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Romani Itineraries across the Atlantic

The Shaping of Expertise in Global Mobility, 1880s–1940s

Adèle Sutre

At the end of the nineteenth century, several Romani families left the Russian Empire and reached Spain via Bessarabia. The story of their journey has been passed down from generation to generation:

> One afternoon, as the sun was shining and nature seemed to be at its best, Chief Chaeco Juro was sitting at the door of his tent. A native, passing by, stopped to chat with him, and the conversation drifted from one subject to another. Finally, the stranger spoke of a beautiful country across the sea. The stranger related some very wonderful stories that his son had written about in his letters to his father, and told Chaeco Juro that the name of this wonderful country was called *America*.[1]

Shortly after their stay in Spain, these families embarked in small groups for the United States. Over the next few years, they established themselves in New York. In the 1930s, their descendants became active as part of the Romani community there, notably through Steve Kaslov, Chaeco Juro's great-grandson, who worked for the recognition of Romani rights in the United States, including with President and Mrs. Roosevelt.[2]

Like the Juro and Kaslov families, many other Romani families left Europe at the end of the nineteenth century to settle in the Americas, Oceania, Asia and Africa.[3] Those who departed represented only a small part of European Roma at the time although they often shared common

[1] Archives Center of the National Museum of American History, *Carlos de Wendler-Funaro Gypsy Research Collection* (box 1, folder 6).

[2] Steve Kaslov's life is considered further in James Deutsch, Chapter 7 this volume.

[3] Adèle Sutre, "Du parcours du monde à son invention. Géographies tsiganes en Amérique du Nord des années 1880 aux années 1950" (PhD diss., EHESS Paris, 2017).

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professional specializations, held similar views of the world and intertwined historical and geographical trajectories. For these family groups, the beginning of the twentieth century marked a turning point, with the development of genuine expertise in movement. This expertise was already being deployed in the context of intra-European mobility. But crossing the Atlantic led to the transposition of this knowledge and know-how into new legislative, political, economic, social and cultural contexts, a process that reshaped their expertise. This chapter analyzes how Roma who left Europe at the turn of the twentieth century acquired and expanded their expertise of international movement on the American continent.

This expertise was part of a genuine "mobility capital." Anticipating the border, negotiating the time of interaction with the inspectors and then reinvesting one's experience for the future constituted the arc of this capital's development. Over time, Romani families acquired significant experience of the border. They learnt the rules of international movement that were being put in place around the world and gradually mastered the codes of face-to-face interaction with immigration authorities.

Writing the history of families who traveled the world means breaking away from "methodological nationalism." Without denying the importance of state frameworks in understanding international mobility, I shift the gaze to consider the articulations between the different scales of belonging, in the perspective of "forging a framework of analysis capable of comprehending the life experiences of transnational migrants."[4] Kinship offers a decisive change of scale to overcome the dichotomy between the microscale of the biographical approach and the macroscale of the global.[5] Family groups become fluid entities whose contours are redefined over time and through exchanges, as members move away from each other or, on the contrary, come closer together.

My approach follows that of historical anthropology inspired by the methods of microhistory applied on a global scale. In contrast to any methodological nationalism, I try to draw the threads of a complex web of archives scattered throughout the world. This work is based on biographical fragments collected in genealogical databases, national and

[4] Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, "Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 645 (1992): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1992.tb33484.x.

[5] Paul-André Rosental, *Les sentiers invisibles. Espace, famille et migration dans la France du XIXe siècle* (Éditions de l'EHESS, 1999); Paul-André Rosental, "Pour une analyse mésoscopique des migrations," *Annales de démographie historique* 104 (2002): 145–60.

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local archives, the press, personal papers of scholars and memories of the families themselves. It is thus possible to draw narratives of lives that are, admittedly, incomplete and sometimes reduced to the status of hypotheses, but which restore the complexity of family itineraries.

FAMILIES SPANNING THE GLOBE

From the 1860s onward, Romani families from the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires began to travel more often and more visibly to Western European countries. To take just one example, in 1868, Belgian authorities became concerned when a group of around fifty Roma from Hungary entered their country: "*Les papiers, dont ils sont porteurs, constatent qu'ils sont originaires de la Hongrie, leurs passeports sont visés par les autorités autrichiennes, vus et signés par les autorités hollandaises et portent pour destination, la Hollande, la Belgique, la France et l'Italie*" (The papers they carry show that they come from Hungary, their passports are stamped by the Austrian authorities, seen and signed by the Dutch authorities, and indicate destinations in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Italy).[6] Administrative, police and newspaper archives enable us to follow the itineraries of this group, confirming what French scholar and archivist Paul Bataillard observed at the time, namely: "*le cercle plus étendu de ces pérégrinations et . . . le nombre plus grand des voyageurs*" (the wider circle of these peregrinations and . . . the greater number of travelers).[7] The 1860s was indeed a key decade for Romani mobility in Europe. The decade saw a change in the geography of routes, networks and anchorages. Far from being a homogeneous whole, the various family groups who traveled across Europe from that time forward differed from each other not only in their geographical origins, but also in the trades they practiced, the way they dressed and the ways in which they moved and settled. However, in most cases, their mobility was guided by specific economic specializations: coppersmithing, horse trading and entertainment.

Their arrival in Western European countries aroused curiosity and media interest, giving great prominence to numerically small groups. In 1886, for example, when a group of around one hundred Roma from

[6] Archives Générales du Royaume de Belgique, *Ministère de la Justice. Administration de la Sûreté Publique. Service de la Police des Étrangers* (I 160–500). Translated from French by the author.

[7] Paul Bataillard, "Les Bohémiens Hongrois à Paris," *Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* 6, no. 1 (1871): 216–24. Translated from French by the author.

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the Ottoman Empire landed in the heart of London, the authorities were extremely concerned, and the newspapers published hundreds of articles in just a few months. However, such mobility during the late nineteenth century remained the work of a few pioneering groups who paved the way for others to extend their routes worldwide in the first half of the twentieth century. From the 1900s onward, what had hitherto been nothing more than pioneering initiatives became a well-established mobility. The routes opened up by the first travelers became well-marked paths, regularly taken by other families across every continent.

Some of the groups traveling through Europe embarked for the Americas. This was the case, for example, of several of the families belonging to the group that landed in London in 1886. Some families eventually settled in the United States, Canada or elsewhere in the world. US and Canadian immigration records and ship passenger lists shed light on the complexity of trajectories, which were far from linear. There was much back and forth between Europe and America, for instance. Entire families could return, or sometimes it was a single individual, usually a man, who played the role of go-between, traveling back and forth between two continents to accompany the arrival of new family groups.

A case study that traces one family's itinerary over several generations illustrates the complexity of long-term trajectories. In 1926, John Dyneley Prince, an American linguist and founder of the Slavic Studies Department at Columbia University, was appointed consul in Belgrade. A polyglot, he mastered the Romanes language perfectly.[8] While in Belgrade, he met a group of some forty Brazilian Roma of American nationality who had been living in South Africa, where they claimed to be trading in diamonds.[9] Born in the United States, they held American passports and had traveled to Serbia to marry their sons to local women. But at the time, Yugoslavia was in the process of joining the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic.[10] They were

[8] John Dyneley Prince, "The Gypsy Language of Denmark," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 45 (1925): 97–105.

[9] John Dyneley Prince, "A Brazilian Gypsey Dialect," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 50 (1930): 139–43. Dyneley Prince began working in Belgrade in 1926 and remained there until 1933. His meeting with this family probably took place between 1929 and 1930, when the article was published.

[10] Yugoslavia signed the convention on May 21, 1929. US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), *Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts* (RG 84, vol. 111, Yugoslavia). On the history of the white slave trade, see Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la Traite des Blanches, Enquête sur la fabrication d'un fléau* (La Découverte, 2009).

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accused of trafficking in women, and Dyneley Prince found himself in charge of their defense as an American consul. The group's leader, George Montes, told Dyneley Prince in Romanes: "*Aviljém man andé Srbjía, de lá mande düi boriá peandurjú múrlo šavén. Ai le(m) mande düi boriá sukár, kai dem pe lende dešefta-mî dinár*" (I came into Serbia to get for myself two daughters-in-law and marry them to my sons. And I got for myself two beautiful daughters-in-law, when I gave for them seventeen thousand dinars).[11] The charges were eventually dropped thanks to Dyneley Prince's intervention and explanation of the practice of bride price, but they had to leave Serbia without the women they had come for.

The Montes family claimed multiple territorial affiliations spread over several continents. They presented themselves as a family of Greek origin, although Dyneley Prince related their Romanes language to that of the Romanian Roma. They traveled between the United States and Cuba in the 1910s and the early 1920s. Numerous visa applications and passenger lists attest to their presence in the region between North Carolina and Florida during this period, as well as in the Cuban cities of Cienfuegos, Santiago and Havana. These trips to Cuba corresponded to the period of the United States' involvement in World War I. But the men in the group were not trying to avoid enlistment; they were registered for the various phases of conscription by the American authorities in Alabama and Virginia.[12] These visits were part of their professional activities and motivated by transnational family ties. As coppersmiths, they also appeared to have traveled to Guatemala, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. In the course of their travels, they put down roots and forged ties, notably through matrimonial alliances, in the territories they crossed.

During the 1920s, the Montes family traveled between South America and South Africa. Marriages and births, always duly registered at the American consulates in the various countries where they lived, made it possible to sketch a map of the countries they visited. From Florida, they continued to the Caribbean, traveling in Cuba and Puerto Rico. One of George Montes' sons traveled to Argentina, registering with the American consulate in Buenos Aires in 1925. Two years later, he declared the birth of his son in the province of Cordoba, five hundred kilometers west of Buenos Aires.[13] Another son disembarked in South Africa in 1926.

[11] Dyneley Prince, "A Brazilian Gypsey Dialect," 140. Translated into English by Dyneley Prince.
[12] FamilySearch.org, *U.S. World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918*.
[13] Ancestry.com, *US Consular Reports of Births, 1910–1949*.

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Registered with the American consulate in Johannesburg as a "coppersmith (with traveling show)," he circulated throughout the country, as witnessed in records made noting the births of his children.

In the early 1930s, members of the family group moved between South Africa, Europe, Argentina, Central America and the United States. George Montes, his wife and several of their children, for example, were recorded as living in the port of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands in June 1930. They boarded a ship bound for San Juan, Puerto Rico, with passports issued in Johannesburg. From there, they traveled between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. The couple, who had later been living in Argentina, moved to South Africa, where they seemed to settle permanently in the autumn of 1931. During the 1930s, the birth of several children in South Africa showed that the entire family group had become firmly rooted in the country.[14]

In 1937, a journalist from the *Johannesburg Sunday Times* visited the Montes family camped in the veldt near Rosettenville in Johannesburg. "I was introduced to the chief, Leo John, a big man, aged 32. Broad-faced. Big-muscled. He wore a boater. A fair man. All along he spoke quietly." The journalist described the scene before him as follows: "Gipsy girls with necklaces of gold coins … coins minted in almost every country in the world … golden bracelets and earrings, and silver, too … girls with natural sun-tan and long black plaits, black eyes … and here and there a girl whose complexion, for a gipsy, seems fair. Men who know almost every country in the world … ."[15] When the journalist asked where they came from, they replied: "From South Africa. Most of us were born here." They said they had traveled all over the world and spoke English, Afrikaans, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Russian, Romanes, Serbian and Turkish. The journalist maliciously asked if they spoke Chinese, and to his surprise: "A young fellow spoke Chinese. He has just come back to the tribe after eight months in Shanghai. 'I can buy and sell anything in Chinese' he said." They admitted they could not speak Welsh but could recite the names of almost every town in Wales. The visitor's attention was drawn to a Johannesburg police car. He asked Leo John Montes what the police were doing in their camp. Montes laughed: "We've got three of them. Anybody can buy them. You can pack a lot in them." They simply bought old police vehicles, finding them handy for transporting their belongings.

[14] Ancestry.com, *US Consular Reports of Births, 1910–1949*.
[15] "Wealthy Nomads," *Sunday Times*, March 14, 1937.

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The family's anchorage in South Africa did not mean that transatlantic connections were lost. Thus, in October 1931, George John Montes, his son Leo and their respective families embarked from Southampton for Lisbon, where they stayed for some time and celebrated the marriage of one of the sons to a young Portuguese woman, before returning to South Africa. In 1938, they set sail for Argentina. Arriving in Buenos Aires, they took another boat bound for Los Angeles. In September 1939, one of the sons applied for a visa from the Brazilian Consul General in Cape Town.[16] They disembarked in Rio de Janeiro and took a boat to New York. The various family groups then met up again in Miami, from where they resumed their circulations in the Caribbean in the early 1940s.[17] They remained highly mobile throughout the 1940s and 1950s: censuses, immigration documents and civil records enable us to locate them in Puerto Rico, New York, New Orleans, Virginia, Texas, Mexico, Panama, Brazil, South Africa and Great Britain, among other places. The archives nevertheless highlight the importance of solid territorial roots built up through mobility. South Africa, Argentina, the United States, the Caribbean and Europe were all points of anchorage for movements that had been mastered and proven over generations.

Over the years, both through and for such movements, Romani families like these acquired experience of the border. They learnt the rules of international mobility that were being established around the world and gradually mastered the codes of face-to-face contact with immigration authorities. This process of learning took place over a number of different temporalities. It involved anticipating and handling the moment of interaction with the inspectors, and then reinvesting the experience for the future, thus building up mobility capital, the knowledge and skills to guide movement.

WAYS OF PRESENTING ONESELF

The families' mobility capital was reflected above all in how they presented themselves at a border.[18] This can be seen in several ways: in the configuration of groups, in the papers they presented to immigration officials, and in how they dressed and wore jewelry. At the turn of the twentieth century, some Roma still traveled in large family groups of over

[16] FamilySearch.org, *Brasil, Cartões de Imigração, 1900–1965*.
[17] FamilySearch.org, *Puerto Rico Civil Registration, 1805–2001*.
[18] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Doubleday, 1959).

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a hundred people. In 1886, the Ottoman Roma who had come to London consisted of a large group of this kind. In another example, from 1904, a ship landed in New York coming from Liverpool with over 250 Roma on board. They were excluded and sent back to Europe.[19] Such massive arrivals tended to frighten the authorities, giving the impression of what used to be called "invasions." Families quickly realized that their extreme visibility when arriving in such large numbers led to their exclusion. As a result, they gradually adopted new strategies at the border, preferring to split up into smaller, more discreet family groups.

An early example of this can be seen with some of the Ottoman Roma who had arrived in England in 1886 and planned to continue on to America. They quickly divided into small groups to take their chances. A journalist underlined the relevance of their strategy:

> It appears that the gipsies are not a tribe, but simply a collection of families brought together by the shippers in Greece. That ought to simplify matters a good deal, for there is nothing to prevent the various families from being separated and gradually emigrated one by one. The American authorities may naturally enough object to receiving a tribe, but they can hardly exclude a family.[20]

Indeed, this strategy proved highly effective most of the time. Over the next few years, for instance, most of the other Ottoman Romani families managed to leave Europe for various destinations after splitting up into smaller groups.

People can also influence the way they are perceived through the papers they present at the border. Illustrated here is both a growing awareness of the importance of "paper identities" and the choice of what to show. At the end of the nineteenth century, Romani families were already in the habit of carrying numerous consular certificates guaranteeing their identity and, above all, their good conduct in the towns and countries they had passed through. For example, a large family group of Kalderash Roma from Austria-Hungary, the Ciurons, systematically obtained letters of recommendation from the consulates of the countries they were crossing. On their arrival in Montreal in August 1913, two Ciuron brothers held passports issued by the Austro-Hungarian consulates in Berlin, Florence and Liverpool. The following year, one of them produced a certificate from the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Rio de Janeiro for immigration inspectors in Philadelphia. Another brother presented certificates from the

[19] See Louis Takács, Chapter 5 this volume.
[20] "The Greek Gipsies," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, October 16, 1886.

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Austro-Hungarian consulates in Naples in 1906, Florence in 1910, Galveston, Texas in 1913, New Orleans in January 1914 and San Francisco in April 1914. These documents attested to their honesty and guaranteed their freedom of movement to work as coppersmiths.

Over the first half of the twentieth century, Romani families' relation to paper identities evolved in line with changes in the political and legislative context. For instance, from 1917 onward, the United States required its citizens to have a passport to re-enter the country. Without one many thus found themselves blocked at the Mexican border.[21] They gradually became aware of the importance of passports, and, over the following decades, showed a constant concern to possess identity papers and to register with the various consulates in the places where they were staying.

As they moved between South Africa, the United States, Argentina and various Caribbean countries, the Montes family systematically visited American consulates to register new births and obtain passports allowing them to travel as US citizens. Indeed, it was usually national affiliation that enabled Romani groups to negotiate their presence locally. In 1926, for example, authorities in the Dominican Republic were concerned about the presence of Roma in their territory. The governor of the province of La Vega reported complaints about: "*la cantidad de Gitanos que en distintas partes del Cibao viven en campamentos asquerosos atrayendo la gente campesina con sus promesas de buena ventura*" (the number of Gitanos that in different parts of the Cibao live in filthy camps attracting the peasants with their promises of fortune telling). To find out how much latitude he had to expel them without contradicting the government line, he asked the Dominican government: "*¿cuales las razones que ha tenido el Departamento de Inmigracion para dejarlos desembarcar?*" (What are the reasons that the Immigration Department has had to let them disembark?). The answer came a few days later: "*La Oficina de Inmigración ha permitido la entrada de los gitanos en cuestión debido a que presentaron documentación de ciudadanos americanos y entonces la Ley no les impide la entrada*" (The Immigration Office has allowed the entry of the Gitanos in question because they presented documentation of US citizens and therefore the law does not prevent their entry).[22] Thus, national

[21] Sheila Salo, "The Flight into Mexico, 1917," *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (JGLS)* 2, no. 1 (1992): 61–81.

[22] Archivo General De La Nación República Dominicana, *Secretaría de Estado de Interior y Policía, Oficios y Correspondencia Enviados y Recibidos* (01 494-1). Translated from Spanish by the author.

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belonging allowed these groups to remain on Dominican soil. The archives contain many other similar cases from the Americas, Europe and South Africa. As their nationality prevented authorities from refusing migrants considered undesirable, some countries, particularly in South America, took specific measures to prohibit the immigration of individuals identified as Gitanos (for example, Uruguay in 1890, Costa Rica in 1904 and Mexico in 1931).[23]

Inspectors categorized those they identified as "Gypsy migrants" on the basis of various criteria, one of the most important being the visibility of clothing and jewelry. US Boards of Special Inquiry often concluded with phrases such as: "From the manner of dress, appearance and evidence submitted, I am fully convinced that these aliens are in reality what are termed gypsies." For example, in 1912, at Del Rio, on the Mexican border, a family was excluded on the grounds that they were "Gypsies":

> From their appearance, the men being dressed in Gypsy style, having their wearing apparel fastened with large gold coins, all of them displaying gaudy jewelry, watches, watch chains, fobs, and rings on their fingers, and the women of the party being dressed in gaudy colors, wearing earbobs, neck chains of large and fancy patterns, and each having on their fingers from five to fifteen rings, this, together with their dirty baggage, and their tan complexions.[24]

While the administration defined its own identification categories, Romani individuals were constantly recomposing the ways in which they presented themselves. These shifts in identity took place at different times, sometimes intertwining and influencing one another; identities were redefined in anticipation of, during or in reaction to, a face-to-face encounter with the authorities.

A reading of transcripts of the interviews with immigration inspectors allows us to postulate the existence of strategic decisions made about the staging and concealment of identity. While the inspectors' questions reveal how the local administration elaborated the figure of the "Gypsy," the migrants, in their choice of answers, enable us to discern their strategies and the constitution of an expertise in migration. Some families set up ways of presenting themselves that explicitly distinguished them as "Gypsies." They played with their appearance, notably through

[23] See also Chapter 6, Buhigas Jiménez this volume. See also David Cook-Martín and David Scott FitzGerald, "How Their Laws Affect Our Laws: Mechanisms of Immigration Policy Diffusion in the Americas, 1790–2010," *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 1 (2019): 41–76, https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12394.

[24] NARA, Immigration National Services (INS), Record Group (RG) 85 (file 53469/25).

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the wearing of specific clothing and gold and silver jewelry, to be recognized as such. Some members of the Ciuron family recounted that while en route to the United States in 1914, the men replaced the silver buttons on their coats with huge gold coins: "Worsho, the chief, having discarded his silver buttons, now wears 16 sovereigns on his waistcoat, 8 on each side. His sons Kola and Janko have bought gold chains each weighing half a kilo and costing 1000 francs."[25] When one of the Ciuron brothers landed in Canada, the inspectors questioned him:

– Why do you dress as you do in such colors and wear so many rings on your fingers?
– Well, this thing is divided in two questions: for the rings and ornamental things, that is in our ambition and belief to have lots of gold; that is our enjoyment, but wearing whiskers and different colors, that is in our faith and belief, to give some confidence to the people, because if you are wearing necktie and colors and shaving, there is no distinction between any of us, and so if we do anything bad nobody could know us, but we do such thing like that in order to be known to everyone and if we do anything bad we can be locked up right away. That is my idea and it came from the beginning. . . . If it is necessary, I can change my shirt and shave our whiskers, but that is the way we dress.[26]

Such examples illustrate an understanding of what historian Henriette Asséo speaks of as "assumed exoticism": "*Ces groupes ne cherchaient nullement à dissimuler ce qu'ils étaient et l'exotisation assumée fut un facteur d'inclusion sociale*" (These groups made no attempt to conceal what they were, and assumed exoticism was a factor of social inclusion).[27] For sociologist Erving Goffman, such staging allows the interlocutor to "place the situation into a broad category around which it is easy for him to mobilize his past experience and stereo-typical thinking."[28] The Roma voluntarily acted on an image in order to be identified as such. If they were reduced to the figure of the "Gypsy," albeit extraterritorial and nomadic, they were nonetheless allowed to enter American soil, since no law forbad them from doing so.

[25] Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) Archives, *Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection* (GLS A35).
[26] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 53676/178).
[27] Henriette Asséo, "L'inclusion exotique. Des Roms de la Galicie polonaise traversent l'Europe 1900-années 20," in *Migrações e dinâmicas urbanas: Brasil–França, séculos XIX–XXI*, ed. Monica Raisa Schpun and Laurette Wittner (Almeda, 2015). Translated from French by the author.
[28] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 16.

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But assuming this exoticized demeanor could harm as much as help them. If the state authorities did not exclude them on the grounds that they were Roma, they were still discriminated against. They had to wait while inspectors investigated, questioned them, checked their documents or had others vouch for them. They might then, on the contrary, develop strategies of invisibility and concealment of their identity, which has been written about as "passing."[29] Harvey Sacks speaks of the strategy of "doing being ordinary" as a counterpoint to the category of foreigner, that is, of acting in such a way as to no longer be distinguished as other.[30] The Canadian government, for instance, deplored this shift to invisibility: "Gypsies have applied for admission at our ports of entry without bearing any particular marks of being gypsies ... Had they come with their gypsy wagons and in gypsy dress there would have been no excuse for our failure to discover them."[31] In another example, a family connected to the Ciurons arrived in Philadelphia in 1915. They were soberly dressed, and the inspectors, having identified them as Roma, asked them why they had left their colorful clothes and jewelry. It is likely that the Ciurons, who had arrived a few months earlier, had warned them of the inconvenience caused by their extreme visibility.

GOLD COINS TO TRAVEL THE WORLD

In North America, playing with clothes and jewelry were ways to become visible as a Roma, a category of migrant not legally barred from entering either the United States or Canada. These were also ways of displaying wealth, a decisive argument for being admitted at the border. An analysis of the files of migrants classified as "Gypsies" in Canadian and US archives highlights the inconsistency with which Roma were treated by immigration services. Considered as "undesirable migrants," Roma could be excluded as "likely to become a public charge." But this argument was of no use with wealthy horse traders, coppersmiths or artists. An inspector concluded his examination in 1904: "the fact that they

[29] Carol Silverman, "Everyday Drama: Impression Management of Urban Gypsies," *Urban Anthropology* 11, no. 3/4 (1982): 377–98.

[30] Harvey Sacks, "On Doing *Being Ordinary*," in *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, ed. Maxwell Atkinson and John Heritage (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 413–29.

[31] Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), *Gypsies Policy and Instructions* (RG76 555-27).

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may have some money is perfectly consistent with their being gypsies. Those people usually carry all their possessions with them."[32]

To avoid exclusion as "likely to become a public charge," the Roma knew they had to present a certain sum of money at the border. In 1902, a group disembarked at Ellis Island from Buenos Aires. They were detained by immigration authorities but eventually allowed to enter because they had $25,000 in gold coins, as well as over $10,000 in jewelry.[33] In 1905, a group of Roma on their way to Australia landed in Honolulu. Observers initially described them as poor, but one journalist remarked: "But they had the money. The chief of the crowd planked down $1000 in the San Francisco office of the Oceanic Company to purchase tickets for the crowd to the Colonies and his hands were full of gold pieces besides, dug up from innumerable pockets."[34] In 1905, a family denied entry at the border between the US and Canada took advantage of an inspector's visit to their camp to prove their wealth: "they showed me a collection of gold and silver pitchers and a woman's coat lined with silver dollars, a solid silver belt and numerous girdles, bracelets and trinkets of all sorts."[35] Wealth opened the doors to most of the countries to which they applied for admission. In addition to paying the costs associated with the journey, their wealth meant they were not excluded as poor, they could hire lawyers to defend themselves, they could live while waiting at the border, and they could deposit bonds with the immigration authorities.

Immigration inspectors did not always understand the point of this form of gold hoarding, and some even concluded that Roma would never be able to adapt to American life because they did not trust banks. This practice, however, had sound justification. A man replied to the inspector who asked him why they were "covered in gold": "Sometimes paper money will get wet. So, we always have it changed into gold. On paper money the market changes. But gold never varies. ... All the money we have is with us."[36] The possession of precious metals allowed them to cross borders without worrying about currency changes, and thus to have universally recognized financial capital, at a time when the gold standard was still the basis of the international monetary system. They could also use pawnbrokers to obtain liquidity quickly. The use of gold by these

[32] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 46 584).
[33] FamilySearch.org, *New York, Passenger Arrival Lists 1892–1924*; "Ivanovich Is Rich," *Globe & Mail*, August 23, 1902.
[34] "Gypsies Bring Dirt Ashore," *Hawaiian Star*, May 24, 1905.
[35] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 48690). [36] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 53676/178).

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Romani families demonstrates, therefore, not an archaic survival, as the American inspectors seemed to think, but rather a very good understanding of the rules of international monetary circulation.

A WORLD OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

The mobility capital of these Romani families also relied on professional expertise constantly adapted to the different economic, social, political and cultural contexts of the places they traveled through. Movements were guided by the search for economic opportunities. Coppersmiths, for instance, worked for distilleries, sugar mills, food or chemical factories, hospitals, universities, hotels and restaurants. They usually set up their workshops in city centers. When they arrived in a new city, they collected addresses from informants, then visited the institutions likely to provide them with work. They also posted signs and distributed leaflets and business cards. One of these, entitled "The Austrian Copper and Tinsmiths," stated:

> We are famous coppersmiths; we make and repair all kinds of copper utensils; no matter what size or shape; we differ from the ordinary coppersmith inasmuch as we make and repair without riveting or patching, or even soldering. If you require any new work or have any repairs that want doing, we will repair you one article, the more damaged the better, absolutely free of charge to enable you to judge our skill. A trial solicited.[37]

Others had cards and sheets of paper made on which they noted their skills and the details of the services they offered. Some published classified ads in newspapers. In the archival file that accompanied the aforementioned business card, a document explained how they proceeded: "we go to one place and set up our laboratory, our shop, and put up a sign for the kind of work we do, and the people passing through know it, and let other friends know what we are doing, and so they bring those things to us." They also directly contacted customers: "We establish our work in one place and we look in the directory for the biggest places for those things as boilers, etc., and we send them letter and let them know what our work consists of, and the people bring us the work at the place where we work." These techniques enabled them to find customers quite easily in places where they were not known. In addition to advertising, they

[37] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 53676/178).

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established a relationship of trust with their customers thanks to the large deposits paid in gold coins. The Episcopal Hospital of Philadelphia, for example, attested to having received, in September 1914, five gold coins as a guarantee for the repair of nine copper kettles.[38]

Their professional identity was an asset when it came to obtaining admission at the border, as it enabled them to justify a certain level of income. When confronted by immigration inspectors, professional identity was systematically put forward. In the course of questioning, some endlessly repeated: "I am a coppersmith" or "we are coppersmiths." This strategy could be successful. In 1914, an American inspector issued a favorable decision, stating: "They all have a trade of coppersmithing in which they are very proficient and in which all their money was earned." Their lawyer added: "the trade of coppersmithing as practiced by these people is a lucrative one and that the demand for their services is very great ... it seems to be a popular and common knowledge that these people are coppersmithers of a superior order."[39]

But the professional skills of these groups could be a source of hostility and rejection. In 1928, an Ohio law firm petitioned the Canadian Immigration Department in Ottawa on behalf of a group of Romani coppersmiths. The petition requested permission from the Canadian authorities to practice their industry in Canada. Canadian immigration authorities refused: "there is little or no demand for coppersmiths in this country and our experience with this class of people has been that they seldom remain long engaged in that trade."[40] These groups were also opposed by professional coppersmith guilds and unions. For example, a few days after the Ciurons arrived in Philadelphia in 1914, a coppersmith's union there petitioned the immigration commissioner for their deportation. They denounced the unfair competition they represented: "Coppersmiths are a small craft. We have only about 75 in Philadelphia and you can readily see that the presence here of an irresponsible band of 50 Gypsies in our business is a very serious proposition for us."[41] Union members accused them of not respecting labor regulations and not paying taxes. They did not understand how the newcomers could accumulate so many work orders in such a short time and suspected them of being in breach of the Alien Contract Labor Law.

[38] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 53676/178). [39] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 53715/102).
[40] LAC, *Gypsies Policy and Instructions* (RG76 555-27).
[41] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 53676/178).

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DRAWING ON A CONSTELLATION OF EXPERTISE

Romani families also relied on the expertise of others, whether these others belonged to the family, larger community network or were from outside the Romani world. In this context, the key issue is the circulation of information. Scattered in family groups around the world, individuals kept in touch despite the distances, exchanging information about places and resources. In this way the first group to leave became pioneers who would then inform the other groups whether or not they should join them. This was the case, for example, for some forty Argentinean Roma who landed in Melbourne, Australia, in the spring of 1902. One of the members of the group explained the reason for their arrival in Australia:

> Sixteen months ago, two of them set out to investigate. Leaving the steamer at Fremantle, they bought a horse and vehicle, and commenced the task of visiting the various States before advising their friends. After traveling across Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria, they reached this State, earning their living en route as tinkers. New South Wales found favor in their eyes, and advice was sent to their friends accordingly. Others, they say, are likely to follow their example, if their reports are favorable."[42]

Perfectly familiar with the various means of communication at their disposal, families exchanged letters, telephone calls and telegrams to find out about the potential of their destination. They would also send messengers who sometimes crossed several countries to carry the news.

Information circulated mainly via letters and telegrams, but classified ads were also a good way of disseminating messages. Archival files contain numerous examples of telegrams sent by Romani families, who kept them as proof of their presence in a particular town or of their connection with their guarantors. In 1917, the American Bureau of Investigation was looking into the case of Serbian coppersmiths applying for admission to the United States at the Mexican border. On this occasion, they discovered several telegrams and letters testifying to the intensity of communications.[43] In the same year, the search of an encampment in Pennsylvania revealed an abundance of correspondence. For example, a telegram from Buenos Aires stated: "Business bad. Letter will follow."[44]

[42] "A New Alien Danger: Immigrants from South America," *The Daily News*, June 9, 1902.
[43] NARA, *Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908–1922* (M1085, case number 8000-50232).
[44] NARA, *Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908–1922* (M1085, case number 8000-4197).

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The circulation of information was key for highly mobile Romani families. Letters, telegrams and messengers had to follow a constantly shifting map of addresses. Some families chose a fixed point to act as a postal hub to concentrate the flow of mail and telegrams and then to redistribute them. In the United States, in just one instance, a drugstore in Fort Smith, Arkansas, became a genuine "Romani post office" during the 1920s and 1930s. The place was first and foremost a meeting point for many Romani families, who stopped there whenever they were passing through the town. The families brought back "curiosities, antiques and all sorts of oddities" from their travels, which were displayed in the drugstore.[45] But more than just a collection of Romani families' travel souvenirs, the place became a true postal hub for Roma around the world. The couple who ran the drugstore received letters from all over the world, which they then redistributed. They also kept a precise map of the movements of each of the families. In 1918, the pharmacist explained to Immigration and Naturalization Service inspectors: "Prior to the war, and since it began, I have received many letters from Nicholas Costello, while he was located and lived at Roanoke, W/Va. I have those letters in my possession or under my control at this time."[46] Most of the messages concerned the location of different groups around the world, but also announcements of weddings, deaths or births, and even calls for help.[47] In 1918, for example, the drugstore owners received a telegram from a family informing them of their new address in Mexico: "I received your letter tell if you get my letter. My address Calle Zaragoza number 3."[48] In another example, a family of Russian origin wrote from Johannesburg in the early 1930s: "Business is poor. How are things back in America?"[49] Mary Cole, the pharmacist, explained the circumstances of their encounter: "The way I come to know Nicholas Costello was about four years ago his sister Mary Miller had a child baptized in the German Catholic Church and I was Godmother to the child, and at that time Nicholas

[45] "Druggist Operates Gypsy Post Office," *The Palm Beach Post*, July 26, 1925; "Trails of Gypsy Tribe to This Man's Door Leaves All," *Ellensburg Daily Record*, August 1, 1925; "Mail Matter Handled for Scattered Gypsies," *The Woodville Republican*, June 30, 1928.

[46] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 54438/12).

[47] "Fort Smith Drug Store Is Gypsy Headquarters," *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 3, 1929; Edwin Hicks, "Where the World's Romany Trails Meet," *The New York Times*, July 10, 1932.

[48] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 54438/12).

[49] "World's Romany Trails Meet at Fort Smith," *The Portsmouth Herald*, October 7, 1932.

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Costello was in the city and I saw him."[50] This testimony sheds light on another aspect of social relations: The service as godparents to Romani children by local notables was a long-established practice through which Romani families were integrated into local social networks.[51]

The case of this drugstore converted into a postal hub illustrates how information circulated and how social networks were formed and consolidated in a context of intense mobility. Certain locations became veritable hubs, concentrating information flows and redistributing them around the world. These fixed points in the cartography of Romani families traveling the world could be long-lasting, as in the case of Fort Smith. They could also be more temporary, as in the early 1910s with the Gypsy Lore Society in Liverpool. Members of the Gypsy Lore Society, founded in Great Britain in 1888 with the goal of studying Romani people, also played a role in these communications in the 1910s. They received and redistributed letters and telegrams and even conversed with messengers. The social networks deployed were not just family- or community-based but were closely linked to economic and scholarly networks. Families developed their expertise on migration by drawing on both their own experiences and the knowledge and know-how of others.

The Ciurons, for example, used the network of Gypsy Lore Society scholars between 1911 and 1914 to gather information on potential destinations and to maintain contact with each other. On his way to Brazil in 1912, Nicolas Ciuron stopped in Madeira, from where he sent a letter informing the other members of his group of the limited opportunities on the island. He addressed his letter to Robert Andrew Scott Macfie, secretary of the Gypsy Lore Society, to be forwarded to his brothers back in England:

> They made us read and translate a letter (in French) which he had written to them from Madeira, and they commissioned Gilliat-Smith to write to the authorities there to ask if Kola was still in the island! He said he had been all over the island, but that there was not a living to be made in it, and he asked if the Manchester party wished to join him there. The date of the letter was May 31, so I expect by this time he has gone on to South America. We also read letters for them in other languages: but in Birkenhead their correspondence (and telegrams) were generally in French, though when Adam Kirpats went to Czenstochoa [Częstochowa, Poland] I think we helped to send and read some wires in German.[52]

[50] NARA, INS, RG 85 (file 54438/12).
[51] Robert Andrew Scott Macfie, *Gypsy Coppersmiths in Liverpool and Birkenhead* (Henry Young, 1913).
[52] GLS Archives, *Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection* (SMGC A33).

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Andreas, one of the Ciuron brothers, corresponded from Uruguay with Scott Macfie, who gave them news of those who had not yet left: "Mr Michael (Milos) Tschuron, with his four sons – Franz, Anton, Johan and Todor – is still in Manchester: but last week, when I paid them a visit, they were finishing their work and were planning to go to Nottingham soon."[53]

But the Ciurons also sought to draw on the knowledge of scholars to guide their trajectories. In their exchanges with members of the Gypsy Lore Society, they constantly questioned them about the economic opportunities of potential destinations:

> When strangers were present, Fardi sometimes improved the occasion by producing a little ragged map of the world to question them about the amenities of different countries. It was a projection after the method of Mercator, in which Greenland appeared, grossly exaggerated, as an attractive patch of bright colour in equal size to the whole of Europe and pleasantly unspotted by the names of icy mountains or any other geographical complexities. This image of Greenland had for Fardi the same attraction as the bellman's chart for the Snark-hunting crew, and he was convinced only with difficulty that, the climate being intolerable and the natives poor, he was unlikely to do there a great trade in mending copper pots.[54]

Just as the Gypsylorists were using their Romani informants to understand Romani life and culture, so too did Romani travelers use the Gypsylorists to access the knowledge that they desired.

To understand this phenomenon, scholarly archives are extremely valuable. Today, they are the subject of critical attention, and rightly so, as they are marked by the preconceived ideas and stereotypes of the materials' creators. It is, however, possible to avoid a pitfall that has long been an unthought-of aspect of using Gypsylorist material. The first strategy is to turn these scholarly archives upside down and consider material in them as ethnographic materials in their own right, without forgetting their biases and limitations. The second is to cross-reference these scholarly sources with administrative sources related to mobility control and with sources from the Romani societies themselves. A transversal question links these very different sources: to what extent can we detect circulations, transfers and borrowings between all these writings? Contrary to popular belief, Romani societies are not totally trapped by stereotypes; rather they participate in their development, and transform, reappropriate and

[53] GLS Archives, *Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection* (SMGC A33).
[54] Scott Macfie, *Gypsy Coppersmiths*, 29.

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divert them. Observing the interplay of resonances from one text to another sheds light on the construction of modalities of self-presentation and ways of thinking about oneself in the world. In this way, we can observe how stereotypes are seized upon and reinvested by those who are their object. This approach reverses the discourse that pits populations against each other and ignores the transitions between worlds that are never absolutely separate but always closely intertwined. Observing the interactions between Gypsylorists and Ciurons between 1911 and 1914, for example, clearly shows how knowledge and skills circulated and were reappropriated on both sides. A few years earlier, at the beginning of the 1900s, contact between Romani families in the United States and the Boston Gypsylorist Albert Thomas Sinclair similarly demonstrated how knowledge and skills circulated and were reinvested on both sides.[55]

CONCLUSION

The intensification of European immigration to the Americas and the expansion of transatlantic routes in the last third of the nineteenth century was an opportunity for many Central and Eastern European Romani families to develop and adapt an expertise in mobility that had until then been confined to European territories. This expertise had several aspects. It involved acquiring the specific skills needed to cross borders, overcome administrative obstacles and adapt to the various regulations of the countries crossed. This ability to understand and circumvent border control regulations was linked to the creation of social networks. These played a crucial role in providing financial and logistical support. Individuals shared information on routes, economic opportunities and regulatory contexts. These networks were made up of family and friends, but also of professional, personal, artistic and scholarly contacts. The circulation of information throughout these contacts enabled many Roma to develop a deep understanding of the cultural, linguistic, social, economic and political contexts of the countries they crossed.

This expertise was built up over the travels of Romani families and, in turn, enabled their intense mobility. Their ability to constantly adapt to new contexts and circumstances explains why they were able to cross borders relatively easily, despite real discrimination on the part of administrators when they were identified as Roma. This mobility capital was the

[55] New York Public Library, *Manuscripts and Archives Division* (Mss Col 2760, *Albert Thomas Sinclair Papers, Gypsy Collection*).

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result of a combination of knowledge, practical skills, the activation of social networks and resilience. This does not mean that border-crossing strategies were always successful. But a study of files produced by inspection boards at various ports of entry across the Americas shows that deportations were quite rare. The first decades of the twentieth century were thus a key moment for certain Romani families, as they adapted and reshaped their mobility expertise in the context of transatlantic circulation between Europe and the Americas. By the late 1930s, some of them even extended their circulation beyond the transatlantic space and spread their itineraries across the Pacific to Asia and Oceania. Each time they did so, they adapted old strategies to new contexts.

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