

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

“Peripatetic Adaptation in Historical Perspective”

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## PERIPATETIC ADAPTATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Matt T. Salo

Ethnographic research among a number of highly mobile groups which are neither hunter-gatherers nor pastoralists has been accelerating since the 1970's and in comparing their descriptions of these groups scholars began to note important similarities and perceive them as a distinct category. The term "peripatetic" was applied to this new designation and attempts started to identify unique features distinguishing it from other categories of nomads. A number of investigators advanced a concept of peripatetic adaptation based on the provision of goods and services in response to diffuse or fluctuating demands and thus requiring spatial mobility (Berland 1979; Hayden 1979; and Rao 1982).<sup>1</sup>

A problem remained. What kind or degree of nomadism would be required for a population to qualify as "peripatetic?" Students of various West European and North American Gypsy groups had long noted that members of these groups, popularly thought of as nomadic, did not travel either consistently or continuously.<sup>2</sup> For example, did the Romnichel Gypsies in the United States cease to be peripatetic when they purchased farms and houses as they did in Ohio and New England; or camp all summer over many years at the same spot as they did in Brooklyn? What about those that conducted most of their business from a fixed site as they did with horse sale stables in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, remaining at the same location for periods varying from thirty to fifty years (Salo and Salo 1982)?

If we were to restrict the concept of peripateticism solely to travel and itinerant work strategies, the problem of sedentism would not even arise. By separating the strategies from the people, we would call the latter "peripatetic" only when they earned their living in an itinerant fashion and "sedentary" when they ceased to do so. However, most advocates of the concept of peripateticism wish to make a stronger claim; they wish to speak of groups characterized by the peripatetic adaptation as peripatetic peoples or societies. In fact this is precisely what anthropologists are doing when we are speaking of hunting, gathering or pastoral peoples or societies. We recognize that their main subsistence strategies sufficiently depict their behavior and social organization for us to consider them as distinct kinds of people. This is especially true when their adaptive strategies exhibit sufficient generality and persistence over time to be recognized as integral components of a traditional culture pattern.

Is the peripatetic adaptation distinct and persistent enough to be considered on the same level? Most scholars working in the area seem to think so; otherwise the need for the separate term would not have arisen. But what of sedentism and other related and possibly conflicting observations of these people staying in urban centers, buying property, living on farms or in urban houses and running long-lasting business enterprises? To claim for peripateticism the status of a distinct adaptation we would have to be able to clearly specify and describe those unique characteristics that distinguish it from other adaptations.

The purpose of this analysis is twofold. First to isolate the adaptive parameters of four North American groups, the Rom, Romnichels, Ludar and the Irish Travelers, which have traditionally been described as nomadic, in order to test and refine the existing concepts of peripatetic adaptation and the peripatetics'

niche. Second, to lay the groundwork for an ecological analysis of peripatetic adaptations which would enable us to account for the observed variation in their adaptive responses. My objectives are to identify crucial variables related to their adaptation and to suggest relationships among these variables in order to generate hypotheses about interactions to be tested by further research.

During the last two decades, research by field biologists has highlighted the importance of resource diversity, density, stability and quality in informing the spatial and temporal foraging patterns of a wide variety of organisms (Emlen 1973; Krebs and Davies 1978; McArthur 1972; and Pianka 1983). The theoretical framework most often used in these studies is that of evolutionary ecology which applies evolutionary concepts to the study of ecological data (Winterhalder and Smith 1981:1-12). Several recent studies, especially those using socioecological approaches, have been applied to the analysis of simple hunting and gathering societies. "Socioecology", which according to Winterhalder "is concerned with the application of ecological theory to the analysis of social behavior" has proven to be especially productive because "It focuses on the contribution of ecological adaptation processes to the variability observed in foraging or social behavior" (1981:1). Optimal foraging theory, which could be considered a subset of the more general socioecological approach, adds a further psychological motivating factor by assuming that organisms generally try to maximize their yield from the resources pursued relative to the energy expended in their pursuit.

Although access to resources is not the sole motivating factor affecting the distribution or movements of either animal or human populations, it is generally the most significant and certainly the most persistent one. Even when people act on the basis of other reasons, the necessity of obtaining a living is always present. If resource exploitation occasionally has to take second place, for example to sociopolitical considerations such as avoiding unfriendly groups, the desire to maximize yields under the new conditions still remains. The new factor has simply become a constraint to the exercise of the most optimal choice, the principle remains intact. Optimal foraging theory may not be able to explain every move people make but it has demonstrated considerable power to predict behavior when the priorities are known, as for example in unimpeded food procurement activities.

The two ecological concepts most germane to the data considered here are adaptation and niche. Adaptation as a response by a population has been defined by Yehudi Cohen as "altering its relationship to its habitat in order to make that habitat a more fit place in which to live, or to make itself more fit to live in that milieu" (1968:3). Adaptation is thus conceived as a dynamic and reciprocal process of beneficially changing the organism - environment relationship.

Niche, in turn, can be viewed as an outcome of the evolutionary adaptive process. Hutchinson has described it as "an n-dimensional hypervolume enclosing the complete range of conditions under which that organism can successfully replace itself" (quoted in Pianka 1983:255). Pianka himself defines the niche as "the sum total of the adaptations of an organismic unit or all the various ways in which a given organismic unit conforms to its particular environment" (1983:253). The units to which he refers can be individuals, populations or species. For our present purposes I define the niche as the position of the adapting group in its environment and its modes of adaptation as its roles.

As with the sociological concepts of status and role, treating niche more as an abstraction derived from observations of the actual adaptive processes saves us from

much of the confusion that has surrounded the niche concept. If the concept of adaptation is restricted to the actual alteration of the organism - environment relationship, niche can be seen as the result of the adaptation. Although the niche itself must always be changing as the overall relationship of the organism to its environment changes, we can abstract that relationship at any point in time and describe it as the organism's niche at that time. Of course, many niches also exhibit considerable stability over time, giving an illusion of stasis; nevertheless none of them are permanently frozen milieu.

Here we are interested in both the parameters of the peripatetics' niche, as they can be isolated from a detailed examination of the groups' ongoing adaptations, and the observed variability among these adaptations. The organization of the study is based primarily on the recommendations for research in Winterhalder's article "Environmental Analysis in Human Evolution and Adaptation Research" (1980:135-170). According to Winterhalder, "ecological adaptations result from historical processes in natural ecosystems which have as their most important characteristics temporal variety and spatial heterogeneity." He is critical of studies that suffer from "short-term perspective" and stresses that research "should be tied down to the physical limitations of events, rates, magnitudes and distances of real environments" (1980:141; also Bates and Lees 1982:146). Winterhalder also reminds us that the real environment also includes the social, which "is taken to be as important as other external factors" (1980:144). As frequently stressed elsewhere, Gypsy and other peripatetic adaptations are linked almost entirely to social environments (Salo 1975, 1977, 1982 and 1986).

My analysis is based on the empirically observed and historically documented variability of environmental influences on the groups mentioned. I will look at their adaptive responses to those influences and at the overall relationship to the environment resulting from those responses, i.e. their niche. I will look at the range of habitats and resources available, the strategies used to exploit them, choice of locations utilized, housing and travel patterns and other related factors. Based on the analysis I will suggest relationships consistent with optimal foraging theory, that can be used as springboards for further research into peripatetic adaptations.

The data used are primarily historical and documentary, although their interpretation is aided by my current ethnographic familiarity with the three Gypsy groups and Jared Harper's publications on the Irish Travelers. The long-term observations of changes in the independent variables and the concomitant documentation of the responses reveal underlying regularities missed by short-term observations and likewise show behaviors that had been taken as characteristically peripatetic, or "Gypsy-like" to be simply situationally variable responses with no across-the-board generality. Winterhalder has also pointed out the advantage of using specific historical and ecological data over the typological approach which utilized environmental averages that destroyed the variability observed on microhabitat levels and therefore the information necessary to explain the responses (Winterhalder 1980:163). Utilizing data on specific spatial and temporal differences also guards against the common errors of proposing tautological arguments so often found in functional and adaptive explanations.<sup>3</sup> Typological thinking is especially prone to such circular reasoning when the definitions of the concepts are not sufficiently precise to separate the dependent from the independent variables. Refining terms avoids the loss of explanatory power that may occur when operating with large general categories that subsume both variables under a single label.

The results are based on simple enumeration, cross-tabulation and graphing of both individual and aggregate statistics. I have calculated frequencies, percentages and changes in the magnitudes and rates of the significant variables as well as trends over time. The results are presented in tabular and graphic form, along with the raw figures on which they are based. The data utilized come from a variety of sources, among which the most important are the 1880, 1900 and 1910 US Census schedules; also used are state censuses, city directories, land, probate and court records, newspapers and oral histories. The ability to check and weigh one type of record against another has been a great help in guarding against misinterpretation, as has the author's ethnographic work among these groups.<sup>4</sup> I shall begin with a historical and comparative overview of the main adaptations of three North American peripatetic groups since their arrival in the United States. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the interaction of specific environmental and cultural factors in the adaptations of Romnichel Gypsies spanning more than a century.

### Comparative Sketches

About the middle of the 19th century several families of Irish Tinkers (today calling themselves Irish Travelers) began immigrating to the United States. According to oral tradition the earliest date of arrival is 1847; however, our earliest actual documentation dates from 1854. Some were possibly driven out by the hard times caused by the potato famine (Gmelch 1977:9; Harper 1969:8-9) although Harper suggests there may have been other reasons as well. Nearly all the men were tinkers in the old country and appear as such on the ships' passenger manifests, although there is no doubt that they utilized a large repertoire of supplementary strategies (Harper 1969:2).

Upon arriving into the United States, the families are reported to have "settled" in the vicinity of Tonawanda, NY, Pittsburgh, PA and Washington, DC (Harper 1969:9). According to oral tradition, hawking and tinning appear to have been the main subsistence strategies (Harper 1969:8). Apparently tents and living wagons were the main kinds of shelter used; the use of houses has not yet been documented, but is possible for urban areas such as Washington, DC where some families claimed their forefathers operated tinware shops (Harper 1969:11).

Following the Civil War, trade in horses and mules offered more lucrative opportunities and many Travelers began to switch over to this line of work (Harper 1969:9). By 1880, and during subsequent census years of 1900 and 1910, practically all adult males identified themselves as horse and mule dealers. The traveling road trade in livestock came to an end with the proliferation of sales stables and better means of transportation allowing even the isolated farmer to make purchases away from home. Customers could now come to the sale barns which kept a large stock of horses and mules; having a better selection on hand further increased the attractiveness of these businesses. According to Harper, 1927-1928 marked the zenith of Traveler life; livestock trade began its decline with only a brief resurgence of demand generated by WW II. Some Travelers apparently continued to trade in livestock until the mid-1950s when the trade, for all practical purposes, came to an end (Harper 1969:13-15). Those who continued to travel used wagons until 1927 and tents into the 1950s. On the whole the Irish Travelers have been the most nomadic of the American peripatetics. The 1880 - 1910 censuses indicate far-ranging travels with some families reporting every child born in a different state (see Table I).

TABLE I

MOBILITY INDEX FOR FOUR NORTH AMERICAN PERIPATETIC GROUPS

$$MbIx = \frac{S}{N} \begin{matrix} \text{(number of states)} \\ \text{(number of children)} \end{matrix}$$

Sample size: n=1945

	Irish	Ludar	Rom	Romnichels
1910	.70	.60	.56	.53
1900	.73	.55	--	.56
1880	.55	--	--	.58
1870	--	--	--	.61
Averages:	.70	.64	.56	.55

Number of children enumerated

	Irish	Ludar	Rom	Romnichels
1910	135	160	66	563
1900	78	39	--	707
1880	13	--	--	171
1870	--	--	--	13
Totals:	226	199	66	1454

In the northern states the end of the livestock trade came even earlier. By the depression many Travelers, both North and South, were making a living by selling "rugs" (linoleum) and relying on sundry backup strategies to make ends meet (Harper 1969:14). Today many Travelers continue to sell linoleum, but have also added a new specialization, spray painting. Spray painting is in many ways an ideal peripatetic occupation: the clientele can be found everywhere, the required equipment can be carried easily on a pickup truck, which may also pull a travel trailer used for housing. According to Harper about half of the Travelers are specialized in linoleum sales and half in spray painting. Travel is restricted to males who work in partnerships, except for the summers when the families come along. According to Harper most now stay in motels, but we have also encountered families living in travel trailers at campgrounds (see Figure 1).

The Ludar, or Rumanian Gypsies, began to arrive into the United States in the early 1880s (see Salo & Salo 1986). At that time most of them were apparently woodworkers and traveling showmen specializing in the exhibition of trained animals, especially bears and monkeys which they brought with them. Very little information is available on this group during their earliest years until after the turn of the century. They apparently traveled widely, with many families making trips back and forth between United States and Europe and South America, possibly to bring in relatives. Early continental travel was mainly by horse and wagon, but trains and ships were also utilized when appropriate. At present little is known about their transition to the use of automobiles and the effect this may have had on their lives.

The Ludar are distinctive in founding large colonies of interrelated families. From the 1920s to the 1940s they built extensive shantytowns in New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago. This did not prevent them from traveling, however, as they continued to range widely exhibiting their animals, trading horses and performing odd jobs, occasionally even wage labor. Their share in the horse-trading business appears to have been short-lived, although perhaps significant in the 1890 - 1910 period; after that carnivals, woodworking, stove repairs and seasonal agricultural labor seem to assume more importance.

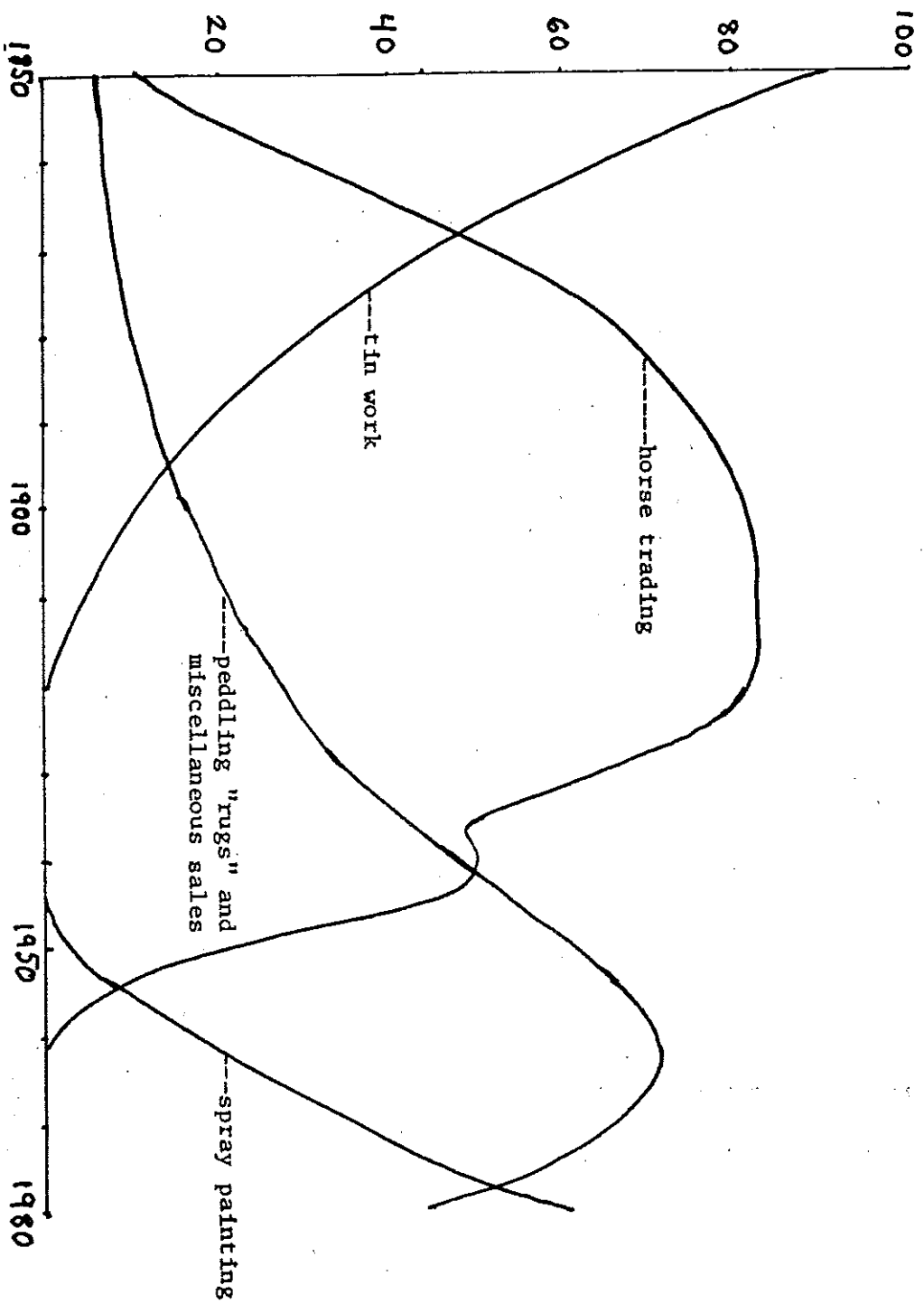
Today many Ludar follow black-topping and roofing trades, although several families continue with carnivals and at rustic furniture making, especially in the South. Their tendency to ethnic enclaving persists and several trailer parks around the country are dominated by their presence (see Figure 2).

The Rom, also known as Russian, Serbian or Greek Gypsies, sent their first scouting parties to America in the early 1880s, but the bulk of their immigration took place between 1895 and 1914. Many of the men were professional coppersmiths and were able to find profitable work almost immediately.

Some of the Rom were also engaged in horse trading, but it is doubtful that any single trade surpassed coppersmithing in importance until the large vats, steam jackets and various industrial equipment they repaired were replaced by Monel metal, stainless steel or aluminum. These did not require the kind of maintenance that copper or copper-lined vessels did. Although some women of all four groups did fortune-telling, the Rom specialized in it more than the others. Since the 1930's it has developed into a major income-producing activity for most families. Fortune-telling from a relatively fixed location requires a large population to generate clientele. Its requirements have affected Rom settlement patterns:

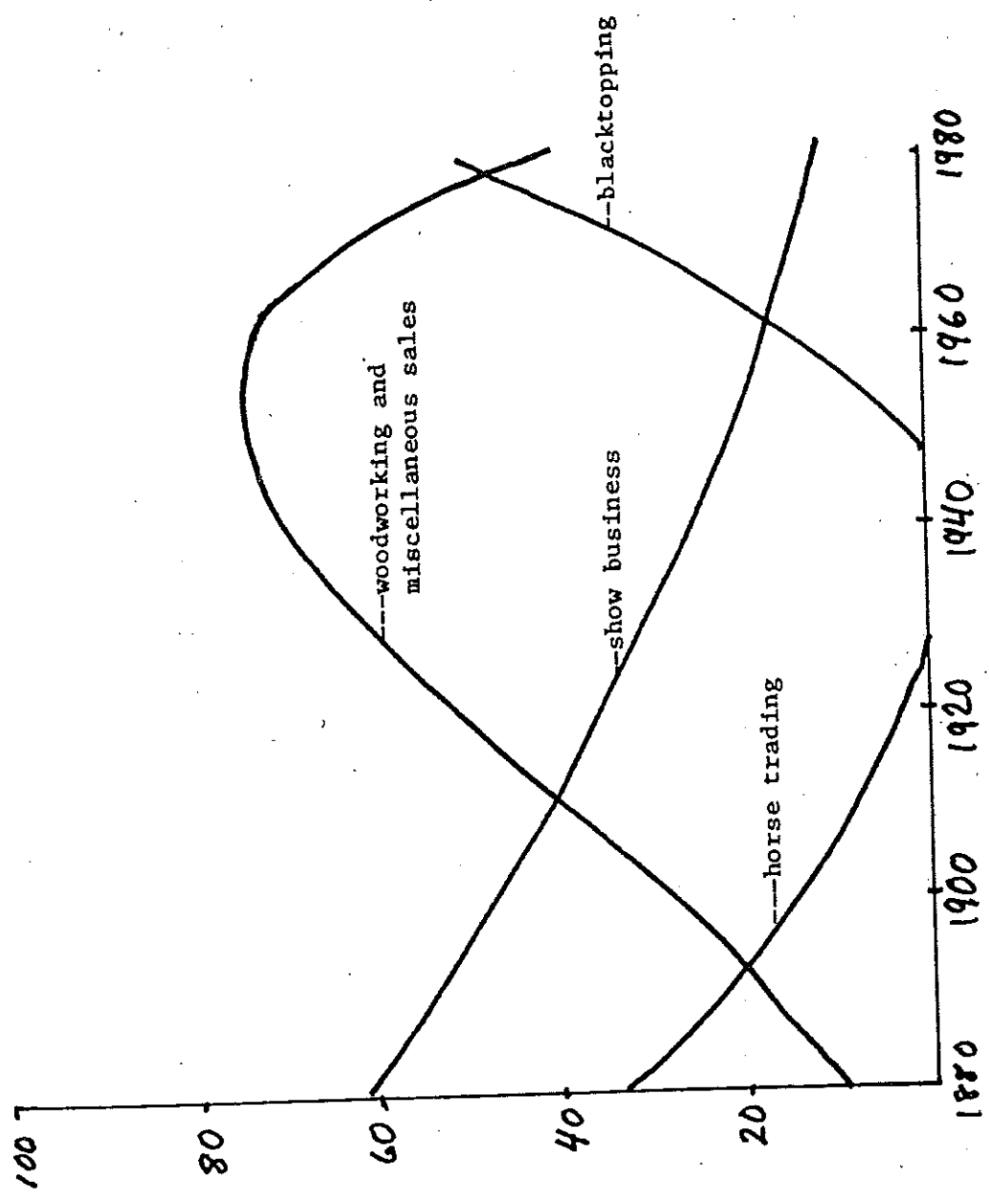
FIGURE 1

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF IRISH TRAVELER STRATEGIES 1850 - 1980\*



\* Based on Harper (1969) and US Census schedules 1880, 1900 and 1910.

FIGURE 2  
MAJOR STRATEGY SHIFTS AMONG THE LUDAR GYPSIES 1880 - 1980



concentrated in urban centers, more scattered in rural areas. The need for good relationships with local authorities in order to continue exploiting the local clientele has led to a system of territories controlled by extended families. Some Rom speak of owning towns or entire regions to which they feel they have rights due either to being the first to exploit the area or because they managed to get the permission of the local authorities to work there.

In spite of their emphasis on fortune-telling, other strategies are still kept alive and new ones added. The men often work at car sales, fender repairs, blacktopping or roofing. Most have at least some carnival experience. The Rom today, perhaps more than others groupwise, continue a highly mobile existence although most now rent, and some even own their own homes. Although the restrictions associated with fortune-telling territories restrict movements somewhat, most Rom have friends and relatives scattered around the country with whom they can visit and work if the local area becomes unproductive or access to its clients is closed off (see Figure 3).

During their earlier years in America the Rom traveled by horse and wagon, and when necessary by railroad. Tents were carried and utilized as the principal form of shelter. As soon as cars became available a switch was made which many of the older people still remember as a great boon to their activities: "We could go further and faster." Today trailers and mobile homes are frequently used although by now the most prevalent form of shelter appears to be a sequence of rented houses, apartments or storefronts. Rented storefronts are especially preferred because they combine the possibility of having living quarters in the back with a fortune-telling establishment in the front.

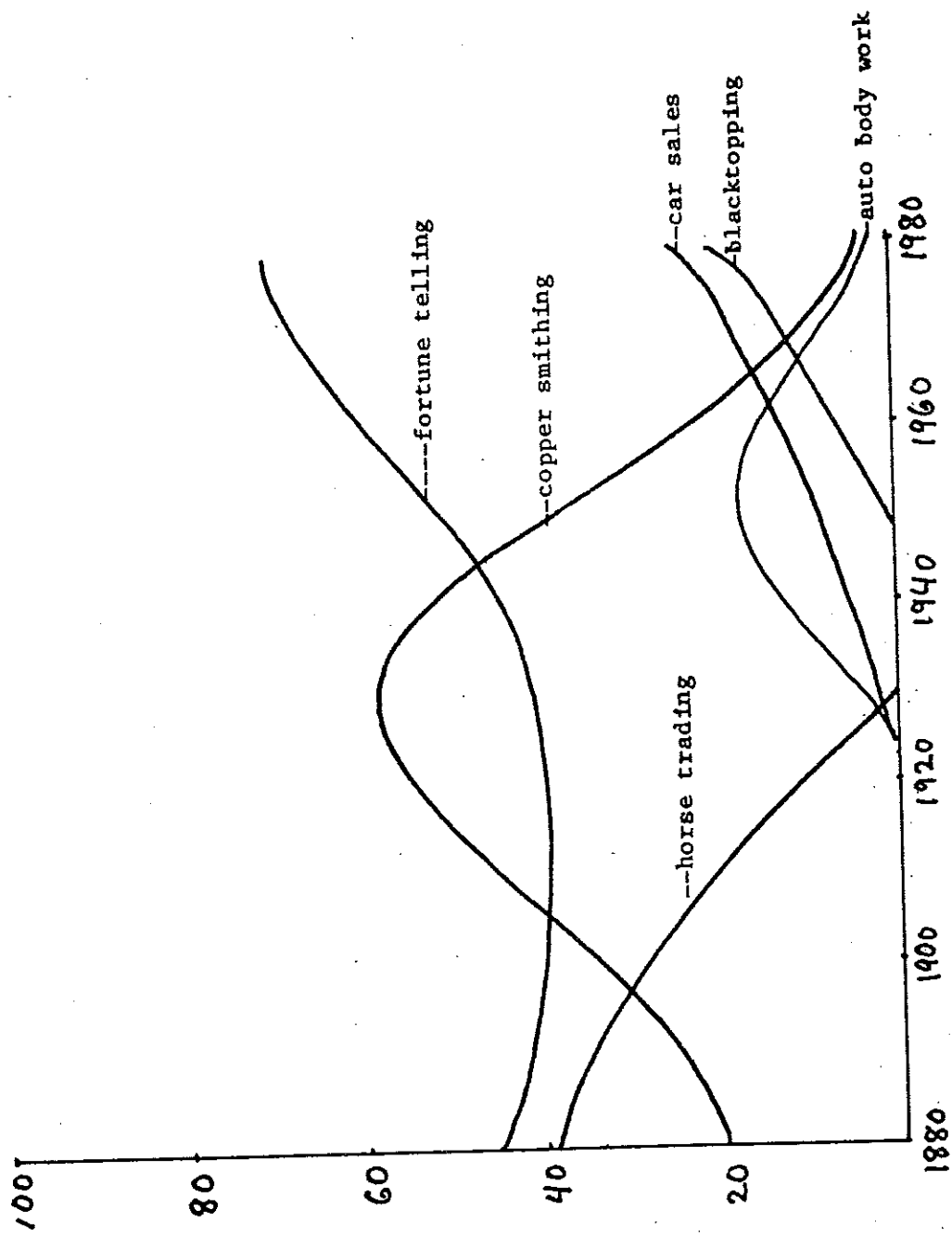
#### Case Study -- Romnichel Gypsies

The Romnichels, or English Gypsies, began arriving in North America in the early 1850's. Because they came in greater numbers and were more visible and urban in their lifestyles than the Travelers more documentation exists on them. Nevertheless, for the years prior to 1880 it is difficult to determine just what resources they exploited and to what extent. We can get some idea of their subsistence strategies from the occupations they claimed on the passenger manifests and from published first hand accounts by observers in newspapers, periodicals, articles and books. We can infer relative dependencies on different strategies by analyzing the frequency of references to various occupations, the number of horses in the camps, presence of various items for sale, etc. Most pursuits mentioned are typical of what are now thought of as peripatetic trades including tinkers, traders, basket makers, knife sharpeners, umbrella menders, rat catchers, herb and patent medicine salesmen and peddlers of sundry other items. Most of the women were also fortune-tellers. In their overall significance these trades appear to have been of roughly equal importance, with no single pursuit predominating. No doubt they were pursued opportunistically, as variations in demand by specific populations, locations or other factors were encountered.

The arrival of Romnichels coincided with the rapidly increasing use of horses in agriculture and urban transportation. Although horse dealing had been only one of the many earlier occupations practiced in England, they soon began specializing in it in America. In fact horse trading remained their mainstay for well over a half century. At first buying and selling was carried on as road trade, as the opportunities presented themselves to the families during their travels. However, as

FIGURE 3

CHANGES IN ROM STRATEGIES 1880 - 1980



the demand increased many Romnichels began selling horses from fixed locations. Some families owned and operated sales stables and did continuous business in the same locale for several decades. The purchase of horses still had to be made at the various locations where the supply was; this generally meant the more rural, less developed and populous areas of the South and the West. Some Romnichels supplying the New England region also brought in horses from Canada.

Specializing in horse trading did not mean the disappearance of the other strategies; only a decrease in importance. We have many reports of the practice of ancillary strategies along with horse trading to generate petty cash. At times of slumps in horse trading or during stays in areas where the demand was low, fortune-telling, peddling or one of the craft or repair trades could become the sustaining strategy. Often a combination of the various strategies was necessary to support the family with all members pitching in to contribute according to their skills (see Figure 4).

When horses began to be replaced by automobiles and tractors a period of 20 to 30 years ensued when the earlier supplementary strategies had to be relied on for most income. Most frequently mentioned strategies from this period include the sale of linoleum, inexpensive fur coats, imitation oriental carpets, bedspreads and doilies of either store-bought or hand made lace. Baskets, rustic furniture and sundry tinware, such as baking pans, were manufactured and sold door to door. Among the service trades stove and furnace repairs, fortune telling and various carnival concessions loomed important. A few individuals took temporary jobs in factories, or performed some other form of wage labor or odd jobs for cash.

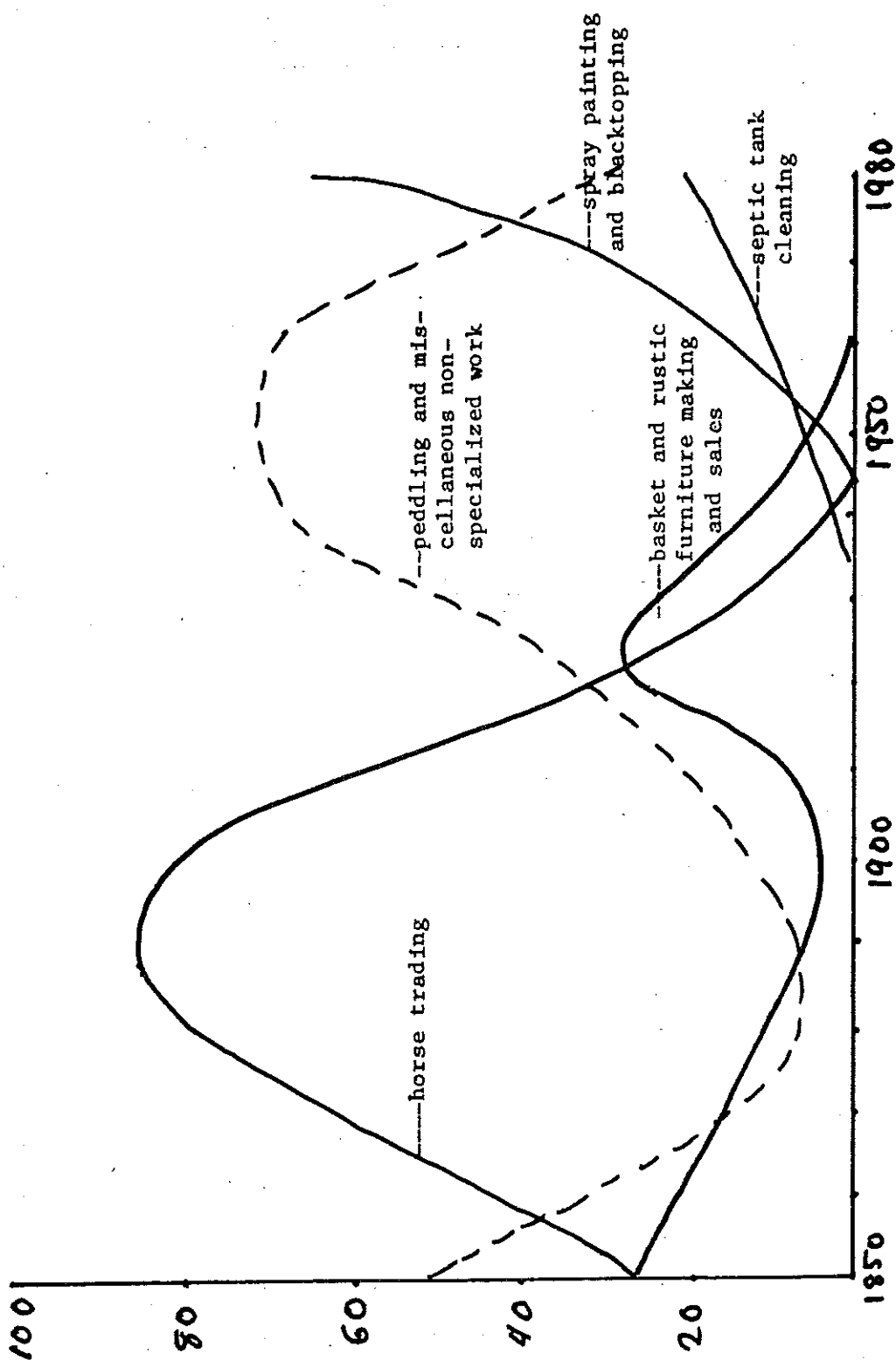
During the 1940's and 1950's new specializations again began to be developed. A few men took to pumping out cesspools with specially build tank trucks. At this time also, according to oral tradition, a Romnichel man modified an orchard spray pump to handle paint and began earning good money by spray painting large buildings. The technique soon caught on and before long spray painting had become almost a new ethnic specialization. Variations of this strategy include painting barns, silos, tin roofs, oil tanks and various industrial buildings, especially with aluminum paint. Later driveway sealcoating, using a similar technology, was added to the repertoire, and this in turn may have led to asphalt paving and roofing as related strategies.

#### Travel

Although difficult to document in detail, Romnichels seem to have, from the very beginning of their arrival to America, resorted to a variety of travel patterns. Some families ranged widely, traversing the country from coast to coast and from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada. Some circulated within more restricted areas, for example through the South, the Midwest, the Middle Atlantic states or New England, and yet others confined their movements within a single state or a local area. There were families that bought farms shortly after their arrival and used them as focal points of their wanderings (Salo & Salo 1982; see also Bryer 1986). Most families seemed to have favored certain sections of the country which they traversed either in a roughly circular route as in the South or in back and forth movements, as for example up and down the Mississippi or along both the western and eastern seabords. Only a few families, however, remained consistently in one area; the adherence of a Romnichel family to the environs of Boston is unusual in

FIGURE 4

ROMNICHEL STRATEGY CHANGES FROM 1850 TO 1980



this regard, but illustrative of the wide range of intercultural variation possible in travel and settlement patterns.

The extent of travel also varied greatly, with some families reporting every child as born in a different state, to others whose children were all born in the same state (Table I). The average mobility for Romnichel families based on the number of birth states divided by the number of children in a sample of about 1500 individuals is 0.55 which indicates a very high rate of itinerancy. Comparisons of the averages by census years show mobility decreasing slightly, but steadily from a high of 0.71 in 1870 down to 0.53 in 1910.

### Shelter

The range of shelters utilized by the Romnichels in North America has included tents, wagons, trailers, pick-up campers, mobile homes, rented and owned houses and apartments, hotels and motels. The type of dwelling used reflects local availability and costs rather than preference. In comparing camping stays to those in fixed dwellings we find no clear patterns of preference over the years. Overall the ratio of moveable shelters to fixed abodes was 56 to 44 over the census years from 1880 to 1910 (Table II). Of the 135 families for which we have such data over consecutive census years, 30% changed dwelling type: 16% from fixed abode to mobile shelter and 14% from a mobile to more permanent dwelling (Table III). Fixed dwellings were used for wintering, for long term exploitation of plentiful local resources, for temporary stops in areas where no campsites existed or where a friend or a relative owned property with housing. Older persons, widows, and sometimes any members of the family not engaged in traveling business, might remain behind in a house. However, not all individuals reported on the census as associated with a definite street address were necessarily living in a house. At least some families were simply camping on a property of friends or relatives. As early as 1858 American Romnichels have owned property, both improved and unimproved. Romnichel-owned lots served as secure camping sites both for the owners and for other families.

It should be emphasized that owning properties or staying in houses cannot a priori be equated with settling down. Even in New England, which had the most stable population, many families could be found in houses year after year but frequently at different addresses. In the few cases where we have been able to pick up urban house dwellers when they disappeared from local records they have turned up hundreds of miles from their home territory. Of two families frequenting the Washington, DC area, one was found in rural part of southern Virginia living in a tent; the other family was staying in an apartment in Memphis, TN. Likewise a family associated with the Worcester, MA stable business was located one year at census time in Detroit, appearing in the records, by all external appearances, to be a typical local urban household there. Of the rural farm houses owned by Romnichels, very few were occupied on a steady basis by the owners. On the contrary, the owners were seldom found at home during the census time. More often than not the farm had been rented out while the owners traveled.

### Milieu

Although we know that the Romnichels were found frequenting both urban and rural locations during their first decades following their arrival we do not know

TABLE II  
PERCENTAGE OF ROMNICHÉL FAMILIES IN FIXED VS MOBILE DWELLINGS

	1880	1900	1910	Av. (Total)
FARMS OR RURAL HOUSES	14 %	8 %	8 %	
URBAN OR TOWN HOUSES	31 %	27 %	45 %	
TOTAL IN HOUSES	45 % (27)	35 % (68)	53 % (99)	44 % (194)
RURAL CAMPS	37 %	27 %	20 %	
URBAN CAMPS	18 %	38 %	27 %	
TOTAL IN CAMPS	55 % (34)	65 % (125)	47 % (91)	56 % (250)

TABLE III  
ROMNICHÉL DWELLING PREFERENCES  
OVER CONSECUTIVE CENSUS YEARS

(h = house; c = camp or moveable dwelling)

Found in same dwelling type	h → h	58 families	43%
	c → c	37 families	27%
Total		95 families	70%
Found in different dwelling type	h → c	19 families	14%
	c → h	21 families	16%
Total		40 families	30%

135 families

what proportion of their time was spent in each milieu. One may assume stays in rural areas were more frequent earlier than later because there were few urban centers and travel was slower between urban areas, necessitating more rural stops. Many reports also indicate that provisions were most often bought or bartered from the farm wives. By 1880 Romnichels were making increased forays into urban centers where many remained for extended periods. Urban or rural, a relatively dense population was necessary for the conduct of most of the trades in which the Romnichels were engaged. An 1892 newspaper article on California Gypsies reports a Romnichel woman to have remarked: "Heaven help me from getting to where there are no people... We only go to such places as Lake Tahoe, the Big Trees, Yo Semite resort areas and so forth where the people congregate. We've got to be among people" (Weekly Mail, 30 January, 1892).

Although part of the increase in frequenting urban locales can be attributed to the overall urbanization of America and the increase in urban populations, the Romnichels are found in urban locations, at least from 1880 on, in far greater percentages than the general population (see Table IV).

If we look at the stability of association with a particular milieu, we find that 79 or 58% of the urban families for which consecutive census data is available, were found again in urban surroundings; however only 21 or 15% were found in the neighborhood of their previous residence (Table V). Thirty nine or 29% of those associated with rural milieu were found in a rural setting again. Of those only 11 were in the same location; mostly old retired couples of widowers. Overall 87% of the families remained in a similar setting; of the 13% that changed milieus, 10% did so in favor of an urban area. This increase is slightly higher than the countrywide urbanization rate. As we have seen (see Table IV), the overall percentage of Romnichels in urban areas remained consistently higher than that of the general population.

#### Analysis: Flexibility Through Time and Space

Both the comparative sketches of three peripatetic groups, and the more detailed examination of a fourth, reveal important similarities and differences among them. Their responses differed according to their past history, cultural traditions, the technology at their disposal and specific opportunities or constraints encountered, both in the short and the long run. Their responses were also alike in that their overall relationship to the social resource base (socioeconomic niche) remained constant in spite of variations in particular situations and adaptive strategies.

The groups started from separate cultural backgrounds and came to America during two different periods of immigration and thus were faced with different problems in making a living as well as possessing different means for coping with them. The Irish Travelers and English Romnichels came during the mid-nineteenth century. The Irish specialized in tin-work, with other work strategies supplementing their income; the Romnichels do not appear to have had any outstanding specialization, but were engaged in rather generalized multi-resource exploitation. The Romnichels also differed from the Irish in having a greater emphasis on strategies such as fortune-telling and basket-making in their occupational repertoires, which at times assumed major importance for them. Both the Romnichels and the Travelers were able to get in at the beginning of the increase in the demand for horses and began specializing in this trade.

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE OF ROMNICHEL FAMILIES IN URBAN AREAS\*

	1880	1900	1910	Av.
ROMNICHEL	52 % (31)	65 % (124)	74 % (159)	67 % (314)
GENERAL POPULATION	28 %	40 %	46 %	40 %
DIFFERENCE	26 %	25 %	27 %	27 %

\* Percentages are based on nuclear families rather than households enumerated by the census; the comparison figures for the general population reflect distribution of individuals.

TABLE V

ROMNICHIEL MILIEU PREFERENCES  
OVER CONSECUTIVE CENSUS YEARS

(u = urban; r = rural)

Found in same milieu	u → u	79 families	58%
	r → r	39 families	29%
Total		118 families	87%
Found in same neighborhood	u	21 families	15%
	r	11 families	8%
Total		32 families	23%
Changed milieu	u → r	4 families	3%
	r → u	14 families	10%
Total		18 families	13%

136 families

The Rom and the Ludar began arriving at roughly the same time, some 30 to 40 years later than the Irish and the English groups. Culturally they were eastern European and less familiar with the American way of life, both in customs and in language, than the two transplants of western European cultures. The Rom had a specialization in coppersmithing and the Ludar in exhibiting trained animals, and to some extent in woodworking. Both groups also had some familiarity with the horse business, but neither seems to have specialized in it. Thus it seems clear that the repertoires of strategies each group brought with it were important variables affecting which resources they were initially prepared to exploit. All groups also shared certain stand-by strategies such as crafts, peddling, fortune-telling, tin-work and performing minor repairs. For the Romnichels a combination of these strategies was used to support them before they began specializing in the horse trade; for the others they were ancillary strategies used alongside more specialized pursuits or during slow periods in the major business. All groups, however, were characterized by a generalist repertoire of multiple strategies and the readiness to exploit one of them more intensely whenever the opportunity arose.

In addition to the culturally specific occupational repertoires and past experience with different types of work, the existing levels of technology and their availability also determined which resources were exploitable and in which fashion at any particular time. The introduction of cars, trucks, trailers, asphalt paving, spray-painting and cesspool pumping equipment provided new opportunities. The introduction of Monel metal, stainless steel, cheaper mass-produced goods and popular entertainment such as films, competed directly with some of the peripatetic trades and in a few cases wiped them out completely. The changes in the environment that provided either opportunities to pursue particular trades or closed off previously profitable pursuits can be viewed at two levels. First there were the spatial and temporal variations in the resources encountered day to day and coped with by the traditional flexibility built into the culture. Second there were the major technological, economic and sociopolitical changes that were sufficiently widespread, pervasive and irreversible to be largely outside individual control and required major readjustments.

The demand for particular goods and services varied from day to day according to the areas exploited. The geographical differences in supply and demand of horses, cars or driveway paving have already been noted. Whether an area was rural or urban, used for agriculture, industry, business or residence, and whether it was upper, middle or working class determined what was likely to be needed or saleable in any particular neighborhood. Only rural areas, for example, had barns to be painted, and industrial areas extractor baskets and steam jackets to be retinned. Both residential areas and farms provided markets for the sale of sundry items and for fortune-telling door to door. The nature of the population also mattered; in addition to social class, its ethnic, religious and educational background might make particular goods or services more attractive to it. The Rom, for example, claim that the clientele for fortune-telling comes mainly from the lower classes, immigrants, highly religious or uneducated populations.

The growth and demise of the horse trade are good examples of the largescale changes that affected both the Romnichels and the Travelers. Both groups were preadapted to the horse business by having already pursued horse trading on a smaller scale and by having a good knowledge of the differences in the supply and demand around the country. The ability to respond positively to new opportunities is built into these cultures, but adaptation to the disappearance of a major resource

required more profound adjustments. A combination of supplementary strategies could be counted on to produce subsistence income, but there is no question that hardships were experienced. To make matters worse, many of the earlier strategies such as tinsmithing, umbrella mending or patent medicine sales were rapidly becoming obsolete, superseded by better technology, mass production and tighter government controls. The Irish eased the transition from horse trade to other pursuits by largely restricting their movements to the southern states where the demand for horses and mules continued longer and tapered off more gradually. For many of the Romnichel families there was no buffer, especially since fortune-telling, the one strategy that might have been expanded into a major specialization, had already been successfully co-opted by the Rom.

The Rom experienced a similar though more gradual loss of their specialization in coppersmithing when Monel metal, aluminum and stainless steel began to replace copper in kettles, vats, mixing bowls or industrial equipment. There were, however, several other metalwork related strategies they could branch into, such as furnace and boiler repair, jack rebuilding, shopping cart repair, auto body work and electroplating. The Rom also had always relied more heavily on the women's fortune-telling than the other groups and frequently had used it as their major income producing strategy. As a result their transition into modern times, save perhaps for a few years of the Depression era, was relatively smooth.

Three of the groups have since developed new specializations and again we can note that each did so in its own way, although, as previously noted, overlap and cross-fertilization occurred to some extent. Whether competition, previous preparation or opportunities played a central role in any particular development is a fertile area for research. For the Rom the reason for their virtual monopoly in fortune-telling may be their aggressiveness and the desire by others to avoid conflict, resulting in a form of niche partitioning. Competition between groups is generally rare, at least according to oral evidence, although conflicts between families of the same group are common.

The Irish and the Romnichels are now specialized in a variety of home-repair trades among which asphalt paving and spray painting are the most popular. Mobility remains high for many families, who may live in trailers the year around. The majority, however, own their own homes and exploit the area around their homes. At present the Ludar are the least specialized; some continue in the amusement business, especially on carnivals, and some still carry on the woodworking tradition by crafting lawn furniture which is then peddled door to door. Many families have also taken up asphalt paving and related strategies.

Regardless of their present specialization or favored strategies, each group retains a wide variety of strategies at its disposal to be pressed into use when necessary. Each individual knows several trades and when the skill is usually sufficient to provide flexibility and resiliency to cope with most changes in resource distribution.

The choice of occupational strategy also had implications for the choice of milieus exploited and the kind of dwelling utilized. We have already noted the preference of Romnichels for urban milieus and customers. Although many continued to camp on vacant lots, rent open spaces or camp on the properties of relatives or friends, an increased amount of purchased land that could be used as bases for exploiting particular areas. Many of the lots purchased already had existing buildings on them and were readily utilized as shelter. Romnichels built

substantial dwellings for investment or their own use. Our data do not reveal a preference or pattern for any particular type of shelter. Apparently housing was one of those dimensions of peripatetic existence which was accepted as a "take it as it comes" basis and readily varied to suit the circumstances. Where consecutive census records describing housing are available, the switch from a camping to a housed existence and vice versa appear to occur in roughly equal proportions.

The choice of location was most often decided on the basis of proximity to known or potential resources, although other factors sometimes prevented optimal choice. Both the external factors of the outside society, for example in the form of local law enforcement, or the internal constraints of competing or feuding families, could restrict access to a particular area. True territoriality has emerged only in the case of the Rom who wish to prevent access by others of their groups to their fortune-telling customers. It is also possible that the Romnichel fixed-stable horse business developed some territorial features, but more information is required on the types of constraints operating.

Although we have noted a strong correlation among Romnichels and urban areas, not surprisingly horse traders indicate a somewhat higher incidence of rural stays. Since the markets for their horses were primarily in population centers, the incidental road trade could hardly account for the difference. I believe the explanation must be sought on the supply side of the horse business. Because the horses had to be bought where they were raised, that is, primarily in the rural areas of the south and west, traders would of necessity have to spend some time there procuring their supply. The amount of time horse traders spent in rural environs remains fairly constant at about 33% throughout the horse trading period. The percentage of time spent in camps, however, is not any greater for the horse traders than for the rest of the Romnichel population. Since it was advantageous for the trader to sell his stock in populated areas and from fixed locations, it also made sense to have locally available fixed housing for the duration. Those who owned their sales stables traveled greater distances only during that part of the year, usually in the Spring, that the horses were acquired; any other travel would have been local and, although occasionally mentioned, it is not well represented in the kinds of records used for this study.

Land ownership in itself never was any hindrance to mobility; in fact as camping spaces dwindled it may actually have facilitated movement. Romnichels began purchasing properties within a few years of their arrival in America. Most did not stay on their properties much of the time. Several families owned a number of properties and seem to have used them as a chain of campsites rather than as permanent residences. For the Rom the relationship between population density and viable existence is demonstrably direct. Fortune-telling requires an estimated population of about 10,000 on the average to support one family. Of course some populations may be better, and a smaller number could generate an adequate pool of clients; the locality itself is irrelevant, the quality of the population is not. As noted, the Rom have expressed a clear preference for immigrant or minority lower class clientele who are uneducated, superstitious or otherwise predisposed to believe in the supernatural. More densely settled rural areas, small towns or urban neighborhoods all qualify provided there is no competition.

Mobility itself can be analyzed on different levels such as scale, extent or patterns of movement. On a larger scale there are movements of entire groups, such as the mass migrations, gradual geographical drift or movements of a significant proportion of the population for a specific reason. On a smaller scale

smaller social units moved independently without affecting the configuration of the group as a whole. In the first category belong the migrations of the forefathers of the four groups which brought them to the New World (Salo and Salo 1986). For the Romnichels the next major exodus involved a number of families who spent the Civil War years in Canada, and similarly for the Rom who moved to Mexico as the United States was entering World War I. The Irish Travelers began moving south shortly after the Civil War and the Romnichels have been gradually drifting both south- and westward at least since the turn of the century. The Rom have been moving into cities on a more permanent basis since the Depression. The impetus for some of the moves is obvious; others may require more detailed analysis to pinpoint significant factors. It may be important to distinguish between pushes and pulls -- which moves were undertaken voluntarily and which forced upon the groups by circumstances.

The smaller social units such as individuals, partners, nuclear and extended families or groups of associated families have always moved independently in search of a livelihood. People moved when the demand for particular goods or services were exhausted in a given area or when better prospects were discovered elsewhere. The actual routes taken have been described either in terms of their shapes or the distance covered. Thus Dollé, in speaking of the French Manouche Gypsies, has described their movements as linear, radial, circular or as a combination of these patterns (1980:46-49). Although these patterns can be superimposed on the travel routes of North American groups as well, their significance remains murky. The actual travel from place to place is governed by factors such as the distances between population centers, the availability of campsites, pastures, water and firewood, the reputation of local law enforcement authorities for harassing itinerants or intragroup social and political patterns. The ultimate shapes of the routes could be similar for different reasons or different for the same reasons; the patterns may simply be the result of applying geometry to the existing routes and thus devoid of further significance. Another classification by George Gmelch in his discussion of Romnichel travel into long distance, regional and local also has its counterparts in the travel patterns of American peripatetics. At present it is unknown what environmental, cultural or personal factors account for the variation. Most of the trades, for example, are represented among families utilizing all three travel patterns. We simply do not know what induced some families to travel the length and breadth of the country while others remained within fairly restricted areas. Extensive travel in an even more extreme form is exemplified today by a few clans of international Rom whose itineraries span six continents and may take numerous years to complete.

In most of our data the extended family seems to have been the primary unit of exploitation that worked and traveled together. However, individual life cycle factors also appear to have played a part in who traveled and when. We often find the very aged, as well as the institutionalized, living alone rather than traveling with their families. Information on individual or small group travel is harder to come by, but enough evidence exists to indicate it was not unusual. We have accounts of two Romnichel brothers from Massachusetts on a horse-buying trip in the Midwest without their families; Sinclair, too (1917:8) refers to horse-buying trips by adult males only. Harper also describes Irish Travelers peddling linoleum or spray painting by themselves in the winter, although their families would join them in the summer. Women's independent travel, on the other hand, was limited to their daily door to door peddling fortune-telling trips into towns.

In addition to longer time span influences on travel, such as migrations and life cycle changes might produce, shorter term variations produced by seasonal cycles also play a part in structuring activity sequences. For seasonally exploited needs, as for example the farmers' need for horses for planting or harvesting, travel schedules had to be planned to have stock on hand when the sales would be best. For those relying on fortune-telling as their mainstay, during the summers the schedules of fairs, carnivals or resort areas determined their round of activities. The United States lacked the carefully orchestrated sequences of livestock fairs that influenced the summer schedules of peripatetics in many European countries. Nevertheless, there was some predictability to their movements based on markets. The Irish Travelers, for example, usually began their annual horse trading season by meeting in Atlanta, Nashville or Memphis. At the same time they would bury those members of their group who had died during the year and whose bodies had been shipped ahead to wait for the gathering of the clans in April or May. From there the families would split up, each going its own way. For those families practicing multiresource exploitation, no seasonal patterns have been detected, but this may be simply because we do not know which resources they relied on at any particular time. Certainly rustic furniture sales, asphalt paving and spray painting for example, would have been primarily summer activities, especially in the north. Fortune-telling and peddling, on the other hand, could be done in any season.

The foregoing discussion highlights the range of differences in adaptation over time among the four groups and suggests some reasons for them. In comparing these adaptations we have noted many similarities among them, that seem sufficiently prevalent and pervasive for us to consider them as constant dimensions of their niche. They do not appear to change during the lifetime of the individual, nor over the generations during the period on which we have data. Each group makes its living from the surpluses of its host society that Joseph Berland (1979:3) has termed the "human resource base." All complex societies have gaps in their service delivery, thus leaving some needs either completely unmet or only partly satisfied. The adaptations of peripatetics have, at least in part, evolved to meet these needs. This human resource base is ubiquitous and exploitable with practically an infinite variety of strategies; in fact Berland has called it "the most predictable and reliable of all the niches in the world today" (1979:30). With low overhead, multiresource strategies, flexible work units, family-based enterprises and potential for mobility or change of location, peripatetics are better equipped to ferret out and serve the needs of the marginal clients that the sedentary provider cannot or will not serve (Berland 1979:7). They are also equally ready to exploit concentrated resources from fixed locations whenever they are able either to compete successfully with local providers (Salo and Salo 1982) or side-step such competition, for example by being first to recognize new opportunities and to exploit them intensively before the competition has time to get organized (Lauwagie 1979:332).

The overall approach to resource extraction tends to be a generalist one. Seldom is there a total dependence on a single resource, although various degrees of specialization do occur. Multiresource exploitation remains the prevalent pattern generated by the spatial and temporal fluctuations of the demand for the various goods and services provided by the peripatetics. As noted, this approach calls for flexibility in the choice of procurement strategies, locations, property ownership, work units, degree of travel undertaken and the type of shelter used. The overall adaptation is essentially a foraging one, although resource-rich areas can elicit lengthy stays, property ownership and intensive exploitation as well as emphasis on one resource over others.

All North American peripatetic groups are distinct, endogamous ethnic entities who do their best to perpetuate themselves by maintaining distance from one another as well as from the larger society. Each group sees itself in opposition to the host society and to some extent in competition with the other peripatetics, their ecological equivalents. The social separation is buttressed by a set of interrelated ideas, beliefs, attitudes and related behaviors that Spicer (1971) has called "the oppositional process." Among the Gypsy groups that ethnic boundaries are also guarded by a complex set of pollution taboos (Salo and Salo 1977 and Salo 1979). The oppositional stance allows discriminatory behavior and promotes negative reciprocity, to use Cahllins' term (1968:83). Those outside the group are considered as an exploitable resource, much as hunters might view their prey and pastoralists their herds.

All the groups exist on a band level of social organization. No loyalty or responsibility is felt toward those outside the group and in fact loyalty beyond one's lineage members is observed more often in rhetoric than in practice. The extended family is at the core of the social organization and is the primary economic unit. Within the family role division is primarily by sex, age and special skills. The only group-wide differences in status are those based on wealth, leadership qualities such as oratorical skills and past record of sound judgements and political connections in the outside society. None of these are hereditary or ascribed statuses; for all practical purposes these groups should be considered egalitarian. Each group values its autonomy and strives for as complete an independence as possible in work, housing and social interaction. Entrepreneurial ability is highly valued; a successful peripatetic is one who works only for himself and to support his own family. Wage labor for others is considered demeaning and is engaged in only as a last resort in times of hardship.

A complex interplay of factors such as experiences of past injustices, both real and imagined; prejudice based on physical appearance, dress, language and customs; and ethnocentrism has resulted in continued separation and discrimination by both the peripatetics and the larger society. The peripatetics' strong sense of identity and self-worth distinguishes their ethos from that of many other minorities who have internalized the low opinion of themselves by the majority and feel helpless and dependent as a result.

#### Summary and Conclusions

I began by noting that the existing definitions of the peripatetics' niche did not adequately account for the observed range of adaptational responses made by many if not most of the groups traditionally thought of as "nomads" or "itinerants." My stated goal was to refine the concept of the peripatetics' niche by examining necessary elements, or constants in their adaptations, and those factors more variable, interchangeable or disposable.

The broader framework used includes the socioecological approach, which puts an emphasis on the role of resource procurement in organizing social behavior, and optimal foraging theory which adds the maximization assumption to resource exploitation. Given certain preconditions and simplifying assumptions, the theories predict likely responses that maximize yields and minimize costs for the actors. A preliminary analysis of the applicability of the socioecological approach and the optimal foraging models suggests a very good fit. Not only are the findings consistent with socioecological assumptions, but in many cases the theory seems to

explain and sometimes even predict the outcomes. The overall ecological framework, the specific models and hypotheses, as well as a growing number of comparable studies on hunting, gathering and other foraging populations should provide peripatetic studies some major new tools to improve the quality of our research.

I have noted how each group began with an adaptive repertoire of its own which included both unique strategies and those held in common with other peripatetics. I described how adjustments were made over the short run to the fluctuations of income-generating resources by manipulation of resource choice, emphasis on a single resource or many, work strategies and units, choice of locales, frequency and extent of travel and types of shelter used. I described how the variability of individual, family group and intergroup repertoires provided flexibility and resiliency. The data reveal what kind of adjustments were made on a day to day basis and what longer-term adaptational shifts occurred when lasting changes took place in the availability of the resources the group relied upon. The analysis shows which aspects of the repertoires were retained, modified, discarded or replaced. Although specific adaptive strategies appear interchangeable and were readily varied according to the local conditions, the overall relationship to the socioeconomic resource base remained constant. It is these constant elements in the overall adaptations of the four groups that constitute the most significant parameters of the peripatetics' niche. Typological approaches to peripatetic adaptations which used short-term observations often mistook the variable strategies for salient niche characteristics. Basing classifications on transient phenomena tends to distort reality and cause researchers to overlook other more fundamental and constant dimensions of the peripatetics' adaptations.

A good example of this is the entire nomadic/sedentary dichotomy that ignores the long-term variations in the travel histories of individuals, families and groups. Travel was never continuous, but varied in extent, frequency and constancy, depending on the resources sought and the constraints affecting access to those resources. Nor was sedentism a fixed state; people who had been associated with a particular place, property or fixed abode, could subsequently take to the roads, living in tents and earning their living while traveling. The potential for mobility seems to be built into social and cultural repertoires; its actualization dependent on situational stimuli.

Based on the above analysis of the adaptations of the four groups studied I tentatively propose that the peripatetics' niche consists of ethnically organized, opportunistic exploitation of the human resource base (the surpluses of complex societies). These social resources are ubiquitous, multifarious and virtually inexhaustible although patchy in distribution. The means of their exploitation are flexible, consisting of a wide range of procurement and maintenance strategies, work units and varying degrees of spatial mobility. The groups are characterized by shifting economic relations, ethnic separation and an oppositional stance coupled with an exploitative attitude toward the host society. This adaptation constitutes an unusually stable intergenerational culture pattern which, although it may exhibit an infinite variety of specific strategies utilized, has remained through the centuries virtually unchanged in its overall relationship to the larger society.

The shifting responses sensitive to the resource fluctuations are predicted by the socioecological theory which, we trust, will in time explain much of the variation now observed in the adaptations of these groups, as well as in other foraging lifestyles. What is not explained, however, is why this form of adaptation arose in the first place and why it now exhibits such tenacity. That peripatetics

have been persistent negotiators of the socioeconomic niche for millenia has now been documented by a number of scholars (Childe 1950:3-17; Basham 1959:43; Berland 1982:73). It seems that an overall adaptation that has the flexibility and resiliency for long-term survival, the ability to cross cultural boundaries with ease, and to find a foothold in every complex society on every continent has something to teach us about human adaptability in general and also perhaps something about the nature of the complex societies which provide peripatetics with the resources they need. What is needed now is broader-scale comparative and historical studies of the entire range of peripatetic adaptations under a variety of socioeconomic conditions. My analysis examines peripatetic adaptations in only one society, and for only a little more than a century. Although I suggest that the findings are probably generalizable to most peripatetic groups, they need to be tested against a broader ethnographic and historical record before stronger claims of overall validity can be made.

The foregoing analysis of environmental conditions and social responses has been exploratory and suggestive of lines of inquiry that might be profitably pursued in future research. I concur with Winterhalder's assessment that "detailed, historical environmental analysis is necessary to determine the role of ecological factors in human evolution and adaptation." (1980:135). The implication of this directive for peripatetic studies is towards collection of more specific longitudinal and quantitative data than has been the case in the past. Since peripatetics are in less danger of disappearing, than say many hunting, gathering and pastoralist groups, data on peripatetics could in the future become crucial for testing optimal foraging theory and socioecological hypotheses.

Specific questions about peripatetic adaptations that could be answered by data already available or easily obtainable include the factors responsible for the population distribution, settlement and mobility patterns; their social relationships, for example, connubia, communications and visiting networks; their uses of property, territoriality and monopoly of trades. Competition in various forms needs to be studied as well as political leadership, alliance and other concomitants of economic claims. We need to get a clear picture of what changes, how much, how fast and in which direction, along several dimensions in order to sort out the significant influences from the spurious. Our analysis strongly suggests that much of the observed variation in the adaptations of peripatetic groups is indeed significantly influenced by the pursuit of resources as predicted by socioecological theory.

Because of the focus of socioecological theory on resource privacy I have glossed over many other important influences. I have spoken little of competition, ideology and social organization, not because they are unimportant, but because overall the subsistence activities are in reality the "bottom line" in human adaptation as Durham has aptly stated (1981:230). That the ecological theories work as well as they do is testimony to the general validity of their assumptions and the overall suitability of the approach to the study of foraging adaptations.

#### Notes

1. Although the conclusions put forth by the three authors cited are very similar, only Berland actually used the term "peripatetic." Hayden refers to these groups as "service nomads" and Rao as "non-food-producing nomads." Other

terms applied to peripatetics include "sympiotic nomads" (Misra 1978:2-6), "trader nomads" (Rauber 1982:143) and "commercial nomads" (Acton 1985:5).

2. A quick overview of the sedentist/nomad dispute as it relates to Gypsies can be obtained from the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (1888 - present).
3. Many scholars have written on the logical difficulties of functional and adaptational arguments pointing out how easily they can be rendered circular by careless phrasing. The problem is essentially a semantic one (how to describe reality) but it can easily become a source of intellectual confusion as well unless care is taken to distinguish clearly between one's independent and dependent variables.
4. The author has done field research among the Kaale Gypsies of Finland in 1967 - 68, the Rom, Romnichel and Ludar Gypsies in North America since 1970. The Traveler data used here derive primarily from the ethnographic work of Jared Harper; the historical documentation is from the 1880, 1900 and 1910 US Census record collected by the author.

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