

TRANZIȚIE CU TURNULEȚE TRANSITION WITH TURRETS

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Discussions of "gypsy" palaces today focus public attention on traditional Roma groups, those that have created their own separate identities throughout history, not least thanks to their colourful culture.

The traditional Roma are former nomads (the largest group being the Kalderash or coppersmiths) who lived and travelled within Romanian territory from the start of the Middle Ages up until 1960. Their occupation and social organisation was different from those of the peasant or urban peoples which made up the rest of the population. Although the term nomad is used to describe them, the resemblances with the migrants that hit Europe up until 1241 are very few, and thus there is a need for a separate term in the future. By "nomads" we mean the groups of Roma who travelled along certain routes, within and between states, primarily due to their specific form of economic existence. This was an "ambulatory" type of travel, one which took place between the start of spring and late autumn. With the exception of the period between 1942 and 1944, when they were deported to Transnistria, and the forced "sedentarisation" practiced by the communists in the 1960s, these "nomads" provided a patch of colour in every village, market town or city, each of which acting as a different outlet for members of the group. They were clearly different from Roma who settled in villages by dint of their unmixed kin relations and retention of the Romany language. Without exception, the covered wagon served as home during the day, while the tent fulfilled the same function at night. Their movements did not take them far: only to the next town or village with a potential for trade, where they would set up camp and stay a few days.

These groups were normally made up of 10-15 wagons accompanied by 40-50 interrelated people. Sometimes the groups were even smaller, though they would also join to form larger groups of over a hundred members on special occasions. Smaller groups found it easier to meet their economic needs and maintain a low level of visibility. Whenever nomad families came together to form larger groups, the authorities would soon have them under observation and intervene to drive them away.

The ability to switch between social visibility and invisibility was the main weapon wielded by nomads faced with constant controls by local and national authorities. They were able to play this endless game thanks to their high mobility and deep knowledge of less-trodden paths. Their preservation of certain cultural traits in an almost unchanged form, in particular the Romani language, testifies to the success of their strategy in opposing state policy.

Their approach today is different. The constant switching between invisibility and visibility practiced in the past (depending on the needs and problems of the community) has today given way to permanent visibility. The parking of wagons and tents on the outskirts of villages close to forests (to be able to become invisible as quickly as possible) has been replaced by the erecting of imposing, highly visible buildings inside the villages. This visibility, however, is in fact only a facade to hide the insides of these dwellings. As before, the community is protected on the inside.

Why this partial change of strategy? The development of Romania post-1989 created an ideal framework within which to practice their skills as tradesmen, something which also led to the accumulation of considerable sums of money. Imitation is particularly prevalent, both in terms of economic activity (all adopt the same type of business after it is seen to be profitable for one member) and housing (where all used to have tents, now all have built similar looking houses). We are also witnessing changes within the Roma community itself. The most powerful family of a

group, that of the Bulibasha, would have the largest tent and wagon and the best horses, etc. The diminishing role of the Bulibasha is also directly linked with the change in the hierarchy of wealth. Imposing buildings and luxury cars have the role of displaying the new power relations within the community.

Visibility is also the result of a growing trust in the strength of the community and the reduction or disappearance of threats to its existence. Their choice of dwelling, however, can also act against traditional Roma, owing to the ease with which they can be identified in the context of hostile government policies, of which history provides many examples. Becoming invisible is only still possible today by adopting the majority type of dwelling and at the risk of losing an interesting and valuable expression of their individuality.

The building of palaces can also be seen as a component of social and financial transition. Displays of wealth are found among all groups that have recently come into money. People not part of the Roma minority also build houses costing similar amounts, albeit the architecture differs. The appearance of new residential districts containing buildings costing hundreds of thousands of Euros places both groups, superficially occupying different positions, on the same side of the barricade. The same family, but living in different political, economic and social environments, will have a different cultural production.

The nomads in western Europe of east European extraction (most arrived in the west in the second half of the 19th century), especially those in France, are the victims of official policies which forced them to remain invisible by obliging them to live in the newly appeared "aires d'accueil" on the outskirts of towns. Their visibility was ensured through the mandatory carrying of circulation cards, replacing in the 1960s the anthropometric cards and many other forms of restriction which prevented the group from giving up their caravans and opting for a different type of dwelling. Keeping the group is a barrier to change.

On the other hand, groups of Kalderash in Brazil have built imposing houses which have remained largely unused. Behind each such houses there is a tent which is used as a dwelling by the family members. However, this tradition has been lost in mixed families in which the man is a gadjo (non-Roma).

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