

2. Populations

Numbers

Census figures on Gypsies and Travellers have always been imprecise. At best they may give a broad indication of population size, since the criteria employed (*Who is a Gypsy? Who is a Traveller?*) are politically determined — which does not necessarily mean that they are precisely defined. Moreover, the majority of Gypsies may not declare themselves as such on census forms, for a variety of reasons, primary among them being caution born of centuries of persecution. For these reasons, in some States, official figures, based on criteria which are usually arbitrary, may differ from estimates made by other bodies by up to 500%. Add to these considerations the fact that the very term “Gypsy” may bear little relevance to the population in question (and we saw above how arbitrarily this term came to be applied to groups from “Little Egypt” long ago).

In a number of States, all terminology indicating an ethnic identity for these populations has disappeared from official documents, to be replaced by metaphors developed in connection with assimilation policies. In some States — Czechoslovakia, for example — census figures took no account of an ethnic identity which was deemed to be on the wane or something to be discouraged, focusing instead on what was defined as a social group in difficulty and requiring the assistance of an integration programme; as a result, only part of the Gypsy population was officially counted.

Let us give a few examples to illustrate the relativity of census figures. In *Great Britain*, in 1991, The Department of the Environment counted 12,316 caravans in England, and, estimating an average of 3 inhabitants

per caravan, and approximately 4 persons per family, this would give a figure of about 40,000 nomads in England. Yet an earlier, more precise census had shown that average family size was in fact 4.5 persons, which would bring the figure for England up to 55,000 for 1991, in contrast to the 1966 figure of 15,000. There has thus been a significant increase in the number of nomads. Still in 1991, 708 nomadic families were counted in Wales (in contrast to the 312 of 1966), while a more exhaustive count would put the figure at closer to 800 families or 3,600 persons.

In Scotland, 980 caravans/3,000 persons are officially recognised, 1,600 of whom are children of school age. This adds up to a total of some 55,000-60,000 nomads in Great Britain as a whole. Since the authorities' main concern is the movement and parking of caravans, they concentrate on counting nomads; as a result, Gypsies and Travellers in permanent accommodation of one kind or another simply do not appear in the statistics, and experts and Gypsy/Traveller organisations alike are agreed that a true picture of the Gypsy/Traveller population is close to double the official figures, with some regional variations. There are, therefore, a minimum of 90,000 Gypsies and Travellers in Great Britain itself, and, for the United Kingdom, a further 800 nomads in Northern Ireland must be added to this figure.

In France, unlike Great Britain, there have been no national surveys based on identical criteria at intervals of a few years. The 1961 census, under the heading "Itinerant Populations and Populations of Nomadic Origin", gives the following figures:

Itinerant:	26 628
Semi-sedentary:	21 690
Sedentary:	31 134
Total:	79 452

These figures cover fairground families, Gypsies, and other nomads, but fail to cover sedentary Gypsies and Travellers. It is also easy to imagine that the census-takers did not manage to count each and every caravan in the country. In 1969, a new law was passed to regulate the exercise of itinerant trades and to standardise regulations applicable to persons of no fixed abode travelling in France. New criteria were defined, and Ministry of the Interior statistics are based on these:

	1972	1980	1984	1989
Itinerant tradesmen:	47 596	92 954	107 805	—
Holders of special travel booklets (persons of no fixed abode exercising an itinerant trade):	31 918	64 176	48 792	53 677
Holders of travel booklets (persons of no fixed abode permanently domiciled in a vehicle, trailer or other mobile shelter):	1 296	4 448	2 272	4 348
Holders of travel passes (idem, but without "regular resources ensuring normal living conditions, notably through the exercise of waged activity"):	7 012	15 312	16 137	25 025

These figures show a significant increase in the number of nomads of no fixed abode (the last 3 categories), as well as in the number of itinerant tradesmen. But children under 16 are not included in these figures (which must thus be doubled to give the true number of nomadic persons), nor are most sedentary Gypsies. If we examine the figures of the final 3 categories, which comprise Gypsies and Travellers almost exclusively, we get a figure for 1980 of some 83,936 licence holders, or by doubling this to include minors, some 167,872 persons, to which figure must be added all the Gypsy families in permanent accommodation, which at a conservative estimate will equal the number of nomads. The overall picture for 1989 is the same. We can therefore estimate that the Gypsy (nomadic or not) and Traveller (nomadic or not: "persons of nomadic origin" or "Travelling People", according to official terminology) population of France is currently somewhere between 280,000 and 340,000 persons.

In Ireland (Éire), 1,117 families were counted in 1961, and 1,953 families in 1977; that same year, a more detailed study undertaken in Dublin ascertained the average family size as comprising 6.23 persons, which would give a total population of over 12,000 for the country as a whole. In 1979 the number of families was estimated as at least 2,200, or 13,700 individuals. This would appear to be a minimal figure, since the only sedentary Travellers included in these statistics are those who have

been "re housed" by the social services, ignoring those who, despite having obtained permanent accommodation through their own efforts, remain Traveller in spirit, language, and customs. The authorities are aware that the Traveller population is currently over 20,000. In 1986, a study confirmed that half of all Travellers are under 15 years of age, and that the average number of children per family is 8. In 1987 a detailed study revealed that the Traveller birth rate stands at 34.9 per thousand.

In Italy, as in other States, strong natural population growth must be taken into account, as a result of which, with ten years between censuses, established numbers show very significant increases. It is equally important — again, here as in other States — to take account of the very significant movement which has brought Gypsies from one State to another, particularly since 1989. Thus, if the Immigration Observatory of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers gave a figure of 29,790 properly registered immigrants in Italy at the end of 1990, there are grounds for believing that the great majority of these were in fact Gypsies. Soon afterwards, war in neighbouring Yugoslavia led to a considerable number of Gypsies among the refugees, bringing the number of Gypsies recently arrived in Italy up to some 40,000. Moreover, the Italian Statistics Institute takes no account of mothertongue in its censuses, save in those regions (Val d'Aosta, South Tyrol, Venezia Giulia) where linguistic minorities receive special protection.

In Bulgaria, the last official census to be published, in 1956, gave the number of Gypsies as 195,000. The 1975 census was not published, but the data collected were passed on to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and indicated a Gypsy population of 373,000. These figures were considered unreliable by the Party authorities, and at their request a parallel census was carried out with the participation of the Ministry of the Interior. The results, communicated in a secret document in 1980, gave the figure as 524,000 individuals. By the same token, a Ministry of the Interior census carried out in 1989 showed a figure of 576,000, and a 1992 update showed 552,665, but spot checks indicate that these numbers fall far short of reality. It should be borne in mind that a significant number of Gypsies in Bulgaria prefer to declare themselves Turks or Romanians on census forms.

The strong migratory movements characteristic of the 1990s make estimating the number of Gypsies even more problematic, not only

because reliable statistics are difficult to ascertain, but also because there are numerous mass movements occurring in waves, and these can modify the local picture in a very short time. Statistics are difficult because immigrants, for example refugees seeking political asylum, rarely specify whether or not they are Gypsies; moreover, to the numbers of official immigrants covered in statistics must be added illegal immigrants who are not. As for the scale of movement: to the classic example, much covered by the media, of Gypsy asylum-seeking in Germany in the 1990s, and the outline given above of the Italian situation, let us add the significant case of Sweden. The Gypsy population of Sweden currently stands at some 15,000 individuals, but the number of Gypsies seeking asylum there amounts to another 15,000.

The table below is an indication of "stable" numbers over long periods, rather than a reflection of recent movements which would push up many of the numbers appreciably: for example, the number given for Sweden is not 30,000, nor is Germany listed as having a Gypsy population of over 200,000. Such an approach is all the more appropriate in that "return" migration may well occur, be it by order of the authorities in the host country, or by agreement between the authorities of the host country and the country of origin (i.e. the agreement between Germany and Romania sending emigrant families — the majority of them Gypsy — back to their place of origin) or indeed at the initiative of families themselves, disappointed or frightened by their new living conditions.

For all the reasons outlined above, *these figures are mere indications of the numbers involved*. To all of the reasons already given for this, two more considerations must be added. The first of these is the strong natural population growth characteristic of Gypsy communities, so that data gathered in a given year must be reconsidered a few years later, and revised upwards: in many States, the Gypsy population can double in under twenty years. Second, in most States there is a near-total lack of data on Travellers deemed — sometimes incorrectly — to be non-Gypsy. The *Jenisch* constitute the majority of the Swiss Traveller population — but what are their numbers in France?

How many *Quinquis* and *Mercheros* in Spain? *Tattare* in Sweden and *Taters* in Norway? *Cammináiti* in Italy and *Natmandsfolk* in Denmark? It is rare for researchers in the field, be they sociologists or anthropologists, to be able to clarify the situation, as up to now they have

accommodation for many years, but who frequently move house — questions to which we shall return in the chapter on “Travelling”. What is more, nomadism is but one parameter among many, and *sedentary Gypsies are no less Gypsy than nomadic ones*; in consequence, the various topics covered in these pages are, with the exception of questions specifically relevant to nomads *per se*, such as the availability of halting sites, relevant to Gypsy and Traveller groups *sensu lato*.

Names

The names attributed to Gypsies and Travellers vary, and designate, for the outsiders who employ them, different and imprecise realities. Such names may indicate supposed origin, a short-term, partial view of Gypsy history: such is the case with, for example, the French term *Bohémiens*, attributed when Gypsy groups arrived in France bearing letters from the King of Bohemia, or the Spanish term *Húngaros*, which assumes a Hungarian origin. The same can be said for all terms deriving from “Egyptians”: *Gypsies, Gitans, Gitanos, Gitani, Yifti, Giftoş, Yieftos*, etc., all still in common use. Such terms may also be employed as blanket designations for culturally very different groups, a trend which has been in existence ever since the “original” confusion between the *Atsinganos* of ill repute in Greece, and nomads who arrived there from India and carried the name with them to the furthest ends of the earth, for this is without question the most widespread name of all: *Zigeuner, Zigøjnere, Sigöyner, Tsiganes, Zingaros, Zigenare, Tsigáni, Zingari, Tigan, Tsignos, Çingene, Cigány, Cikan*, etc...

Even more pejoratively, Gypsies have also been confused with groups held in low esteem, vagabonds and rovers, as reflected in deprecatory names such as *Vaganten, Vagabunden, Kilinghiros, Koulofos, Baraquis* and many others, some of which denote — accurately or otherwise — a characteristic trade or way of life: *Forains, Woonwagenbewoners, Camps-volants, Barakkenvolk, Tinkers, Nomades, Kurbétia, Mastori*, etc. Still other designations are drawn from Gypsy terminology itself: *Manouches, Romani-chals, Didikais, Romanichels*... a list to which a multitude of regional and dialect variations could be added.

The connotations attached to these terms, already generally deprecatory and in common use in everyday language, are sometimes reinforced by

the use of even more stigmatising names: *Knackers, Mumpers, Katsiveli, Rabouins*, etc. And, while all of these are generally applied as blanket terms to populations which are in fact diverse, they may also carry nuances. This is the case in Spain, where *Gitanos*, by far the most common term, is replaced by *Húngaros* to designate “second wave” groups. So too in Italy, when *Zingari* and *Giosirai* (“fairground operators”, even if they are not) designate long-established groups, *Zingari montenegrini* Gypsies who immigrated in the first half of the 20th century, and *Nomadi slavi* the latest arrivals, from Yugoslavia.

To all of these popular terms must be added those employed administratively. These are frequently paraphrases or metaphors: the *Tinkers* of Ireland were rechristened *Itinerants*, while in France *Tsiganes* and *Voyageurs* became *Personnes d'origine nomade* (“persons of nomadic origin”) and later *Gens du voyage* (“Travelling People”).

The term *Travellers*, which we use to designate predominantly “indigenous” groups not generally considered to be of Indian origin, is used by these groups themselves in many countries, and, since it is not part of the terminology commonly employed by surrounding society, is not loaded with misleading connotations. For both these reasons, it is an acceptable term, and we can use it without misgivings. As for the term *Gypsies*: although it is, as we have already noted, geographically widespread, it is not, save in certain languages (English among them), the one most often employed in common speech, and even where this is the case, it is generally less stained than other designations by pejorative connotations (except in the German language, due to the stigma attached to the term *Zigeuner* since the Nazi period). Insofar as the populations thus described have no name of their own for collective self-designation, it seems acceptable enough a term to cover this ensemble made up of diverse groups.

We should also add that the line between “Gypsies” and “Travellers” is not always a clear one, and asking which category a given group belongs in is an irrelevant and indeed unanswerable question in some contexts: intermediary groups have been in existence for a very long time, and new ones are still forming. Instead of thinking in terms of either/or exclusivity and breakoff points, we should look at this in terms of complementarity and continuity. As for the term *Rom* or *Roma*, which is increasingly used in political contexts by Gypsy organisations: it does not cover, even

politically, all of the groups in question, particularly those who call themselves *Travellers*. It does, however, have the advantage of being clearly distinct from the stereotypes attached to designations attributed by outsiders to "Gypsy" groups, of being a term of self-designation for a significant number of these groups, and of more accurately corresponding to both the socio-cultural reality and the political will of groups in Central and Eastern Europe, who make up 70% of the Gypsy communities of Europe.

Roma, Gypsies, Travellers: this series of words, the title of this book, is an effort to reflect, and to express respect for, linguistic, cultural, social and numerical reality.

Their arrivals in different waves, their travels and their sojourns have created a great variety of groups differentiated one from the other. The names used by Gypsies and Travellers to describe themselves are only very rarely the same as those applied to them by the populations with which they come into contact. Gypsies call themselves *Rom*, or *Manuš*, or *Sinti/Sinte*, or *Kalé*, with variations: for example in England, Wales, and Southern Scotland long-established Gypsies use the term *Travellers* for both themselves and other Gypsies, and *Romanichals* as a self-designation; those in Northern Wales call themselves *Kalé*; sometimes English and Welsh Gypsies use the term *Gypsies* — considered pejorative until recently, but rehabilitated by the development of Gypsy organisations — as a self-designation; this political adoption of "popular" terms such as *Gypsies*, *Tsiganes*, etc. is also occurring in other countries. Norwegian Travellers call themselves *Reisende*, some Spanish groups, *Mercheros*, and Irish Travellers, *Travellers*, as well as *Pav*, *Pavvy*, *Mincéir*. The section on social organisation will illustrate how each of these categories is frequently subdivided into a large number of smaller groups.

Accommodation

In describing the places where Gypsies and Travellers live in different countries, it is only possible to indicate general tendencies. In effect, situations vary greatly, and in most cases mobility remains an important adaptive element in changing circumstances, especially in the fields of accommodation and economic activities. This means that the sedentary

family can go back on the road, the nomad can halt, and all can move from one place to another.

Generally speaking, Travellers, and Gypsies of the "first wave", nomadic or sedentary, spread throughout the whole of a given territory, with concentrations around capitals and other big cities. Gypsies of the "second wave" (late 19th — early 20th centuries) pursue an almost exclusively urban nomadism, stopping in the suburbs of major cities where the communities they comprise may be permanent or ephemeral, and which display the same characteristics when they are — not infrequently — sedentary. Such communities may appear stable, while in reality there is a constant turnover of the families comprising them. Gypsies of the "third wave", from Yugoslavia, have established themselves both on the outskirts and at the heart of cities, and, whether sedentary or seminomadic, are predominantly urban.

The variety of types of accommodation is a reflection of the variety of places of residence and situations, both of which are largely determined by surrounding society: not just rejection, but regulations imposing requirements, limitations, prohibitions, and which vary with time and place. While current policies concerning nomads tend to aim towards their sedentarisation, such policies were for a very long time more geared towards moving them on, with a few exceptions (Spain from the beginning, Romania during the centuries of slavery, Austria under Maria Theresa and Joseph II), in this way perpetuating nomadism even though some of those affected would have preferred to stay put. Any desire to settle, however — even with the backing of the public authorities, and sometimes even of those in charge at local level — runs up against the ever-constant attitudes of rejection from the local populace. The nomad's adaptation to his surroundings must therefore, of necessity, take the form of varied and often provisional accommodation. Tents, wagons, and horse-drawn caravans are becoming rarer, but still exist nonetheless, while at the other end of the scale, campers and vans are on the increase. In Western Europe the two most common types of accommodation at present are the caravan — from the smallest and most dilapidated to vast, luxurious mobile homes — and the single-story detached house, small or large, whether recently constructed or in an area awaiting demolition, often supplemented with the addition of a small extension serving as a sitting room/parlour, and surrounded by a couple of square metres of yard where the family's own caravan, and that of any visiting relatives, can be parked.

But shacks put together out of waste materials, whether singly or clustered in shantytowns, are still to be found in many places, and living in flats, officially promoted in many States, has been characterised by numerous difficulties due to the inappropriateness of this type of accommodation. To the above list must be added local variations, such as abandoned houses in Greece, cave dwellings in Andalusia, and caretakers' flats, which have become popular accommodation for Yugoslav Gypsies in Austria.

Caravans may occasionally move singly, more often in small groups, and now and again in convoys of several dozen; their stopping places are extremely varied, sometimes spontaneously chosen, sometimes imposed, legal or otherwise, a simple patch of earth or a managed halting site. Caravans may be constantly on the move within a restricted circuit of a couple of dozen kilometres, or they may cross entire nations. They may only be in use during the summer months, whether for 500 or 5,000 kilometres.

Sedentarism, for a Gypsy or Traveller, is an objective fact, not a subjective one. He may live in a house, or in a caravan without wheels, and still retain a *nomadic mind-set*, for his situation is often precarious, and may last for decades or for his entire life, or indeed may change very quickly. He may move at any moment, be it by choice or in response to outside pressure (trouble with the neighbours, economic necessity, eviction when the area comes up for redevelopment, etc...). Caravan, house, and any other kind of dwelling must be adapted to an environment which is usually hostile, to the demands of one's work, and to the necessities of social life (receiving, and going to visit, parents and other relations). Although the social aspect is the priority consideration in the choice and layout of the dwelling, external contingencies are usually the principal determinants. The choice of accommodation is, finally, a compromise between these diverse demands.

Tent, caravan, or house, Gypsies and Travellers rarely judge themselves or others on the basis of type of accommodation, knowing it to be utilitarian and provisional, and often precarious and imposed from without. Administrative classifications and political ideologies often dichotomise the "nomadic" from the "settled", categorising "tent dwellers" and "caravan dwellers" separately from "housed" families, and draw arbitrary conclusions from this erroneous pigeonholing: for

example that the only "real" Gypsy, the depository of tradition, is the disappearing tent-dweller, while the "housed" Gypsy is merely a "person of nomadic origins" with "social adaptation problems". The truth is that tradition is as much to be found in the house as in the tent, the caravan, or the flash American Dormobile complete with CB radio. As far as Gypsies and Travellers themselves are concerned, there is generally no sense of "progress" attached to passing from a caravan to a house: such change is a temporary result of compromise, and may indeed, if too strongly imposed from without, be seen as a step downwards.

Current circumstances, especially in Western Europe, have led Gypsies and Travellers to regroup on the outskirts of cities in caravans, houses, and mixed habitats, due both to a decrease in rural resources (a fall in rural commerce and the market for itinerant trading, a drop in seasonal employment) and to the development of modern transport which, paradoxically, has led to a decrease in nomadism: now both clients and relatives can be reached in a single journey, instead of requiring a series of overnight stops. The "plus" of faster travel is counterbalanced by the twin drawbacks of the difficulties of getting about with a conspicuous caravan (subjecting the family to numerous police spot-checks en route) and of finding a place to stop (because of hostility and prohibitions), and these factors combine to produce the tendency towards sedentarism. Families try to stick together: the caravans draw closer, they look for houses in the same area, sometimes the same street, and the communities thus formed are often very strong numerically — which in turn creates new problems with those around them.

A "mixed habitat" develops: the area around the house provides parking space for one or more caravans, which may or may not be lived in, but which one way or another make it possible to get up and go. Given the range of current difficulties, the "mixed habitat" appears to offer some form of security: by keeping a caravan nearby the family retains its orientation towards the road, to which it can return should necessity, danger, or simple choice require it; the house or shack on a bit of land is a place of refuge in times of difficulty, whether short-term or long (the winter months, difficulties in finding a stopping place, illness in the family, loss of vehicle, etc...). A similar formula is more and more in evidence among families who buy or rent a bit of land and install a huge "mobile home" on it, but also own a lighter trailer which enables them to take off for short or long periods. The mobile home itself is rarely or

never moved — but it *could* be, if it had to: it answers better than a house to the desire to avoid being tied down to a fixed abode.

Further on, in connection with the effects of official policies and practices, we shall be returning to the question of living conditions, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Extreme policies of forced sedentarisation imposed in the 1950s in most of the countries under the Communist régime led to accommodation in extremely bad conditions — giving rise to shantytowns and ghettos both urban and rural — and to major upheavals in the social, cultural, and economic equilibrium of the Gypsy communities themselves, and in the equilibrium of their relations with local populations. These groups' own practices and cultural expressions were directly affected by practices imposed from without. We shall discuss these phenomena in more detail in Part II of this volume.