

Captions :

LIVING AMONGST THE ROMS

Photographic essay by

Yann MERLIN

France - 2013



Photo 01 - The three main streets of the village are swept clean every morning by women who share the task.



Photo 02 - Not all of the children of the village go to school. Most of them stay with their mothers and spend the day playing in small groups. The others leave early in the morning with their parents to try to find the few euros they need to live.



Photo 03 - Adolescents spend most of their time outside. They play cards, dice, or football, in a schoolyard they got into by climbing the railings. They rummage through dustbins and sell what they find at the Garibaldi Market in Saint-Ouen, or recover copper from electric cables.



Photo 04 - Young girls help their mothers with household chores. When a young Rom is in love with a girl, he has to come looking for her at her home and must win over the father. They spend the night at a hotel and when they come back the next day, the relationship is official. Couples sometimes form while they are still under age.



Photo 05 - All the women are in couples, there are no single households in the camp. When there is a problem between a man and a woman, it is discussed in public. Titel, who represents authority, has the final word if necessary. He tries to ensure that a degree of harmony exists in the camp and threatens anyone who flouts the rules with expulsion. Alcohol, for example, is forbidden within the camp.



Photo 06 - There is neither running water nor electricity in the camp. Some of the villagers rig up rudimentary systems with water canisters connected to kitchen taps. Everyone washes either in basins or at the municipal baths.



Photo 07 - Some of the Roms have no access to healthcare in Romania, so they travel to France and stay in the camp for a few months in the hope of being able to treat their sick children.



Photo 08 - Those women who do not work stay inside the camp and give a hand minding each other's children. In this village of La Courneuve, all are Evangelists and are fervent believers.



Photo 09 - August is the time for holidays back home for those who have saved enough for the journey. It's the moment to bring back all sorts of things which will be received liked treasure in Romania.



Photo 10 - The kitchen is an extension of the home which sometimes amounts to a one-roomed hut. The most recent arrivals take whatever lodgings are available and often find that it is a tight squeeze.



Photo 11 - Elderly women get no pension in Romania. Some of them follow their children and grand-children, taking care of them like grandmothers do in any family.



Photo 12 - Very few have their own vehicle. A return trip to Romania costs 160 euros on a bus operated by someone from the community. The Roms don't make the trip every year, but when they do, they stay for two or three months.



Photo 13 - Around 6 :30, the generator is started, giving electricity to the villagers and allowing the children to watch cartoons on television.



Photo 14 - Interiors are brightly coloured, decorated with salvaged carpets and cloth to improve the isolation of the huts. They are heated with wood-burning stoves.



Photo 15 - Fetching water is a daily chore. There is a fire hydrant three hundred metres away to which the villagers connect an ingenious system of drain pipes and a hose, allowing them to fill their canisters in a few seconds.



Photo 16 - Women dressed up for the religious ceremonies that take place every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Some of them sing hymns.



Photo 17 - Those who don't go to church dine at home. They go to bed early to be fit to work at six the next morning.



Photo 18 - Men and women pray separately at the Evangelist church in the village.



Photo 19 - Mass is also held outside. During the group prayer sessions, participants often go into a trance, calling out to God.



Photo 20 - Titel founded this village at the end of 2008. With his bare hands he built the church and it is he who organises village life, but he finds it hard to sleep now that the mayor of La Courneuve has gone to court to seek the eviction of the whole village. Now he counts only on God for help.