

OAC PRESS

Working Papers Series #10

ISSN 2045-5763 (Print)

# **Friendship, anthropology.**

**Liria de la Cruz and Paloma Gay y Blasco**

*University of St. Andrews*

© 2011 Liria de la Cruz and Paloma Gay y Blasco

Open Anthropology Cooperative Press

[www.openanthcoop.net/press](http://www.openanthcoop.net/press)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No

Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

The reflexive turn that made anthropologists protagonists of their texts did not alter the role of informants: they remain objects rather than creators of anthropological knowledge. Through their concepts, analytical frameworks, and debates, ethnographers talk to each other, not to their informants. As interlocutors, informants belong firmly in the field, not in the academy. It is as if informants were what happened to ethnographers before they started writing. And so, although ethnographies deal with the lives of informants, informants are kept out of the conversation of ethnography.

Here we collaborate, acknowledging that ethnographic knowledge is made by ethnographers and informants, and should be owned by both. We write together, an informant and an anthropologist, a Gitana (Spanish Gypsy) and a Paya (non-Gypsy), a street seller and an academic, two women born in the same city, in the same year, two mothers, two friends. We write about our worlds and about us: this text is ethnographic and biographical. We talk about being women, mothers, wives, lovers, and workers in a world shaped by inequalities to do with gender, class, ethnicity and wealth. And we talk about anthropology: not just as writing, although that too, but as a powerful presence in our lives.

By reflecting together on our lives and on how we have influenced each other through the years, we try to challenge divisions that have been fundamental to anthropology since its beginnings. These are the divisions between field and academia, between the ones who write and the ones who are written about, those who do the knowing and those who are known. We also consider other divisions: between men and women, Gitanos and Payos, people for whom everyday survival in twenty-first century Spain is easier and people for whom it is harder. These are the divisions that have moulded our lives and that underlie our friendship.

We first met in 1992, when Paloma was doing her fieldwork in a government-built Gitano ghetto in the south of Madrid where Liria had some close relatives. The two of us were twenty-three at the time, since we were born in Madrid towards the end of the Francoist dictatorship. Our lives, however, had developed in very different directions. Liria, a Gitana, had grown up in the expanding suburbs where the cheapest council housing mixed with shanty-towns. Until leaving to start university in Britain aged eighteen, Paloma, a middle-class Paya, had lived in a large apartment in an affluent district of the city. When we met, Liria was a young mother of two sharing a council flat with her husband and children near the ghetto, in an inner-city estate where Gitano families mixed with low-income working-class Payos. Paloma was working towards her anthropology PhD for Cambridge University in the UK, and was looking for a Gitano family with whom to stay. Liria and her husband, Ramón, offered their home. Quickly, we two became close friends.

Nineteen years later, Liria no longer lives with Ramón and their children. In 2008, she met a young Moroccan immigrant, Younes, fell in love, and had to lose her whole family in order to start a new life with him. She is shunned by other Gitanos and lives instead amongst North African and Latin American immigrants. Paloma is now an academic, a wife, and a mother of two working in Scotland. On the cusp of middle-age, we are still close friends. Until recently, we have remained fixed in our roles as informant and anthropologist. Now we have decided to challenge these roles: we have things to say, and we believe we can say them best together. In this project, Liria is not the provider of raw material, of 'ethnographic data' for Paloma to analyse and argue about. We each talk, about ourselves and about each other, from our own particular standpoints, with our histories, our own interests, fears and desires as

a foundation—including a deep involvement with anthropology. In these pages both of us speak, sometimes apart, sometimes together, sometimes with each other. The strength of what follows lies not only in the story we tell but also in the way we tell it. We mix voices and styles because we want to foreground our complicity and also the tensions, negotiations, agreements and disagreements involved in doing and writing anthropology.

### **How we work together**

In order to write this article, we started by discussing what we wanted to write, and how we would do it. Since we were apart for the majority of the time, Liria in Madrid and Paloma in St Andrews, we talked on the phone and emailed each other with the kind assistance of Younes Bziz, Liria's partner. Liria wrote in Spanish, by hand, the sections where she speaks in the first person, and Paloma typed them, added punctuation and translated them into English. On her laptop Paloma wrote in English the sections where she speaks in the first person and translated them into Spanish for Liria to read and suggest changes. Paloma also wrote in English first drafts of the sections where we speak together, using the plural 'we'. She translated these drafts into Spanish, and Liria made changes and additions, sometimes very substantial, which were then incorporated into the English text. We had Paloma's fieldnotes, and her letters from the field to her PhD supervisor in Cambridge, Stephen Hugh-Jones, but only Liria's letters to Paloma since Liria had left Paloma's letters behind when she eloped. We also had many hours of taped conversations in which we talked about our lives, past and present, and our friendship. Because Liria is unfamiliar with anthropological literature, we have not quoted other authors. We have only made a short explicit reference to anthropological debates in the introduction, and Paloma is responsible for this interpretation.

We hope that readers will be able to make their own connections with other anthropological texts.

In order to make our joint and separate voices clear to readers, we use three different fonts. We use Arial when we speak together, Cambria for Liria's sections, and Calibri for Paloma's.

## **Beginnings**

I would like it if, with what I am going to write, people could understand how wonderful and important it was to meet my friend Paloma. No matter how much I write, it will never be enough to express so much gratitude towards just one friend. Because everything started with just a fieldtrip. We never thought this would reach so far into both our lives. We had barely started to live, we were both twenty, she was single and I was married with two children, Nena and Angel. We have had so much in common although we grew up in very different settings because I was Gitana and she Paya, and because we belonged to different ethnicities (*etnias*). That never pulled us apart, the very opposite. I even believe this was the interesting thing about our friendship, the desire to get to know new worlds and different people from what we were used to living with.

For this reason I remember very well the day I met Paloma. My elder sister Carmen had already talked to me about her. She had told me that she had met a

Paya girl who came to the Villaverde church and who was doing a study about the Evangelical Gitanos and about all our surroundings and anything related to the Gitanos of the neighbourhood. Back then Paloma lived in Tío Basilio's house, the most respected Gitano in the area of Madrid and some provinces. He was also my father's uncle, although we have been brought up very differently in our two families, in particular we in my father's house. And so when my sister told me that a young Paya girl was staying at Tío Basilio's, I was surprised, not because they are bad people but because, as Gitanos, they still lived by rather old customs. When my sister introduced her to me, I thought she appeared ignorant and shy, but I recognise now that we were the ignorant ones, and she was also very brave to be in a neighbourhood full of Gitanos, most of them poor and with little schooling. For this reason I recognise that she was doing a very difficult job because she had started with the hardest part, and she still had a long way to go.

My first impression was that she was intelligent and a little serious. After introducing us my sister had told me that Paloma needed to live with a family in the neighbourhood but nobody was offering their house and all her studies hung on her living with a family. I hardly knew Paloma, only from seeing her in church, I had never talked to her, but my sister had said very good things about her and she told me that they couldn't have her in their house because her husband was an Evangelical pastor. They could be given a church to lead at any time, and they would have to go outside Madrid, so they wouldn't be able to pay the necessary attention to Paloma to help her do her work. But I also know they were influenced

by gossip because they were a young couple, and people's tongues and their enviousness are very bad. I too was advised not to take a Paya girl into my house because she would bring problems to my marriage. But my marriage could not go to waste more than it already had, even though back then he was not so bad with me. So I felt very sorry for this girl who had so much interest in our lives and our way of life, that we would not give her the chance to realise her project and her future. It was then that my parents supported my decision to have Paloma in my house. They have always been very liberal, in particular my mother, who had friends of all ethnicities (*etnias*), not minding about race, or colour, or circumstance. She put that in our hearts, and without a doubt this helped me a lot in my decision to open my house to Paloma and to show myself the way I was. And also I acknowledge that I too was interested in knowing more about her world, because the first friends I had as a girl were Payas who went to school with me and I liked very much their way of being, so simple. For Payos live more independently in their lives, without thinking about others' opinions or gossip. And it has always bothered me, having to do things so that people will let you be and not be criticised for no matter what. For this reason I wanted to have a Payo friendship in my life, because since I married all my friends were Gitanas. I had a good group of friends, and got along with everybody, but I also wanted to make new friends, different from what I was used to.

And so, listening to my heart and my instinct, I said yes, she could come to my house to live with us and finish her research. Although in some ways I also

researched her, because I was fascinated by her world and her way of life, even though I did not know what Paloma's family thought about us, the Gitanos. I admit that I have never been bothered by what her family or my family think, although I have to say that my parents behaved rather well with Paloma, and they were never negative about her work and our friendship. The truth is that Paloma earned their trust through her behaviour. She adapted very well to the Gitano world, and she knew how to get in, through the elders and then through the church, and coming to live with me was the icing on the cake.

It was an experience for both of us. In our free time we used to go to the university behind Ramón's back, because Gitanos, and in particular the men think that a woman goes to places like that because she wants to meet boys and do bad things. They do not think that two people can just be friends, without going any further. And in that they were wrong, because I met friends of Paloma, and nothing bad ever happened.

### **Paloma's fieldnotes, March 1993**

Liria and I talked today about what it has meant for her to have me in her house, and about what other people have been asking and telling her. She told me that people have been amazed that she has a young Paya in her house, in particular because her husband is very young. Young men are easily tempted, she said, and any tiny event would make people gossip: 'you know what people's tongues are

like...’ For example, she said that if it was hot and Ramón took his shirt off, and I happened to be in the same room then, people would say ‘Ramón is having it off with the Paya’, and specially ‘how stupid Liria is, they are doing it in her own house’. Even people who have known me well for a full year were, according to Liria, shocked to learn that I was living in her house. The two pastor’s wives, Carmen and Emilia, who are always friendly and open with me, refused to take me in on the grounds that ‘people would talk, and it would damage very much out testimony, our standing’. Today I began to understand the implications that having me in her house has for Liria, since even those who seem to accept me best and talk freely with me would not have me. According to Liria, even these people ask her if I pay her money, and if I help her in the house, and she said she feels compelled to say that I do, because it is a kind of justification. I said to Liria that, in my opinion, for them it is a question of finding out who is fooling who, who is being tricked, and who is doing the tricking, a very Gitano thing: Gitanos won’t accept that ours could be a relationship on equal terms. So when her grandmother ‘innocently’ asked me where I was staying (she already knew) Liria told her, ‘poor wee Palomi, she is very good, poor thing, she helps me a lot in the house and with the children.’ Although I see that Liria could have done little else, I was rather offended at this, being made to look like a dimwit. But I didn’t say anything.

### **Informant and anthropologist**

Our friendship started with her kindness, taking me into her house although she

barely knew me and even though I was bad news. I was a Paya, young, unattached, not really managing to gain acceptance in a strongly marginalised community where the dominant Payos were distrusted and despised, and where Payas were considered uniformly immoral and sexually promiscuous. It was only because Liria looked beyond the stereotypes and the conventions that dominated interactions between Payos and Gitanos, because she questioned what most around her took for granted, that we became friends. Her generosity, her compassion, and her curiosity were the foundation of our friendship. From the first time we met and throughout twenty years, she has loved, helped and supported me.

We were fascinated by each other, perhaps because we were both dissatisfied with our lives and because we embodied for the other the deep unfulfilled desire to belong somewhere else. I had had an average childhood in an upper-middle class, conservative family. I had learnt languages and travelled abroad relatively often, but had also been immersed in a world of rigid conventions regarding such things as class, upbringing, occupation, dress and accent. I looked to anthropology as an escape into imagined, alternative worlds, but all I did was exchange the inward-looking, suffocating atmosphere of the Madrid middle-class for the inward-looking, suffocating atmosphere of a Cambridge college, and I felt at ease in neither. Among the Gitanos of Villaverde I was even more out of place: by the time I met Liria I had been doing fieldwork for nine months and was increasingly frustrated and convinced that I would never 'get in'.

To start with, Liria seemed to me certain of her place and of her path in life. She was a well-respected young matron, a good street seller and money-maker, strict in her adherence to the highly elaborated Gitano code of conduct for women, always dressing modestly in long skirts, not smoking, drinking, or interacting with unrelated men. Her parents were well off by comparison with other Gitano families nearby, and they were very well liked, her father's patrilineage was large and powerful and controlled much of Gitano life in the ghetto. At fifteen, her mother had arranged her betrothal to an older relative, Ramón, and she had married well, at a wedding ceremony where her virginity was tested and displayed, rather than much less prestigiously by elopement like some of her cousins and friends. She fitted in, and yet I soon learnt that she was discontented, with her marriage to a man she did not love and who could not love her, with the routine of wifely everyday life, and with the restrictions that being a 'decent Gitana' imposed on her. Above all, she was desperately curious to know what things were like among the Payos, the Others who surrounded her but were beyond her reach. She had a deep intuitive understanding of what anthropology was about and embraced the informant role with enthusiasm.

Liria wanted to learn, about the Payos and so about me and what she called 'your world'. Together we took what seemed like huge risks, lying to Ramón and going for secret outings into Madrid so that she could see what my life was like. We dressed Payo-style, discarding our long skirts and putting on trousers, which the

Gitanas never wore, and we visited museums, parks, middle-class restaurants, and the home where I grew up. Since she had opened up her house and her life to me, and she was so curious about mine, I felt I had to reciprocate and took Liria to my mother's flat, where she met not only my family but the housekeepers who worked for us, and to the university where we had lunch with my childhood friends, well-off boys and girls who studied business, law or economics. Just like fieldwork amongst the Gitanos for me, these trips into middle-class Madrid were a great adventure for Liria. Having spent all her life on the periphery of the city, she literally discovered a new Madrid. And, at the university, she talked freely with unrelated men of her own age for the first time in her life.

Our outings were interludes—from the strain of fieldwork for me, from the monotony of everyday life for her—and they made us accomplices. Aged 22, we were excited, by life itself and by our friendship. We talked endlessly, while selling in the streets, cooking, taking care of the children, and at night while Ramón watched TV. We talked about men and about sex, about our pasts and futures, about being Gitana and Paya, and about anthropology. We argued about whether, as a Paya, I really had more freedom than her, and of what kinds. I read to Liria from San Román's classic Gitano ethnography, and we discussed together the rights and wrongs of the anthropologist's account of Gitano patrilineages. I also read to her from my fieldnotes, and we laughed about things we had said only days or weeks before. Liria's friendship was a wonderful gift.

Looking back, I see that we were not preoccupied by the material inequalities between us, which now seem so blatantly important and which worry me so much. I was very aware of the large-scale hierarchies and inequalities that framed Gitano marginality, and of our relative positions within these, but in our everyday life in the ghetto I was out, wanting in. Yes, my parents were better off and I had reaped the benefits, having a comfortable life and going to study abroad. But Liria came from a Gitano family which was highly respected in Villaverde and she was secure in her role within the Gitano community, where the hierarchies and inequalities that mattered were among Gitanos, and where Payos were despised outsiders. In Villaverde Liria belonged and had status where I had none. Similarly, it did not occur to me that opening my life to Liria might be unethical. Later on, talking about our friendship to anthropological audiences in the UK, I have been criticised for not considering the impact that allowing Liria to meet my family might have on her, for not envisaging that it might make her dissatisfied with her lot as a poor Gitano woman. Back then, both of us knew that that I could not ask to be let into Liria's life whilst keeping mine out of her reach.

## **Friends**

Paloma and I, after spending so many moments together from when she came to my house to do fieldwork until now, we have lived so many experiences together that I would not have notebooks enough to tell all the good things and the bad ones. Today I can say with all my heart that between myself and Paloma there is a

relationship as if we were sisters, because friends are not just for when things go well, but for when things go badly. And throughout many years I think that both of us have realised that our relationship as friends has been very firm and sincere. Even when we were separated by a large distance because she had to work in England, nothing prevented us from staying in contact, by letters or by phone, and whenever she came to see her mother in the holidays she kept some days exclusively to share with me. Nothing has stopped our union as great friends. Even though one was Gitana and the other Paya, and even though we had such different customs, we knew very well how to share our ideas and our tastes. My whole world revolved around the Gitano environment (*entorno*), and when Paloma was living with me just seeing her was an eye-opener. I saw that a woman is not just good for marrying and having children and cleaning, even though within the Gitano world I used to go out with my sisters, to the beach in the summer, and in winter to the malls and shopping. But with Paloma I did other things, like visiting museums, or going to the university, and many more things that I loved. And above all she made me see my qualities as a woman. She always used to tell me that I was intelligent and a very good person, but in my family I was always treated as a something of a moron, and I used to be taken for a ride. One of the people who helped me see my good qualities and my worth was Paloma. In particular with Ramón, he knew how to have me all mixed up, psychologically, with the idea that I wasn't sufficiently clever, or pretty, and he told me so often that I came to believe it. Until one day a great friend turned up to tell me that this was not true, and through the years I have had other Paya friends, I had the

pleasure of working with them when I was president of the parents' association in my daughter's school and they also encouraged me.

From the first time I met Paloma I opened my heart to her, as sincerely as possible, because as time went by I realised that I could tell her any secret since I knew she would keep it, and she knew she could also tell me anything, because with me it would be safe. The truth is that in this life you never know when you are going to need your friends. I think that in life, if you do good, the future can return it to you, although I never helped Paloma out of any kind of interest, and she knew it. Because when I helped Paloma I never thought that later on she would return the help to me with increase. When I decided to leave my Gitano environment (*entorno*) to find my happiness in a completely different world with a Moroccan partner (he was prepared to fight for our love against the Gitano people, Younes Bziz is his name), that is when I received all the support and the unconditional love, something never seen before, from my great friend Paloma. This is why we decided to write together. We both know we have many experiences to tell, together and apart, but our lives are always intertwined, the lives of two people, a Paya anthropologist with a great heart, and a sincere Gitana.

### **The middle years**

Between 1993 and 2008 we wrote to each other, back and forth. We also talked on the telephone often and met whenever Paloma was in Madrid, at least once a year. As time went

by, we continued to share our preoccupations—with pregnancies, children, schools, husbands, work, and our families. Liria and Ramón continued to earn their living by selling textiles at open air markets. They were resettled by the local government to a different flat, even closer to the ghetto where Paloma had carried out her fieldwork. Earning a livelihood became increasingly difficult as they became indebted and lost first one and then another permit to sell at weekly markets. Villaverde changed around them as immigration into Spain grew and more and more North Africans and Latin Americans came to the southern periphery of the city. Meanwhile, Paloma and her husband obtained tenured academic positions, moved to Scotland and bought a house. They settled into a typically British middle-class life.

All along Paloma wrote about Liria and her relatives and neighbours, a book and articles: we were friends, but we were also anthropologist and informant. Liria helped Paloma with her anthropology because she was a friend. She had a sense of what Paloma's anthropological interests were but did not fully know what Paloma did with what she learnt, how she communicated her knowledge and to whom, and who benefitted or how. Paloma felt that she could only explain to Liria in very basic terms what her work was about, or how academic anthropology is produced. The jargon and theories through which Liria's life could be made anthropologically meaningful seemed to Paloma almost impossible to convey to her. The fact that Paloma wrote in English meant that Liria could not even read what Paloma produced.

Throughout these years our friendship continued whilst our personal lives changed. Liria's marriage deteriorated and she left Ramón several times. She took her children to her father's house, but was always persuaded by her family to return. But as her difficulties inside the home increased, Liria found satisfying rewards outside it. In 2008 she became president of

the parents' association at her daughter's school. She found herself at the helm at a time of serious crisis, when the local government decided to transfer the children (mostly Gitano) to a smaller building of poorer quality, to make way for the children of a neighbouring school (mostly Payo). Liria became a key player in the campaign against the plans, making several appearances on national radio and television. Although the fight was lost, Liria discovered in herself new capacities and needs, the desire to become something else than a Gitana wife and mother. In the meantime Paloma too found herself moving in new directions. She became a mother by birth and adoption in her thirties, engaged in political activism, and let her career take second or even third place in her life. For both of us our horizons opened up throughout the 2000s: for Paloma to the world beyond anthropology and academia, for Liria beyond her family and the Gitano Evangelical Church. And then Liria met Younes, by chance, and our lives were brought closer than ever before.

### **Lives transformed**

*One morning like so many the unexpected happened.* There was a young man working with some friends of mine at a stall nearby, we were separated only by some fruit sellers. I don't know how one morning I came to the stall of my friends to say hello, and to see the clothes they were selling, because often they had very pretty things and I liked to buy from them. The truth is that I had already seen that boy before, but shame and fear to fall in love, especially because he was younger than me, those things did not allow me to pay attention to him or to anybody else. But I don't know how something made me look at him that

morning, and his eyes were fixed deep into mine. I felt that he talked with me through his eyes. I had never felt like that before.

*One morning like so many the unexpected happened.* Liria's sisters phoned me from Madrid. She had disappeared the day before, and they were desperate. They had found a small piece of paper with a man's name and a telephone number in one of Liria's handbags, and they suspected that she had eloped with him. I was to ring them immediately if she got in touch. I tried and tried Liria's phone, and texted her, 'Where are you? Everybody is worried. Is everything ok? Please get in touch, I'm dying of anguish here.' That evening she rang. She had left with Younes, her sisters had realised she was having an affair and she felt she had no option but to elope, straight away. She had tried living with Ramón for twenty years, and Younes loved her. She hadn't been able to take her young daughter along: according to Gitano customary law, which is often violently enforced, in cases of adultery children must remain with the blameless spouse. And so her family were looking for her, to bring her back and perhaps punish Liria, and Younes too. She was terrified. I was to pretend she had not been in touch, keep her secret, help her be safe.

*I had no alternative but to return,* because my sisters and their husbands found me, and my family threatened to kill Younes, and so I had no other option. Today I realise I allowed myself to be intimidated, and that my fear did not let me think straight. Now I see they could easily have harmed him before coming up to fetch

me from the flat where I was hiding, because they were with him downstairs quite a while, but they did not. The thing is they convinced me, with threats and with kindness, they did all they could because they were desperate at that time. For me it was very painful, in two ways. First there was Younes, and being forced to leave him. I didn't know how to explain to him that my family feared that he had tricked me, or pressured me somehow to be with him, because I had never done anything like this before. And then there were my children, and when I returned my heart broke to see how much they had missed me. 'How am I going to recover my family, and my children?', that is what I was thinking back then. But it was too late, nobody trusted me, they kept me under watch all the time. They tried to make me see I was deluded, that it was all an illusion because I had never had happiness with Ramón. And so they thought I was very confused, and a little bit mad.

*She had no alternative but to return* and, when three weeks later I went to Madrid, all her family wanted to make sure I understood why she had done wrong. 'This is how we Gitanos do things, you know us, you understand us, you know how terrible this is for us, we are not like you Payos, this is beyond the pale, there is nothing worse than this.' I had to talk to her, they said, convince her not to elope again, help to keep her in the house, under their control. Ramón, Carmen and Liria's other sisters, her children, her daughter-in-law... they were the voice of Gitano reason. They knew how close Liria and I were, and were desperate for me to take sides. These were 'the Gitanos' of whom I had written for so many years,

and what they said fitted all I had learnt about them: women's virtue and subservience to men were central to how they saw their place in the world. And yet she asked for my help, and she was Liria, my friend, a woman whose fears and desires I knew, who had shared with me her wishes and disappointments, who loved me and whom I loved. So I did not say 'leave' or 'stay', but I helped her meet Younes clandestinely, taking our young children along as cover, knowing that the family would never think we would try something like that. When she decided she would leave for good, I helped again, sorting out plans, listening to Liria's fears, anxieties, and hopes, and giving some of the money they needed to try to start again. After she and Younes went into hiding, I became the point of contact between Liria and her family, relaying her children's heart-wrenching pleas, receiving and forwarding Ramón's desperate letters.

*My heart is broken in two.*

Every day that passes I feel worse, for my daughter. Whenever I see girls of her age in the street I die inside, it is true.

Something is killing me inside.

I try not to tell Younes and I go into the bathroom to cry.

I tell myself, 'Be happy'. How can I be happy knowing that my daughter needs me?

Then I say, 'What if I return, and I die of longing for Younes?'

I can't think of anything else, I only think about her.

*Her heart is broken in two.* Liria spent six months of living with Younes, in flats shared with African and Latin American immigrants, working as a domestic, hiding her Gitano identity from her middle-class employers, people very similar to my own family. We talked almost every day, and I visited her in Madrid every few weeks. I could see how much she and Younes loved each other, how much fun and freedom she had in her new life, but also how deeply cutting her pain was. I saw her cry with my daughter in her arms. I raged at Ramón and her sisters, who were unwavering: so long as she stayed away, she would not see her child. And if she took the child, they told me, they would kill both her and Younes. I understood well the cultural logic that underlay their actions, and knew I could not expect them to behave in a different way, yet I did. I began to ask myself about the force of compassion and of hatred too: could Ramón and Liria's sisters not take pity on her, just because they were Gitanos? Were they so firm because they were Gitanos, or because they hurt? Liria asked for my help and from Scotland I rang women's NGOs in Madrid, government agencies, social workers, solicitors, but nobody seemed to be able or willing to give any help. They were all puzzled by the complexities of the Gitano world, unable to understand why Liria would not simply apply for a divorce, request access to her child through the usual legal routes, why she was frightened, why there were threats. We could not see a way forward and so she went back once again.

*When for the second time I had to return it was much worse.* I thought that after so many conversations with my sisters and my children's father, the situation was

going to be better. But it was much worse. I could feel a tremendous hatred from Ramón. Earlier on, even when I was an honest and stupid woman our marriage did not go well, so imagine the situation after living six months away from home, with another man, and Ramón swallowing his pride of Gitano man, fooled by a woman who was inferior to him. So the last night I spent with my daughter I made her a promise, and I told her, 'Darling, whatever happens I want you to know I love you very much', and told her that if one day we had to be apart from each other for whatever reason, I would fight for her, until we could be together again. She looked into my eyes and said, 'Mama, you are going to leave again'. And with pain in my soul, and so as not to worry her, I said no, but that if that happened I would go back to get her. And I looked at her straight and said, 'You believe me, don't you?' So the first thing I did when I returned with Younes was find a solicitor to get custody of my child, and my divorce from Ramón. I got on with it, ready to face the world for the sake of my daughter.

*When for the second time she had to return it was much worse.* Ramón knew I had helped Liria with money and emotional support during her time away: although he allowed us to talk on his mobile phone, he was always nearby, listening closely to our conversations. Younes was heartbroken, thinking that she had left him for good, and would not sleep or eat. We talked often, but there was little I could do for him. Liria had managed to hide a mobile phone, and she would go into the bathroom at three or four in the morning, to ring Younes and me. In whispers, she told me about her life: she had no freedom, Ramón was in touch

with a solicitor to get sole custody of her child, he wanted to have sex in spite of her reluctance, and she missed Younes desperately. When her sisters brought a Gitano Pentecostal priest to exorcise her, she thought it was the last straw, and decided to leave knowing that this time there would be no turning back.

### **Sharing our lives**

When Liria left her home for the very first time, but also later, she and Younes were in dire need of money. Since they had to hide from Liria's family, they also lost their livelihoods. Liria could no longer sell with Ramón and Younes could no longer work for Gitano street-market sellers loading and unloading stock. As the economic crisis deepened and Spain's unemployment reached 20%, finding work became almost impossible. Without papers the only jobs Younes could find were sporadic and very badly paid. They could not afford to lose Liria's small disability pension, so she worked without contracts for two or three euros per hour, cooking in bars, as an office cleaner or as a domestic servant.

Knowing it would be difficult to provide substantial economic help on a long-term basis, Paloma applied first to her Department and then for a small grant to pay Liria for writing down her life. What began as a way to find money became a project that came to fascinate us both. We started to tape long conversations, about Liria's elopement, our earlier lives, and our families and friendship. Liria wrote, and Paloma wrote too. Liria went to Scotland, visiting Paloma abroad for the first time ever. She talked to Paloma's colleagues and students, and we gave a talk about our relationship. As Liria's and Younes' life unfolded, and as Paloma shared in it, we thought together about what it meant. Since Paloma was not just an observer,

but a player in the story, it became clear that what we wrote had to include her too.

In March 2011, two years after she first eloped, Liria went to court to claim visiting rights to her child. She was the first Gitano woman to turn to the Payo courts to challenge Gitano traditional law and custom. Paloma went with her, and we came face to face with Liria's sisters, their husbands, and Ramón. In spite of repeated requests, we had not managed to be allocated police protection, and we were frightened that Ramón or Liria's brothers-in-law would manage to hurt one or both of us. All in Liria's family thought Paloma had betrayed them and had shown her true nature as a Paya, helping Liria in her transgression. They were wrong in thinking that Paloma had encouraged Liria to leave, but right in identifying the strength of our bond.

Paloma's Spanish family too have seen our friendship, and are disturbed by it. One of Paloma's sisters suggested a solicitor and a social worker who might help. Another opened her home to Liria and Younes when they needed a place to stay for a couple of nights. But their middle class, comfortable lives have very little in common with Liria's and Younes's, and they are keen to keep their distance. They have a highly developed sense of class and ethnic distinctiveness, like many other well-off, culturally conservative Madrileños. They believe firmly in their economic and moral superiority. Paloma's family see Gitanos like Liria and immigrants like Younes as unfortunate parts of Spanish society, to be blamed for their 'situation', victims of their inability to join in or 'integrate'. They perceive Younes, like other Moroccan immigrants, as one of the lowest of the low, a member of an abject tide that threatens to engulf Spain. They call him, pejoratively, 'el moro' ('the Moor'), and have been adamant that he must under no circumstance visit their homes, where Paloma stays during

her visits to Madrid. The majority of Paloma's Spanish relatives are not unlike Liria's Gitano family in the effort they make to keep themselves distinct, and in their conviction that they, and only they, live righteous and beautiful lives. But while Liria's family were the amongst the first Gitanos to open their lives and their homes to Paloma, most of Paloma's family want to have as little as possible to do with Liria or Younes. For them, Paloma's friendship with Liria is a sign of her unfortunate eccentricity. The fact that Paloma spends more time with Liria than with her own sisters or her mother, demonstrates that Paloma has failed in her responsibilities to her family.

### **Writing together**

*I learnt what anthropology was when Paloma came to live in my house.* I had a vague idea of what anthropology was, but it was living together day by day, seeing Paloma's fieldwork, that I learnt its meaning. I think it is a very beautiful work that opens frontiers onto new worlds. Because it is not just writing about other people, but getting to know their lives, their customs, religions, and their ways of being. I find it fascinating, writing not only about my life, but about Paloma's life. Because I have always been the informant, but now we are breaking the mould. We know that telling our lives, together and united, is going to be something never done before. Two women, a Paya and a Gitana, but very close from youth, breaking the barriers between two different levels and ways of life, although that distance never pulled us apart. Since I started writing about anthropology I have found it wonderful to have the opportunity to express my

feelings towards other people, and to understand them. As I write about Paloma, I also learn to see things in a different way, especially because we two have been brought up so differently, in our customs. I know for sure that what I am doing right now is that I would like to do for the rest of my life, because getting to know people, their customs, their experiences, their sadness and their joys, and especially having another person opening their heart to you, is wonderful.

I want people to know what the world of a Gitana is like, told by herself, and also how my life has changed so that through circumstances I find myself in the Payo world. I want to tell how I see everything, and also how my life changed, and also how things changed for Paloma and those who surround us, like Younes, and Paloma's husband and her children... All of us have come much closer together. Being able to become united while you work, that is the beauty of anthropology. For me anthropology is about complicity and union, so that we all of us can build a better world, a world with more love.

*I have learnt what anthropology is alongside Liria, and my understanding has changed as we have become older and our lives have been transformed. For many years after I first did fieldwork among the Gitanos I thought that my task was to extract information, make knowledge, weave patterns with words. I wrote and I looked away from those parts of experience I could not make sense of easily, from what did not fit into the moulds I had built. And so much of Liria's life, and of the lives of her relatives and neighbours, was invisible to me. Over the last few*

years I have been drawn into Liria's life much deeper than ever before, and she into mine. Sharing our happiness and our difficulties, I have had to confront the nitty-gritty of experience, as a person and as an anthropologist.

The bedrock of anthropology is fieldwork, because fieldwork is what brings us into deep contact with people, with their daily miseries and joys, their fears and their hopes. And it is during fieldwork that we anthropologists open ourselves up to others. But then those others, our informants, are left behind, they do not continue the journey with us. Imagine the possibilities if the deep mutual commitment that is so often seeded in fieldwork were allowed to grow, to spread into other areas of life. I do not know how successful our experiment has been. But I know that, if I want to learn and write about Liria, I have to let her learn and write about me. We share our lives, this is why we write together.

*We meet in the spaces between worlds:* between Gitanos and Payos, between immigrants and middle-class Spaniards, between informants and anthropologists. These worlds touch and interpenetrate, but they are also sealed away from each other, in many senses far apart. Anthropology is what has enabled us to come together, yet anthropology also erects barriers between us: until now Paloma has watched, investigated, looked for, written; Liria has been in a way in the dark. Our relation has been unequal, not because of Paloma's greater wealth, but because Liria was a friend above all while Paloma was always a friend and an anthropologist. For anthropology to reach its potential to change the world, barriers like these need to be not just acknowledged, but undermined. By writing together, about our lives, our

friendship, and our worlds, we hope to have contributed, in a small way, towards this project.