

Silverman

CAROL SILVERMAN

Negotiating "Gypsiness" *Strategy in Context*

The apparent paradox of American Gypsy ethnicity is examined, that is, how Gypsies cultivate a distinct ethnic identity while appearing to assimilate. Boundary maintenance and boundary crossing are explored in relation to innovations in Gypsy culture. The non-Gypsy environment is not a threat to Gypsy culture but a rich storehouse from which Gypsies creatively draw, adopt, and interpret.

FOR YEARS, popular writers and even some scholars have predicted the assimilation of Gypsies in the New World (Clark 1967; Esty 1969; Murin 1950; Preston 1975; Reeves 1890; Traverso 1958; Weybright 1938). Early works claimed that Gypsy blood was gradually becoming mixed with non-Gypsy blood and that land and houses were tying them to civilization: "The power of civilization will by and by blot this people as a people from the earth" (Reeves 1890:450). More recent observers claim that American Gypsies are "culturally deprived" and that many Gypsies have disavowed their Gypsy heritage and become non-Gypsies (Esty 1969:132). I have found, on the contrary, that the modern American urban environment has encouraged Gypsy ethnicity in very specific ways. Among the American *Rom* (Gypsies who speak *Romanes*) there exists a culture that is vital and innovative, but that exhibits few signs of decline or assimilation, defined as the disavowing of Gypsy culture and the loss of Gypsy ethnic identification and institutions. The vitality of Gypsy culture is shown by how few Gypsy children disavow their heritage, how few Gypsies intermarry with non-Gypsies, how many Gypsies articulate distinct identity, institutions, and folklore, and how steadfastly they maintain the Gypsy/non-Gypsy boundary while innovating with cultural forms.

This article explores the dimensions of the negotiation of Rom ethnicity by analyzing the dichotomy between Gypsy and non-Gypsy with reference to boundary maintenance and boundary crossing. Ethnicity is viewed as creatively tied to boundary maintenance and boundary crossing in a situation where the details of the culture are constantly changing (Ballard 1975:11-12). Although many innovations have occurred in Rom culture, they do not point to loss of ethnic identity; rather, change is a strategy of adaptation to new en-

Carol Silverman is Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1218

vironments—both a strategy of manipulation of new situations and a creative response to them.

American Rom are Gypsies who speak the *Romanes* language, a member of the Indic branch of the Indo-Aryan languages. After leaving India in approximately A.D. 900, this nomadic group reached the Balkan Peninsula by the 14th century. By the late 19th century, Rom were dispersed throughout Europe and had begun emigrating to the United States. The current United States Rom population is estimated at somewhere between 20,000 and 200,000 persons (Cohn 1973: 27); more recent estimates claim twice as many. Census statistics are unreliable because Rom do not usually report themselves as Gypsies to census takers.

In the United States, there are three subgroupings of Rom: *Kalderash*, *Machwaya*, and *Lowara*. This article deals with the two most populous American subgroups, *Kalderash* and *Machwaya*, which are homogeneous enough to be considered a single ethnic entity (Salo 1981:iii). Henceforth, the word *Gypsy* refers to this population.¹ My fieldwork was conducted among approximately ten extended families from 1974–79 in New York City, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and various southeastern cities. My role at various times was teacher at a temporary Gypsy school, tutor, maid, babysitter, chaperone for unmarried girls, photographer and household member. I was a participant in daily and ceremonial life, including travel with a nuclear family.

Boundary Work

Any investigation of Gypsy ethnicity must begin with a discussion of boundaries. As Fredrik Barth wrote, "The critical focus of investigation . . . becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses" (1969:15). The Gypsy worldview is lodged in the dichotomy between insider and outsider, or *Rom* (meaning Gypsy, man, or husband; plural *Roma*, meaning people) and *gazhe* (non-Gypsies, by implication, nonpeople or subpeople; masculine singular *gazho*, feminine singular *gazhi*). This dichotomy is summarized in Table 1. This table, like most binary models, is a gross simplification of a vast number of subdivisions. For example, within the large category Rom there are many finer distinctions regarding Gypsy groups deemed to be less Rom because of some unacceptable behavior.² Similarly, within the category *gazhe*, there are distinctions based on such factors as ethnicity, race, and social practices. (As an intermediary between Rom and *gazhe*, I had a fluid status, depending on the situation.)

Gypsies view the world of the *gazhe* as not only separate but also inferior and polluting. The only extended contact with non-Gypsies occurs in the economic sphere, where self-employed Rom provide for non-Gypsies various goods and services, such as used cars, body and fender repair, and fortunetelling. Profit is procured from these exchanges.³ The separation between Rom and *gazhe* is grounded in the taboo system, which concerns polluting or

Table 1. Dichotomy between Rom and Gazhe

| Rom | Gazhe |
|---|---|
| 1. Superior | 1. Inferior |
| 2. Clever | 2. Gullible |
| 3. Clean; maintain Rom taboos | 3. Dirty, polluted (<i>marime</i>); unaware of taboos |
| a. Source of health | a. Source of disease |
| b. Modest and chaste | b. Promiscuous |
| 4. Member by birth (at least one Rom parent) | 4. Both parents gazhe |
| 5. Speak and understand <i>Romanes</i> | 5. Do not speak or understand <i>Romanes</i> |
| 6. Adhere to Rom kinship and social organization | 6. Lack Rom kinship and social organization |
| 7. Self-employed | 7. Work for others |
| 8. Derive profit only from outsiders (gazhe) | 8. Derive profit from their own kind |
| 9. Abide by <i>kris</i> (Rom court) | 9. Abide by gazhe authorities |
| 10. Nomadic (as the ideal, have freedom to travel) | 10. Tied to location |
| 11. Flexible in organization of time | 11. Adhere to schedules |
| 12. Display Rom physical appearance and nonverbal behavior | 12. Do not look or act like Gypsies |
| 13. Display Gypsy material culture (dress, houses, jewelry, cars) | 13. Do not display Gypsy material culture |

defiling persons, objects, foods, body parts, and topics of conversation.⁴ Cleanliness is associated with Gypsiness, males, superiority, health, luck, and success. Pollution is associated with non-Gypsies, Gypsy women, disease, death, bad luck, and failure. Gazhe are by definition polluted because they are ignorant of the rules of the taboo system.

The center of ritual purity is the head, more specifically the mouth. The lower body is considered *marime* (ritually unclean, polluted), and everything associated with it is potentially defiling (i.e., genitalia, inappropriate sexual activity, bodily functions, the bathroom, clothing touching the lower body, and topics of conversation alluding to sex and pregnancy). Strict washing regulations are enforced (e.g., separate towels, soaps, and washbasins for the two body zones). In addition, objects from the environment are classified as to *marime* status; for example, mops and brooms are *marime*. Anything entering the mouth, such as food, or anything touching the head, like a pillow, is carefully screened. The most potent danger of pollution emanates from the woman's lower body. A woman can deliberately defile a man by touching him *in public* with an article of clothing from her lower body (e.g., a slip or stocking). Appropriate sexual activity, that is, *in private* within marriage, is acceptable, yet it too is tinged with shame. Although the act of public defilement by a woman

rarely occurs in actual fact, the knowledge that it *could* happen is sufficient to exercise the resulting fear. When a man is defiled, he himself becomes *marime* and is excommunicated, that is, cut off from commensality and sociability with other Gypsies. This is the greatest shame a man can suffer. The only way *marime* can be revoked is by convening a *kris*, an arbitration council composed of respected men.

Because a woman's lower body is the source of the most potent pollution, both men and women enact a ritualized proxemic and kinesic code vis-à-vis each other. The sexes are segregated at any public event, and a woman monitors her movements so that she does not pose a threat to males by appearing physically or symbolically higher than they. Thus she does not step over or through male territory or intrude in the public domain dominated by men. With this elaborate system of classification and behavior, it is not surprising that Gypsies consider non-Gypsies to be ruleless, orderless, promiscuous, dirty, inferior, and totally undesirable. This view is substantiated not only by avoidance codes, but also by oral tradition.⁵ Gazhe who enter the home are provided with their own cup, plate, and silverware. These objects are *marime* and are often treated with disgust; a six-year-old child warned his sister, "Don't use that glass—gazhe drank from it." One Gypsy woman remarked to me, "I used to be crazy. I was so particular about being clean. I used to carry my own glass around in my bosom, even at weddings. I still drink from paper in a restaurant. I don't use their forks. I use my hands. Their plates are okay because they didn't touch their mouths. Sometimes I imagine that they go to the bathroom and don't wash." Similarly, I monitored my own change in status from suspect outsider to tolerated insider by how I was treated vis-à-vis the taboo system. At first I was served on *marime* dishes, but slowly, as I learned the rules of appropriate behavior, this treatment was reversed and I was warned to stay away from the *marime* dishes lest I become ill. On one occasion while traveling with a family, the mother introduced me to our Gypsy host as her daughter. Subsequently, the host expressed interest in me as a bride for his son. The father, frightened that the host was too serious and wishing to avoid earnest marriage negotiations, quickly changed my status to *gazhi* tutor. In order to prove I was not worth marrying, he told the host that I drop towels on the floor and step over them, and use the same cloth to dry my face as my body. All of this was untrue, but he had to expose my ignorance of *romania* (Rom traditions) to prove I was a *gazhi*, and thus undesirable.

The criteria for membership in the group Rom deal, then, primarily with demonstrable behavior after descent has been established (Salo 1977:38-39). One must not only be born Rom to be Rom; one must also act Rom, that is, display *romania* to other Rom. Displaying Rom social organization involves abiding by lineage (*vitsi*) affiliations and obligations, age and gender roles, marriage customs such as brideprice, and *kris* decisions. If a Rom disobeys the decisions of the *kris*, he is formally relegated to outsider status (*marime*) for a certain amount of time. The impact of public opinion enforces *kris* decisions.

in a more general sense, the *kris*, by monitoring deviant behavior, helps to maintain Rom traditions and the Gypsy/non-Gypsy boundary.

Although the Gypsy/non-Gypsy boundary is the cornerstone of Gypsy ethnicity, there is a great deal of movement of people, goods, and ideas across this boundary. In fact, Rom survival depends on crossing this boundary to negotiate a viable niche in the greater non-Gypsy milieu. Successful interaction with non-Gypsies is crucial for survival because Rom depend economically and materially on non-Gypsies. When Gypsies interact with non-Gypsies, they have various motives for influencing the impression received. To a lawyer, they may be interested in demonstrating their credibility as American citizens; to a welfare worker, their victimization as an afflicted minority; to a restaurant audience, their flair with music; to a fortune-telling customer, their spirituality. Switching among these roles has made Gypsies expert in the arts of "impression management" (Silverman 1982). Moreover, it is often necessary for Gypsies to submerge their Gypsy ethnicity entirely, because it is a social stigma. Gypsies pass as Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Greeks, or other ethnic groups to avoid harassment by gazhe authorities such as landlords, tax officials, truant officers, welfare workers, and the police; and to obtain housing, jobs, and welfare.

Passing involves adopting the personal front of a non-Gypsy, including appearance, demeanor, language, names, and government papers. For example, when looking for an apartment, one Gypsy woman dressed like a non-Gypsy: she used pale makeup to lighten her skin, she wore a blonde wig, she took off her traditional head scarf, and she wore an "American" dress, which was shorter, more tailored, and more subdued in color than her usual clothing. In addition, she spoke only English, not *Romanes*. More than once, I was sent to procure rental housing for Gypsy families. "Tell them you're sisters, you're Jewish, and give them your name. Tell them your grandmother does some sewing business in the house. Don't tell them where we live. They're prejudiced against Gypsies." In this case, a non-Gypsy contact was used as a front (Silverman 1982:382). Furthermore, I was often warned not to tell the neighbors, the fortune-telling customers, or the local storekeepers that the family was Gypsy. I was even warned not to tell the maid for fear she would quit. "Don't tell the customers we're Gypsies. They don't trust Gypsies. Say we're Greek."

Naming is another strategy that Gypsies use in passing. Gypsies use a multiplicity of common American names to avoid visibility; there are probably hundreds of Gypsies named John Miller. When a truant officer enters a home looking for John Miller, six boys may answer to that name, hopelessly confusing the case. A Gypsy family may list their apartment under one name, the telephone number under another, and the fortune-telling business under yet another. Because many urban Rom are seminomadic, addresses change continuously. This multiplicity makes Gypsies hard to identify and trace, producing precisely the effects the Gypsies seek. In Western society, a name is an

indelible mark that rarely changes. For Gypsies, on the other hand, changeable American names are a strategy they use to remain invisible, concealed, and untraceable.

When dealing with non-Gypsies, Gypsies may sometimes perpetuate and exaggerate the common gazhe stereotypes of themselves. Gypsy fortune-tellers advertise themselves as spiritual, psychic, religious, foreign, erotic, and exotic healers, gifted with supernatural powers (Silverman 1980, 1982). Gypsies encourage this stereotype not only because it promotes business by fulfilling gazhe expectations, but also because it serves to conceal the in-group culture. In effect, the outside world is presented with a surrogate Gypsy culture. Furthermore, Gypsies perpetuate misconceptions such as the "King of the Gypsies," a title deliberately used to inflate the power and romanticism of the Gypsies and to secure privileges. An elder male said, "Any Gypsy who enters a hospital is automatically a King. They get better treatment." Another Gypsy related, "There's no such animal in the Gypsy race as King. . . . It's just some person who wants to be glorified. But you go to the newspaper morgues in New York and get old papers and every time a Gypsy died he was King. There has got to be 1000 Kings. . . . He could have been penniless, didn't have a dime, but when he died he was King. . . . That's just garbage." In effect, the "king" holds no absolute authority within the community; he is a public relations man whose main task is negotiating between non-Gypsy governmental authorities and Gypsies.

For some groups, ethnicity involves the proud public presentation of distinctiveness. Nancie Gonzalez writes that ethnicity is the conscious cognitive construction of an identity for the individual and the group out of traditional cultural symbols, "a self-conscious ideological framework which glorifies and crystallizes the new collectivity" (Bennett 1973:3). The Gypsy case, however, shows that ethnicity is a great deal more complex than glorifying the collectivity. A large part of Gypsy ethnicity consists of concealing rather than demonstrating ethnic identity at appropriate times. Demonstrating, hiding, or exaggerating one's Gypsiness is socially situational. There has been, however, a tendency to study Gypsies context-free, that is, as an isolated, bounded group. This tendency reflects the conventional concept of an ethnic group which implies that members have more frequent and intense contacts with each other than they do with outsiders (Levine and Campbell 1972:4). While this may be true, ethnic groups, especially Gypsies, engage in much formal and informal interaction across the boundaries that separate them from nonmembers. Any discussion of Gypsy ethnicity must account for the rich interplay between Gypsy culture and non-Gypsy culture. Rena Gropper claims that non-Gypsies are part of the Gypsy socioeconomic system (1977:9). To extend this argument further, they are also part of the Gypsy cultural system, as viewed from two angles. Firstly, the Gypsy's socioeconomic relationship with the non-Gypsy generates a huge repertoire of cross-boundary folklore, as shown by passing and exaggerating stereotypes. As Richard Bauman suggests, "The contrasting

identities of the participants are directly relevant to the structuring of the situation. . . . The difference in identities, not necessarily sharing, can be the base of folklore performance" (1972:34-35).

Secondly, Gypsies not only interact with gazhe culture, they also freely adopt and adapt many aspects of it, redefine them and incorporate them into their own culture. In spite of the sanctions against intimate social contact with non-Gypsies, Gypsies adopt numerous non-Gypsy cultural traits, such as clothing, music, language, and occupation, without becoming gazhe. These "extrinsic" cultural traits, as defined by Milton Gordon, are products of the historical vicissitudes of a group's adjustment to its local environment, and are external to the core of the group's cultural heritage (1964:79). The traits in themselves have no meaning; rather, their use determines their significance. Ethnic identity, then, does not depend on cultural diversity *per se*, but rather on the assignment of social meaning (Blom 1969:74). Michael Moerman claims that the specific cultural baggage that goes inside a boundary is a superficial variable, subject to differing interpretations by members and non-members (1974). For example, if we take an isolated cultural trait, such as gaudy, opulent home furnishings, we find Gypsy taste coinciding with Italian-American, Greek-American, and Yugoslav-American taste. As an outsider we may see few distinctions, but to Gypsies, their furnishings are part of what defines them as Gypsies. The issue is not the degree of objective difference but the social significance attributed to any similarity or difference (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1983:44). For the Gypsy, then, distinctiveness or gazhe origin of traits are irrelevant.

In the past, some observers of Gypsy culture have naively labeled gazhe culture as "the enemy": "This time the enemy comes in sheep's clothes, not attacking with claws but with all the temptations of gazho culture. Television and movies, socialized medicine, and consumer goods—all these may finally accomplish what five centuries could not" (Esty 1969:138). Esty ignores the fact that Gypsies could not survive without their supposed "enemy," the non-Gypsies. The surrounding culture is not a threat to Gypsy culture but a rich, ever-changing storehouse from which Gypsies draw and adapt, and with which they interpret and create. Television, for example, rather than being a tool of assimilation, is a great asset for Gypsies in gaining cultural information about non-Gypsies. From the media, Gypsies learn about the psychology, customs, and material culture of the gazhe. This information is used in tailoring services for the non-Gypsy, such as fortune-telling, and is also used in the process of adapting to new non-Gypsy environments.

Innovation as Strategy

In bemoaning the supposed assimilation of Gypsies in America, many observers have misunderstood the function of change in Gypsy culture. They have mistakenly equated change with disappearance and placed a negative con-

notation on the entire concept of change. Titles like "Destiny Is Closing in on Today's Gypsies" and "Vanishing Vagabonds" yield statements such as "the signs of change are there. Small and subtle as they are, they are a very real source of worry to the older Gypsies" (Clark 1967:206). Viewing change as a negative force is not limited to Gypsy studies, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out for folklorists as a whole: "Folklorists have tended to view change negatively, whether it occurs on a small scale . . . or on a large scale, such as when a community migrates or becomes urbanized. . . . Few folklorists have studied change as a positive force, either with regard to the role folklore plays in implementing change or to the stimulus that sociocultural change provides not only for the persistence and revitalization, but also for the creation of folklore" (1979:109-110).

Change has indeed occurred in Gypsy culture, but it does not necessarily signal assimilation unless the worldview, lodged in the separation between Gypsy and gazhe, disappears. Innovations in areas of culture such as housing, travel patterns, occupation, and acquiring non-Gypsy languages, signal creative adaptation to situations of perpetual cultural contact. These areas of Gypsy life have been changing for centuries and will continue to change, because, traditionally, these cultural zones have been open to innovation. Change occurs not only because it is inevitable, but also because it is the fundamental adaptive and creative strategy of Gypsy survival in non-Gypsy settings. Furthermore, innovations in certain cultural areas serve to foster conservatism in other areas of the culture, such as worldview, the taboo system, and the belief system.

Successful adaptation and creative utilization of change can be seen by examining several areas of recent innovation: urbanization, decline in nomadism, change in means of travel, change in occupations, and multilingualism. Urbanization has been regarded by some observers as a sign of lost ethnicity:

To them it must be terrible, not merely to live cooped up in a city, but to see their old trades and skills become obsolete and many of their customs die out under the pressure of modernity. They cannot be assimilated into the gazho population—this being neither desired by the gazhe nor by themselves—nor are they able to live in a way that Gypsies should live. They are still separate from the people around them, but city life, the movies, and television (which a few, but fortunately not very many, possess) mean that they can no longer maintain the isolation from the gazho ways that they used to preserve in their camps. [Traverso 1958:136-137]

It is a misconception that Gypsies are miserable today because they live "cooped up" in cities. Yet the romantic stereotype persists that formerly Gypsies traveled freely and joyfully in picturesque caravans camping under the stars, while today they suffer from being relegated to urban streets. In the literature we find statements such as: "A good part of the appeal of the Gypsies for him [Charles Leland] was the fact that they were to be found near water, woods, and rocks—in such lovely places of beauty. How different it is today when the Gypsies are found in the ugliest sections of the city slums" (Esty

*up to this is C 8.
-ie not just to preserve*

1969:126-127). In actuality, Gypsies have always voluntarily passed through cities, finding business plentiful and convenient in the urban environment. They have sometimes settled in lower-class neighborhoods because the Gypsy way of life may not be tolerated in upper-class areas and the fortune-telling business tends to be poor, if not altogether illegal. In the United States, busy shopping streets offer Gypsies more freedom and the greatest business advantages. They meet the requirements of a good business location, accessible shopping, and an area containing a sizable customer population (Silverman 1982).

Historically, urbanization and sedentarism are related processes that arose in response to the changing social and economic conditions of the early 20th century. Up until the 1930s, the Rom traveled extensively in small groups during the spring and summer months, and camped in larger groups outside towns and cities during the winter (Gropper 1975:18). After the Depression, however, Gypsies moved into the cities to take advantage of welfare and relief programs. Nomadism was also somewhat curtailed by gas rationing during the Second World War (Gropper 1975:20). Today most American Rom live in city storefronts (*ofisi*), which are also used for fortune-telling, or in houses or apartments near their *ofisi*.

The Rom have adapted extremely well to urbanization. Their used-car and fortune-telling establishments tend to thrive in urban environments. Rules of territoriality have arisen to deal with the problem of competition for fortune-telling customers in areas of dense Rom population. In New York City, for example, a three-block rule was in effect during the late 1970s, stipulating that no *ofisa* could operate closer than three blocks of an existing *ofisa* without the consent of the Rom involved.

Due to urbanization, the physical (but not the emotional) distance between Gypsy and gazhe has narrowed significantly. Prior to the 1930s when Gypsies camped outside cities and traveled in caravans, contact with fortune-telling customers (and non-Gypsies in general) was sought in non-Gypsy territory on outings to the city or by setting up a booth at a carnival. Today, customers enter Gypsy territory for readings. A curtained-off "reading room" has emerged, which is the Gypsy/non-Gypsy interface. This space is manipulated by the fortune-teller in constructing her image and establishing her credibility (Silverman 1982).

Increased contact with gazhe has also created new possibilities for the performance of and advertisement for fortune-telling. Handbills are distributed on buses, subways, and at busy street corners. One Gypsy woman always gives a handbill to her taxi driver and to the nurses and aides in the hospitals she visits. Another remarked, "I like to go and pay bills at the telephone company because there are lots of people there. I pass out [hand-]bills in line." These opportunities are seized because Gypsies are so attuned to making contacts in the non-Gypsy world.

American cities have, then, become havens for Gypsies. Those Rom who live in small towns ("in the sticks") are often ridiculed by urban Rom. Not

only is their gazhe customer pool small, but they are isolated from the sociability of other Rom; this is nearly equivalent to cultural stagnation in a society that depends so much on face-to-face communication. Urban life also offers many locations for in-group Rom gatherings such as weddings, baptisms, and saint's day celebrations. Like their urban neighbors, Rom now rent catering halls for these occasions. Far from hampering Gypsy life, then, the social conditions of American cities favor it. Cities are quite anonymous, and it is possible to slide through the bureaucracy untraced and to remain unnoticed for long periods of time. The United States does not require settlement, registration, and multiple citizenship documents as do many other countries (especially in eastern Europe). Some elderly American Gypsies do not have birth certificates or social security numbers, having been born in campsites. Jan Yoors remarked: "They are everywhere; they've done well here. The United States has the largest percentage of college-educated people: that prepares them for psychoanalysis—and for fortune-telling. And then lately Gypsies have been cashing in on being an ethnic minority, getting foundation grants and money from the churches and Small Business Administration loans. To them this ethnic minority business is just one more strange gazho custom to take advantage of, like wanting to have your fortune told" (Hochschild 1978:42).

Moreover, the freedom of mobility in the United States is ideally suited to Gypsy life. Although nomadism has declined somewhat among the Rom, it is still a strong cultural concept. In actuality, a Gypsy may be nomadic or sedentary as the situation requires and the environment changes. In much previous literature entire Gypsy groups were labeled as nomadic or sedentary, but the Gypsy's mode of residence seems to be chosen according to the requirements of the situation (Salo 1976). Nomadism and sedentarism are alternate strategies for negotiating the social and economic niche. The amount of time spent traveling is inconsequential; what is significant is that the option to travel is constantly present in the minds of the American Gypsy in spite of the fact that they may remain sedentary for long periods of time. One Rom family who has "lived" in one home for 11 years still spends at least three to four months a year traveling and would consider "moving" at a moment's notice if the right opportunity arose, such as a good business venture. While they travel, their home is rented to Rom relatives. A family may accumulate a great deal of expensive furniture, but they do not hesitate to leave their home for travel. The status in owning an opulent home or furniture comes from spending the money and from the oral circulation of legends about the opulence. It matters little that the family is not occupying the home. Thus, lavish furnishings are typical of Rom households, but the objects do not make the Rom sedentary.

Travel is necessary to find brides, to attend Gypsy celebrations, to be near ill relatives, and to find profitable business locations. Gypsies think nothing of traveling 600 miles by car in one day to attend a Gypsy wedding and then

traveling home the next day. A Gypsy funeral draws people from hundreds of miles away within a couple of hours, regardless of the plane fare. Travel is also a viable means of problem-solving, that is, by physically removing oneself from the source of the conflict. The conflict may be with gazhe authorities or with other Gypsies. If the police, for example, are cracking down on fortunetellers in a particular area, Gypsies may move permanently or temporarily until "things quiet down." Similarly, a Gypsy who is *marime* (ritually polluted) in one state may travel to another state or take a trip for the duration of his excommunication.

Modern means of transportation, moreover, have actually helped keep nomadism viable. The passing of the horse and caravan and the coming of the automobile, rather than signaling assimilation, has simply increased the Gypsy's rate of travel. Not only is automobile travel easier, faster, and more comfortable than caravan travel, but it is also "the American Way." Upon returning to New York City, a Rom child explained his nomadism to an outsider in commonplace American terms: "I just got back from vacation." The "vacation" was actually a three-month-long trip to numerous southern cities visiting relatives, investigating marriage and business possibilities, and telling fortunes at every possible opportunity.⁷ Change in means or frequency of travel, then, has not altered the basic relationship of Gypsy to gazhe but rather has provided new opportunities to explore.

Similarly, modern methods of communication, such as the telephone, have actually contributed to the vitality of Rom networks. The telephone is a constant source of news concerning marriages, elopements, brideprices, deaths, and feasts. Through the telephone grapevine, people and events are endlessly discussed and evaluated, reputations are established and lost, and the kinship network is activated. Telephone conversations also provide data about the non-Gypsy world, such as business locations, weather reports, and the reputation of doctors, hospitals, lawyers, school and welfare officials, and the police. Another contemporary innovation is the use of the telephone for fortunetelling. A separate number is usually used for this purpose; it is answered only by women in the language of the customer population. The family may also have a second number for car transactions; it is answered by men. A third number is the "Rom phone," which is known only by other Rom and which is answered in *Romanes*. In sum, the telephone has encouraged the orality of Rom culture.

Occupational innovation is another indication of successful adaptation to changing environmental conditions. During the early years of the 20th century, the North American Rom continued their European trades of horse trading, horse doctoring, carnival work, and metalwork such as replating vats and nixing bowls for institutions like hospitals and bakeries. Women often jugged and told fortunes, especially in the winter when a storefront would be rented. In the postwar years, horse trading and metalwork have been replaced by used-car trading and body and fender repair of cars (Boles 1958; Salo 1981).

The switch from tinkering to automobile body and fender repair has been viewed by some as the loss of a traditional Gypsy trade (Traverso 1958:137-138). While this may be partially true, body and fender repair can also be seen as a creative adaptation of metalwork to a new medium. Rather than indelibly labeling a certain occupation "Gypsy," it is important to consider the larger view of Gypsy economics. Throughout the years, certain occupations have become "traditional" because they are lucrative and fill the needs of the time and place, while not compromising basic Rom values such as self-employment, mobility, independence, and the restrictions of the taboo system. In North America, for example, as Rom became more urbanized, fortune-telling became the major source of income with male income viewed as supplementary. The fortune-telling niche serves the Rom well, since "reading and advising" seems to strike a responsive chord for many American customers. However, whenever fortune-telling is not profitable, Rom easily switch to another service trade. While much of the literature assumes the existence of static tribal occupations, such as kettlemakers or horse traders, in actuality the choice of occupation is extremely flexible, and a Gypsy man or woman usually engages in many occupations during his or her lifetime (Salo 1981:73). In general, the more skills a Gypsy accumulates, the better off he or she is; Gypsies prefer strategies of survival that offer multiple opportunities. Thus, they learn many trades and many languages and absorb information about diverse aspects of the surrounding cultures. During his or her lifetime, a Gypsy accumulates a host of skills and cultural information, and he or she is extremely facile in the manipulation of these skills.

Another perpetually important skill is linguistic agility. While virtually all American Gypsies have learned to speak English, they also retain *Romanes* because both languages are necessary. As Anne Sharp recently reported, "The mixing of *Romanes* and English . . . is not due to the imperfect learning of either language, but is a beneficial way of insuring that all members of the community know both languages from an early age. While English is essential for economic survival, *Romanes* continues to be important for cultural solidarity. The mixing of the languages follows rules which show that mixing is not random and does not lead to general confusion of the grammar of either language" (1983:2).

Wherever Gypsies live, they learn the languages of the local peoples in addition to retaining *Romanes*. They are, at the very least, bilingual and usually multilingual. In southern California and New York City, for example, many Gypsies speak Spanish as well as English. Gypsy women may command use of a greater number of languages than Gypsy men because they service many ethnic groups through fortune-telling. There is also a marked specialization in the function of non-Gypsy languages: for example, there are Gypsy women who can tell fortunes in nine or ten different languages without being able to speak fluently in any of them.⁸ Gypsies, then, learn as many languages as are necessary; in fact, the more the better. Multilingualism has always been a sig-

nificant asset to the Gypsies and has not interfered with the retention of *Romani* as an exclusive in-group language.

In sum, innovation in areas of culture such as language, occupation, residence patterns, frequency of travel, and means of transportation are indications of successful adaptation to non-Gypsy environments. Adaptability in these areas of culture is complemented, not threatened, by the worldview that is lodged in the insider/outsider boundary and the taboo system.

Conclusion

Definitions of ethnicity that list traits are clearly insufficient in explaining the Gypsy case. Naroll, for example, defines an ethnic group as a group of people who share fundamental cultural values expressed by unified cultural forms (1964). The Rom do share fundamental cultural values; however, their cultural forms are not shared. Perhaps the underlying cultural structure of life is shared, but its manifestations are variable because Gypsy culture is situationally dependent. There is not one Gypsy culture but rather a Gypsy worldview that produces many variations of Gypsy culture depending on the particular environment. Gypsies cultivate multiple cultural repertoires and effectively switch among these cultural codes (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1983:43). Trait inventories may superficially describe a Gypsy culture at a frozen point in time or space, but these traits change from location to location and year to year. An adequate assessment of Gypsy ethnicity must take into account these environmentally dependent variables plus explain the processes that produce them.

Ethnicity is "accomplished" by negotiating one's identity vis-à-vis non-members (Moerman 1974). The boundary between Gypsy and gazhe, then, is central to the process of self-identification. Gypsies become *marime* (like gazhe) when they violate that boundary. On the other hand, they frequently cross the boundary using traditional modes of performed behavior, such as passing and exaggerating stereotypes. The boundary is maintained as a cultural construct while numerous traits flow across it. Change is thus activated not only as a by-product of culture but also as a strategy of creative adaptation to new environments.

We can now tackle the apparent paradox of Gypsy ethnicity, that is, how Gypsies keep themselves distinct while *appearing* to assimilate. Gypsies appear to be Americanized: they speak English, dress in the latest American fashions, live in apartments, drive cars, sell cars, and furnish their homes with American furnishings. Indeed, they are "American" because they have adapted well to the American context, they have interacted to a high degree with American culture, and they can pass as non-Gypsy Americans. Yet the basic values and worldview of Gypsy culture, which are lodged in the insider/outsider boundary, are extremely strong; thus, Gypsy culture remains distinct from its surrounding American context. At the same time that they are "Americans,"

Problem = culture & Gypsies

11 51

Gypsies steadfastly maintain the boundary that defines them as different from "Americans." This complex process is not unique to Gypsies, and can sensitize us to the workings of ethnicity in other ethnic groups.

Adaptations to the American setting have caused the formation of a vital, specifically American brand of Gypsy culture. American Gypsies are different from Gypsies anywhere else in the world because they have successfully adapted to the American environment. Yet they are undeniably "Gypsy" because they express the Gypsy worldview, enact appropriate Gypsy behavior, and maintain the Gypsy/non-Gypsy boundary. They are no less "Gypsy" because they are also "American"; their multiple identities do not necessarily compete, but serve to stimulate the creation of a rich store of expressive behavior.

Notes

I would like to thank Stephen Stern for comments on early drafts of this article, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett for guidance and encouragement, and the editor of *JAF* for his comments. My primary debt is to the Rom who shared their lives and thoughts with me.

¹Deciding who is Rom, however, depends on who is doing the deciding. As Matt Salo has aptly demonstrated, ethnic labeling is highly problematic when dealing with Gypsies; each group defines *Gypsy* as its own group and contrasts itself not only with non-Gypsies, but also with other Gypsy groups (1979:81).

²For criteria of ethnicity, see Salo (1977).

³On the economic organization of Rom, see Salo (1981).

⁴For a detailed analysis of the Rom taboo system, see Sutherland (1977) and Silverman (1980).

⁵See Salo (1977) for excellent data on Rom conceptions of *gazhe*.

⁶Many disputes arose, however, with regard to controlling territories in which handbill advertisements could be distributed. The question was further extended to the control of advertising on subway lines. These disputes were arbitrated by *krisa*.

⁷For example, at each motel in which the family slept, the mother passed out handbills among the maids and waitresses and did readings in the motel room. At Disneyland, she passed out handbills while waiting in line. Even while shopping she found opportunities: "This carpet wasn't too expensive because, when we sent to Atlanta to the factory to get it, I told a couple of fortunes to the salesladies in the waiting room, and so they knocked off \$100 here and there."

⁸This remark was made to me by Jan Yours in an interview in April 1974.

References Cited

- Ballard, Roger. 1975. Review of *Gypsies: The Hidden Americans*, by Anne Sutherland. *Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter* 8:11-12.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Bauman, Richard. 1972. Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore. In *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, eds. Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, pp. 31-41. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bennett, John W. 1973. *The New Ethnicity: Perspectives from Ethnology*. Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society. New York: West.
- Blom, Jan-Petter. 1969. Ethnic and Cultural Differentiation. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. F. Barth, pp. 74-85. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Boles, Don. 1958. Some Gypsy Occupations in America. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 37:103-111.

- Clark, M. W. 1967. Vanishing Vagabonds. *Texas Quarterly* 2:204-210.
- Cohn, Werner. 1973. *The Gypsies*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Esty, Katherine. 1969. *The Gypsies: Wanderers in Time*. New York: Meredith.
- Gordon, Milton. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford.
- Gropper, Rena. 1975. *Gypsies in the City*. Princeton, N.J.: Darwin.
- _____. 1977. Hedging the Bets: Risk-Taking among the Rom Gypsies. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Houston, Texas.
- Hochschild, Adam. 1978. A Gypsy for Our Time. *Mother Jones* (February/March):36-47.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1979. Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity. In *Folklore in the Modern World*, ed. Richard Dorson, pp. 109-122. The Hague: Mouton.
- _____. 1983. Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore. In *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard Dorson, pp. 39-47. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Levine, Robert A., and Donald T. Campbell. 1972. *Ethnocentrism*. New York: John Wiley.
- Moerman, Michael. 1974. Accomplishing Ethnicity. In *Ethnomethodology*, ed. Roy Turner, pp. 54-68. Baltimore: Penguin.
- Murin, Stephen. 1950. Hawaii's Gypsies. *Social Process in Hawaii* 14:14-38.
- Naroll, Raoul. 1964. Ethnic Unit Classification. *Current Anthropology* 5(4):283-291.
- Preston, Marilyn. 1975. Destiny is Closing in on Today's Gypsy. *Chicago Tribune* (June 9).
- Reeves, James K. 1890. A Gypsy Settlement. *Chautauquan* 10:466-450.
- Salo, Matt T. 1976. Norms and Flexibility in the Patterning of Adaptations among North American Gypsies. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C.
- _____. 1977. The Expression of Ethnicity in Rom Oral Tradition. *Western Folklore* 36:33-56.
- _____. 1979. Gypsy Ethnicity: Implications of Native Categories and Interaction for Ethnic Classification. *Ethnicity* 6:73-96.
- _____. 1981. Kalderash Economic Organization. In *The American Kalderash: Gypsies in the New World*, ed. M. Salo, pp. 71-97. Hacketstown, N.J.: Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter.
- Sharp, Anne. 1983. The Relationship between Romanes and English as Spoken by the Portland Gypsies. M.A. thesis, Portland State University.
- Silverman, Carol. 1980. Rev. Sister Navajo: Reader and Adviser—Deciphering Gypsy Fortune-telling Handbills. *New York Folklore* 6:29-43.
- _____. 1981. Pollution and Power: Gypsy Women in America. In *The American Kalderash: Gypsies in the New World*, ed. M. Salo, pp. 55-70. Hacketstown, N.J.: Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter.
- _____. 1982. Everyday Drama: Impression Management of Urban Gypsies. *Urban Anthropology* 11:377-398.
- Sutherland, Anne. 1977. The Body as Social Symbol among the Rom. In *The Anthropology of the Body*, ed. John Blocking, pp. 375-390. New York: Academic.
- Traverso, Georgina. 1958. Some Gypsies in Boston, Massachusetts. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 37:126-137.
- Weybright, Victor. 1938. Who Can Tell the Gypsies' Fortune? *Survey Graphic* 27:142-145.