*' (conversion brings joy to your home).

La Pequeña Villa's doctrine seeks to reorganize gender relations and re-educate spouses so that the household becomes a haven of peace, and in-family hostilities and conflicts are prevented. Pastor Pablo often describes Pentecostalist Gitano masculinity as a process through which Gitano men '*se hacen dóciles*' (become docile). The analogy of docility, which refers to the obedience of domesticated animals to humans, expresses how Gitano believers are held accountable to God for their behaviour towards their wives. In line with some developments in certain African regions (Burchardt 2018),

Pastor Pablo counsels Gitano believers and creates men-only groups to discuss men's issues. According to Dawley (2018), it is participation in these groups – which for Gitanos often involves the strong presence of close and distant relatives on both sides of the family – rather than formal conversion, which is the experiential force that transforms many men's lives, their gender identities, and their relationships with others. In addition to the men-only groups, Gitano couples are offered the opportunity to discuss marital relationships.[2]

The heterogeneity of church contexts and membership complicates questions about religious compliance. Pressures to comply with moral standards for Gitano men differ significantly according to roles, positions, and seniority in the church. As a rule of thumb, the longer you are a church member, the higher the expectations are for men to comply with Pentecostal standards. Regardless of their role in the church, men raised in Pentecostal families are expected to have a solid moral compass and embody virtuous masculinities. Unmarried young Gitanos may sometimes receive *disciplinamientos* (punishments) in the form of temporary church exclusion activities or verbal reprimands for minor wrongdoings, such as partying too much. Married Gitano males are encouraged to police themselves. Otherwise, if men's behaviour is publicly and notoriously unfitting, male pastors or respected elders may intervene to mediate between male believers and their aggravated partners or their families.

The theme of redemption and masculine reformation illuminates the emergence of ethical aspirations, compliance, and anxieties, as well as symbolic and practical negotiations between 'barrio' (street) and 'Evangelical' masculinity (see Thornton 2013; 2016) for Gitano believers. Some La Pequeña Villa male believers portray themselves as street men who previously had affairs with non-Gitana women and neglected their wives and children. Following conversion, believers are strongly encouraged to give up or refrain from engaging in worldly and sinful entertainment (gambling, heavy drinking, partying) and pleasure (prostitution, pornography). As husbands, male believers are expected to stay faithful, treat their wives gently, and ensure that their households remain argument-free. Nonetheless, conversions are not linear but complex identity transformations for Gitano men. As suggested by Coleman (2003), they are not singular events, but experiences ingrained in processes and, to some extent, a continuous process of self-persuasion. Some Gitano male believers show signs of nostalgia for their worldly life, and many acknowledge they have experienced crises and reverted temporarily to their former habits.[3] Pastor Pablo teaches that *el Enemigo* (the Enemy or Satan) is behind temptations and temporal crises.

On a few occasions, I heard stories about male Gitano pastors from other churches spectacularly failing to comply with Pentecostal morals. Hypocrisy and false piety from pastors, who are deemed to inhabit a high moral and spiritual ground and whose behaviour must be exemplary, are particularly damaging to the moral fabric of congregations. However, stories about pastors' failings also act as cautionary tales. No man is free from sin, so, regardless of status, age, or time as a church member, Christians must always remain vigilant and committed to their faith to please God, avoid worldly temptations, and become good Christian men.

Church, *roneos*, and marital choices

Pentecostalism's sway over Gitanos' love lives stretches back to the period that Gitanos known as *mocedad* (puberty), marked by the end of childhood and the awakening of sexual desire. *Mozos* (young non-married Gitano individuals), on average, marry

earlier than non-Gitano people in Spain (Martín & Gamella 2005: 52-5). Indeed, most *mozos* in La Pequeña Villa marry in their late teens or early twenties. Not unlike the Cortorari Roma analysed by Tesăr (2012), Gitano spouses, far from being represented as autonomous individuals, are conceived of as persons enmeshed in a web of kinship relations. The success, or failure, of *mozos* in choosing an adequate spouse may affect the status of their families. La Pequeña Villa believers deem marriage between two Gitano converts the highest form of Gitano union. When La Pequeña Villa members marry non-converted individuals, partners typically face pressure to attend or join the church.

Pentecostal Gitanos follow traditional Christian teachings about sex and partnership and deem marriage a sacred, lifelong, and monogamous union between a man and a woman. Regardless of their religious identity, many Gitanos strongly believe Gitana women must marry the man with whom they first have intercourse. Violence or punishments between Gitano families – such as temporary or permanent removal from the neighbourhood – may follow if the man fails to meet his moral responsibilities towards the Gitana woman with whom he had intercourse. Furthermore, women become objects of scorn if their partner does not recognize his responsibility and cohabitation does not follow (Gay y Blasco 1997: 524). Divorce or separation is also frowned upon.

Since both cultural and religious belief systems discourage separation, young Pentecostal Gitanos face a critical life decision at a very early age as they seemingly have only one shot at choosing the right partner and starting a family. Gitanas, I often heard my interlocutors saying, want to avoid *Gitanos canallas* (cruel/unsavoury Gitano males), who are prone to violence and difficult to control. Looking within the church for a potential mate is a common strategy, particularly for women, because in line with other Pentecostal believers, such as those described by Gill (1990: 717) in Bolivia, more 'domesticated' and reliable spouses can be found compared to those inhabiting society at large. A popular saying in La Pequeña Villa that shows how ideals of gender integrity link to attractiveness is that '*Los Gitanos evangélicos son un buen partido*' (Evangelical Gitanos are a good catch).

Born-again males' appeal is increasingly catching ethnographers' attention. Burchardt (2018: 122) has noted that by converting to Pentecostalism, pastors and other males increase their sexual desirability (see also Thornton 2018: 151). Many of Burchardt's Pentecostal female informants in South Africa have long suspected that some men used their participation in church life to meet, get to know, and ultimately have sex with women, and that pastors are no exception to this concerning development (2018: 121). Gitanos, especially *mozos*, know how desirability is connected to church attendance. By attending church, *mozos* are symbolically endowed with qualities that enhance their chances of being perceived as husband or wife material and improve their marriage prospects. Gitano male believers are expected to be kind, treat their spouses well, and become devoted husbands and fathers. Gitana female believers are expected to respect men and to display modesty and sexual shame.

Anthropologists have noted that the obligation for women to be virgins before marriage is a powerful ethnic marker heavily linked to a strong sense of *honra*, or honour (Gay y Blasco 1997; Pasqualino 1998). Conversely, non-converted Gitano men can often improve their social standing by demonstrating they are sexually active. Because of the strict family monitoring of women's sexual behaviour, unmarried non-converted men are encouraged, or at least often feel free, to engage in sexual activities before marriage with *payas* (Gay y Blasco 1997: 523). Pastor Pablo reinforces

Gitano gendered views by preaching in favour of women's virginity before marriage. However, he also introduces novel ways for Gitano believers to approach sexual life by advocating that men, ideally, should stop engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage. Gitano Pentecostal sexual morality thus is organized around the core values of premarital abstinence and marital fidelity, leading to a religious ideal of masculinity which stands in stark contrast to the lived reality of some young Gitanos in Madrid, whom ethnographers repeatedly describe as willing to showcase their masculinity and trying to have sex with non-Gitana females before marrying Gitanas (San Román 1997).

The story of Pastor Pablo's nephew David exemplifies how the church and certain religious qualities associated with believers are central to shaping marriage choices. David, 18 years old and father of two, never attended church in his early teens. This changed when he met his future wife Ana at 14. Although David had liked Ana since first laying eyes on her, he was not inclined to ask her out before knowing more about her character and compatibility, which was a complicated effort as *mozos* are not meant to speak to each other in public. When David learned Ana attended the church of La Pequeña Villa, he joined the church and courted her discreetly, privately, and during *roneos* (see below). For a year, David participated in the church regularly and proved his commitment to Christian values to the congregation.

Some recurrent and typical features of masculinity culturally valued by non-married Gitano males include being showy and bold, exhibiting strength, being boastful, and displaying a drive for the sexual conquest of *payas* (San Román 1997: 147). In contrast, David behaves to the contrary, being humble, cautious, and chaste. From her behaviour in church, David also knew his future wife to be modest and a virgin. This proved a significant factor informing his decision to ask his cousins and brother to reach out to Ana through a female relative of hers and let her know of his interest. Her parents did not know David, yet his exemplary behaviour in church, a kind word from Pastor Pablo, and the knowledge that he was raised in a Pentecostal family all contributed to their approval. Not long after, his future wife agreed to *pedirse* (get engaged), and subsequently they got married in the church.

David and Ana's love story is exemplary for La Pequeña Villa's believers. Paramount to its relevance is not only that the church brought them together, but also that they kept their moral commitment to the church after marriage. This is critical since some believers feel that some young Gitanos convert strategically to find their partner and never return when that goal is achieved (see Méndez 2005: 129). David himself frequently complained to me that some of his male friends never attended the church once they were married, or only went back to church to restore their reputation when some *manchas* (moral stains) or rumours about their behaviour had reached the ears of other Gitano families. For men, overt public exposure to drinking, partying, or getting into trouble is, according to David, the go-to reason to rejoin the church. For women, a broken engagement, for instance, has such a negative impact on their sexual reputation that only by joining the church and being born again could they expect their good name to be restored. David considers these behaviours shame-worthy and by-products of demonic attacks and a lack of commitment to the church. Only by keeping oneself committed to the church can Gitanos avoid these embarrassing and ungodly situations.

Paradoxically, despite the rigid moral principles that dominate the interaction between genders in La Pequeña Villa, church attendance opens the way for courting practices. Gitano believers indeed acknowledge the concomitance of church and

courting. Pastor Pablo himself claims that the IEF churches are 'marriage bureaus for Gitano people'. I have often heard converts teasingly saying, '*Si no casas a tu hijo/a, traelo/a la Iglesia!*' ('If you have trouble finding a partner for your son or daughter, have them join the church!'). Christian events that gather young Gitano people as platforms for courting are nothing new. Catholic pilgrimages have been reported as occasions where Gitano people's marital engagements are commonplace (Méndez 2005: 129). What is particular about the IEF events, however, is that they draw young Gitano people weekly, so their potential impact on marital choices is unparalleled.

Courting occurs in very subtle and cautious ways during church time or events. While adults listen to sermons and pastors' messages, WhatsApp messages and hidden *notitas* (short messages written on paper) frequently circulate among *mozos*. Unlike in some other Pentecostal churches in Brazil or Bolivia (Brusco 1995: 113; Gill 1990: 712), Gitana women cannot openly build new relationships with unrelated men in the church without laying themselves open to accusations of immorality. Gitano parents in La Pequeña Villa strive to prevent improper gender interactions between male and female unmarried Gitanos, so when they approach their teens, young Gitanos are separated along gender lines in social life, and open contact between non-related Gitanos is almost non-existent between potential partners. Interestingly enough, courting takes a collective ritual form that enables Gitanos to navigate the contradictions of a cultural system that encourages *mozo*s to marry in their teens and labels face-to-face interactions between potential partners as immoral.

Ronear is a verb that translates as to flirt. As a social practice, *ronear* marks the beginning of Gitanos' romantic love. It defines a widespread popular ritual of courting among young Gitanos, in which males gather in small groups, usually made up of close relatives (brothers, cousins), and walk around similar groups of females, usually made up of a Gitana's young relatives, exchanging glances. On *roneos*, *mozos* parade around showcasing their beauty and displaying their availability as potential partners. Young Gitanas may like to *ronear*, yet they never want to be seen as *roneadoras* (too flirty or open to having a sexual encounter). Rumours about Gitana women's indecency travel fast and may affect a family's honour. In consequence, this ritualized practice operates under specific rules.

During *roneos*, potential couples must not talk to each other openly, so females' reputation is not damaged. Similarly-aged relatives from both parties usually take over and negotiate an exchange of phone numbers or arrange each other's presence for future *roneos*. Critical to *roneo* interactions are *recaditos*, verbal messages carried by young relatives from male suitors to young Gitana women, or vice versa. Conversations between potential partners usually continue discreetly on social media and instant message platforms like WhatsApp.

According to my Gitano interlocutors, *roneos* have emerged as a relatively recent urban phenomenon intrinsically connected to the growth of Gitano churches in urban landscapes. Large squares and malls in the south of Madrid near the largest IEF churches have recently become fashionable for *roneos* among young Gitano believers. To the surprise of passers-by and customers, squares and malls can gather hundreds of *mozos* every weekend (particularly on Sundays) right after church night ceremonies end.

Because *roneos* gather a large number of non-converted and converted young Gitanos weekly, they turn into social practices/rituals in which tensions and contrasts between masculinities frequently emerge and become apparent. During *roneos*, some young male Gitanos display traditional forms of masculinity associated with

bravery, boasting, and arrogance. Others, however, embrace and display Pentecostal masculinities, defined by moral religious principles. Since young Pentecostal Gitanos strive to incarnate cultural ideas associated with *conocimiento*, *formalidad*, and respect, and are thought to be, potentially, good 'husband material', believers are often some of the most sought-after bachelors, especially for the many Gitanas who place value on faith and spiritual commitment and consider Pentecostal ideals about masculinity appealing and attractive.

Anthropologists have long commented on the role of kinship in shaping marital choices among Gitano people. Historically, Gitanos have shown a strong preference for marrying within their kinship structures (Gamella 1996; 2019; Lagunas 2005) or into other Gitano families with whom they have built up local political partnerships over generations (Lagunas 2005: 262; San Román 1997: 111). For instance, first-cousin marriage is a prominent traditional marital option amongst Gitano people, provided both spouses have not been brought up together. Gamella and Martín (2008) report that in some Spanish regions, such as Andalusia, IEF churches reinforce a traditional consanguineous pattern of marriage, with pastors favouring and vindicating cousin marriage as a practice predicated on biblical teachings in the Book of Leviticus (Gamella & Martín 2008). However, my fieldwork in urban areas of south Madrid offers a different angle, complicating our understanding of how Gitano Pentecostal churches may impact Gitano marriage patterns.

The spread of *roneos* and church-related social events offers *mozos* unprecedented and regular opportunities to seek out spouses within non-related Gitano families in the city of Madrid. As a matter of fact, *mozos* associate *roneos* with individual freedom and often set this practice against an undefined past in which marital choices were perceived as overwhelmingly dominated by parents' preferences. According to many of my Gitano interlocutors, *roneos* favour overcoming previously deep-seated endogamic and kin-based inclinations when choosing partners. Moreover, young Gitano believers often claim that finding a Pentecostal Gitano partner facilitates acceptance by parents and relatives when Gitano families are non-related or have not established previous relationships. Whereas my ethnographic material and other empirical studies may seemingly clash, if analysed together, they unequivocally suggest that Gitano believers weave courting practices, marriage choices, and religious identities together, which signals the fundamental influence of Pentecostal Christianity over Gitano believers' ideas of marital commitment.

Conclusion

Gitano masculinities have proven to be an important locus for examining the dynamics of cultural continuity and change among Pentecostal communities. The spread of Pentecostalist notions of masculinity is critically grounded in Pentecostalism's capacity to resonate with fundamental aspects that some Gitanos in the south of Madrid believe to be the core of their traditional gendered views and values, notably ideas about respect, honour, authority, and knowledge associated with prestigious elderly Gitano men. To a large extent, Pastor Pablo re-creates what many believers in La Pequeña Villa consider vital aspects of Gitano culture using Christian discourses and idioms. In so doing, he accommodates and validates dominant conservative approaches to the Gitano cultural repertoire by re-encoding deep-seated values into a transcendental religious system that allows Gitanos to keep emphasizing the ethnic divide and

moral boundaries they experience vis-à-vis non-Gitanos through the production of distinguished masculinities.

In contrast to dominant depictions of Pentecostal masculinities perceived as 'soft' or 'effeminate' by other men elsewhere, Pentecostal Gitanos uphold prestigious hybrid 'manly' masculinities. Pentecostal Gitanos – often the most committed to their faith, religious identity, and God – preserve and refashion their sense of masculine worth and authority by redefining the domestic realm as a meaningful place in which moral distinction and religious standing are produced, earned, and displayed vis-à-vis their spouses, kin, and community. Pastor Pablo's teachings in La Pequeña Villa set the boundaries to the production of gendered models: the natural hierarchical position of men, men's right to lead the household, and their demand for obedience. Yet the remaking of men's authority within families and gender roles leads to relevant transformations for men in La Pequeña Villa, too. Becoming 'docile' and holding themselves accountable to God for their behaviour is fuelled by a desire to deepen their connection with the sacred, reinforce the 'natural' moral order of things, and enjoy the benefits of married life as God wants it to be. Pentecostalism provides models for what a good domestic life looks like and a framework which enables Gitano males to achieve and experience a strong sense of gender integrity by redefining normative ideas of what it means to be an exemplary husband and family man.

I have argued that moral and gendered relational aspects of conversion, or, more concisely, the sphere of current or prospective marital relationships, have become a central dimension upon which ideals of Christian Gitano masculinity are constructed. Pentecostal masculine ideals are highly valued and esteemed in religious communitarian frameworks among Gitano men and women alike, especially during the time Gitanos know as *mocedad*. Proof of the role of IEF churches in Gitano communitarian life and Pentecostal Gitano males' appeal is the popularization of courting practices symbolically contiguous and temporally concomitant with religious activities, as well as the emergence of large Pentecostal Gitano marriage markets entangled with Gitano church rituals, ideologies, and practices across the city of Madrid.

Married life, blissful ideals regarding marital companionship, and prevalent images of nurturant fatherhood common in Pentecostal portrayals occasionally clash with Gitano men's and women's personal experiences. Revisiting previous material and adding new insights regarding the love life and heart-breaking family struggles of Agata, her main interlocutor in the field, Gay y Blasco shifts attention from 'normative and generalising depictions' of religious behaviours and experiences to 'the processes through which ideals of gendered behaviour that make reference to religious themes become charged with experiential meaning' (2012: 2). She affirms that Pentecostalism is far from being understood by Gitanos solely as a trigger for change in gender relations. Importantly, particularly for new Gitano generations brought up within the Pentecostal system of thinking, Pentecostalism has become a moral and symbolic language and framework within which Gitanos evaluate and make sense of women's and men's behaviour. Discussing the traumatic separation from her husband that led to Agata's removal from her community, family, and children's lives, Gay y Blasco indicates that 'core Pentecostal categories involving the opposition between God and the Devil are activated in strongly emotional ways in the conflict' (2012: 15). Whereas Agata's husband depicts her as a sinner condemned to eternal damnation, Agata herself interprets the success of her plans, against nearly impossible odds, to leave her husband

for a non-Gitano partner as 'a sign that God was happy with her decision' and that 'God understands and loves her' (Gay y Blasco 2012: 16). Analogously, I believe that in order to understand the complexities of Gitano men and their struggles, it is anthropologically productive to point to the entanglement between masculine understanding of the self and Pentecostal doctrine as well as the impetus to reshape the lives of individuals upon conversion.

Despite the fact that Pentecostalism enables pathways for performing, acquiring, and displaying men's respectability in the public arena, and that a significant amount of Gitano males identify themselves as Pentecostal believers, fewer Gitano men than women choose to attend religious services regularly. Importantly, males' failure or success in attending church and complying with Pentecostal moral standards is interpreted through religious lenses, language, and ideas. Motivations and inspirations to enact conservative ethical masculinities and explanations as to why some Gitanos are (un)able to do so successfully are also understood through biblical narratives and Pentecostal warfare concepts (i.e. the Enemy, Satan, etc.). Inconsistencies between identities, beliefs, and practices are presented as evidence of flawed human nature and the negative result of a broader cosmological confrontation between good and evil. Additionally, Gitano men are thought to encounter more significant challenges than women when converted because of the temptations of street life and worldly pleasures, and because the changes to their gender role expectations are more substantial (see also Lindhardt 2012).

My material, which is restricted to a specific Pentecostal Gitano community in a particular deprived urban area in the south of Madrid, fits descriptions of Gitanos as a conservative cultural group on gender issues. As a matter of fact, Pentecostal Gitano models of masculinity and ideals for a good domestic life unequivocally stand as a sharp social critique of liberal and progressive developments around family and sexuality in Spain and beyond. However, I want to re-elaborate here a point made by Cucchiari (1990) for women and echoed later by van Klinken (2012) for men regarding the capacity for disruption, renewal, and possibility embedded in Pentecostal ideological systems. According to Cucchiari, Pentecostalism is a

> gender-system-in-the-making, a new calculus of human worth, that combines new structures with aspects of a failing hegemonic system. The result is a more complex, ambiguous patriarchy, one that may be less viable than the hegemonic system, enabling believing women to transcend some of the gender constraints of the prevailing system (1990: 687).

In the same vein, van Klinken (2012) argues that male pastors mobilize male agency by challenging hegemonic perceptions of masculinity in society and reminding men that they can live up to an alternative ideal. I believe the prominent position of debates around masculinities and believers' identities, concerns, and narratives signals that manhood is becoming an increasingly contested concept among Gitano communities. Paradoxically, whereas religion acts as a driving force preserving some traditional views on gender, it may enable social change by fostering discussions around men's roles, positions, behaviour, and moral standards.

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NOTES

[1] My positionality in the field (male, young, non-Gitano) prevented me from accessing the female world. My gendered experience in fieldwork resonates with that of male ethnographers working with Gitanos (Lagunas 2005: 16) and other Romani communities elsewhere (Stewart 1997: 12).

[2] Nonetheless, Gitana women have exposed strong patriarchal prejudices in the way some Gitano pastors engage with counselling practices among believers. Indeed, Gitano pastors have been accused of favouring the preservation of marriage over the well-being of women, even in those cases where women endure gender-related and domestic violence (Gay y Blasco 2011).

[3] Thornton argues that men's stories are usually exaggerated since '[m]en in the church are attributed respect not only for who they have become (born-again Christians) but also, importantly, for how far they have come – how great a transformation they have made – from who they used to be as extraordinary sinners (macho-men-of-the-streets)' (2018: 165). I noted similar forms of hyper-masculine exaggeration among many of my Gitano interlocutors.

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« Les Gitans évangéliques sont une bonne prise » : masculinité, églises et *roneos*

Résumé

Le présent article explore les principes, l'imagerie et les idées chrétiennes qui modèlent la (re)construction des idéaux, comportements et identités masculines parmi les Gitanos pentecôtistes espagnols. Les travaux sur les masculinités pentecôtistes soulignent que dans, des contextes de forte revendication de principes de type *macho*, les hommes ont du mal à satisfaire les critères pentecôtistes de la virilité, et ceux qui se convertissent sont souvent taxés d'efféminations et perdent l'estime des hommes non convertis. Si les Gitanos convertis ont souvent du mal à satisfaire les exigences morales du pentecôtisme, les croyants tentent de réformer leur masculinité suivant des idéaux ethniques dominants et très valorisés. Le lien entre les parcours masculins de conversion, l'engagement moral et spirituel et le prestige culturel a des implications importantes pour la manière dont les hommes croyants sont perçus et appréciés comme des partenaires potentiels dans les milieux culturels et communautaires gitanos. Le présent article avance que ce sont les idées genrées des chrétiens pentecôtistes sur le comportement des hommes qui définissent les idéaux de masculinité, les attentes éthiques et les pratiques de formation des couples parmi les Gitanos espagnols. Il présente un récit ethnographique des mécanismes à l'œuvre dans la production, la reproduction et la perpétuation des cadres discursifs, sociaux et communautaires et des manières de faire la cour (les *roneos*) dans lesquels les idéaux et les aspirations de virilité des Gitanos pentecôtistes acquièrent signification et attrait.

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