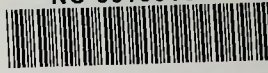


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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Gypsies

*And The Comparative Similarities Between The Romany Gypsy
And The Irish Traveller*

A Thesis Submitted to

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART & DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

and

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE B. DES. IN FASHION DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it is the fundamental difference in culture that had drawn me to research the topic of Gypsies, and those of Traveller stock. It is reckoned that there are approximately seven million Romany Gypsies in the world today, more than twice the population of Ireland. Gypsies are nothing short of fascinating. They are a landless people with a very clearly defined ethnic identity, being nomadic and 'different' to so called 'normal' society. They have for the most part become a rejected and downtrodden minority so accustomed to their mistreatment they bear it like bad weather. Misunderstanding of these nomadic people, by the settled community has led to inappropriate action on the part of bureaucracy, their goal being primarily to convert the travellers to a sedentary way of life.

Many Gypsies lack education and so suffer discrimination, both in an economic and social sense. The largest communities are growing up in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe while the Gypsies in Western Europe are suffering most with rejection. It is worth noting that Travellers in Ireland, although not related in any way to the Romany Gypsies, suffer the same rejection and intolerance. Not only do they have this unfortunate feature in common with Gypsies, but a closer look reveals that they have much in common with regard to their lifestyle and customs.

It is most interesting that the physical appearance of Irish Travellers differs greatly from that of settled Irish people. The women particular have a stalwart gait and ruddy complexion. Perhaps it is only their nomadic lifestyle that causes Gypsies and Travellers to have so much in common. In this essay it is my aim to give an insight into the culture of Gypsies, to discuss them at length and to draw comparisons between them and Irish Travellers.



Plate: 1 Romany Coppersmith Gypsies, England 1912

ORIGINS

"We used to have a great king, a Gypsy ! He was our prince. He was our king. The Gypsies used to live all together at that time in one place in one beautiful country. The name of that country was Sind. There was much happiness and much joy there. The name of our chief was Mar Amengo Dep. He had two brothers. The name of one was Romano and the name of the other was Singah. That was good, but then there was a big war there. The Moslems caused the war. They made ashes and dust from the Gypsy country. All the Gypsies fled together from their own land. they began to wander as poor men in other countries, in other lands. At that time the brothers took their followers and moved off and marched along many roads. some went to Arabia, some went to Byzantium, some went to Armenia." (1)

This story told by an old Eastern Bulgarian man, to his grandson. It relates to how the Gypsies left India in three large groups. Today we call these groups the Rom, the Sinti and the Kale. Early accounts refer to repressive laws and trials for crime. The Gypsy scholar, Jan Kochanowski believes his people were sedentary until rising interference and warfare in the area forced them to migrate. (2) However it is difficult to prove such theories and so, speculation must continue to reach the middle east, why they left, and when? However one piece of literary evidence worth examining comes from the Persian poet Firdusi (c.930 - 1020). In his shahnameh, or Book of King's (vol. 7. section 39), (2) an epic of ancient Iran completed in 1011, he

reports, giving no exact date that King Bahram Gur, wishing to make his people happy, asked his subjects what they wanted. The reply: "We see that the whole world prospers, blessings, arising everywhere, except that the poor complain of the king and their misfortune, for the rich drink wine to the sound of music, their heads crowned with flowers, while poor men, like us who drink without music or flowers, count for nothing." The king at once dispatched a messenger to Shankal, the king of India whose daughter he had married. 'O ever-helpful king', he beseeched him 'choose ten thousand Luri men and women, expert in lute-playing.' When the Luri arrived, the king welcomed them and gave each one an ox, an ass and some corn, to turn them into farmers. They in return were to play music for the poor for free. The Luri 'left, ate the oxen and the corn and returned a year later, with sunken cheeks. The king told them. "You should not have wasted the seed, the corn and the harvest. You still have your donkeys: load up with your possessions, prepare your musical instruments, and put strings of silk upon them." and so now the Gypsies....'live by their wits, they have for company the dog and the wolf, and tramp unceasingly. (Firdausi Vol Vii Sec 39) (3). The Gypsies probably stayed in Persia until the time of the first Mongol inroads. These seemed to have been their most likely motives for moving westward. There have been many hypothesis put forward concerning their way of life and place in Indian society. It is mostprobable that they existed initially as a group of nomadic tribes, remaining outside the rigid cast system, and so it being in their nature to keep moving. Having wandered westward, first

into Armenia, a number of Gypsies seemed to have turned southward into Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The people going west having reached Greece by about 1300. It has been noted that in 1326 some had settled in Corfu (4)

The Turkish invasions caused further migrations and many thousands settled temporarily in Romania - this being apparent by the fact that romany dialects are penetrated with romanian words, continuing westwards from Romania through Hungary and Austria and France in 1428 and by 1450 the first band of Gypsies had reached England. They travelled in large bands and wove tales of fascinating adventures, so as to create an air of mysticism - exotic appeal. They referred to their leaders as dukes or perhaps counts of Little Egypt. They spoke of being on a pilgrimage, serving seven years penance, imposed on them by the pope for infidelity to the christian faith. Many versions of this account can be found, so perhaps it is not pure legend but has some truth in it.

At first these newcomers were tolerated even liked and given alms. However, as stories of pilfering and fortune telling became increasingly common, one country after another enacted repressive measures against them. There seems to have been a black period of gypsy history from 1555 to 1780. Penalties for simply being a Gypsy included flogging, mutilation, deportation, slavery and in some places execution. It was not until well into the 18th century did more temperate official attitudes arise.



Plate 2:

Romany Gypsy Women at Epsom Races 1949

note the very Indian features of the women

RELIGION

In the early 15th century a large group of Gypsies wandered from the Turkish empire into western Europe. Soon their presence could be felt in every European country. They travelled in mass groups and told tales of fabulous adventures, so as to heighten their exotic appeal. They spoke on a seven year pilgrimage imposed on them by their bishops as a penance for infidelity to the Christian faith. When an early sixteenth century author asked some Gypsies, why they never stopped wandering after the seven years, he was told that "the road was closed to them, which prevented them from returning to their country even though the term of their penance was over." (1) Many Gypsies sought to conform to the religion of the country they had come to inhabit, thereby removing at least one reason for their persecution. This was one of the rare instances where the church hesitated to accept nominal conversions.

For the Gypsies were competition for the priests, competing for the superstitious minds of both common folk and gentry. The priests telling of the supernatural and the Gypsies reading of palms and predictions. The Gypsies had little apparent regard of religion. The reasons being as one story goes, God was giving out the different religions. The Gypsies wrote their holy book on cabbage leaves, a donkey promptly came along and ate it. (9) and so the Gypsies have no care of religion. A Turkish proverb says there are seventy-two and a half religions in the world and the half belongs to the Gypsies (2) At present most

Gypsies are Moslem , Roman Catholic Orthodox and Protestant. Their choice of religion having largely followed the prevailing faiths of the countries in which they lived. However, the Gypsies have many of their own ceremonies for such sacraments as marriage, baptism and burial. Their own ceremonies being practiced in preference to those of their church. present day religion will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11. Gypsies in Common with Travellers.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Rom Gypsy Society is built on a complicated pattern of family relationships. A group of related families form the clan (vista). This vista is a kin group which supports its relatives. It is headed by a chief, who is perhaps a very well respected elder. He, being the acknowledged leader of his group, may direct its wanderings and deal with the outsiders (gage). The female equivalent is usually the grandmother, who sees that the morals of the group are in order. Violations of the moral code are often referred to a special assembly of males, called the Kris. This courts jurisdiction covers a wide range of offenses including stealing from other Gypsies and violations of taboos in eating, drinking and washing. Penalties usually being fines, beatings or at worst expulsion from the group. Defilement will be dealt with later.

There is another subdivision, Rom Gypsy social organization, one not based on grounds of kinship: the kumpanja. This is a group formed by a temporary community at a campsite. This group is comprised of several families who may or may not be related, but who joined together for economic reasons and for security. This organization develops ties of mutual aid and solidarity between families. Leaders may change in a Kumpanja, families may leave, families may join, yet The Kumpanja keeps its form and rules of organization. One of the rules is that newcomers to the territory of a Kumpanja must get permission to work in that area and they must also pay something in compensation

as they will be exploiting the same economic resources; the gaje. In exchange the Kumpanja will help acquaint the newcomer with local conditions, laws and authorities. New comers do not respect the Kumpanja often find themselves in trouble with the gaje authorities. The Kumpanja maintain a monopoly on the economic resources of the area, defending economic resources of the area, defending these money making resources from other Rom.

One of the important roles of the Kumpanja is to bring together families that are not kin. Travelling very often divides family communities and so the Kumpanja brings about an element of unity by relating the unrelated. Various Kumpanja groups maintain relations with one another, mostly through kinship ties and the social exchanges that occur at marriages and funerals. Gypsies are inclined to have a very low self image, and are not recognized as individuals as such, relying on the group they belong to for a sense of identity. Many writers emphasize the males of the community most Rom describe the Kumpanja as composed of so many (tents) households.

The importance of the Kumpanja can not be stressed enough. It is the basic unit of public, moral and social behaviour and it comes under the authority of the Kris Romani, (the Kris Romani, being a tribunal of Gypsy elders, which is their only authority in matters of Gypsy law and ceremonial behaviour) important issues such as Gypsy law, social behaviour and morality will usually involve several Kumpanja at a trial (Kris Romani), for it takes a broad section of persons to hold a Kris by itself or to take decisions other than family matters. If an individual

does something wrong, the Kumpanja will be held responsible and will feel responsible. They will take up collections to help pay fines or perhaps bail. The Kumpanja also contribute to such things as funeral costs and newly married couples. Thus the Kumpanja is not only the largest economic group, but it is the largest viable social and ceremonial group.



Plate: 3

Large Group of Gypsies - Kumpana, 1908

TRAVELLING

Travel is a symbol and honour for all Gypsies, they like to be called travellers. It gives them an identity, marking them off quite dramatically from house dwellers. Travelling is considered good and is associated with health and good luck, whereas settling down is associated with sickness and bad luck. Old ladies will very often take a trip to recover, if feeling ill. It is believed that the Rom Gypsies used not fight while they were travelling but now they have settled in cities, they fight constantly, it not being in their nature to remain sedentary. Settled people remain settled people when travelling just as Gypsies remain nomads even when not travelling. The Gypsies have "a flexible identity unattached to any particular piece of earth, the land of the Gypsies being within themselves." (1)

The Gypsy movements are not clear and organized, yet they don't simply travel around aimlessly without any pattern. The majority usually travel within a region of several counties, (in the case of England) others travel country wide. In this main region, they would usually be familiar with routes and stopping places: a talent acquired in childhood, routes being governed by things such as harassment by police, availability of work etc. They generally aim to stay in one place for about three weeks remaining in large clusters around the towns in winter and spreading out over a wider area in summer, perhaps exploring new areas. / there appears to be three classes of Gypsy; Just as there is in popular society.

Type A: being poor living in tents and are either not motorized or only intermittently so. These Gypsies are to be found mostly in rural areas, moving on, usually by way of lifts given by relatives. Their occupations being severely limited by their lack of mobility, and so they suffer poverty in abundance. The few Travellers in Gage employment such as grave diggers, farmhands or labourers, being most likely in this Category.

Type B: Being motorized, perhaps their vehicles needing repair. This group congregate mainly around industrialized areas perhaps on the verge of a high way - Again living mostly within a certain region. Venturing out perhaps to escape serious prosecution, these Gypsies deal mostly in scrap metals, Iron etc, and are not as poor as the 'lower' group.

Type C: This group being in more lucrative occupations, having money to travel more further afield, selecting convenient plots of land near major routes and therefore less conspicuous than their counterparts forced on to roadside verges. Most Gypsies fall roughly into these three categories. The majority in Type B. Most Gypsies make a decent living, surviving reasonably well unless victims of their own misfortune, for e.g. poverty due to alcoholism.

Gypsies have the ability to extract a living from the Gage. The Gage are perceived as an economic race whose *raison d'être* is to trouble the Rom. There is constant pressure on Gypsies to give up their footloose ways, they are no longer perceived as merely different, but are now looked upon as staunch

opponents of basic social order, seeking to live outside conventional society as we see it.

There are now more 'settled' Gypsies than there are nomadic. The distinction not being clear, because many nomadic Gypsies rest for a time in the winter and there are many settled families that take to the roads for a few weeks every year. In Europe a different type of settlement is becoming more and more common. This has come about from Gypsies being driven off the roads and coming to rest on wasteland on the fringes of towns, enforcing the view that properly planned and equipped campsites are necessary if the Gypsy nomadic way of life is to be successfully integrated into the complex society of today. But is this the answer should the culture and nomadic ways of the Gypsy not be nurtured? instead of assimilation into what we see as normal society!



Plate: 4

Horsedrawn Van, Kent 1949

HALLMARKS OF THE RACE

Gypsies have always been an ethnic puzzle being difficult to fit into any particular bracket. Always, no matter where, being regarded as foreign. "The men were very black, with curly hair. The women were the ugliest and blackest that have ever been see. Their faces were all furrowed with wrinkles, their black hair like a horse's tail, their only clothing was a very rough old blanket fixed to their shoulders by a strip of cloth or a string,, with only a torn vest underneath. In short they were the most wretched creatures that had been seen in France in living memory." (1)

The Gypsies encountered much misunderstanding. One accusation being that they deliberately darkened themselves, using walnut and other vegetable substances.



Plate: 5

Typical Example of Romany Faces, England 1910

MARRIAGE

Marriage was always considered a personal affair. However at present the administration of most countries insist on a church or registry office wedding. In the past, weddings were a very tribal matter. The joining of hands and the affirmation to each other wholly binding "Lancelot Lovell made me an offer, as you call it, and we were married in roman fashion; that is, we give each other our right hands, and promised to be true to each other." (1) Gypsies marry young in comparison to gajo society, with the usual age being from 17 to 22 for men and from the age of 15 for women, few remaining single. The relationship between a young man and woman is very formal. They must not go for walks or to the cinema alone. They must meet in the homes of their parents. A girl who chats to a boy on the street or in a bar gets a bad reputation.

Family is important to the Gypsies as is lineage. Gypsies say that they "belong to the fathers lineage first and to the mother's secondly." A woman is said to enter her husband's lineage upon marriage. The fathers lineage continues to exist through the generations whereas the mothers lineage holds importance only during her lifetime. If a dispute occurs between the lineages of a husband and wife, the man always supports that of his father. Marriage within a lineage is common, marriage between different lineages is also common, forming an alliance between different groups. The Gypsies prefer their children to

marry "known people", relatives being in this category. The Gage are looked upon as being impure and so marriage between a Rom Gypsy and a Gage is taboo. "Marriages....occur between Gorgios and Romany chies; the result of which is the mixed breed called half and half,.....'the half and halves.....they are the bad set"

(2) Upon occasion a Rom may marry a non-Gypsy woman, have children, lose favour among his people, but come back into public life after some years and be treated with toleration. However a Romni (woman) who marries a non-Gypsy, loses her rights as a Rom citizen forever, as she is responsible for the purity of race. Parents are said to forget the names of their daughters that marry non-Gypsies. Innocence ends with marriage, it being the rite de passage to adulthood. A girl becomes a Romni with marriage, a woman and a wife; a boy becomes a Rom a man and a husband. The married couple are respectful and decorous in approaching one another, either at home in front of the children or in public.

Ideally, an individual should marry only once, yet marrying more than once, although frowned upon, is permissible. A couple may separate where they have no children. A spouse is ostracised by the whole Gypsy community, should he/she leave their spouse when they have young children. The separation being quite acceptable should the children be over fourteen years of age. A widower may marry again but a widow, should remain with the memory of her husband. There is seldom a ceremony for second marriages. They are usually criticized at first, but eventually these couples are looked upon as being married. A Gypsy woman's standing in the community depends on whether she has been married by a proper

wedding ceremony, has married only once and remained with her husband, has not married when she became a widow. When she has her first child her marriage is consolidated and if her first born is a son the woman's influence and prestige in her husband's lineage are increased. (This latter custom is a similar characteristic of Indian and Pakistani families, which is more than co-incidental, considering that the Gypsies originated in North-West India which is now Pakistan)

Authority rests with the men. A woman upon marriage enters her husbands lineage of which she will always be a member. A man has the exclusive right to inflict physical punishment on his wife, a woman being considered 'weaker' and 'inferior' to a man. A woman is subject to her husband. He is entitled to beat her and must always defend her, "Women must bear, brother; and, barring that he kicked and beat me, and drove me out to tell dukkerin when I could scarcely stand, he was not a bad husband. A man, by Gypsy law, brother, is allowed to kick and beat his wife, and to bury her alive, if he thinks proper. I am a Gypsy and have nothing to say against the law." (6)

LANGUAGE

The language of Rom Gypsies, Romany is a neo-Indic dialect of the north western part of India, now Pakistan. The language having elements of the various countries, which the Gypsies travelled through from their original home to the west. It was a Hungarian student who in the late eighteenth century, made a real breakthrough. By chance he came across three students from north west India. He was drawn to them by the similarities between their language and that of the Gypsies he knew. By drawing up a vocabulary and comparing it to that of the Gypsies, he had started the ground work for the experts who followed in his trail. Thereafter many works were published.

It was a man called Pott who attempted the most rigorous demonstration of the Indian origin of the Romany (Gypsy) language he being, the inventor of comparative phonetics for Indo-European languages. Pott came to the conclusion that Gypsies having come from India, had spoken a single language until their dispersion gave rise to different dialects. (1)

Like the languages currently spoken in India, - Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Romany, descended from Sanskrit. Romany's closest relation being Hindi. Not only can this relationship be demonstrated, but it is quite obvious.

Comparisons Showing Origin of the Gypsy Language and Borrowings
Made During Migration

<i>Gypsy</i>	<i>Hindi</i>	<i>Punjabi</i>	<i>English</i>
Kan-	Kan-	Kann	'ear'
Cor-	Cor-	Cor	'thief'
nakh-	nak-	nakk	'nose'
dikh-	dekh-	dekh-	'to see'
<i>Gypsy</i>	<i>Persian</i>		<i>English</i>
Kez	Kaz		'raw silk'
zor	zur		'strength'
tang	tang		'narrow'
<i>Gypsy</i>	<i>Greek</i>		<i>English</i>
drom	dromos		'road'
zumi	zoumi		'soup'

Lacroix, to play at a party he threw to launch his autumn collection.

The Gypsy Kings have done much to improve the image of Gypsies. They have highly valued occupations in the eyes of fellow Gypsies and remain true to their roots on the road.



Plate: 6

Tradition of Music Being Handed Down From Father to Son,
England 1977

GYPSY DRESS

In general, Gypsies adopt articles of clothing from their host people. The men's clothing being usually non-descript and shabby, the women's clothing usually being more distinctive. They are inclined to wear full long skirts and loose blouses. The long skirts, perhaps because the lower half of a woman's body is the ultimate source of shame (defilement). Anyone having contact with the lower female body, traditionally the underskirt is ultimately ostracized. This form of defense, providing Gypsy women with protection among their own kind.

George Borrow's book 'The Romany Rye' gives a good account of the 'Roman' fashion in late nineteenth century England. "Mr. Petulengro was dressed in Roman fashion, with a somewhat smartly-cut sporting-coat, the buttons of which were half crowns - and a waistcoat, scarlet and black, the buttons of which were spaded half-guineas; his breeches were of a stuff half velveteen, half corduroy, the cords exceedingly broad. He had leggings of buff cloth, furred at the bottom; and upon his feet were highlows. Under his left arm was a long black whalebone riding-whip, with a red lash, and an immense silver knob. Upon his head was a hat with a high peak in favour with the bravos of Seville and Madrid.... Mr. Petulengro had on a very fine white holland shirt...Mrs Petulengro.... was also arrayed very much in the Roman fashion. Her hair, which was exceedingly black and lustrous, fell in braids on either side of her head. In her ears were rings, with long drops of gold."(1)

Gypsy women have a great love of gold jewelry usually made from gold coins. The wearing of jewelry acts as a means of storing wealth for the family.

GYPSY CUSTOMS

There are certain customs structures and laws which control and guarantee the consistency and survival of the gypsy way of life. A body of rules and taboos governing everything from the preparation of food and personal cleanliness to dress and etiquette. (for example;) The burial of a person is most important, members of the dead man's lineage being ostracised should they not attend the funeral. If a man die's leaving a widow with young children, members of his lineage are expected to look after the family, financially. Another custom being; the widow should not remarry, but should remain in the memory of her husband.

There exists a way of settling disputes among Gypsies based on Gypsy law, preventing them going to the police should they commit crimes against one another. There are cases of an elder committing a crime and should the police intervene, a younger member of the lineage owning up. The elder being more important than the younger members of the lineage. The younger member may even, serve the sentence for the elder so as to gain prestige. Honour and prestige being very important to the Gypsies, for example an illegitimate birth would very much damage the prestige of the couple involved, also damaging the honour of their lineages. so as we can see above, the Gypsies code of customs and laws is largely defined by relationships among themselves.

Gypsies generally do not use physical force as a means of earning money. The use of force only attracting additional abuse from the gaje (settled community) However the Gypsies do

have a cunning wit when it comes to making money. The ability to live by their wits having become an integral part of their lives. Crimes such as murder or rape are considered so serious that Gypsies will not admit that these could be perpetrated by one of their own. If a Gypsy was responsible they would be mahrim (outcast forever). Although Gypsies generally do not earn their living from crime, that is not to say they are not a violent people. A lack of education, and an inability to be articulate causes them to express themselves very often in a physical way. (1) With the law forces seldom interfering, because Gypsies only report violence in order to gain revenge.

PREJUDICE/DENIAL OF CULTURE

"When I go to the market there in the corner stand the accursed Gypsies jabbering to each other in a speech which I cannot understand."(1)

Perhaps it is a lack of understanding on the part of the Gajo; of different cultures and customs that leads to a certain ignorance and the denial of Gypsy culture. "The devil you know, is better than the devil you don't." (2) People are often wary of those who are different to themselves. There was a resentment towards the Gypsies for several reasons. Firstly they spoke a foreign tongue, which was seen to be an obscure and mystical language, incomprehensible until linguistic studies in the eighteenth century, linked it to the Indo-Aryan group. Secondly the Gypsies had no apparent roots or attachment to any known country. Another strong factor in the intolerant attitude was the suspicion attached to anyone who crossed from the Turkish occupied lands at the time of their first arrival into Europe. for it was from that direction that came enemies of the states and the church, lacking an organized religion of their own, the Gypsies were openly attacked by christian clergy and moslem priests.

At present both Germany and U.S. Rom activists have had to challenge the continued employment of 'Gypsy experts' by police agencies. Police have been known to have kept records on Sinti even when they had no criminal record while in several American states there are anti-Gypsy laws despite anti-racist legislation.

GUILDFORD RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL ACTS, 1931 and 1936.

PROHIBITION OF MOVEABLE DWELLINGS

Take Notice

That by an Order made under Section 57 of the Surrey County Council Act, 1931, as amended by Section 131 of the Surrey County Council Act, 1936, by the Court of Summary Jurisdiction at Guildford on the 11th December, 1953, the placing of

Moveable Dwellings

on any part of an area of land at Effingham, Surrey, comprising 162 acres or thereabouts generally known as Effingham Common (including *inter alia* the private properties known as Slaters Oak, Lee Brook, Leewood Cottages, Brickfield Cottages, Wise Folly and part of Woodland known as Gallows Grove) all of which area of land is bounded on the West by Hooke Copse and Heathway; on the North-West by the rear boundaries of properties fronting the railway line; on the North-East by Norwood Farm, and Lower Farm and lands attached thereto, to Indian Farm, and on the South by the Northern boundaries of private properties and agricultural land having a frontage to the said Effingham Common is

PROHIBITED.

E. W. BELLINGS,

Clerk of the Council.

"Moveable dwelling" means any tent any structure capable of being moved from place to place and any van cart carriage truck tramcar motor car caravan trailer or other vehicle used or intended to be used for the purpose of human habitation (whether temporarily or otherwise).

Any person who places or retains any moveable dwelling on the land in the area referred to in contravention of the said Order shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a penalty not exceeding TEN POUNDS and to a daily penalty not exceeding FIVE POUNDS and the Council may enter on the land and remove the moveable dwelling in respect of which the offence has been committed and recover the expense of so doing summarily as a civil debt from the person guilty of the offence.

WILLS & SONS, PRINTERS, LTD., CARPIS STREET, GUILDFORD.

Plate: 7

A Typical Anti-Nomadic Measure

GYPSIES IN COMMON WITH TRAVELLERS

The term traveller embraces both gypsies and Irish itinerants and in fact may include all people of wandering origins. currently the word 'Itinerant' is used by social reformers in Ireland. The word 'Tinker' is now looked down on, though once it linked the Irish wanderer with his trade. An Irish Itinerant may be called Gypsy even though he may refer to himself exclusively as traveller. In this study I shall refer to members of the Irish travelling class as 'Travellers'. This designation not to be confused with Gypsies who also prefer to be called by this name.

The Travellers here in Ireland are Irish and are not connected as such with the Romany Gypsies. Nan Joyce (1) claims that there have been travellers in Ireland since St. Patrick's time, the original travellers being musicians, tinsmiths and carpenters. Over the years they have mixed in with travellers from other countries, like the Spanish, who came to Ireland approximately five hundred years ago, hence the dark features in many of the Irish Traveller Clans.

Irish travellers are limited to the British Isles and America. Gypsies speak Romany and Travellers cant or gammon, a language of celtic origin. There is great difficulty in trying to place Travellers in a credible historical context. It has been said that travellers were put on the road at the time of the famine. Eoin Mac Neill (2) suggests that travellers are descendants of the rivet-makers, who were a pre christian minority

group which gave valuable service to ancient warriors, and were later made inferior by the invading gael. This theory helps explain the present prejudice of the settled community towards the travellers. Another suggestion being that travellers are descendants of the defeated armies of the Battles of Antrim and of the Boyne.

In 1844 Bataillard wrote that Gypsies, blacksmiths in the bronze age, may have established their production centres in the region of the western Alps; from where as they roamed, spread their metal working among the celts. (3). "Discoveries have shown - early bronze smiths were nomadic - went about from village to village making and selling new objects and buying up old broken wares to melt and remould.... The bronze smiths must have travelled in large bands for mutual protection. Nothing is more likely than that they formed in time a community with distinct laws and language. Nor is it improbable that this has transmitted to the tinkers - it takes a long time for men to form a distinct class with a separate tongue. The Celtic of the English are unanimous in claiming for their class or clan a very great antiquity. Now classes pursuing the same calling of working in period of time, we may rationally surmise that they had a common origin." (Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, Liverpool, April 1891, p. 157.) Unfortunately there is not enough evidence to bear out one theory over another.

One Traveller whom I asked of her origins replied with a story about her father being scolded for smoking as a child, so much for a faulty historical memory. As we can see it is

difficult to determine the exact origins of the travellingcommunity. Although they are not connected in any way Gypsies and Travellers have much in common. Perhaps it is their landlessbackground, their nomadic way of life and the similar prejudices they suffer from which seem to unite them in culture and tradition. As a people they are so separate and yet they have so many common characteristics. The Gypsies and Travellers share; an itinerant way of life, crafts, similar type of home, the structure of their community, apparent lack of regular religion, extremely high moral values, occupations, love of celebration, instinct for survival, violence and abuse. Perhaps it is little more than a basis fight for survival that causes Gypsies and Travellers to behave and exist in such a similar way.

It is both strange and fascinating, that Gypsies and Travellers alike have a similar selection of myths concerning birth, death and creation. They also both share the "displaced lord" theory while having an air of mysticism about it. The primary advantage being, it gives both the Gypsy and Traveller a 'raison d'etre', and creates a certain nature of relationship to the settled community. It is interesting to note that Travellers seem to have made a conscious imitation of the Gypsies with regard to the tent and later the Gypsy caravan. This seems strange when we consider that Travellers do not like to associate themselves with gypsies and likewise Gypsies consider basket makers and those who live in caravans, very much a lower class than themselves.

Intermarriage is supposedly rare between travellers and Gypsies and is rather looked down on. However due to both being in abundance in Great Britain, marriages do occur between Gypsies and Travellers, "the result of which is the mixed breed, called half and half which is at present travelling about England.... half and and halves.....they are a bad set." (4)

Both Gypsies and Travellers have the traditional type of marriage, it is arranged by a matchmaker, such a man may well be the bride's uncle. Marriages are seen as a way to create closer ties between families. Morals are quite high, should a couple sneak off together, perhaps to the cinema, they are often made marry on their return for girls are not permitted to be alone in the company of boys. Teenage marriages are becoming increasingly common. For the boys, the responsibility of a wife and children can often make them settle down. Early marriage for a girl is a guarantee against 'scandal'.

As with Gypsies; it is most important for Travellers to marry from among their own clan. Close-kin marriages help strengthen family solidarity: Men have the right to beat their wives, but being close relatives it is believed that the men will have more respect. As one Traveller put it, "if the wife runs off, the boy has no trouble getting her back, because she's going to go back to her family. Her family is the boys aunt and uncle. They're all the one people.....they're all the one blood. But if you marry a stranger, if she's gone, well that's it.....she could be gone."

There are certain occupations which suit the nomadic way of life, again these are common to both Gypsies and Travellers; Antique dealing, scrap dealing

The largest group of Gypsies/Travellers in the entertainment business can be found having carnivals. The carnival way of life suiting a nomadic person's temperament. Constantly being on the move never staying in any place for a lengthy period of time. The atmosphere of the carnival being ideal for the application of some quick witted swindles to con money from the settled community. The women usually set up fortune-telling tents, while the men work the carnival. Most people reckon that any Gypsies/Travellers working at carnivals are operating a hustle.

The Gypsies/Travellers who deal in antiques and scrap are usually quite well off and act as bankers for the others.

At one time over three quarters of Travellers were engaged in tinsmithing, in the early sixties, only one tenth were similarly engaged. (5)

METAL WORKING:

Metal work has been a traditional trade among Gypsies and Travellers for centuries. Metal workers can be divided into several categories: the blacksmith, who works with a hammer at the forge; the tinsmith (hence the name Tinker) or coppersmith, who works with sheet metal, which is either riveted or hammered out and who repairs large pots and pans,; the tinner who plates objects with tin plating and the silver and goldsmith, who works

at repairing jewelry. Occasionally gold and silversmiths will counterfeit commemorative or foreign gold or silver-plated coins, which are hawked at flea markets as the genuine articles. The smith is a dying breed of artisan because there is a lack of demand for his craft in modern society. "There seems to exist on different cultural levels, a close bond between the art of the smith, the occult sciences (magic) and the arts of song, dance, and poetry. " (Mircea Eliade)

HORSE TRADING:

For centuries Gypsies and Travellers have been associated with horse trading and are considered clever horse traders. Horse trading is a lucrative business, large livestock auctions are held regularly.

Many gypsies follow their forefathers into the business of selling horses, travelling constantly from one auction to another. Because both the Gypsy and the Traveller are not restrained to any particular place of residence they are free to travel and are thus enabled to maintain a wide circle of contacts among horse breeders and dealers throughout the country. Their transient mode of living enabling them to keep in tune with the current state of the market, what animals are available, trade prices etc.

A horse entrusted to the care of an unscrupulous trader can emerge unrecognizable after a short time. A horse in bad condition can be bought for very little at one auction and sold at another for a respectable profit. To make the horse appear frisky

and prance the Gypsy or Traveller will prick him repeatedly with a pin just prior to showing him. Another trick being to shake a bucket of pebbles under the animal's nose until it almost goes crazy. At the time of the sale, the mere sight of a bucket will cause the horse to arch its neck, snort, and dance about. To raise the tail, a piece of ginger is placed in the animal's anus. The list is endless and it may take a day or more for the new owner to realize he has been swindled. By such time the Gypsy or Traveller may be several hundred miles away. Should the victim confront the Gypsy/Traveller recognition is difficult as all Gypsies/Travellers tend to look alike to the settled community.

The Gypsy/Traveller will most likely play along with the uncertainty and boldly deny selling him the horse, putting the blame perhaps on his cousin who looks very like him.

Fortune telling is a traditional occupation of many Gypsy women. Travelling women also tell fortunes but the romany women believe that only they have the special powers. Fortune telling tents being a common site at fairs, flea markets and carnivals. One old romany a Mrs. Grey based in Lucan told me of having learned the art from her mother, who in turn had learned it from her mother. The men are given the job of arranging the setting up of the fortune telling tent, negotiating the fees and acting as watchmen. Fortune telling is most likely a skill in character analysis rather than an exhibition of extrasensory powers. The fortune teller has the ability to observe and deduct and extract information which she then relays back to the customer who marvels at the Gypsies magical powers.

Gypsy and Traveller women are fully occupied with minding their numerous children. With the decline in tinsmithing and horse-trading the men are left with little to do but collect welfare. To the Gypsies/Travellers welfare is merely a means of extracting money from the settled community. The welfare worker being referred to as the money man, having large sums of money to give away - it is simply a case of establishing the need, something which is relatively easy for the cunning 'Gypsy' having large families paying no income or property taxes and having very little documentation with regard to birth, marriages and deaths.

The reason Travellers turned (for livelihood) from tinsmithing to begging is perhaps because, early this century the British Government put a tax of five pounds on their smelting pots. "They used to haul the 'smelting pot' around in a pony cart and were able to do all kinds of 'tricks with metal', such as put the 'legeens' on an iron pot - they could mend ploughs and so on." (Irish Folklore Commission) Much of their trade was said to have died out with this tax.

Gypsies more so than Travellers have little regard for religion, Travellers have, for the most part a strong faith but do not practice as regularly as the settled community, in fact there is little evidence of church attendance apart from ceremonial events such as christenings, weddings and funerals.

For both the Gypsy and Traveller, death more than anything shows the depth of their religious belief and the strength of their kinship. A wake is held in the deceased persons

caravan, / this usually lasts a day and a night, / when the person is buried, their caravan is very often burned to the ground, for it would be unlucky to live in a dead man's caravan. (6)

There was a time when both the Gypsies / and Travellers / identities were a source of security, / now their identities are merely a source of conflict. They find themselves dependant on the social welfare provided by the state. They are oppressed because they do not live in 'normal' houses as we the settled community see it. Government policies are encouraging them to settle in houses where they are yet again oppressed by their new neighbours. 'Society has always found the Romanies an ethnic puzzle and has tried ceaselessly to fit them, by force or fraud, piety or policy, coaxing or cruelty, into some framework of its own conception, but so far without success.' (7) The same can be said for Travellers. They are an oppressed people if living on the side of the road and they are the bottom of the barrel, as regards society if choose to live in houses.



Plate: 8

Unauthorised Traveller, Halting Site

INTERVIEWS

The majority of Travellers in Ireland have Irish backgrounds, are no different to the settled community, it is simply that they are nomadic and have a different lifestyle. However, there are some Rom among our Travellers, although very few, (a Mrs. Whitehouse in Balbriggan, a Mrs Joyce in Finglas and a Mrs Grey in Lucan) / Mrs. Whitehouse is renowned for talking to the press and being tired of it, would not entertain me at all, on the cold and miserable day that I visited her, perhaps it was only my non-acceptance of her offer to tell my fortune?

Thankfully Mrs. Grey was more than obliging, an attractive woman in her early sixties, with large brown eyes and prematurely aged sallow skin. Her mobile home gleamed so much that it would put the settled population to shame as she described having separate basins for washing themselves and for washing dishes. Mrs Grey knew little of her ancestry bar that her parents and grand parents had travelled England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, attending the big fairs and meetings. A living being made by telling fortunes and hawking and dealing. Mrs Grey saw herself as living a very similar way to the Irish Travellers, but being very different having a different background and tradition, earning her living by fortune telling whereas Irish travelling women are merely housewives. She agreed with me that there are many similarities between the Rom and Irish Travellers one of such being, the urge to move on, not to stay in any particular place for a lengthy period of time. Having being born on the road Mrs. Grey's wish was to die on the road. She explained that Gypsies

are a 'different' people, when summer is on the horizon they feel the need to move on/they have a certain loneliness for the road. Many would love a house for the winter months with the option of travelling when the weather picks up. Some travellers describe a house as like being in a closed in space, where the walls come in on you and you get the feeling of being smothered.

One young Traveller I interviewed , Sally Flynn, was quite helpful in regard to information about Travellers, but was quite defensive and would not admit to the Travellers over indulging in drink or perhaps abusing their wives etc.,/it is in the Travellers nature to be on the guard and not to reveal too much of their culture and traditions to the settled community. Having researched both the area of Romany Gypsies and Travellers extensively it becomes clear that they are quite analogous. My visit to the halting site at Lucan gave clear evidence of this. Mrs. Grey, although Romany lives along side many Irish Travellers,/ a person not familiar with families on the site would conclude that they were all the same, but closer inspection shows subtle differences. The area around the Grey's caravan was spotlessly tidy and may I say, perhaps, over decorated, gleaming chrome and the frilliest of frilly curtains decorating the tiny windows. Inside some of the seats were covered with plastic so as to keep them clean, antique plates dotting the walls and a fabulous set of silver eating utensils in the corner. Loose rugs covering the floor and not a crumb in sight. An abundance of pride was evident in comparison to their 'Irish' neighbours. The crochet cushions were crafted by Mrs. Grey herself as were the cloth covers strewn

over the couch. These crafts being passed down to her from her mother and grandmother before. There is no evidence of needleworking among Irish Travellers. Sally Flynn (1) explained that the only needleworking being carried out by Irish Travellers was that which was being taught at the twenty seven various training centres around the country. There is no tradition, as such, of crafts among Traveller women, perhaps because they were mainly occupied with child rearing, having such large families.

CONCLUSION

The history of nomadic peoples is a story of relentless persecution. From the middle ages to the present day, Gypsies have been the target of racial discrimination and outright genocide. Fragmented and scattered throughout the globe since their departure from north India a thousand years ago, Gypsies have been unable to defend themselves and have relied for their collective survival on avoiding confrontation and keeping a low profile.

Through long separation most Rom Communities have held on to the Romani language, customs and beliefs. Some have maintained an independent judicial system, known as the Kris. they have supported each other through the extended family and the clan, and so in this way, the Gypsies have stayed behind their own barriers, shunning conventional politics and have been wary of outside influence. However both Gypsies and Travellers have existed in a very hostile environment for many centuries. Yet they have maintained themselves by holding tight to values and attitudes which are often in conflict with the settle community. If they had not done so, they would simply have assimilated into settled society, and would no longer exist as a separate entity.

They, like the Jews, have been put under immense pressure but have not ceded. It is known that not only the Jews but the Gypsies were also put to death in Nazi Germany. The devastating impact of the Nazi holocaust showing the Gypsies how vulnerable they were as a despised minority in ruthless modern states.

Economic changes have resulted in a society of mass consumerism. The urbanisation of many towns has caused restrictions in camping and so travelling. There are now many laws leaving it almost impossible to move around at ease. Settlement is becoming the rule. Pressure has been put on the Gypsies/Travellers since the early 1960's when assimilationist policies were brought into being. Although these laws are not clearly directed at them (The word Gypsy or Tinker is rarely mentioned.) The restrictions on the camping of caravans, scrap-metal dealing / door to door hawking are having extremely negative effects on both Gypsies and Travellers. When the caravan ceases to travel from place to place, its owners lose their source of income and their ability to adapt. The actual fabric of the Gypsy/Traveller lifestyle is torn. Once their identity was a source of security, now it becomes a source of conflict. Culturally destroyed they find themselves supervised and dependant particularly on social welfare. "If ever Gypsyism breaks up, it will be owing to our chies having been bitten by that mad puppy they call gentility." (1) After centuries of repeated failure in their efforts to cast Gypsies and Travellers out, governments are now introducing policies that are most likely irreversible. Assimilation is the order of the day and assimilation is not incompatible with continued rejection, becoming wage earners does not free them from oppression. The policy of economic and social integration has jeopardized the means of existence of Travellers and Gypsies.

Andre Glucksmann has observed, irrespective of ideologies, for a millennium now the call to "eliminate ghettos" has actually been a call to eliminate those who live in them'. Both Gypsy and Traveller trades traditionally permit constant adaptation to changes in conditions and allow independence, cutting off their sources of income drives them towards a settled way of life. Looked upon as sub-proletarians, the settled community wishes to give assistance by giving them the experience of entering the world of labour, public housing or perhaps permanent halting sites, and so these Nomadic People are rehabilitated in societys eyes. All this good behavior leads to the occupancy of a cramped flat instead of a caravan - unable to cope the Gypsies and Travellers become sub-proletarian again "The alternative now faced by Gypsies is unpalatable: to stay different is to be considered deviant and to be treated as such; to conform is to blend away through assimilation." (2)

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1.

1. Gratton Puxon, *Europes Gypsies* (London:minority rights group, 1973) Page 13
2. J.B. McLaughlin, *Gypsy Lifestyles*, (Lexington 1980) Page 30
3. J.P. Leoigeois, *Gypsies an Illustrated History*, (Alsaqi books, London 1983) Page 30
4. *Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol. 11 Page 43

Chapter 2.

1. J.B. McLaughlin, *Gypsy Lifestyles*, (Lexington 1980) chapter 1
2. Gratton Puxon, *Europes Gypsies*, (London: minority rights group, 1973) Page 14

Chapter 4.

1. J.P. Leoigeois, *Gypsies an Illustrated History*, (Al Saqi books, London 1983) Page 54

Chapter 5.

1. Gratton Puxon, *Europes Gypsies*, (London: minority rights group 1973) Page 26

Chapter 6.

1. George Borrow, *The Romany Rye*, (Oxford Press, 1984) Page 73
2. *ibid*, Page 68

Chapter 7.

1. J.B. McLaughlain, *Gypsy Lifestyles*, (Lexington 1980) Page 29

Chapter 9.

1. George Borrow, *The Romany Rye*, (Oxford Press 1984) Page 33

Chapter 10.

1. As Betty Neville, National Council for Travelling People explained: Irish Travellers are often physically violent towards their wives because of an inability to communicate verbally in a sufficient manner.

Chapter 11.

1. Gratton Puxon, *Europes Gypsies*, (London: minority rights group 1973) Page 7
2. Old Irish Proverb

Chapter 12.

1. Quote, Nan Joyce founder of the Minceir Misli.
2. Eoin Mac Neill, *Phases of Irish History*, (Gill and Son Dublin 1968)
3. J.B. McLaughlin, *Gypsy Lifestyles* (Lexington 1980) Page 23
4. George Borrow, *The Romany Rye*, (Oxford Press 1984) Page 68
5. The Commission Report, Dublin, Government Publication, 1963
Appendix IIV. Page 137
6. Quote Sally Flynn, N.C.T.P.
7. Stuart Mann, *Encyclopedia Britannica*

Chapter 13.

1. Quote Sally Flynn - National Council for Travelling People
Conclusion.

1. George Borrow. The Romany Rye, (Oxford Press, 1984) Page 79

2. Jean-Pierre Legeois, Gypsies an Illustrated History, (Al Saqi
books, London 1983) Page 179.

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