

MANCHESTER  
1824

The University  
of Manchester

[romani] PROJECT

# The Romani Community in Gorton South, Manchester

Yaron Matras

Giuseppe Beluschi Fabeni

Daniele Viktor Leggio

Eliška Vránová

Romani Project

School of Languages, Linguistics & Cultures

The University of Manchester

Manchester M13 9PL

October 2009

## Executive summary

The Romani community in the Gorton South area of Manchester comprises up to 50 mostly related nuclear families, each composed on average of around 7 persons. Most of the families originate from Țândărei in southeastern Romania and belong to the Romani group referred to as *Peptenari* or *Kangliari* (“Comb-makers”). They arrived in Manchester largely in two waves. The first came in 2001-2003 via other western European countries (Germany, France, Italy and Spain). The second, informed and attracted by the first wave, arrived in 2007 directly from Romania or via Spain. They keep close contact with family networks spread across several European cities as well as in Țândărei, and these also function as economic networks. Income is often sent back to Romania to support the elderly generation and other dependents. The parent generation living in Manchester are typically in their early 30s and have only a low level of formal education and in many cases only very basic reading and writing skills (in Romanian). Most have work experience as manual labourers. The community relies on benefits and occasional work such as selling newspapers (Big Issue), though some are engaged in other trades. Children generally attend the local primary school. Regular school attendance is an aspiration but in the absence of educated role models, immediate family activities are often allowed to take priority. Most members of the community are of Christian Orthodox background but are now followers of a Romani Pentecostal church, which is the main community forum. However, there is no evidence that the church plays any significant role in the day to day social organisation of the community beyond religious affairs. There is no apparent community leadership structure, and nuclear families function as autonomous units within a tight-knit network of related households. Members of the community generally have a positive view of their present living conditions and future prospects in Manchester and they intend to stay. Overall, their network of mutual support gives the community a feeling of confidence. They have access to health care and their access to casual work opportunities, social benefits, and education generally meets their level of expectation. Articulated short-term needs include more employment opportunities and easier and more transparent access to social services and school places. Members of the younger age groups between 17-25 express some interest in regular employment, but in the absence of role models or contacts outside the community they generally lack clear ambitions or expectations regarding career prospects. These characteristics highlight the importance of an effective engagement strategy. Suggested options are outlined in more detail at the end of this report in the section “Towards an engagement strategy”.

## **Background**

A noticeable number of Romani children have been admitted to local schools in the Gorton area over the past two years. Gorton Mount Primary School approached the Romani Project at the University of Manchester in May of 2008 and asked for advice on the cultural and social background of Roma. This led to a series of meetings with school staff as well as to meetings with Romani parents, who welcomed the initiative to enlighten teachers about the cultural background of Romani pupils. A former member of the Romani Project team was assigned to the school as part of a PGCE work placement scheme toward the end of 2008 and became a full member of the school staff in 2009. By the end of the school year 2008-2009 it was reported that Gorton Mount School had taken on around 60 pupils of Romani origin, mostly from Romania. At the same time it was reported that some other schools in the area had adopted a policy of refusing to offer school places to children of Romani background, although it is difficult to establish evidence for this.

We understand that during 2009, Manchester City Council received complaints from local residents alleging anti-social behaviour on the part of Roma. It appears that these complaints centred mostly on the fact that Romani people tend to congregate for long hours on street corners; in other words, it was the mere visibility of the Roma that triggered the complaints. In addition, there appear to have been complaints about littering. As far as we are aware, no arrests or convictions resulted from these complaints, nor were any anti-social behaviour orders issued against Roma, although there are, reportedly, several addresses under investigation. The complaints remain a subjective reaction on the part of some members of the community to the presence of Roma. Parallel to these local complaints, press reports beginning in January 2008 alleged that a ring of child-traffickers based within the Romani community of Țăndărei in Romania was operating in the UK. It appears that these reports came to the attention of the authorities in Manchester.

We are also informed that an officers' working group was formed, which met on a regular basis to discuss the impact of the Romani community in the Hemmons Road neighbourhood. No members of the Romani community were involved in these discussions. Indirect communication channels were set up via Gorton Mount School, the International New Arrivals Unit, staff at a local community centre that provided meeting facilities for the Romani Pentecostal

Church congregation, as well as police officers assigned to local duties. The lead author of this report was contacted on behalf of this working group in July 2009 and asked to advise on the possibility of setting up a more direct and regular communication channel with the Romani community as well as on a possible long-term engagement strategy.

The lead author is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Manchester and coordinator of the Romani Project. He has authored official reports and position papers for the Council of Europe on post-1990 Romani migrations in Europe, on the immigration of Czech and Slovak Roma to the UK in 1998, and on the status of the Romani language in Europe, and participated in the Council of Europe's working party for a European Language Curriculum Framework for Romani. The Romani Project at the School of Languages, Linguistics & Cultures has existed since 1999 and has received external research grants in excess of one million pounds from UK and international research funding councils, from UK government departments, and from NGOs for the study of Romani language and culture and the development of audio-visual teaching and learning resources on Romani. The project accommodates several research students and a semester-long undergraduate course unit on Romani linguistics attracts between 70-90 students annually.

### **Remit and scope of the present survey**

The survey team was set the following goals:

- On the basis of interviews with a representative sample of households, to try and draw a general profile of the local Romani community, its origins and motivation to immigrate to the UK, its age and occupation profile, and its aspirations.
- To identify and to highlight significant issues that appear to be of concern to the Romani population and which might be resolved through intervention on the part of local authorities.
- To identify individuals with a potential leadership or mediation role, either deriving from an existing position of authority within the community or else from personal aptitude and motivation, and to consider ways in which these individuals might be involved in discussions surrounding the general situation and the future of their community.

The survey focused on the area between Stockport Road and Mount Road, and between Crowcroft Park and immediately adjoining areas (including Northmoor Road and side streets) and Barlow Road. The team was given a time frame of twelve days to gather information in the neighbourhood and a subsequent period of three to four weeks to transcribe and assess the interviews, evaluate the questionnaire data, and review and evaluate notes from general observations before submitting its report.

### **Method and facilitating factors**

For the purpose of carrying out the survey, the project engaged a team of three research assistants all of whom have a good knowledge of the Romani language, are closely familiar with Romani traditions and culture, and have experience in carrying out both linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork in Romani communities in and from eastern Europe. The research assistants are listed as co-authors of this report. The project team designed a questionnaire covering key issues of interest to Manchester City Council. The questionnaire focused on the composition of households and the background and activities of their members. This served as a guide toward structuring oral interviews in Romani with individual representatives of Romani households in the neighbourhood. Individuals interviewed were encouraged to engage in conversation beyond the pre-structured questionnaire. These more spontaneous parts of the interview took on the form of typical ethnographic interviews in which participants are encouraged to discuss their family and community, social roles and conventions and so on, and they became instrumental in gaining further insights about the background of the community and its social organisation structure. Wherever possible a digital recording of the interview was carried out. Information relevant to the questionnaire was extracted and plotted on spreadsheets for comparison and evaluation. In a number of cases, community members were willing to engage in conversation about their community and family but reluctant to be recorded; where possible, notes were taken after the conversation and the information included in the spreadsheets.

Our method was to approach in the first instance families whose acquaintance we had made before the start of the survey, and then to rely on the

‘snowball effect’, that is, to be referred from one family to another. After the first day or two our presence in the neighbourhood became known to most households and we were able to approach individuals on the street and to get references from them to individual addresses of Romani families in the neighbourhood. We deliberately avoided working with lists of households produced by any of the local services, for fear of being seen as operating with a brief to report on the activities of specified individuals.

The approach was facilitated through a series of informal encounters in the immediate two-week period preceding the survey, during which the lead author met with individuals from the community and explained the Council’s interest in setting up a dialogue with the community and in learning more about its needs and aspirations, and announced that visits would take place to give families an opportunity to put their views and relevant information on record, which would then be summarised in a report to the Council. These encounters triggered mixed reactions, though the overwhelming attitude was positive. Earlier encounters with some individuals in the context of Gorton Mount School, the involvement of staff from Gorton Mount School in the talks in preparation of the survey, as well as the fact that two of the families had met the lead author in connection with the activities of a Romani NGO in Germany in the early 1990s, were instrumental in creating an atmosphere of trust. An additional motivating factor appeared to be the hope on the part of several individuals that cooperation with the survey might open the possibility of some part-time employment, both short term (on the survey itself) and longer term. Most Romani residents in the neighbourhood were welcoming and happy to cooperate with the project team, which enabled the survey to meet its targets successfully.

### **Impeding factors**

Despite some preparation work and several supporting factors, the survey also faced a series of impediments. For a start, any vulnerable population is naturally suspicious of outsiders arriving at their homes to ask questions about personal details which are then recorded and passed on to others. The traditional experience of alienation and marginalisation of Roma merely adds to this natural attitude, which regards enquiries of this kind as intrusive. In our particular case there was no short-term benefit to participating in the survey and in the absence

of any experience in engaging with local authorities, there was scepticism with regard to any prospect of longer-term benefit. In this respect, higher-key preparations by the Council might have contributed but are unlikely to have offered any guarantee for increased cooperation. Our position as mediators, in a way, between the Roma and the local authorities in fact triggered suspicion among some members of the community in the first place. The limited resources and the short period during which particular information had to be obtained meant that we had to rely on the technique of a pre-structured interview, which is perceived as more intrusive. Ideally, data on community structures and socio-economic activities is gathered over a prolonged period of participant observation through more casual, spontaneous conversation, during repeated visits to the same households and through regular participation in community events.

Much importance is given in Romani culture to 'invisibility', at several levels. Toward non-Roma, 'invisibility' protects Roma from being singled out as a menace or public nuisance. Roma are thus accustomed not to draw attention to themselves and if approached, to avoid engaging in any interaction that might prove to be harmful to their interests. At the more internal level, 'invisibility' is a means of evading responsibility as well as a means of conflict-avoidance. Against this background, as soon as some individuals expressed scepticism toward our work others who had been welcoming at first turned their backs on us and were not willing either to defend the survey, or to be seen to be participating in it. We were told by several Roma that they would have gladly participated but would not let us into their homes in clear view of a group of Romani men who were standing on the street corner. As an alternative, some Roma referred us to the clergy of the Pentecostal church, suggesting that their approval would strengthen our position. In fact, two of the meetings in preparation of the survey involved members of the clergy; one was with the local Preacher. Both persons were supportive of the idea. However, when we visited the Church service on a Sunday afternoon, accompanied by a member of the City Council's Regeneration Team, at the invitation of some of the Roma in order to explain the purpose of the survey, some of the clergy took on a hostile attitude and refused to let us speak at the meeting. We attributed this to a fear that our intervention in the community might lead to the formation of some kind of community institution that would be seen by the church leadership as competing with their own activities. We base this interpretation on the words of one of the men who took

on a hostile attitude, and who compared us to the founders of foreign-sponsored NGOs which in recent years have been active among Roma in Romania.

Some hurdles arose from the plain fact that Romani culture is generally characterised by a spontaneous daily agenda that is sensitive in the first instance to the immediate needs of individual members of the household rather than to the expectations of any outsiders or external institutions. Thus, interviews that had been scheduled for the following day were often cancelled at short notice, and individuals who had promised to assist often failed to appear at the agreed time and place.

Coordination work by the Regeneration Team in the days preceding the survey succeeded in preventing interference through parallel activities of the Council and the Police in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, on the first day of the survey, staff from the International New Arrivals Team appeared in the neighbourhood, targeting Romani households where it was believed there were children missing education. Many Roma associated their appearance with our survey, since we had notified some families of our intention to begin the survey on that day. The presence of the Manchester Advice trailer hired by the New Arrivals Team was in turn regarded as an opportunity to clarify queries regarding benefits of various kinds. Roma appeared at the trailer equipped with their documents, only to find out that no interpreter was present, and that our team in fact had no connection to the trailer, and concluding from this that they had been misled both by the New Arrivals Team who had called on them to approach the trailer earlier that morning, and by us, who had announced the Council's intention to engage more directly with the local Roma. Anger was targeted at us, who remained present in the neighbourhood, and this quickly turned into reluctance to participate in the survey and active discouragement of others to engage with us. It took several days for this anger to subside, during which time we were able to work with just a limited number of households.

Finally, it is possible that some of the suspicions derived from reports in the media, which had targeted the Roma of Țăndărei accusing them of involvement in organised criminal activities. These reports have a long history. But the most recent appeared in the Sunday Times on 23 August 2009, just a week before our survey, triggered by a press interview given by the Metropolitan Police and targeting specifically the Roma from Țăndărei living in England. The article was released in conjunction with a news item in a Romanian newspaper, which was then replicated throughout the Romanian press in the days preceding

our approach to the neighbourhood. There is no doubt that many Roma in Țândărei itself became aware of these reports and their origin in UK police reports, and there is little doubt that talk of these reports was shared with family members living abroad, especially in England. In line with ‘invisibility’, politeness and conflict-avoidance rules, these reports were not mentioned to us by anyone from the community and we are unable to assess whether they had any direct impact on individuals’ willingness to trust our initiative. We were not, in fact, aware of the published reports until several days after we began the survey.

### **The sample**

Our goal was to interview as many of the adult Romani residents as possible and to obtain a full or near-full questionnaire record from a sufficient number of households to allow us some generalisations regarding the basic data that are of interest. The sample therefore combines a quantitative analysis, obtained by assessing the responses to the full questionnaire, with a qualitative analysis, obtained by evaluating all the information received through conversations with residents and observations during the twelve days spent in the neighbourhood. Altogether, 29 individual households were approached. Of those, 5 were reluctant to carry out a full interview but the approach itself yielded relevant information on some areas of interest which we have been able to take into account. Our quantitative survey can thus rely on data from over 20 households for most questions. In addition, we rely on fieldnotes from observation (having spent many hours during the survey period in informal conversation with Roma on the pavement, at the local schools, in the park as well as in their homes), on indirect information given by some Roma about other households, and on spontaneous narratives that we recorded. The households approached are on Agnes Street, Stovell Avenue, Longden Road, Maida Street, Mathews Lane, Charlton Road, Drury Street, Grasmere Street, Hemmons Road, Hornbeam Road, Patey Street, as well as one on Albert Road, west of Stockport Road. Most addresses have been recorded. A number of interviews were carried out on the street or in the house of neighbours and we have been unable to verify the precise residential address beyond the name of the street.

## **Demographics**

Based on our conversations with the Romani residents, our approaches to individuals to obtain interviews, and on our general observations during the twelve-day period of fieldwork and the preparation period, we estimate that there are around 40-50 Romani households in the area. This number is well in line with the number of Romani children enrolled in Gorton Mount Primary School (around 60), allowing for the possibility that there is a small number of children of primary school age who are not actually enrolled, and that some younger couples do not yet have children of school age. Our estimate is also confirmed by our observation on the number of persons attending church services and the residents' reports that almost all families belong to the local Romani Pentecostal church, while we know that younger people (aged 17-25) show lower church attendance, and that women are prohibited from attending church in the weeks immediately following childbirth. This means that our survey of individual households covers a representative proportion of the actual number of Romani residents in the area, which we estimate is somewhere between 280-350.

Overall, the group that may be considered the parent generation in the community consists of men and women in their 30s, with an average number of 5 children per household/couple, hence an average number of 7 persons per individual household. The age of children ranges from several months (and in a couple of cases several weeks) to the early 20s in the case of parents in their late 30s. There are a few couples in their 20s, with children aged up to 2 years. Among couples, the average age of men is 34, only slightly older than that of women, which is 32, while the average age of mothers at the birth of their first child is between 18-19. The average age of children is 8. The most common co-residential group (persons sharing a household) thus consists of parents aged between 20-40 and their children between the ages of 0-20. There are very few cases of three generations co-residing in the same household. We encountered only one single mono-parental household (a 33-year old mother with her 8 children). Table 1 provides an estimate, based on the sample data, of the population by age groups. As can be seen, we are dealing with a very young population, with almost 50% under the age of 12 (compared to around 15% for Greater Manchester as a whole, according to the 2001 census), and over 90% under the age of 40 (compared with 55% for Greater Manchester as a whole).

Table 1: Romani population in Gorton South by age group

Age Group	Number of individuals surveyed	Percentage
0-4	23	23.47
5-12	25	25.51
13-19	13	13.27
20-29	10	10.20
30-39	21	21.43
40-49	4	4.08
50-59	2	2.04
Total	98	100.00

The absence of elderly people in the community can be explained in several ways. Firstly, the overall life expectancy of Roma in Romania is with 63-64 significantly lower than that of the national average, which is just over 70 (cf. United Nations Development Programme report on 'The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the dependency trap', 2002, ISBN: 92-1-126153-8). The age of marriages is significantly younger, and individuals in their 50s are always grandparents and sometimes even great-grandparents and nearing the end of their working life. Their chances of finding a source of income and adapting in a foreign country are regarded as low. In cases where the family has kept a house in Romania and has not sold it in order to finance their emigration, it is necessary for the elderly to remain in that house as caretakers and in order to maintain the family's presence in the network of social contacts of the local Romani community. We have also heard statements indicating that Roma fear a situation where an elderly parent should die in England and the family would have difficulties meeting the expense of sending the body to Romania for burial. It appears that burial in England is ruled out due to a fear that the authorities might impose on the family to have the body cremated, which strongly conflicts with Romani traditions. This attitude also serves to illustrate the degree of social isolation and ignorance of community and institutional practices in England.

## Origin and migrations

Almost all members of the Romani population in the neighbourhood originate in the city of Țândărei or its vicinity, in the Romanian province of Ialomița, roughly half-way between Constanța on the Black Sea coast and Bucharest. They belong to the Romani group referred to in Romani as *Kangliari* (in Romanian as *Peptenari*), both meaning ‘Comb-makers’. Like the name of most Romani groups in Romania and the Balkans, this name derives in all likelihood from the traditional occupation of their forefathers, probably during the period of serfdom before the mid-nineteenth century. Profession names have been retained since by Romani groups in the region irrespective of subsequent changes in the occupation profile (though in many cases traditional occupations reflected in the group label continue to be practised until this very day, or until one or two generations ago, as in the case of Drill-makers, Kettle-makers, Silversmiths, and others). The contemporary group to which the name refers is bound together by kinship and commercial ties among related clans, by shared values and traditions pertaining to celebrations, dress code, and associations with other Romani groups, and by a shared dialect of Romani. The group is sub-divided into clans, which are kinship units bound by frequent intermarriage and identifiable common ancestry, and these in turn are made up of extended households each comprising nuclear families who share a living ancestor or family head (i.e. siblings or cousins and their children and grandchildren, and more rarely second-cousins and their children and grandchildren). Apart from two of the households encountered, all speak Romani in a dialect that might be classified as belonging to what is known as the ‘Southern Vlax’ dialects of Romani, which are spoken by geographically dispersed communities all over the southern Balkans, but also within a geographical continuum of Romani communities in southern Romania, Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, and Bosnia. There is some linguistic evidence of intermarriage with Bulgarian and Serbian Roma in past generations, but this remains inconclusive. The families themselves do not seem to have any recollection of such contacts and these may go back many generations.

Although the group has its territorial centre in and around Țândărei, like most other Romani populations of southeastern Europe it does not define itself in relation to territoriality but rather as a network of social and economic contacts which may cover considerable distances. Some of the families in Gorton South in

fact come from Fetești, and one from Slobozie, both just a short distance from Țândărei. It appears that rapid and significant socio-economic changes after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in 1990 led to economic gaps and thus to conflicts between family networks. Following a strategy that is common among Romani communities throughout Europe, an end was put to family feuds by one of the conflicting parties leaving the town and moving to a nearby location. This happened on several occasions and led to the geographical split-up of the Țândărei Romani community. Nevertheless, the awareness of being just one single community remains, and individuals maintain close relations with other families belonging to the same group across the Țândărei region. This model, it appears, is being adopted now in relation to the various diaspora communities of Țândărei Roma outside of Romania.

One single household, comprising three generations, originates in Timișoara in the Banat region of southwestern Romania and belongs to the Romani group known as *Kelderașa* or ‘Tinnners’. They speak a so-called ‘Northern Vlax’ Romani dialect, closer to the Romani varieties of Transylvania. Though distinct, it is fully mutually intelligible with the dialect of the *Kangliari* of Țândărei. The *Kelderașa* regard themselves as somewhat superior in maintaining traditions and what they regard as ‘honour’, which can be explained partly through the persistence of semi-nomadic traditions among their group until very recently, leading both to a more conservative and traditional lifestyle and to greater dependency on, and so also an intense feeling of loyalty and pride in remote networking with related kin, as well as through their continued specialisation in trade and traditional crafts. They regard the *Kangliari*, who have been settled for many generations, as people who have given up many of their Romani traditions and who rely on handouts from the majority population. From this perspective, both street begging in the literal sense and the search for casual employment in the service of non-Roma are regarded as ‘handouts’, for they indicate a dependency on the majority population. By contrast, the *Kelderașa* view themselves as professionals specialising in commerce and crafts, to whom the majority population turn as clients, which in their eyes constitutes a more advantageous, privileged position. The family in question report on the presence of other *Kelderașa* from the Timișoara region in other parts of Greater Manchester. The reason they decided to settle in Gorton South was their affiliation to the Pentecostal church and their wish to be close to one of its Romani congregations.

The *Kangliari* Roma appear to have settled in and around Țândărei many generations ago, and gradually gave up whatever traditional crafts that had been characteristic of their group. These were replaced by an economy of unskilled manual labour, which was predominant among during the Ceaușescu era at the very latest and in all likelihood even earlier. Some of the people interviewed, who are old enough to have worked in Romania during the Ceaușescu era, reported on working at a local brick factory and others in similar industries. In the early 1990s Roma suffered high unemployment in the aftermath of the collapse of the state-run economy and increasing discrimination in the private labour market. Romani men in employment age turned to work for local authorities in the refuse disposal sector or as occasional street sweepers, construction workers, cleaners, or as peddlers, while women typically worked in housekeeping or as cleaners in the catering industry. Individuals now aged 35 and over are able to report on such employment patterns post-1990 from personal experience.

The weakening economic situation after 1990, discrimination on the now open (and no longer state-run) job market, increasing dependency on a family-based informal fringe economy such as dealing in scrap-metal and other industrial waste products or in grey market goods, and the overt hostility that such activities (coupled with a history of prejudice) triggered on the part of the majority ethnic Romanian population – all these created push-factors that motivated Roma to leave Țândărei. The opening of borders and opportunities to set up a basic residential infrastructure by applying for political asylum created pull factors that attracted Romani emigrants in the first instance to Germany between 1990-1993. The asylum procedure provided applicants at that time with free accommodation and health care, a basic income, in some regions access to school and so opportunities for children to learn the language (which in turn was regarded as a useful skill to help the family negotiate with institutions as well as for informal economic activities) and opportunities to engage in an informal economy, whether as low-wage labourers or in trade, e.g. through unregistered market stalls. The wholesale rejection of asylum applications of Romanian Roma and the tightening of both border and entry regulation and expulsion procedures, and ultimately the denial of access to the asylum procedure to all those originating in European countries, led Roma to return to Țândărei. Several families in Gorton South were part of this wave of emigration to Germany and

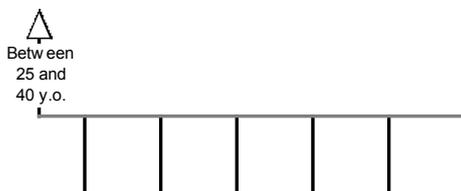
spent several years in Hamburg as asylum seekers, returning to Romania in or shortly after 1993.

With push factors continuing to provide a motivation to leave, Roma began searching for new destinations. Large urban settings in communities in which Romanian Roma would enjoy relative invisibility attracted more entrepreneurial individuals to set up a base in places like Milan, Madrid, London and Birmingham and this created new pull factors for family members back in Țândărei. It is in this context that the first Romani families from Țândărei settled in Manchester in 2001-2003. A second wave of arrivals can be identified beginning in 2007. We can assume that free movement thanks to Romania's EU accession created a pull factor both from Romania and from other European countries for those families who already had relatives in Manchester but had difficulties arranging entry into the country before.

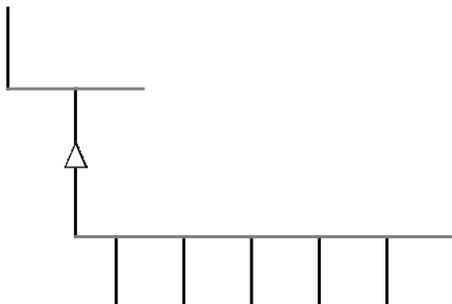
Many of the Romani families now resident in Gorton South arrived during 2007-2008 from Spain, having lived there since 1997-1998 or later. In Spain they engaged in seasonal jobs such as day labourers harvesting oranges, or in the building sector as workers with a low level of specialisation. Most of them worked without any formal job contracts, lived in makeshift accommodation, and combined paid employment with begging and playing music in the streets. The economic crisis in the building sector in Spain, combined with other hardships such as the accommodation conditions and overt and partly violent hostilities on the part of authorities and the local population, created a push factor that led some families to seek an alternative destination. It is likely that their move to Manchester was also motivated by two further pull factors, the first being reports from Roma who settled here about their overall satisfaction with life in Manchester and the absence, by and large, of conflict with either authorities or local residents, access to health care and relatively easy access to high-quality accommodation, coupled with the ability to earn a living through a combination of benefits and occasional employment. An additional pull factor may have been the establishment of a well-organised Romani Pentecostal congregation and the promise of support from its clergy of officers, who have a network of contacts with other Pentecostal congregations, including those run by English Gypsies, and so in all likelihood also access to occasional employment opportunities.

## Relations and family networks

Since Romani society is organised around kinship groups and the family network is the core structure of socio-economic organisation, Romani migrations are generally migrations of extended households or family networks. Most of the adult individuals interviewed by us have siblings living in Gorton South. Among the parent generation there are also a few cases of second level relations (cousins) living locally. Family networks generally comprise the nuclear families of two or three brothers. Occasionally the network may extend to include brothers-in law and their nuclear families. Nuclear families live in rented 3-4 bedroom houses, which are generally in good condition. Nuclear families belonging to a family network typically aim at renting houses in the same or an adjoining street. When new families arrive who are part of the network, a need sometimes arises to re-configure the residence arrangements. It is not unusual for families to then move to another home within the neighbourhood. There are several types of co-residential households (i.e. where individuals who are related share living quarters). In the first and most common type, a male head of the household, typically between 25-40 years of age, shares a house with his children and wife:



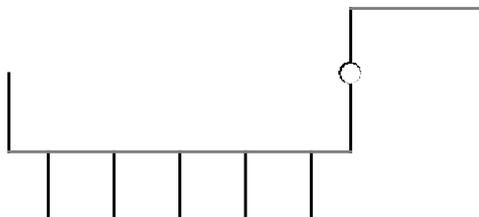
In the second type, the household may also include the parents of the male head of the household, thus three generation will live together:



A less common pattern is for a single-parent female to head of the household, and to live alone with her children:



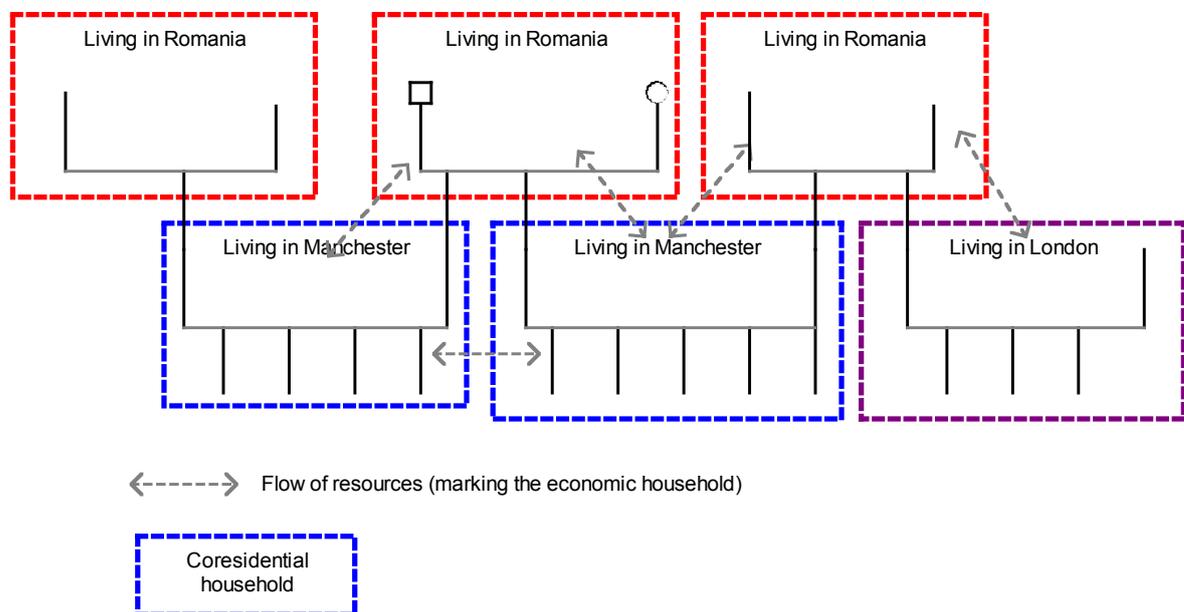
Alternatively, a household may include the parents or an unmarried sibling of the wife:



From an economic point of view we can identify a different kind of household that doesn't necessary coincide with the co-residential one. An 'economic household' is the unit within which resources are shared in order to ensure the survival of all members. As in the case of other migrant populations, the economic households of the Roma of Gorton are spread between Manchester, other diaspora communities, and the region of origin in Romania. Most of the Romani residents have elderly parents who are still living in Romania. They depend economically on pensions (perceived as low by the people we spoke to) and on remittances from Manchester and other cities where relatives are living. Networks of family ties are located in 'colonies' or 'diasporas' in various European cities, which appear to have existed at least for the past decade and possibly even since the mid-1990s. A map of the Țândărei 'diaspora' offered by the people we consulted includes Madrid, Milan, and Rome, in all of which the Roma live in makeshift camps in the outskirts of the towns, as well as Paris, London, and Birmingham. Some also report on family relations in Ireland, USA and Canada. We have also heard reports and on migrations to Argentina and Brasil in 1997, though it is claimed that all those who went there returned to

Țăndărei in 2001. Currently, Birmingham and London appear first on the list of towns identified by Romani residents of Gorton as places where ‘their Roma’ now live.

Thus, in the local context, several co-residential units in Gorton South will together constitute a tight-knit economic household, sharing not just income and major expenditures but also household utensils, food, and information on outside connections (such as staff at school or services who are willing to help) and procedures (such as welfare benefits). Such information is only shared with outsiders, even Romani neighbours, in exchange for money or a favour deemed to be of equivalent value. Within the larger, international or ‘diasporic’ economic household, resources are shared in order to support elderly relatives back in Romania or on special occasions such as weddings, the purchase of a house or clearing of debts incurred by one of the members, and information is shared about sources of income and accommodation, potentially leading nuclear families that form part of the economic household to re-locate from one diasporic ‘colony’ to another. Other members of the economic household can thus be parents or siblings of one of the parents, living either in Romania or in one of the diaspora colonies:



## **Education and skills**

The community shows some significant differences in education background. Those aged 35 and over have usually completed around 8 years of school in Romania prior to the regime change in 1990. They have very basic reading and writing skills in Romanian, though they very seldom engage in reading or writing. By contrast, young adults up to the age of 26 who have experienced frequent change of residence place and country, may not have been schooled at all or only intermittently, in different countries and in different languages. In practice, then, the entire adult community has only basic or may even lack reading and writing skills. Nor were we able to identify adults with IT skills. Some of the teenagers claimed to frequent a local internet café. They engage primarily in playing online games and downloading Romanian music, which for them represents an important product of cultural consumption which also contributes toward maintaining a symbolic relation with Romania. This helps to develop some skills in web navigation, but beside this, they are not involved in any activity that requires text editing of any kind. Children between the ages of 5 and 13 appear to have various levels of familiarity with English. The only language used in the home is Romani. Parents and young adults have a firm command of Romanian, too (note that Romanian is not at all related to Romani, and the similarity in names is purely coincidental; Romani is related to the Indo-Aryan languages like Punjabi and Gujarati, while Romanian is related to Romance languages like Italian, French and Portuguese). Adults who spent time in Spain also have some knowledge of Spanish, and a few individuals have very basic knowledge of French or German. Older children typically speak Romani, Romanian, Spanish and basic English (some also know some French or German), while the younger children speak Romani and English. Very few adults have more than just a very basic knowledge of English. Aside from one individual who works as a painter and decorator and another who had worked as a welder in Romania, we have not been able to identify any individuals with any vocational training or specialised work experience.

## **Religion, community institutions and leadership**

The great majority of the Romani community currently belongs to a Pentecostal Church run by Romanian Roma, which is part of a network of such congregations operating among the Romanian Roma in Romania and in the 'diaspora' communities. The community appears to have converted to Pentecostalism some 15 years ago, with the rise of new evangelical movements among the Roma throughout the Balkans, in particular, but also in other parts of Europe including the UK. It is not clear whether the local clergy or church officers have any direct links to the Light & Life Mission, which is the largest Pentecostal movement among English Gypsies. We are aware of such links between Light & Life and other Pentecostal congregations of Romanian Roma elsewhere in England, as well as of attempts by Light & Life in 2001-2003 to organise regular services in Romani for Romani immigrants from eastern Europe in the Greater Manchester area, which at that time also attracted a number of Romanian Romani families. Before converting to Pentecostalism, the community followed the Orthodox Christian faith, though their connection with the church as an institution was rather loose and usually limited to basic ceremonies such as Christenings and Burials.

Several factors make the Pentecostal church more attractive to Roma. Firstly, its doctrine of faith is based on an emotional experience of spirituality rather than on either a rational acceptance of the textual message of the Bible or the acceptance of the authority of the priesthood as messengers. Next, the Pentecostal church offers Roma a segregated space in which Romani traditions are integrated and interwoven with Christian symbolism, and where their Romani identity is not just tolerated but indeed celebrated by a clergy that is itself of Romani origin and part of the community. This is a sharp contrast to the mainstream churches, which are invariably run by members of the majority ethnicity and where Roma are at most a tolerated minority. The conversion to Pentecostalism carried with it the abandonment of key Orthodox traditions such as the procedure of funerals and mourning, which represents a key change in cultural traditions.

Some of the people we interviewed regard Pentecostal norms of behaviour as a way to be accepted by the majority society, since the church promotes a taboo on any form of antisocial behaviour, including the consumption of alcohol. Religious affiliation is also seen as a way of maintaining invisibility

and avoiding conflicts within the neighbourhood. In the words of one of our interviewees: *I'm religious, I'm Pentecostal. I don't want to be a vagabond and walk around in the park. I want to have a job. I don't want to drink alcohol. I don't want them to think about me that I am one of those people who drink and create problems. I would like you [the team of Gorton Survey] to say to the Council that here there are people who want to work [...].*

As indicated above, whereas the mainstream churches (in Romania, the Orthodox church) often regarded the Roma's persistent maintenance of their own non-Christian traditions with suspicion and as proof that the Roma's acceptance of Christianity was not sincere, Pentecostalism allows Roma to integrate old traditions – both those that are specifically *Romani*, and some that are Orthodox – into the framework of the church. Norms on purity of the body, especially those concerned with birth and female sexuality, traditionally related to the Romani concept of *mahrime* and attested among many Romani groups, are reintroduced in the form of a prohibition on women to attend church during their menstruation period and in the first few weeks after childbirth.

The church does not seem to interfere with marriage choices or with the non-religious way in which marriages are celebrated. Marriages allow Roma to establish political alliances among families. Usually, partners are chosen from within the *Kangliari* community of the Țândărei region and its diasporas abroad. Marriage may be accompanied by the payment of bride wealth, a sum of money that the family of the groom pay to the family of the bride. According to some accounts, there was an inflation in bride wealth sums following the political transition in 1990. This might be regarded as an indication of a process of social stratification. As a result, some families abandoned the practice of bride wealth altogether, while other members of the Gorton community continue the practice. In any case, there is no involvement of any religious officer in the marriage procedure, a Romani tradition that is frowned upon by the Orthodox church, but is fully accepted by the Pentecostal priesthood.

An almost anecdotal indication of the extent of freedom afforded by the Pentecostal church to its members is the popularity of rugs depicting the Kaaba and central mosque in Mecca and accompanied by Arabic verses from the Quran, which many Romani families in Gorton hang in their sitting rooms as wall decorations. In our first encounters with these artefacts and before we learned about the community's Christian Orthodox past, we assumed that they represented an origin in the Muslim Romani community in the Romanian

Dobrudja region on the Black Sea coast. However, it appears that the rugs are purchased in the nearby Muslim markets in Longsight and Levenshulme, and have simply become fashionable, irrespective of the religious content of the depiction.

Outsiders often expect Roma to have a strict leadership hierarchy and often seek to identify Romani leaders who are authorised to negotiate on behalf of the community. This attitude has its roots in several conceptions and misconceptions of Romani society. In many fictional sources, Romani communities are pictured as a kind of primordial society where group-internal loyalty and an imagined 'code of honour' override personal interests and aspirations; such societies are in turn imagined as tribal, answering to a strong and powerful leader. The Roma, for their part, have often promoted such an image of themselves, identifying several benefits: First, these images can provide a source of income. Travelling Romani communities had often orchestrated, and in some regions continue to do so, huge gatherings that were announced as coronation ceremonies of the Romani 'King', selling entry tickets to outsiders to what was nothing but a roadshow that repeated itself in numerous locations. Second, diverting responsibility to an identified individual is part of the 'invisibility' strategies that allows the majority of Roma in the community to avoid contacts with outsiders and especially to avoid being seen as taking responsibility for any negotiations, or indeed as assuming responsibility for the behaviour of fellow Roma. The one person who is singled out as a 'King' or 'Judge' is then expected merely to report on any approach made to him by outsiders, but is not in any way held accountable for any undertakings given seemingly on behalf of the community. In short, pretending to meet the expectations of outsiders is a strategy from which Roma can benefit, both economically and in order to be left unchallenged and undisturbed by the majority and its institutions.

In actual fact, Romani communities show a code of loyalty to the immediate kin group, and the principal person of authority is the head of each and every household. There are no community institutions or individuals that are entrusted with regulating individuals' lives or norms or to speak on behalf of units beyond the level of the individual household. The only procedures that may to some extent have a regulatory effect on people's lives are those related to mediation between Roma and non-Roma (Gadje), and those that pertain to internal conflict resolution. In traditional communities, individuals who had

managed to establish a network of personal contacts with persons in influential positions in trade and local authorities used these positions to provide mediation services to other Roma in exchange for payment or favours of various kind. In Romania, this kind of role of a Romani mediator with authorities was traditionally known as *Bulibaşa*. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Roma were subjected to slavery and serfdom in the Romanian principalities of Walachia and Moldova, and were sold and bought in markets regulated by the state. Some Romani groups, however, had an itinerant economy, sub-divided into professional skills, producing tools or offering services to the local population. These groups had somewhat greater freedom of movement, but also the obligation to pay an annual tax to the regional Nobleman or Prince (known as *Voivod*). The *Bulibaşa* was a mediator between the state and various itinerant Romani groups in a given region, with the responsibility to mediate between the Roma and local market officials, to collect the annual tax for the Voivod, as well as to resolve any conflicts arising between the groups under his watch.

In later periods, following the abolition of slavery and well throughout the twentieth century, the *Bulibaşa*'s effectiveness in solving problems was as strong as his ability to offer bribes to local officials and their willingness to accept them in return for favours to the *Bulibaşa*'s clients. The role of the *Bulibaşa* still exists in Romanian towns and elsewhere in eastern Europe. On a much more modest scale and in an adapted form, a system of mediation is widespread in Romani communities. We found examples among the Roma in Gorton South as well: A Romani person who appears to have found out the correct address at which to deliver an application for housing benefits, for example, will be approached by other Roma and asked to accompany them to that address in return for payment of a modest fee. Unwillingness to comply with the request is regarded as a bargaining strategy. Such transactions take place only across family boundaries, of course. Extended families share resources and information of this kind, which is ultimately concerned with a way of obtaining income, is considered an economic resource. Since most families in the neighbourhood are related in one way or another, the potential for trade in mediation is limited. Paradoxically, therefore, it is the coherent family relations structure among the Gorton South Roma that prevents the emergence of a strong mediator modelled on the *Bulibaşa* type.

There are several patterns of internal conflict resolution. The first is the invisibility strategy, which requires parties to keep a low profile amidst the threat

of conflict, or, in more extreme situations in which conflict had been unavoidable and cannot easily be resolved or ignored, requires at least one of the parties to move away. Such moves to a separate locations are not considered as loss of face and are extremely common among Romani communities throughout Europe. Another method of conflict resolution is known in Romani as *kris*, often translated as ‘Romani court’. Its code of practice and method varies from community to community but the institution is widespread among the Roma of the Balkans and Transylvania as well as in parts of Central Europe. The *kris* is based on the appointment, by invitation, of a group of arbiters agreed upon by the disputing parties to propose a settlement. Unlike other groups, among the *Kangliari* Roma the *kris* is not a public event that is attended by the disputing parties, witnesses, and spectators. Instead, it is a private procedure by which a group of arbiters referred to using the Romanian word *žudikatori* or ‘judges’ visit each of the parties in private, establish the cause of the dispute and the responsibility of the parties, and propose a settlement. The judges are usually *Kangliari* Roma with a reputation for fairness and experience in conflict settlement. They come either from other communities or from families of the same community who are known to have a neutral position toward the conflicting parties. They are not formally trained nor do they hold a formal office. We understand that in some cases they are offered a fee for their services.

In our attempts to secure the cooperation of families with our survey and to establish whether there are any individuals who are seen as persons of authority in the community, we were referred several times to the local Pentecostal preacher, who arrived quite recently with his family from Romania. The preacher in the Romani Pentecostal church is a position that is attained through work experience within the church, through display of loyalty and respect of the church hierarchy and participation in study groups, but is not, as far as we are aware, associated with the completion of any formal course of training. It is, rather, a kind of promotion awarded by a small circle of high-level functionaries who run the network of congregations. The preacher is in charge of the ceremonial side of church services, but he does not run either the services or the church congregation on his own. He is assisted by a small team of church officials, whose ‘authority’ to take decisions on the course of action appears to be no smaller than his. The church meetings – three-hour services, twice weekly, accompanied by a prolonged informal gathering both before and after the service – clearly constitute the principal congregation forum and seem absolutely

essential to lending the community a feeling of security and mutual protection, socially and spiritually. At the same time it is very difficult to ascertain the degree to which the church is involved in everyday affairs of individuals. It appears that we were referred to the preacher for advice on how to reach the community mainly because we had asked whether there was a person in authority and our interlocutors were keen on providing us with a helpful answer that would meet our expectations.

On another occasion, as pointed out above, individuals referred us to the church clergy more as part of an invisibility strategy, that is, in order to avoid taking responsibility for a decision that might turn out to be unpopular (i.e. leading us to individual households to facilitate the survey). We have not encountered or heard of a case where Roma in difficulty turned to the preacher for help. Nor did we receive the impression, when talking to the preacher in preparation of the survey, that he had any interest in being either informed of, or involved in any communal initiative or any initiative that might affect his congregation's chances of finding training opportunities or employment. Much like any other average Romani citizen of the neighbourhood he enquired about possible financial benefits to himself and his immediate family. Thus when asked whether there were any young people who might be interested in a paid internship at the local primary school, he suggested himself; asked then whether there were any young women who might be interested, he suggested his wife.

On the other hand, we did encounter some jealousy on the part of church officials and a feeling of protectiveness of their congregation, which we interpreted as a fear that social projects associated with the model of NGOs in Romania might establish themselves in the community and so divert loyalty away from the church (see above). The hostility was partly presented to us as a reaction to the withdrawal of permission to use the premises on the corner of Matthews Lane and Stockport Road for church meetings, a decision which the clergy attributed to the Council and thus brought in connection with our survey, which, we explained, was being carried out in cooperation with the Council. Two relevant observations deserve to be mentioned in this connection. First, despite the hostile reaction of the clergymen, communicated in public at the church, Roma continued to meet with us and answer our questions, and in fact toward the end of the survey period our team managed to establish very friendly relations with a number of families and spent many hours conversing with them in their homes. The clergy's reaction thus by no means carried any intimidating or even

binding message to the members of the community. Second, despite the frustration of being deprived of their previous meeting place, the clergy did not at all seem helpless in any way and managed within a matter of days to negotiate an arrangement with a church on Slade Lane to use their premises twice a week for the Romani services.

In conclusion, we can identify the Pentecostal clergy as a resourceful and well organised institution who command considerable authority and respect within the Romani community, but whose authority seems limited almost entirely to regulating issues of faith and those deriving from them, such as general guidelines on social behaviour, and who are reluctant to play any mediating role toward external institutions or even to become involved in any matters that are beyond their very strict religious remit. Still, the importance of the Pentecostal church in the lives of the Gorton Romani community serves as a guarantee that those modes of behaviour that are strongly condemned by the church, such as drunkenness or other antisocial behaviour, as well as any behaviour that might provoke non-Romani neighbours, are likely to be avoided.

### **Employment and economic activities**

Traditional Romani economy is based on manufacturing goods or selling goods or services to the non-Romani community. The few exceptions to this rule are Roma mediators who may charge other Roma a fee for their services, Romani shopkeepers in larger settlements who may have Romani as well as non-Romani customers, and of course a sector within the younger generation of Roma in urban centres all across Europe who are engaged in various pathways of professional career development. For the parent generation of Roma in Gorton South, a small variety of activities are categorised almost equally as income-generating activities that are within reach. Invariably, the source of income is the non-Romani population and the means to obtain that income involve some kind of accommodation, or some might say ‘performance’ – that is, a particular pattern of behaviour that is expected by the ‘client’ and is then rewarded through payment of cash. It is important to note that from the perspective of a Romani cultural background, the full range of such activities is regarded as ‘work’, whereas from the perspective of the majority society only some, and perhaps none of these activities are seen as genuine cases of ‘work’. The difference lies

in the attitude to work, which from the traditional Romani perspective involves, as indicated, an income-generating performance toward a non-Romani audience of potential clients, whereas the majority perspective sees work as the engagement in some kind of skilled or semi-skilled activity of production or service.

Only very few members of the Gorton Romani community engage in work in the latter sense. We met a self-employed painter/decorator who, despite having only basic knowledge of English is able to obtain work through references from one client to another and who communicates with his clients through gestures and basic vocabulary. Some women reported selling flowers, and some men reported that they collect and sell scrap metal. We also met young boys who approached cars stopping at intersections and cleaned their window screen, asking for money once the task was complete. This activity, which is very common across eastern Europe and most of the Mediterranean region, is frequently regarded in Britain as aggressive and intimidating and we have heard reports about boys being detained by the police, and indeed we are aware of police reports that regard such activities as actual ‘offences’ in the legal sense.

The most common income-generating activity is selling the Big Issue. Both men and women gathered their first experiences in selling social press in France and Spain, and the Big Issue replicates those. Women especially will combine selling the newspaper with begging, or will go out begging if they happen to have missed the distribution of the paper, or have sold out the limited number of papers assigned to them. Begging, similarly regarded by police authorities as a criminal offence and by much of the UK public as antisocial behaviour tends to target the Muslim communities in areas such as Rusholme and Levenshulme, where it is tolerated, and indeed even encouraged, as giving *zakā*’ or support to the poor is one of the commandments of Islam. From the Romani perspective, begging (= appealing to a stranger’s generosity by asking for money without offering anything in return) is not fundamentally different from selling the Big Issue (= appealing to a stranger’s generosity by asking for money in exchange for a piece of printed matter in which the stranger has no genuine interest, but which changes hands simply in order to symbolically replicate a purchasing transaction), and it is therefore difficult to comprehend why one is legitimised and can be carried out in central Manchester among just any crowd of people, whilst the other must be carried out more discretely among only certain sectors of the population. The reason that begging is primarily a female

activity seems to be the chances of success, or in economic terms, the value for money effect, as reactions toward women are much more favourable and therefore than those toward men making begging by women more profitable.

At the farther end of the continuum of income-generating activities we find attempts to secure steady income from housing and child benefits. Arrangements to secure income from benefits are equally regarded as work, and since the income is then steady they have absolute priority on the agenda of new arrivals once they qualify. Limited access to information on how to claim benefits, delays in authorisation, difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation and other impediments to benefit claims are a source of tremendous frustration and anxiety to members of the community. The link between child benefits and school attendance is a major factor in the motivation to send children to school.

All adult members of the household share the responsibility for income-generating activities and will combine their efforts to optimise and exploit any available opportunity, sharing the tasks and sharing the income. Thus selling the Big Issue, begging, and arranging benefits and working to meet the eligibility criteria are all 'organised' in the sense that they constitute a joint and coordinated effort on the part of all members of the household. We have not come across any clues whatsoever that would suggest the involvement of any external or entrepreneurial forces behind any of the income-generating activities pursued by Roma in Gorton South.

Roma are very conscious that their social status as Roma has a 'universal' character and while they do emigrate in the hope of improving their immediate living conditions – finding adequate accommodation and a steady source of income, and protecting their children from having to work, or suffer extreme poverty, or suffer abuse and violent hostility by the surrounding population and the authorities – they do not expect their traditional, marginalised position as Roma to change in any radical way. The parent generation therefore entertain very few ambitions, either for themselves or for their children. They are not ashamed of carrying out manual labour of the most degrading nature and at the lowest pay level, but are helpless to obtain such jobs due to their limited social contacts in British society and their lack of language skills. Language problems are even a hindrance, sometimes, in getting a license to sell the Big Issue, and certainly in registering for other jobs or obtaining a National Insurance Number. Nevertheless, many members of the community seem to overcome at least some

of these hurdles though any jobs that are beyond the traditional repertoire seem unobtainable in principle, both to the parent generation and as a future option for the children. Most adults admitted that they were unhappy with their current employment and expressed a wish to work as cleaners, sweepers, refuse collectors, and housekeepers, in other words in much the same kind of occupations that they had in Romania.

While the parents do value their children's education and appreciate that regular school attendance, the challenges they face at schools and their command of English all contribute to their immediate well-being, we have not come across any member of the community who entertained any long-term career plans for their children, as in *I would like my child to open a business* or *I would like my child to work in a bank*; the prospect of their children integrating into the non-Romani world of 'work' seems unimaginable. Some of the young adults seemed more open to the idea of seeking longer-term work. Indeed, some have begun to make preparations by registering as self-employed and obtaining the necessary permits. However, absence of contacts and a lack of access to information about employment create a vicious circle which these individuals seem unable to break on their own. At the same time, any contacts with non-Romani people are expected, by them and by their families, to yield immediate income and are otherwise considered futile. Thus on two occasions, after completing the survey, we invited a young member of the community to our offices at the University – first to meet some of our students and listen to a lecture on Romani history, and on another occasion to meet with a representative of the Council's regeneration team for advice on training and employment opportunities. On both occasions, the young man asked to be paid, as he was 'losing income' by spending time with us (consider that the man is unemployed and does not have any regular income anyway). When we declined to pay for his time, he described to us a series of emergencies, ranging from a landlord who was threatening to evict the family and on to a sister who had to undergo an operation on that very afternoon, and asked to borrow money in order to manage. When we declined yet again, he simply asked for reassurance that we had not been offended by his requests. This indicates a willingness, at least, to engage in a process of overtly negotiating cultural differences and differences in expectations, but shows at the same time how deeply entrenched the Romani view of the world is, which regards Roma as dependent on handouts by non-Romani people, success at work as the ability to draw an immediate financial gain, however modest, from any encounter with

non-Roma, and above all any dealings with non-Roma as mere opportunities to obtain an immediate financial reward.

### **Access to services**

Romani residents in Gorton are generally willing and eager to send younger children to school. School is seen as a chance for children to learn English and children who attend school represent an important cultural capital as ‘interpreters’ and informal mediators for their own families as well as for the whole community. School is also a way of keeping children away ‘from the street’, and it is also a source of income, constituting the eligibility for child benefits. There is generally a very high level of satisfaction with the schooling system in Manchester as represented in particular by the local Gorton Mount Primary School, which is the one attended by most of the Romani children. However, families encounter difficulties in finding school places and have no understanding for this shortage. It was suggested that some schools in the area have refused to accept Romani children because they are known to have a poor attendance record. In Gorton Mount School, this issue is being addressed through frequent visitation in family homes, and by engaging a member of the Romani community as liaison person with the families. The School has also had a series of teacher training events devoted to the cultural background of the Romani community and has recently appointed a full-time teaching staff member who has previously worked on the Romani Project and has knowledge of the Romani language and culture. All these measures have not gone unnoticed in the Romani community, and it is clear that Gorton Mount is the one institution in the neighbourhood that families feel they can trust to be working with them and in their interest, despite the fact that staff members do exert pressure in relation to pupils’ attendance.

While we are not in a position to go into detail about the specific attendance problems of individual children, global problems of attendance that are related to the specific structure and values of the Romani community include a) minimal school experience on the part of the parents and lack of any familiarity with the meaning of discipline and routine in academic learning, b) a culture in which immediate family needs always take priority over any external obligations and hence spontaneous concerns for the welfare of a sick sibling, for

example, or the wish to spend time with a visiting uncle, or even the wish to share with the family the excitement over the purchase of a new piece of furniture or a television set, might override the commitment to go to school; alternatively, concern for the child's immediate well-being will motivate many Romani parents to allow the child to stay at home if the child seems in any way anxious about the coming school day, e.g. afraid of a test or of being asked for homework or of participating in a planned sport event, etc., c) even the overall commitment to schooling is ambiguous and consists of an assembly of considerations, among them the hope that the children might draw some long-term benefits from school, weighed against the scepticism that the community would ever be in a position to compete with non-Romanies over career tracks in the non-Romani world; the realisation that school allows children to acquire useful short-term skills and the family to obtain child benefits, weighed against the knowledge that such skills and benefits will continue to be acquired despite gaps in attendance; and an appreciation that the children enjoy going to school, weighed against the fact that they are spending many hours of their day with strangers instead of enjoying the maximum amount of attention from their parents and siblings at home. These issues can only be tackled through a prolonged process of discussion and reflection, guided by somebody who is closely familiar with the school as an institution but at the same time sensitive to the needs and traditions of Romani families.

We have encountered a high level of awareness of health care services among the Roma in Gorton. The majority of families have a regular GP, though we did hear complaints about the limited amount of time that doctors devote to their patients. There is also a fair awareness of housing and child benefits, but lack of knowledge of English makes it difficult or even impossible to access services wherever this requires filling in forms, managing post or arranging appointments by phone. Help is obtained mainly from members of the community with better English skills. The closure of the Romani church meetings at the New Covenant church on Matthews Lane ended the opportunity for 'casual' encounters with members of another congregation of African origin, who had provided some help and assistance with forms. The declared segregation of the Romani community now prevents them from approaching the African church for help. For assistance, most Roma depend either on school-age children who know English, though they are often unable to understand forms and bureaucratic procedures, or on Romanian translators, who occasionally visit the

families. The latter, however, are not always trusted, since they represent the system that is associated with Romania. On many occasions their ability to help is limited since whenever families congregate together the conversation immediately turns into Romani, and since younger members of the community, even some of the young adults who left Romania as children, often don't speak Romanian at all.

### **Relations with outsiders**

Invariably Roma in Gorton have no perception of any open hostility toward their community and this fact is a key factor in their motivation to stay in Manchester – maintaining one of the most important ‘pull’ factors. At the same time they report on only very weak ties both within the neighbourhood and beyond, indicating a very poor level of ‘social capital’ which would otherwise facilitate obtaining information about work opportunities, among other things. Typically, no use is made of any entertainment or shopping facilities outside the neighbourhood. Interest in outsiders is largely confined to identifying opportunities to seek advice and favours in the form of mediation in dealings with services, filling in forms, and so on. There is a general acceptance that these are tasks in which Roma perform poorly and which are better left to Gadge (non-Roma) to negotiate amongst themselves, and there is a realisation that in every society there is at least a handful of well-meaning Gadge who are prepared to act in the interest of the Roma on a particular occasion and help approach institutions or fill in forms, as required. When asked about social contact with non-Roma, some of our consultants replied somewhat apologetically that they do, indeed, interact on an occasional basis with non-Roma, but that they only do this because they, as Roma, lack sufficient knowledge of English, and if they had the language skills they would not depend on help from Gadge and would not require the interaction with them.

Relations with neighbours in particular are limited entirely to sharing public space (parking, shops, way to school, and so on), and we have not encountered any cases where any social relations existed even with next-door neighbours who were not Roma. Once again it is worth pointing out that wherever possible, related households will tend to live next door to one another, thus creating chains of houses inhabited by Roma. There is, however, no feeling

of hostility or particular suspicion towards outsiders. The Roma tend to have a perception of 'Muslims', 'Pakistani' and other groups in the neighbourhood as being more organised and economically integrated, which hints at hidden aspirations that the community itself might at times entertain. At the same time there is some degree of fear of the social ways of the outside world, which threaten in particular Romani morality (which, in this community, is tightly integrated with the Pentecostal perception of morality). Thus we heard from young people in their early 20s that they never approached, and were never curious about, any of the entertainment clubs for young people in and around the city centre, and that their perception of these places was that one gets tricked into consuming alcohol and drugs and then becomes defenceless against abuse. Especially the group of young adults, who tend to have a lower level of responsibility as earners, tend to spend their entire time between the home, the School (where they deliver and pick up younger siblings) and the local park, and have very poor knowledge of other areas of the city. The community is aware of the presence of Czech Roma in the area, but apparently they do not have any contact with them, though we are aware of contacts between *Kangliari* children and the children of Czech Roma at Gorton Mount School.

Only two examples of conflict were mentioned to us, both on several different occasions. The first was an argument with a group of people referred to as 'English Gypsies'. We are not aware of any English Romani Gypsies in the area and assume that the reference is to a group of Irish Travellers. It is not quite clear what the background for the conflict was, but it did leave behind an impression of fear and suspicion against the particular group, or family. The second was a series of complaints against a female police officer. Here too, we have been unable to understand the precise nature of the problem, other than a general accusation of harassment and intimidation. We have also been unable to obtain any description of the officer that might help identify her. Although both examples of conflict were cited repeatedly and by several people, we have the impression that on both occasions the reference is to a single incident, respectively, rather than to any ongoing situation of conflict.

It appears that the Roma's overall perception of a peaceful, conflict-free co-habitation with neighbouring residents is to some extent at least at odds with the complaints that have been targeting the Roma in recent months. We attribute this difference in perception partly to the Roma's particular patterns of using public space, which differ from those of the non-Romani residents. In Romani

culture there is a much more smooth and less regulated movement between the private and public space. Among related households, and also toward other Roma who are part of the community, there is generally an 'open door' policy, meaning that non-residents of a particular household are not required to ask permission to enter that household. Certainly, Roma would never make a prior appointment with other Roma for the purpose of social visits. Members of the household must therefore be prepared at any given time for the spontaneous entry of a (Romani) non-member of the household. This imposes a very strict obligation on residents to always keep their house tidy and transparent in the sense of both physical and moral cleanliness. It is expected that the toilet and washing areas remain invisible to the spontaneous visitor who is entering the sitting area so as not to cause offence, while by contrast bedroom areas must remain visible and open to 'inspection' so that visitors can be convinced that they are clean and that no activity of an offensive nature might be going on behind closed doors at the time of the visit.

None of these rules apply to the public space, which is not deemed to be anybody's responsibility and is not used to cast judgement about the attitudes, the cleanliness, or the honour or morality of any nearby residents. Nonetheless, use of public space is intensive. In the absence, by and large, of hobbies, either physical or intellectual, and in the absence of a culture of entertainment consumption, spending time in an informal communal gathering is the favourite way to pass time that is not devoted to work. Crowcroft Park is the main place of gathering for men, women with children and young people. Gatherings are separated by gender and age, though the groups generally remain within eyesight of one another. The young men (up to 25) often use the gatherings to play football. Adult (parent generation) men mainly stand or sit on benches or tables and talk, while the women are usually accompanied by little children and gather closer to the play area.

The neighbourhood pavements are used by the Roma not just as a place of passage, but also for gatherings. Apart from the value of such gatherings for spontaneous entertainment, like the gatherings in the park, they allow a certain degree of social control over the public behaviour of other Roma who live in the neighbourhood but are not participating at a given moment in the communal gathering. Romani residents are very conscious of the fact that their movement in and out of their house and any unfamiliar visitors that they may have are subjected to the attentive scrutiny of all those -- especially men -- who happen to

be gathering on the pavement at a given moment. The communal gathering is a major feature that distinguishes Roma from non-Roma. Other residents in the neighbourhood tend not to use the pavements in this way and this therefore increases the level of visibility of Roma. In some cases (as reported to us by police officers) it also leads to complaints from non-Romani neighbours concerned about noise disturbances or even just about the mere presence of ‘Gypsies’.

### **Articulated needs**

A priority in the brief for this survey was to ask for residents’ opinions about aspects of their lives that they would wish to see improved. We encountered general satisfaction with accommodation, the layout of the neighbourhood and access to public space, with commercial provisions and services available in the area, with the procedure for housing and child benefits, with medical care and treatment and with educational services (though it appears that there is little interest in the details of children’s education, mainly because parents do not pretend to be able to understand what children are taught or why and consequently do not voice an opinion on the content of the curriculum or form of delivery as long as the children themselves seem content; it is our impression that the content of school life remains undisclosed to most parents and is not the topic of everyday conversation or of reports by the children within the household).

Critical demands tended to be uniform and so it is quite easy to identify those areas in which Romani residents perceive a need for improvement: Many of the residents complain about having been turned down when attempting to enrol their children in local schools, and see the provision of more school places as an immediate necessity. As a further priority all residents point out the absence of efficient and effective communication channels to allow them to make optimal use of available services. The problem is essentially one of language, in the first instance, as well as one of access to specific procedural information such as information on where to obtain certain forms, which documentation to present, how to fill in forms, and which office to approach. This ‘package’ of access to information also includes access to information about available jobs, as most residents articulated a wish to be able to have a broader choice of appropriate jobs and complained about being limited to selling the Big Issue.

It is noteworthy that once these various issues are summarised under the heading of language skills (i.e. if they had the necessary language skills they would be able to find out information on access to advice, forms, jobs, and so on), none of the residents considers studying the English language to be a viable and realistic option to overcome these difficulties. First, the concept of ‘studying’ a language through formal tuition is alien to the community, which displays an aptitude and social norm that is fundamentally favourable toward multilingualism but regards language as a skill picked up in context, not through formal instruction. Next, the prevailing notion is that if time is to be spent at an institution, governed by the rules of that institution, then this is a case of recruitment for work in a non-Romani environment, for which the Roma expect to be rewarded through cash payment, much like sending their children to school is rewarded in the form of child benefit payments. Since they cannot imagine that anybody would pay adults to be taught, the concept of attending language courses is not seen as realistic. Finally, the information that is missing concerns invariably negotiations with non-Romani institutions, and this is a task for which the Roma traditionally depend on mediators. Thus, the complaints about missing access to information on jobs and services amount to complaints about insufficient provisions of teams of interpreters, social workers and the like.

So far, the residents rely on two main mediation strategies. The first is to engage their children in interpreting. The difficulty here lies in the fact that children have varying degrees of competence in English, and second that they are often unable to understand the complexity of the matters that are being discussed. The alternative strategy is to approach Romanian interpreters. The difficulty here, as pointed out above, is firstly lack of trust, as persons of Romanian origin are regarded as inherently suspicious of and prejudiced toward Gypsies. But there are also practical issues associated with the fact that Romanian interpreters are unable to keep up when, as is usually the case, the ‘clients’ are not individual Roma but rather an entire family and the conversation inevitably switches into Romani. Nor are they able to help effectively in cases where the health of children or young people is concerned who are not at all fluent in Romanian. In such cases, the parents end up having to translate from Romani to Romanian, with the interpreters bridging the gap to English. In all these cases the existing interpreter facilities are not seen as effective because if they do manage to make some information accessible to the Roma, they fail to genuinely transmit the Roma’s interest and point of view to the other side (e.g. to the official, social

worker, potential employer or health worker), and it is this aspect that is seen as crucial in the procedure of negotiating with institutions and their agents. To summarise this point, the Roma of Gorton ***need effective mediation provisions that would help them articulate individual needs in the relevant institutional contexts.***

### **Towards an engagement strategy**

Following from the above discussion, we consider a purposeful engagement strategy addressing the needs of the Romani community and other residents of Gorton South to pursue the following aims:

- To set up effective short term and long term communication channels to allow individuals within the community to articulate their needs and to approach services in a targeted and more productive manner, as well as to facilitate approaches on the part of services to the Romani community, both collectively and individually;
- \* To prioritise support for the schooling and extra-curricular development of the younger generation (of pre-school, primary school and secondary school age), in order to ensure longer term integration and the availability of a wider range of opportunities to this generation in the future;
- \* To raise awareness of the Romani community, its cultural background and its immediate needs among relevant sectors, in particular among local services, the education system and as far as possible among local residents, in order to minimise the potential for suspicion and hostilities based on mere lack of information.

We suggest the following measures:

- 1) To create a one-year position for a ***Mediator/Interpreter***. The Mediator/Interpreter will provide a temporary solution to the absence of communication channels by filling the gap in the short term, in order to facilitate access to information on social services, school places, and job opportunities, to the parent generation. The Mediator/Interpreter will also have a key role in mentoring a small group of Young Adult Trainees (see below) recruited from within the community, who will, in due course, take over the role of mediators for their own community. The Mediator/Interpreter will also work closely with

the Romani Project at the University of Manchester to provide expertise and advice to Council services, Police, Schools and residents on the Roma and their background, and so raise the community's profile and raise awareness of their needs and interests. The Mediator/Interpreter will be a fluent speaker of Romani and Romanian, with thorough familiarity with Romani culture and society (ideally with work experience in Romania, or with Romanian Romani emigrant communities in western Europe), with professional qualifications ideally in the areas of health, employment and/or social policy and experience in working both with Romani communities and with local authorities. The cost of such a position is estimated at around £35k p.a.. The Mediator/Interpreter will work together with the Romani Project and depending on the person's academic qualifications and interests in carrying out research, the Romani Project will make an effort to secure funding for a subsequent period of 2-3 years in the form of a research project which will enable the Mediator/Interpreter to continue working in the community in the same role, as a participant observer, while writing up relevant research.

2) Funding to be sought for a one-year period of training activities for a group of up to five **Young Adult Trainees**, to be identified and recruited among the group of 18-25 year old Roma in the neighbourhood. The purpose is to lay the foundations for the middle term emergence of a group of potential mediators within the community, who, drawing on existing partial language skills and flexibility will be able to support the parent generation in interactions outside the community, will provide immediate role models for the younger generation currently in school and will in due course facilitate and support their integration into further training and career paths, and will help maintain awareness of the community and its needs and interests among local services, institutions and the neighbouring population of residents. The funding would be used to support a) stipends and fees for individual training in generic skills such as English and ICT, as well as for further training according to individual needs and preferences, b) part-time salaries for work as interns at local schools with a high intake of Romani children, supporting teaching staff in monitoring regular attendance, welfare and as family liaison persons, and as interns on the Romani Project, supporting student practical assignments and helping collect and archive material on Romani language and culture. The purpose of these internships is to develop a sense of community responsibility, to understand the methods and constraints

under which educational institutions work as well as their goals and overall structure, and to give some direct input into the training and career development of teaching staff and students, both of which are populations of potential multipliers who have dealings both with Roma and with attitudes toward Roma. In addition, the trainees will be able to engage in a bi-directional process of knowledge transfer, enriching the student experience by sharing their own knowledge, and importing academic knowledge about Roma into the school and community environment. Depending on training opportunities and associated fees, costs for one year for each trainee are estimated at £13k-£14k. The trainees' individual development programmes will be tailored to their needs and wishes in consultation with Council officials and supervised by the Mediator/Interpreter, who will serve as programme mentor.

3) Up to two one-year positions will be created for ***Romani classroom assistants*** to support local schools. Their role will be to give immediate support to teaching staff in dealing with the high number of Romani children who have recently joined the school and their availability may provide an incentive for schools that have so far hesitated to take on Romani children to offer them places. The assistants will have a teaching qualification, native-speaker command of Romani, excellent knowledge of English, thorough familiarity with Romani culture and teaching experience in a Romani community. Dozens of individuals answering to this specification work in schools, in other public sector institutions or in NGOs across central and eastern Europe, and recruitment of suitable candidates who would be willing to move to the UK for a year to gather specialised experience here should not prove difficult at all. It is assumed that funding for an extension of the one-year contracts could be obtained from EU sources or from the Roma Education Fund, perhaps in conjunction with an ongoing Council of Europe initiative for Romani education to be launched in 2010. The Romani Project will be able to advise on possible recruitment paths and to help interview suitable candidates as well as to participate in efforts to secure funding for a continuation of the contracts, should this be desired. We estimate annual costs for each individual classroom assistant position at around £18k-£19k.

4) An initiative to raise awareness of the Romani community in Gorton South is in our view an essential component of an effort to support the community in its

longer-term ambition to integrate. We propose a series of presentations and workshops (precise format to be designed as appropriate for individual audiences) targeting staff of the various services (social services and housing, Police, schools, health, and so on) and possibly also groups of local residents. The events will cover issues in Romani culture and history and provide an opportunity to discuss and understand culture-based behaviour and communication patterns. It would seem appropriate for the series to be prepared and run by the Romani Project, in close cooperation with the Mediator/Interpreter and where possible involve the group of trainees. Depending on the demand and volume of activities, part-time administrative support in the form of an events coordinator might be required in order to strengthen the Project's capacity and ensure that it can deliver a full-range programme. The events would accompany the induction and later on support the work of the Mediator/Interpreter and the group of trainees, and are deemed essential to pave the way for them to have smooth access to institutions.

5) Provisions will be made to create school places with a priority for Romani children from the neighbourhood. We estimate that the population of school-age children among the Roma numbers between 100-140. Taking into consideration the number of those already enrolled in school (ca. 70-80) and leaving out those who are older than 14-15 and are not in school, and therefore less likely to join school at this stage, we estimate an immediate need for up to 30-40 school places. We propose that various means of support be offered to schools taking on Romani children, among them the service of classroom assistants and interns and advice from the Mediator/Interpreter and the Romani Project, but also support in generic infrastructure and perhaps also staffing. Schools will also be encouraged to offer extra-curricular activities to Romani children, drawing on the capacities of the classroom assistants, interns and Mediator/Interpreter.



Map of proposed engagement strategy

(yellow = new positions, pink = new provisions, sea green = Romani community, lime = existing institutions)

**Recommended information websites on Roma:**

Romani Project (<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>): information on Romani language and audio-visual learning materials

Rombase (<http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase/>): general information on history and culture

Journal Romani Studies (<http://romanistudies.org/>): academic forum on Romani culture, ethnography and history

**Recommended reading on Roma in Romania:**

Achim, Viorel. 1998. *The Roma in Romanian History*. Central European University Press.

Barany, Zoltan. 2001. *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics*. Cambridge University Press.

Crowe, David. 1995. *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*. St Martin's Press.

Engebretsen, Ada. 2007. *Exploring Gypsiness: Power, Exchange and Interdependence in a Transylvanian Village*. Berghahn books.

© 2009

Romani Project

School of Languages, Linguistics & Cultures

The University of Manchester

Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

<[romani@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:romani@manchester.ac.uk)>