

“They Are Undesirables”: Local and National Responses to Gypsies during World War II

Shannon L. Fogg

On February 24, 1941, gendarmes in Limoges gathered information on “several tribes of undesirable nomads” parked on the city’s northern outskirts after the prefect received a petition from neighboring residents. The local men and women living near the Rue Descartes and the Rue de Bellac complained that the thefts and damages in the area since the “bohemians” arrival created an unpleasant living situation. The twenty-two inhabitants interviewed by the gendarmes all had similar opinions about the nomads: “The presence of bohemians in the street is undesirable. These people take no account of hygiene. They relieve themselves right in the middle of the street. They break the fences to heat themselves. They accost people to ask them for alms.” The quarter’s residents also expressed unanimity in their belief that the “nomads” (an administrative term synonymous with Gypsies) were “undesirables and their departure [was] to be wished for.”¹

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Several grants made researching and writing this article possible: a Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship for Archival Research from the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; a Stanley Fellowship, a T. Anne Cleary Fellowship, a Lafore Fellowship, and a Seashore Fellowship from the University of Iowa; and a Research Board Grant from the University of Missouri System.

¹ Service Historique de la Gendarmerie Nationale (hereafter SHGN), box 12701, BT Limoges, procès-verbal 382 (Feb. 24, 1941). The article’s title also comes from this source. I use the terms *nomad* and *Gypsy* throughout the article, depending on the circumstance. When the French word *nomade* is used, I use the direct translation of *nomad* to respect the vocabulary used at the time and to designate administrative references to this population. I use the term *Gypsy* to describe the perceived racial heritage of the people represented by the word *nomad*, and when individuals are referring to the people as an undesirable group and not as an administrative category. Jean-Pierre Liégeois asserts that the use of the word *Gypsy* carries fewer derogatory connotations and is a legitimate term to describe a varied population, especially since many communities have no specific names for themselves (*Gypsies and Travellers* [Strasbourg, 1987], 25). In some

French Historical Studies, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Spring 2008) DOI 10.1215/00161071-2007-024
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Despite the prefect's having instigated the investigation, the findings from the lengthy examination into the nomads' activities did not find their way to his monthly public opinion report for February 1941. In fact, throughout World War II Gypsies rarely appeared in official reports, although their presence greatly occupied local residents, as evidenced by petitions and gendarmes' procès-verbaux. The prefect instead described the growing material shortages during the month that prompted residents to focus on their personal situation rather than on the hardships facing the entire country. Claiming that the majority of the population still venerated Marshal Philippe Pétain and had confidence in his government, the prefect nonetheless noted that the presence of "too many" Jews—not Gypsies—in Limoges had influenced public opinion by creating residents' hope for a return to the past.² By the time these Limoges residents made their official complaint about the "undesirable" nomads in early 1941, the Vichy government's concerted propaganda efforts on behalf of the National Revolution—Vichy's conservative agenda for the regeneration of France—were already failing to produce the desired results.³ The French were also engaging in widespread illegal activities that manipulated the National Revolution's tenets, thereby undermining the regime's legitimacy by the spring of 1941.

Yet in the case of Gypsies, natives' personal interests coincided with national interests. The government and the local population held the same low opinion of the traveling bands and expressed this attitude through common stereotypes: Gypsies were dirty beggars and thieves who posed a danger to the health and welfare of society. The combination of ideological and material issues unique to the war years created an environment in which Gypsies were particularly vulnerable to repressive measures. When it came to the Gypsies, many French people embraced those tenets of the National Revolution that they often ignored in their own lives. For example, while supporting the internment of Gypsies to impose regular work habits, inhabitants of France rejected forced labor when it touched their sons and husbands.⁴ Many families par-

cases, I employ the terms *Roma* or *Rom* to represent the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic communities believed to be descended from Indian ancestors. On the term's origins and the ancestry of present-day Gypsies, see esp. Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (New York, 1972), 13–17; and Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* (New York, 1996), 83–112.

² Archives Départementales de la Haute-Vienne, 185 W1 45, rapports du préfet de la Haute-Vienne au ministère de l'Intérieur, rapport mensuel du 4 mars 1941.

³ For a concise discussion of Vichy's propaganda agenda, see Denis Peschanski, "Control or Integration? Information and Propaganda under Vichy," in *War and Society in Twentieth-Century France*, ed. Michael Scriven and Peter Wagstaff (New York, 1991), 201–18.

⁴ The failure of Vichy's *relève* program in which three workers volunteering to work in Ger-

anticipated in extralegal and illegal activities to procure additional food and other supplies, yet any hint of material or moral impropriety on the part of Gypsies resulted in accusations and investigations. Officials and civilians also viewed nomads as potential spies and therefore as a threat to the homeland. However, in reality, the greatest threats to the nation stemmed from the military defeat, the German occupation, and Vichy's commitment to collaboration.

In other words, the French state and some individuals justified the exclusion of certain Gypsies from the national community by referring to the nomads' failure to embody the values represented in the National Revolution's motto "Work, Family, Homeland," as well as by citing the material inconveniences created by the "undesirables" in local communities. Long-standing cultural differences and centuries of Gypsy marginalization contributed to the French inability to equate their daily suffering with that of the Gypsies. But this dislike of Gypsies did not reflect a total commitment to Vichy's ideology; rather, it reveals an area in which individuals displayed their complicity with the regime's actions, further complicating our ideas about the nature and specificity of Vichy's popular acceptance.

Studying local attitudes toward Gypsies during World War II also raises other issues that have long been important to Vichy-period scholars: namely, continuities with the prewar period, the extent of the regime's exclusionary politics, and public opinion. Yet an examination from a daily perspective reveals some of the limits of previous investigations. The treatment of so-called undesirables during the Vichy period cannot be explained fully by the intensification and codification of latent French racism or xenophobia. As the prefect's report also reminds us, shortages became a political issue that directly affected outsiders during the war. Poverty, living conditions, and thievery became central issues in ordinary citizens' treatment of Gypsies during the war.

A History of Persecution

The discrimination against and marginalization of Gypsies has a long history in France. Pushed to the edges of society in medieval Europe due to their dark skin, strange language, indifference to established religion, and perceived threat to guilds, Gypsies in France faced the

many gained the liberation of one French prisoner of war and the massive resistance to the *service du travail obligatoire* (obligatory labor service) underlined this rejection. See, e.g., Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York, 1972); Robert Zaretsky, *Nîmes at War: Religion, Politics, and Public Opinion in the Gard, 1938–1944* (University Park, PA, 1995); John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* (New York, 1994); and H. R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942–1944* (Oxford, 1993).

first legislation against them in 1539.⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, actions intended to rid France of this unwanted population, such as expulsions or attempts at forced assimilation, further reinforced the negative image of Gypsies in French society. The Third Republic's battle against vagrancy, which began in the 1880s, ultimately resulted in the law of July 16, 1912. It provided the government with a legal means to control traveling professions, defined various categories of itinerant merchants, and introduced a new identity card aimed specifically at Gypsies.⁶ The French government, drawing on the traditions of revolutionary republicanism, was careful to avoid defining Gypsies in racial terms in the new law.⁷ Instead, the law separated mobile traders into three groups: traveling salesmen (*marchands ambulants*), traders at markets and fairs (*forains*), and nomads (*nomades*). The first article of the law defined traveling salesmen as anyone (French or foreign) having a fixed residence in France and practicing an itinerant trade. The second article required *forains*—French nationals who had no fixed residence and lived by selling items at markets and fairs—to carry a special identity card with a picture, stating their personal information, profession, and last address. The third article defined nomads, “regardless of nationality,” as “all individuals circulating in France without a home or fixed residence and not falling into any of the above categories, even if they have resources or claim to exercise a profession.”⁸ The law also required individuals in this third category to carry anthropometric identity cards documenting their physical characteristics.

The third article of the law thus introduced both a new administrative category and a new identity card without clearly defining who was a “nomad.” The ethnically based words *Tsigane*, *Gitan*, *Bohémien*, *Romani-chel*, and *Manouche* appear nowhere in the text, but, according to Marie-Christine Hubert, “it is exactly Gypsies [*Tsiganes*] that the legislator

⁵ On the origins of discrimination in Europe, see Kenrick and Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*.

⁶ On the battle against vagrancy and the evolution of identity cards in France, see Pierre Piazza, *Histoire de la carte nationale d'identité* (Paris, 2004). For the full text of the July 16, 1912, law, see Denis Peschanski with Marie-Christine Hubert and Emmanuel Philippon, *Les Tsiganes en France, 1939–1946* (Paris, 1994), 125–30. The law remained in effect in France until 1969.

⁷ See Marie-Christine Hubert, “Les réglementations anti-tsiganes en France et en Allemagne, avant et pendant l'occupation,” *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah: Le monde juif*, no. 167 (1999): 20–52, for a discussion of the differences in French and German policies, especially in terms of racial aspects. See also Christophe Delclitte, “La catégorie juridique ‘nomade’ dans la loi de 1912,” *Hommes et migrations*, nos. 1188–89 (1995): 26. Drawing on Enlightenment and French revolutionary principles, the Third Republic distinguished between race and nation with priority going to shared culture and heritage. See Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, trans. Geoffroy de Laforcade (Minneapolis, 1996), 10–11.

⁸ Peschanski, *Les Tsiganes en France*, 126.

meant to designate by the term ‘nomad.’”⁹ The vagueness of the categories also meant that some families of Gypsy (Roma or Sinti) descent were classified as *forains*. Although officials avoided using the language of race in the laws, the daily determination of who was a *nomade* took place on a local level and did, in fact, depend on certain undefined characteristics that can best be labeled as racial.¹⁰ Required to present the anthropometric cards on arrival in and departure from any commune, nomads used the cards as a travel visa that allowed officials to track their movements.

The establishment of anthropometric cards also demonstrated the lawmakers’ association of nomadic Gypsies with criminality. In 1913 the government officially outlined the information to be included on the cards: name, date and place of birth, height, chest measurement, size of head, length of right ear, length of left middle and little fingers, length of left arm from elbow to middle fingertip, eye color, all ten fingerprints, and two photographs (full face and profile). Such physical descriptions had been recorded only for criminals previously. Biological determinism and environmental factors as explanations for criminality thoroughly permeated medical and political thinking about deviance by 1912.¹¹ Many believed that the “criminal” behavior of Gypsies—begging, stealing, and vagabondage—was passed on to future generations. Modifying the criminal’s social environment, however, could rectify this behavior.

Indeed, one goal of the 1912 law was to make the itinerating Gypsy population sedentary, thereby eliminating the threat from dangerous vagrants on French roads and simultaneously encouraging assimilation. Lawmakers believed that those who chose to conform to French cultural norms, including having a permanent residence, could be integrated into society. However, Gérard Noiriel has noted an important aspect of the French assimilatory process that early-twentieth-century politicians overlooked: “The nation-state did not assimilate individuals of immigrant origin. On the contrary, it is they who assimilated national norms.”¹² While many immigrants proved willing to adapt to

⁹ Hubert, “Réglementations anti-tsiganes,” 25. Delclitte makes the same argument by tracing parliamentary and journalistic debates in “Catégorie juridique ‘nomade.’”

¹⁰ The exact number of Gypsies in France remains unknown as censuses with ethnicity questions do not exist. See Hubert, “Réglementations anti-tsiganes,” 28. Kenrick and Puxon estimated the number to be forty thousand, although this is probably an overestimation (*The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*, 183).

¹¹ Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton, NJ, 1984). See also Sarah Fishman, *The Battle for Children: World War II, Youth Crime, and Juvenile Justice in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 19–21.

¹² Noiriel, *French Melting Pot*, xx.

French culture, Gypsies throughout Europe have remained remarkably hesitant vis-à-vis the dominant culture's norms. Economic, linguistic, and educational marginalization limited Roma social contact with Europeans, as did Romani culture, which prohibits close association with *Gadje* (non-Gypsies) to protect ritual purity. This separation has also preserved Romani society, culture, and tradition despite centuries of persecution.¹³ While some nomads did become sedentary after 1912, others continued to travel the roads of France.

With the start of the so-called Great War in 1914, fear of all foreigners and the government's desire to control foreign populations increased. Foreign nationals from enemy states—including Gypsies—faced internment and surveillance throughout the war. Gypsies from Alsace-Lorraine (considered foreign after the loss of the provinces in the Franco-Prussian War) were interned in a concentration camp in the Drôme after 1915 due to their “uncertain attitude and dubious feelings” toward France.¹⁴ Internment measures rarely touched French nomads, although they were often viewed as potential spies and therefore faced severe limitations on their mobility during the war. Fear of espionage, desertion, subversive activities, and shortages led to the extension of identity cards from undesirable nomads to immigrants in general in 1917, when cards became mandatory for every foreign resident over the age of fifteen.¹⁵

The continuing codification of a nationality code in the 1920s and 1930s set the stage for the Vichy regime's exclusionary politics between 1940 and 1945. Immediately following the Great War, politicians called for identity cards for French nationals. These calls intensified in the 1930s as waves of refugees flooded France and officials wanted to control the movement of all French residents, identify citizens, and create a sense of national belonging. While not explicitly intended to “stigmatize certain categories,” the cards, a result of a 1935 decree and first appearing in 1939, were meant “to delimit more rigorously the contours [of the national community] and to better locate those who did not make up part of it.”¹⁶ What had begun as a means of identifying and controlling nomads would now apply to everyone living in France, although anthropometric cards for nomads continued to distinguish

¹³ Ian Hancock, “Romani Americans (‘Gypsies’),” in *Roma and Sinti: Under-studied Victims of Nazism* (Washington, DC, 2002), 3–4. See also Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Filhol, *Un camp de concentration français: Les Tsiganes alsaciens-lorrains à Crest, 1915–1919* (Grenoble, 2004), 24. On average, 160 Gypsies were interned in a former monastery in Crest throughout the war in abominable living conditions. See *ibid.*, 50. Unlike other interned civilians, Gypsies were rarely allowed to leave the camp.

¹⁵ Piazza, *Histoire de la carte nationale d'identité*, 119–21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

them from the rest of the population. The concurrent evolution of specialized police forces to deal with foreigners during the interwar period made the surveillance of nonnationals even easier.¹⁷ Antinomad measures also continued to appear between the wars. A decree issued on July 7, 1926, required prefects to retain a copy of nomads' anthropometric cards in their archives and to forward an additional copy to the Ministry of the Interior, thus creating a centralized, national registry. The same year, a decree required nomads to renew their cards biennially, bringing them into regular contact with authorities. After the Kristallnacht pogroms in November 1938 and the subsequent arrival of thousands of foreigners fleeing persecution, French decree laws established special centers for illegal, undesirable refugees, allowed the government to strip naturalized citizens of French nationality, and effectively closed France's borders to all legal immigration. The difference between French and foreign was thus crystallized and codified under the Third Republic and could be readily used against foreign, undesirable nomads.

Gypsies and World War II: Discrimination and Material Shortages

While these laws could be applied to nomads, the law of 1912 and subsequent decrees and circulars concerning nomads laid the legal foundation for the French response to Gypsies after the declaration of war in September 1939. The law of April 6, 1940, promulgated by the French Third Republic and later perpetuated by the Vichy regime, forbade the circulation of nomads in France for the war's duration and forced nomads to reside in an assigned area under police surveillance. At this time Germany had not yet launched its western offensive, but the French people faced major food restrictions as the country continued preparing for war. With its soldiers mobilized since the previous fall and its interior departments adjusting to life with tens of thousand of culturally different Alsatians evacuated for their own safety, France focused on securing its borders. The introduction to the 1940 anti-Gypsy decree law included a letter to the president of the republic, explaining the need for such restrictive measures:

In wartime, the movement of nomads, wandering individuals generally without a home, a homeland, or an actual profession, constitutes a danger to the national defense and the safeguarding of

¹⁷ On policing and immigrants, see Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

secrets that must be removed. The nomads' incessant displacements—which must not be confused with *forains*, industrial or commercial, for the most part honorably known—permit them to discover troops' movements, units' campgrounds, defense locations and systems, [and] important intelligence information that they are likely to communicate to enemy agents.¹⁸

Accused of potential spying for foreign enemies, nomads were among the first groups singled out for repressive measures after the war began. By focusing surveillance on the predominantly foreign *nomades* and allowing French *forains* to continue their migrations, the authors of the law demonstrated the degree of prewar xenophobia in France.¹⁹ However, the accusation of Gypsy spying also reflected a long-standing cliché in French society. The wave of Gypsies crossing the Rhine around the time of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 gave rise to suspicions of spying, and the government interned nomads during World War I for the same reasons.²⁰ Increased xenophobia thus does not fully explain the law or the treatment of nomads with the outbreak of World War II.

Gendarmes in the Creuse wasted no time putting the April 6, 1940, law into effect in their department under the prefect's instructions. Although waiting for more detailed information concerning the law's application, authorities knew that nomads were to be immediately immobilized in their current locations. The prefect, however, feared that "bordering departments might evacuate their territories of these undesirables and send them to the Creuse."²¹ As a result, the platoon leader of the gendarmerie in the Creuse instructed the brigades in the department to turn away any new nomads trying to set up camp in their district. The memo to the section leaders made no mention of the nomads' potentially traitorous actions, nor did it instruct the gendarmes to monitor the population and report any suspicious activities. Rather, officials sought only to prevent a larger, undesirable Gypsy population from staying in the department, which would create addi-

¹⁸ Peschanski, *Les Tsiganes en France*, 131.

¹⁹ On xenophobia, see Eugen Weber, "Foreigners," in *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York, 1994), 87–110; and Ralph Schor, *L'opinion française et les étrangers, 1919–1939* (Paris, 1985).

²⁰ On the war of 1870, see Jacques Sigot, "La longue marche vers l'internement des Tsiganes en France pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale," *Etudes tsiganes* 13 (1999): 20. On World War I, see Hubert, "Réglementations anti-tsiganes," 29–30; and Filhol, *Un camp de concentration français*. Guenter Lewy notes a similar phenomenon in Germany in *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (Oxford, 2000), 65–66.

²¹ SHGN, box 12536, Grpt Guéret, R/2, Chef d'Escadron Chapaux à Messieurs les Commandants de Section (Apr. 15, 1940). A military decree issued on Oct. 22, 1939, had already forbidden nomads in eight western departments, including the Haute-Vienne, from circulating in the region. Cited in Hubert, "Réglementations anti-tsiganes," 29.

tional policing responsibilities and require attention for the remainder of the hostilities. Local, pragmatic concerns appeared more important to these departmental officials than the potential military threat that nomads posed to the native population.

Furthermore, authorities' concerns diverged from those of the local residents. While national officials feared the antinational activities of nomads, Limousin natives seemed more concerned with the Alsatians in their midst—the potential German “Fifth Column.” The Third Republic evacuated residents from the country's border region to interior departments in September 1939 for their own safety, and officials immediately launched a campaign explaining the Alsatian language and culture in the attempt to prevent misunderstandings. Yet rumors of the evacuees' alleged antinational activities spread quickly throughout the region; there was no mention of local concerns about nomads spying for the enemy.²² But Alsatians represented part of the French national community; nomads did not, thus making them the target of restrictive, discriminatory laws.

The minister of the interior (via the general director of national security, A. Bussière) provided prefects with a more detailed explanation of the new law in a circular dated April 29, 1940. Prefects had the responsibility of determining the exact location of the assigned residence areas for the Gypsies in their department, though Bussière advised against the creation of “concentration camps,” noting the inconveniences created by such a solution.²³ Not only would camps group nomads authorities had long worked to separate but they would also create a financial burden for the locality in terms of lodging, feeding, and guarding the inmates. Instead, the circular suggested that smaller groups of nomads remain dispersed throughout the department in distinct zones outside large cities yet within close proximity of gendarmerie posts. The law permitted nomads to move about freely within the zone designated by the prefect, and in exceptional cases (such as the death or illness of a close relative or the need to attend legal proceedings) individuals could apply for passes to travel outside their assigned area. Under no circumstances were nomads allowed to exchange their anthropometric identity cards for other forms of identification that would exempt them from the current measure, nor were they to receive any funds from the state to assure their subsistence. In other words,

²² On evacuees and local fears, see Laird Boswell, “Franco-Alsatian Conflict and the Crisis of National Sentiment during the Phoney War,” *Journal of Modern History* 71 (1999): 552–84.

²³ Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), F7 16044, lettre du Ministre de l'Intérieur à Messieurs les Préfets (Apr. 29, 1940).

they would not be eligible for refugee allocations, nor would they be considered on equal terms with the Alsatians forced to evacuate to the region as a circumstance of war.

Nomads thus found themselves under a kind of house arrest by the spring of 1940, though some movement continued, especially after German troops began their assault on France in May. Gypsies joined millions of other French men and women attempting to flee the Nazi advance by heading south during the *exode*. The de facto annexation of Alsace and Lorraine to the Third Reich prompted German authorities to expel some undesirable nomads from the territories in the fall of the same year, putting more Gypsies on the roads to the southern zone. The ancestors of many of the Gypsies assigned residence in the Limousin in 1940 likely arrived in the region during the late nineteenth century or the early twentieth. Patrick Williams's anthropological study of the Limousin Gypsies finds that most modern *Manouche* had been wandering the region for generations, staying largely within two or three of the area's departments. Like many refugees during World War II, the nomads stayed due to the region's material advantages: "Because there was brush, because there were hedgehogs, because there was pasture for the horses, because there were rivers with trout, because the peasants were giving them hay, bacon and milk, because there were springs on the mountainsides and fountains in the villages."²⁴ Thus the nomads immobilized in the region included refugees, expellees, and regular travelers.

Just three months after the April 1940 law, the Third Republic voted itself out of existence, and on September 3, 1940, the Vichy government upheld the application of the law under the new regime. By the end of the month, citizens in the Limousin began to complain about the nomads forced to reside in the region. These complaints coincided with the start of official rationing in September 1940 and the growing competition and cooperation among residents in their daily search for food during 1940–41. Gendarmes reported that as of October 22 fifty-eight nomads (all French) resided under surveillance in the Haute-Vienne. By mid-November the number forced to live in the department had reached 163.²⁵ Despite the small numbers (significantly less than any other refugee group in the area), the nomads' presence engendered considerable grumbling from the local population. There was no concerted government-sponsored propaganda campaign on behalf of the

²⁴ Patrick Williams, *Gypsy World: The Silence of the Living and the Voices of the Dead*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago, 2003), 3.

²⁵ SHGN, box 12640, BT Limoges, R/2, Etat des Nomades astreints à résider dans le département de la Haute-Vienne (Oct. 22, 1940; Nov. 14, 1940).

nomads, like there had been following the arrival of Alsatian evacuees the previous year. Facing complaints, letters, and petitions from permanent residents, local gendarmerie brigades searched for solutions to the disagreeable living situation. The Limousins' primary complaints stemmed from "inconveniences" such as the theft of poultry and vegetables that resulted from the prolonged stay of Gypsies in any particular commune.²⁶ Petitioners felt that it was only fair that other areas share equitably in the hardship of living near the unwanted population.²⁷ Such reasoning was reminiscent of the government's own justification for rationing and restrictions, as well as of officials' assertions that "the necessary sacrifices would be equally borne by all."²⁸ Authorities promised the fair and equitable distribution of food, clothing, and heating materials, and locals living in proximity to nomads also wanted the fair and equitable dispersion of Gypsies throughout the department.

Residents throughout the Creuse and the Haute-Vienne pointed to both the material and the more intangible burdens created by their new neighbors in the petitions and complaints. Despite the reminder in the preface to the April 6, 1940, law that *nomades* and *forains* should not be confused, residents of the region used the terms interchangeably and often also complained about *forains* without fixed residences. To Limousin residents, the appearance of being a nomad or being of Gypsy descent counted more than the official designation. Gendarmes' reports recording thefts, damages, and "improper" behavior demonstrate the difficulties of classifying individuals, the ambiguities created by the vague definitions in the 1912 law, and the importance of local perceptions. People officially classified as *forains* retained the right to practice their trades and move about freely, yet in daily interactions with the region's natives, the traders were often viewed as *nomades*. Rural inhabitants blamed the theft of precious items such as wood and farm products on "nomads," whether the culprits were nomads, *forains*, or neither. On the outskirts of towns, residents complained about the human waste, about empty cans and bottles, and about the general dirtiness of the people parked in neighboring fields. By failing to conform to the accepted ideals of French society and by creating further material difficulties through their thefts and littering, nomads faced increased marginalization, which ultimately led to the incarceration of

²⁶ SHGN, box 12753, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 365 (Aug. 10, 1941). The procès-verbal uses the term *forain* in describing the people stationed near the village, though they had been there for over a year.

²⁷ SHGN, box 12640, BT Limoges, R/2, Chef d'Escadron à Monsieur le Préfet de la Haute-Vienne (Oct. 26, 1940; Nov. 15, 1940).

²⁸ "Les Sacrifices," *Le courrier de la Creuse*, no. 67 (1940): 1.

thousands in concentration camps. Furthermore, Vichy's commitment to "Work, Family, Homeland" provided non-Gypsies with an easily accessible vocabulary of exclusionary justifications.

Gypsy Thieves

Thefts motivated by both necessity and opportunity became a regular aspect of daily life in France after the introduction of rationing in September 1940. As residents experienced the first extreme shortages, an unguarded vegetable field or a stray chicken proved too tempting for many hungry and frustrated French men and women to resist. Nomads, forced to reside within a specific area and with limited opportunities to earn a living, were no exception. What was exceptional was the regularity with which native residents blamed nomads for the thefts. The presence of a few dozen nomads or *forains* in a community often sparked accusations of Gypsy thefts. The official administrative designation differentiating among traveling merchants, *forains*, and nomads often meant little to locals concerned with the disappearance of precious supplies. Ingrained stereotypes meant many people in law enforcement and on the street believed that while the laws "[said] 'nomads,' [they] think 'gypsies,' spies, thieves."²⁹ Whatever the administrative designation, sedentary residents in the Limousin blamed Gypsies for stealing wood, vegetables, chickens, and rabbits.

Although often greatly exaggerated, thefts by Gypsies were a reality of daily life. Gypsy thievery, exacerbated by the shortages of the war years and the inability to move to new markets, reflected a long-standing practice in the community. The stereotype of the sneaky, stealing Gypsy existed long before World War II and was a reaction to the nomadic population's lifestyle.³⁰ Gypsies' willingness to steal from their non-Gypsy neighbors reflected both material need and part of their belief system. Jan Yoors, a Belgian who spent much of his adolescence in the late 1930s and early 1940s living with Gypsies wandering throughout western Europe, learned much about such practices from his adopted family. The differences between Rom and Gadge (the Rom word for non-Gypsies) attitudes toward nature helped explain the practice of "subsistence thieving." Yoors asserts, "In a general way they [Gypsies] consider the entire Gajo world a public domain"; thus picking up wood for fires or hay for horses did not constitute a crime in their eyes.³¹ But

²⁹ Peschanski, *Les Tsiganes en France*, 17.

³⁰ See Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*, 11–12.

³¹ Jan Yoors, *The Gypsies* (New York, 1967), 7. Fonseca also addresses the Gypsy attitude toward stealing in *Bury Me Standing*.

for the dominant society, based on the sanctity of private property and facing extreme shortages, the practice amounted to nothing more than illegal activity. Yoors's friend Putzina explained the Gypsy's position: "Stealing from the Gaje was not really a misdeed as long as it was limited to the taking of basic necessities, and not in larger quantities than were needed at that moment. It was the intrusion of a sense of greed, in itself, that made stealing wrong, for it made men slaves to unnecessary appetites or to their desire for possessions."³² Gypsy custom also prohibited Gypsies from stealing from one another, and as a Gajo, Yoors was forbidden from taking anything that was not his. The difference in worldviews meant that Gypsies considered the occasional theft of a chicken or a rabbit from a farmer for family consumption legitimate, while the region's natives despised it.

As more town residents ventured into the countryside in search of food and fewer peasants brought their goods to markets during 1941, the livelihood of *forains* and *nomades* who relied on local markets and fairs as places of business also suffered. Like other French men and women, nomads ventured into the countryside to find food and materials. Neighbors reported that the nomad Madame Loustalot and her children spent their days "covering the countryside to find some supplies," while the male members of the *forain* families in Sauviat-sur-Vige went out in search of rabbit skins to purchase.³³ Unlike most other residents, however, nomads and *forains* also went door to door to sell items and services rather than solely purchasing farm products. Some women sold buttons or stationery; other nomads or *forains* offered to "reseat chairs, sharpen razors, and repair umbrellas."³⁴ The daily trips replicated the phenomenon of the city venturing into the countryside that became ubiquitous during the war years, but reversed the economic relationship because peasants were supposed to purchase items rather than sell them.

While visiting farms provided *forains* or *nomades* with the opportunity to make money, it also brought them into contact with scarce food items. All French residents found it difficult to make ends meet during the war and often resorted to extralegal or illegal means for survival. However, the migratory outsiders lacked many of the connections, finances, and other resources required to participate in bartering or the black market. Traveling and living in family groups without any kind

³² Yoors, *The Gypsies*, 34.

³³ On the Loustalot family, see SHGN, box 12724, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 460 (Nov. 18, 1941). On *forains* in Sauviat-sur-Vige, see box 12754, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 115 (Mar. 24, 1942).

³⁴ SHGN, box 12701, BT Limoges, procès-verbal (Jan. 21, 1941).

of fixed address also meant that nomads could not easily turn to *colis familiaux* (family packages—a vital source of supplemental goods for many urban French residents) for additional food. Gypsies—like their sedentary counterparts—yielded to temptation on occasion and were probably aided by previous experience in stealing. After having given two “nomad women” a couple of umbrellas to mend, Léonard Saulnier, a farmer in the village of Rouzeix just outside Limoges, noticed that three of his chickens were missing. A month later the women returned, and the suspicious farmer hid in his pigsty to watch them. Saulnier later claimed that they had dropped a trail of bread crumbs and that when the chickens had begun to follow it, one of the women had grabbed two of them. Both women—*foraines*—denied trying to trap the chickens and claimed that they had visited the farm only to deliver the repaired umbrellas. On finding the bread crumb evidence in the yard, gendarmes arrested the women.³⁵ In another case, a farm woman working in her cow pasture accused two women and two children “who appeared to me to be nomads” of killing and hiding a chicken. Overhearing one of the strangers saying, “We’ll get it on the way back,” Marie-Louise Paviot decided to investigate and discovered the still-warm chicken. On returning to her home, Paviot learned that the “two bohemians” had been there selling lace and immediately filed a complaint with the gendarmerie.³⁶ In both cases, the “nomad” women allegedly committed the crimes while pursuing legitimate sales.

Complaints and accusations that *nomades* and *forains* stole wood appeared consistently. A general fuel shortage plagued French residents throughout the war; thus the disappearance of wood greatly affected daily life. With only 47 percent of the prewar amounts of coal available, people turned to wood for their heating, cooking, lighting, and transportation needs.³⁷ Converted cars ran on *gazogène*, a fuel derived from wood or charcoal. Increased demand for wood did not coincide, however, with increased production; France also faced a shortage of lumberjacks and lacked the transportation necessary to distribute the wood.³⁸ In the Creuse the growing clandestine transport of wood out of the department prompted gendarmes to increase their surveillance of forests and logging trucks in early 1942.³⁹ In this context, wood thefts by nomads raised harsh criticism, and the thefts’ destructive nature fur-

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ SHGN, box 12753, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 376 (Aug. 14, 1941).

³⁷ Statistic cited in Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et survivre en France, 1939–1947* (Paris, 1995), 133.

³⁸ Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France*, 11; Veillon, *Vivre et survivre*, 137–38.

³⁹ SHGN, box 12538, BT Guéret, R/2, Chef d’Escadron aux Commandants de Section de la Compagnie (Feb. 20, 1942).

ther angered the victims. Several residents of Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat (Haute-Vienne) and its surrounding communes complained that nomads and *forains* parked at the town's fairgrounds stole deadwood from hedges and fences.⁴⁰ After two years in the same location and numerous complaints, the mayor dispersed the thirty members of the four families to smaller villages near Saint-Léonard, hoping the problems would be solved. Instead, he received new petitions and individual complaints in November 1941 that the nomads "cut tree branches in the copses with hatchets" and "carry off the deadwood found in the hedges that enclose . . . meadows and fields." The same residents renewed their complaints four months later.⁴¹ The Gypsies continued to steal wood and to destroy property in the process, further alienating themselves from local residents whose primary concerns centered on shortages in their daily lives. Gypsies' actions interfered with family supplies and were thus targeted for sanctions.

It often took little more than sighting someone who looked like a nomad to accuse him or her of a crime, although the entire country experienced a dramatic increase in thefts during the war. Paul Sanders has called stealing even more prevalent in wartime society than the rampant black market, and Sarah Fishman's investigation of crime under Vichy reveals a remarkable increase in theft trials for both adolescents and adults during the war years.⁴² The apogee of theft charges occurred in 1942, when over 26,000 juveniles and nearly 115,000 adults stood trial, with most defendants coming from the working class. Nearly all theft cases reported to the Gendarmerie Nationale in the Limousin cited an "unknown author" as the culprit, and investigations usually led to a non-Gypsy petty thief. But the Vichy regime's practice of stopping suspicious individuals to search for illegal activity combined with ingrained anti-Gypsyism made nomads more vulnerable than non-Gypsies. Gendarmes stopped individuals having a "nomadic allure," and the questioning process often demonstrated the prejudice prevalent in society.⁴³ Officer Hugonnaud of the La Souterraine Gendarmerie arrested Louis Lafleur in October 1941 on an outstanding battery charge. While searching Lafleur, Hugonnaud noted that the *forain* was wearing a new leather jacket with a new hat and was carrying more

⁴⁰ SHGN, box 12753, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 384 (Aug. 22, 1941).

⁴¹ SHGN, box 12754, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 536 (Nov. 28, 1941), procès-verbal 125 (Mar. 31, 1942).

⁴² Paul Sanders, *Histoire du marché noir, 1940–1946* (Paris, 2001), 134–35. Fishman reports that theft trials increased by 267 percent for juveniles and 245 percent for adults between 1937 and 1942 (*Battle for Children*, 83; see also comparative charts on 84–85).

⁴³ See, e.g., SHGN, box 12708, Haute-Vienne, BT Limoges, procès-verbal 836 (May 7, 1943).

than twenty-three hundred francs and an automatic lighter. “Lafleur’s tidy clothing [and] the possession of such a large amount of money,” the gendarme noted, “appeared very suspicious for an individual from his class [*catégorie*], an illiterate, so-called chair reseater who in reality hardly seems to devote himself to any work and travels a lot.” Lafleur “could not furnish any explanation for his trips,” Hugonnaud concluded, “and there is every reason to assume that he is engaged in some illicit dealings and is likely to commit thefts.” Furthermore, some unsolved robberies in an area Lafleur had visited during his travels might have been committed by *forains*, according to the locals.⁴⁴ Although Lafleur had been stopped for another reason, the mere appearance of material impropriety led the gendarme to assume that he was a thief.

Like Hugonnaud, permanent residents did not need to capture Gypsies in the act of committing a crime to accuse them of stealing. A widow living in a small village outside Limoges reported that someone had stolen eight rabbits from her farm. During the investigation she told the gendarmes, “I have no suspicions; however, I must tell you that yesterday morning around eleven, two bohemians came to the house to sell some lace.” To corroborate her story, a worker on the farm stepped forward to say that he had noticed a suspicious man on a bicycle who looked like a nomad.⁴⁵ On discovering the theft of her chickens, another farm woman also contacted the gendarmes in Limoges to file a report. Like the widow, the woman could not name a suspect but made a point of mentioning that two young women whom she thought were nomads had recently visited her home in search of supplies. The women “stayed a fairly long time at the house and had the time to inspect the place. I cannot tell you if there is a correlation between the visit of these women and the theft.”⁴⁶ Clearly, a correlation did exist between the nomads and the thefts in the minds of these women. Each victim implied that the Gypsies were the culprits. The mayor of Moissannes shared this attitude: “Since these *forains* have been in the commune, I have had frequent complaints about vegetable thefts. I cannot say if they are the authors of these thefts, but before their arrival in the village, such things did not happen.”⁴⁷ We know, however, that at the time of his report in the fall of 1941, thefts were a regular part of daily life.

Theft victims never reported any suspicious “French-looking” or

⁴⁴ SHGN, box 12631, Grpt Creuse, Section de Guéret, BT La Souterraine, R/2, Rapport de l’Adjudant Hugonnaud, cmdt la brigade de La Souterraine sur les agissements du forain Lafleur (Louis) (Oct. 31, 1941).

⁴⁵ SHGN, box 12702, BT Limoges, procès-verbal 1058 (June 7, 1941).

⁴⁶ SHGN, box 12709, BT Limoges, procès-verbal 2426 (Nov. 19, 1943).

⁴⁷ SHGN, box 12753, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 365 (Aug. 10, 1941).

“Jewish types” in the area; the Gypsies bore the brunt of the accusations, which demonstrates the extent and specificity of antinomad sentiment in society. Although some farmers did suspect that urban residents traveling into the countryside for food were responsible for thefts, the stereotypical traits associated with Gypsies made them more likely suspects and more acceptable scapegoats. The frequent movement of nomads and *forains*, their lack of regular employment, and the general belief that they possessed large sums of money led to the conclusion that Gypsies must be involved in illegal activity. It did not cross the minds of most theft victims that the culprits, whether Gypsy or other, had stolen to provide for their families. With a limited potential for sales and without state aid, nomads turned to other options. Domiciled residents of the Limousin justified their own extralegal and illegal activities—such as the abuse of family packages or unauthorized trips to the countryside—by citing family provisioning needs. Vichy officials often turned a blind eye to such behavior when it contributed to the survival of the all-important family. However, nomads did not fit the image of the ideal French family and thus did not benefit from such rationalization.

Gypsies and the National Revolution

Under the National Revolution, the Vichy regime promised to create a renovated civilization free from undesirable elements and fundamentally different from the degenerate society of the interwar years. The government’s propaganda campaign focused on unity and renovation, but the material situation worked at cross-purposes by further dividing the French population in its competition over scarce supplies. Inherent in this propaganda was the belief that unity could be achieved only through the elimination of “dangerous” portions of the population. At first glance, it appears that the same forces were at work as thievery widened the distance between Gypsies and the native population during the war years rather than creating unification through shared hardships. Furthermore, Limousin residents regularly applied Vichy’s rhetoric about undesirables to their nomadic neighbors. Officials and ordinary citizens also used the regime’s commitment to the National Revolution to justify their calls for the physical exclusion of nomads. In this instance, locals revealed their complicity with the Vichy regime and its agenda: both groups wanted to be rid of the nomads. However, their reasons and expectations were surprisingly different. On the one hand, local communities wished to be rid of a group that infringed on their material well-being and accordingly called for internment. On

the other, the Vichy regime remained committed to the idea of nomad assimilability throughout the war years and saw internment as a path to social reintegration. The same beliefs that had animated Third Republic politicians appeared again under the authoritarian Vichy government, complicating our ideas about its exclusionary agenda embodied by the National Revolution.

Travail: Nomads and Work

Most nonnomadic French residents did not meet the Vichy regime's expectations for the project of national renewal. By the fall of 1942 the increase in all forms of illegal activity and the strengthening Resistance movement clearly demonstrated a rejection of collaboration and the ideals of the National Revolution. People proved unwilling to make sacrifices for the abstract good of the nation (and the German war effort) when it directly affected their ability to care for their families' daily needs. Yet the same standards did not apply to those on the margins of society.

Implicit in many local residents' complaints about nomads and in the government's attitude toward the population were ideas about work. Even before the establishment of the Vichy regime in July 1940 and Marshal Pétain's demands for a national revolution, French officials concerned themselves with nomads' work ethic. The minister of the interior, in his April 29, 1940, letter to the prefects, expressed his hope that by requiring nomads to provide for themselves and denying all state aid, a few of them would acquire "if not the taste for, at least the habits of regular work."⁴⁸ The prerequisite for sustained employment was a sedentary lifestyle, and the laws of July 16, 1912, and April 6, 1940, both worked toward achieving this goal. French nomads, like other migratory workers, traditionally practiced trades that depended on their ability to move freely about the country. The anthropometric cards that served as visas and required official stamps before nomads could engage in work of any kind made working on farms during the harvest or selling wares and services at local fairs and markets more difficult. Intended to encourage Gypsies to abandon their nomadic lifestyles in favor of a permanent address, the law of July 16, 1912, achieved some success.⁴⁹

The travel inconveniences created by the 1912 law seem negligible in comparison to the effects of the 1940 law. In the Haute-Vienne offi-

⁴⁸ AN, F7 16044, lettre du Ministre de l'Intérieur à Messieurs les Préfets (Apr. 29, 1940), 6.

⁴⁹ Hubert, "Réglementations anti-tsiganes," 28.

cials specified that nomads had to report weekly to the gendarmerie station in the area where they were assigned residence. In addition, they had to have all travel itineraries approved before they could leave the district. To assure that nomads returned to their place of assigned residence, gendarmes held the nomads' family identification cards and anthropometric cards and provided travelers with a receipt to be traded for the cards once they came back. Nomads who left their assigned areas without permission faced fines, arrest, and imprisonment. The laws concerning the movement of non-Gypsy French and foreigners during the war required these populations to remain within the zone in which they resided (occupied or unoccupied, etc.). Infractions carried a fine of eleven to fifteen francs and up to five days in prison for repeat offenders. Nomads, forced to remain within certain communes, faced prison terms of one to five years for the first infraction.⁵⁰ The constant threat of reassignment to another area also added to the uncertainty of nomads' daily lives. For example, during the spring of 1941 the minister of the interior ordered all nomads expelled from the department of the Allier, where the new government had established itself at Vichy.⁵¹ Over one hundred nomads thus ended up in the neighboring department of the Creuse. Nomads were also moved from commune to commune after residents had complained to local authorities.

Though permitted to move about within a proscribed area, nomads, like many other French residents, could no longer meet all their material needs. It soon became apparent that rather than forcing Gypsies to find regular employment, the circumscribed areas only further encouraged them to turn to illegal activities such as begging and stealing or to abandon their areas of assigned residence. In November 1940 the gendarmes warned, "One must not place too much hope on changing the nomads' wandering mentality; their work remains, in all likelihood, limited to basket making, knickknacks, or lace making."⁵² Numerous subsequent petitions and investigations made reference to the begging of nomads or their children, and gendarmes arrested nomads asking residents for food, claiming that they had been "caught red-handed begging."⁵³ Gendarmes in the Haute-Vienne arrested a

⁵⁰ See Joseph Valet, "Gitans et voyageurs d'Auvergne durant la guerre 1939-45," *Etudes tsiganes* 6 (1995): 212.

⁵¹ SHGN, box 12537, BT Guéret, R/2, Chef d'Escadron aux Commandants de Section (Apr. 23, 1941).

⁵² SHGN, box 12640, BT Limoges, R/2, Chef d'Escadron à Monsieur le Préfet de la Haute-Vienne (Nov. 15, 1940).

⁵³ On begging, see SHGN, box 12701, BT Limoges, procès-verbal 382 (Feb. 24, 1941), and box 12724, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 460 (Nov. 18, 1941). On the arrests, see SHGN, box 12754, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbaux 188-89 (May 16, 1942).

“*Romanichel* tribe composed of a woman and five children” for leaving its area of assigned residence in the Creuse in early December 1943. On questioning, Marie Wiss explained that she had left the town of Pontarion two weeks earlier to sell some lace: “I left my assigned residence because I could no longer find anything to eat for my children. I knew that I should not leave; it is destitution that pushed me.” She also acknowledged that the tribunal in Guéret had already condemned her once for the same infraction the previous year.⁵⁴ Thus for many, assigned residence did not lead to stable employment, and the inability to provide for oneself and one’s family led to behavior that only worsened relationships with other residents.

Farmers facing labor shortages and daily thefts found the unemployed nomads in their communities troublesome. In the fall of 1941 the mayor of Moissannes reported that the local population resented the refugee *forains* who had been living in the commune since the previous summer. “These people, not engaged in any steady work,” wrote Léonard Dumoulard, “are the object of criticism from the commune’s population that lacks labor due to the large number of prisoners of war.”⁵⁵ By the next spring two of the families previously living in Moissannes had moved to Sauviat-sur-Vige, just five kilometers farther east in the rural Limousin. The mayor in Sauviat argued that all three of the families of *forains* in his community should be reclassified as *nomades* and interned in “special camps” because they did not practice an identifiable profession. The apparent wealth of the families, despite their inactivity, led many residents to believe that the *forains* thrived by illegal activity, fostering discontent among the native population. In addition to the mayor, the gendarmes interviewed at least four other people who noted that none of the men—“nomad types”—worked.⁵⁶ For the residents of Moissannes and Sauviat-sur-Vige, the solution to the problem was not to find regular jobs for the men on farms but to place them and their families in centers under surveillance. The call for internments reflected not only the usual anti-Gypsy sentiments but also local frustrations about labor shortages, perceived economic inequalities, and the *forains*’ refusal to participate in new forms of employment.⁵⁷

Gypsy attitudes toward regular employment clearly contradicted

⁵⁴ SHGN, box 12710, BT Limoges, procès-verbal 2554 (Dec. 2, 1943).

⁵⁵ SHGN, box 12753, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 365 (Aug. 10, 1941).

⁵⁶ SHGN, box 12754, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 115 (Mar. 24, 1942).

⁵⁷ Similar accusations and complaints were often directed at Jews and evacuees from Alsace-Lorraine, although the reasons for unemployment differed. Anti-Jewish legislation excluded Jews from most professions, while the payment of allocations and the cultural differences of evacuees could discourage regular employment.

the National Revolution's commitment to hard work and discipline. While the regime's focus on artisans, peasants, and corporatism differed from that of its predecessor, the attention paid to employment did not. Robert A. Nye has shown that late-nineteenth-century concerns about vagabondage and begging were not about the crimes themselves, but about the failure to work they represented. Treatises and public figures lamented that an "invading horde of lazy no-goods, professional delinquents, true enemies of society" were violating "work, that holy law of the world."⁵⁸ Gypsy begging and vagabondage that continued and even intensified during World War II thus challenged the supposedly natural law of labor.

Despite the stereotype that nomads were lazy and never worked, some did find regular employment. Joseph Vingerder, forced to reside in Saint-Alpinien in the central Creuse, remembered: "When my father saw that we had nothing to eat, he placed all of us to work with peasants. I was twelve at the time." Tsigane Coussantien's father and brothers worked in the forests near Felletin in the southern part of the Creuse, making charcoal to be used in *gazogène* vehicles. After the German troops' arrival in the unoccupied zone in late 1942, the family moved farther south to the Corrèze to continue their work.⁵⁹ The government succeeded in forcing these men into jobs in areas in which labor was greatly needed but not, unsurprisingly, in converting them into supporters of the new regime or of "Work, Family, Homeland."

Famille: Internment and the Family

Gypsies' failure to conform to the accepted ideas of family—the centerpiece of the National Revolution—became another reason for the government and for ordinary citizens to exclude them from society. The twelve members of the Loustalot family, assigned residence in Janailhac (a rural town twenty-six kilometers south of Limoges), moved to an isolated house in the countryside after previous neighbors in town had complained about their drinking and nightly fights. According to gendarmes' reports, the ten children begged for food from neighbors, destroyed hedges, and were often left hungry and alone. Neighbors observed that Georges Loustalot and his wife, "when they have some money, indulge themselves in drinking and leave their children in an appalling state. [The children] are dressed in rags and never have anything to put on their feet. These poor children are to be pitied." Others

⁵⁸ Cited in Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics*, 73.

⁵⁹ Valet, "Gitans et voyageurs d'Auvergne," 214, 217.

agreed that “the Loustalot parents raise their children in a deplorable manner and are incapable of meeting their needs”—indeed, that the pair were “unworthy of raising their children.” The mayor, like many other residents, concluded: “It would be desirable, as much for the region’s inhabitants as for the Loustalot children, who are completely destitute, that an internment measure be pronounced against them.”⁶⁰ For sedentary neighbors, poor parenting skills, as demonstrated by the pitiable material condition of the children, warranted the whole family’s internment. Such action would also remove begging, undesirable Gypsies from the community.

While the children appeared destitute to neighbors, it is possible that this assessment represented only an outsider’s interpretation. The Loustalot family’s downstairs neighbor, Jean Latouille, reported that each time one of the ten children came to ask for a little salt or some garlic, they offered him a one-franc piece. The farmer never accepted the money, believing that it was just part of the children’s begging routine.⁶¹ Isabel Fonseca, who spent years studying eastern European Gypsies, explains that children’s begging does not always stem from necessity. While it allows children “to pick up a little pocket money,” it also encourages a distancing between Gypsies and *Gadje*. “This attitude—though not necessarily the begging—is widely encouraged by adult Gypsies, who are understandably anxious that their children should neither mix with *gadje* nor be thin-skinned.”⁶² In any case, it created further distance between the two communities during the war.

The children’s torn clothing also reflected Gypsy customs and may have served as a strategy to gain additional food, especially useful in a time of extreme shortage. Children throughout France often helped supplement the family’s food supply during the war by visiting neighboring farms to purchase goods or by tending garden plots. The Lous-

⁶⁰ SHGN, box 12724, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 460 (Nov. 18, 1941). Despite the complaints, apparently no action was taken against the family. On June 1, 1942, gendarmes returned to Janailhac, and the mayor reported that the family had left its assigned residence without permission. The family returned sometime in 1943 because the gendarmes appear to have questioned the father and his brother multiple times that year. See SHGN, box 12725, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 196 (June 1, 1942).

⁶¹ SHGN, box 12724, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 460 (Nov. 18, 1941). Another man interviewed in Janailhac also reported that the children always offered to pay, but he considered this to be evidence of their skill at begging.

⁶² Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*, 51. Despite the difference in time and place, Gypsy culture has maintained some central tenets, just as European stereotypes draw on remarkably similar themes. Hancock notes the continuity of culture among the Roma, including the fact that “Romani culture itself (called *rromanipé*) does not permit involvement with the non-Gypsy world beyond the minimum required for business” (“Romani Americans,” 3). Yoors notes similar attitudes among the western European Gypsies with whom he lived and traveled in the 1930s and 1940s (including in France) in *The Gypsies*. Kenrick and Puxon also note continuities in *The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*.

talot children also went from house to house in the area, and Mayor Barrette reported (six months after the initial complaints against the family) that the people of the countryside gave the Gypsy children “lots of provisions [*beaucoup de vivres*]” out of pity.⁶³ Dressed in “rags” and without shoes, the children aroused sympathy in some neighbors. Fonseca again provides an important insight into Gypsy cultural attitudes toward clothing: “Gypsies never mended; this was the case everywhere.” While symbolic cleanliness was important, adults expected children to get dirty as they played. The appearance of poverty also had several uses: it could scare non-Gypsies into keeping their distance from the “dirty” Gypsies, or it could inspire *Gadje* to give alms to the “poor” Gypsies.⁶⁴ Judging by the local residents’ statements given to the gendarmes, the Loustalot children appeared successful in getting food for their family, and the mayor reported that the children, despite being dirty, were “robust and in good health.”⁶⁵ The “advantages” of Gypsy attitudes toward clothing and cleanliness proved detrimental in times of heightened xenophobia, when the “filth” of Gypsies became associated with disease and contamination.⁶⁶ Furthermore, many in French society viewed outward appearances as indicative of one’s worth. Social workers investigating juvenile delinquents regularly viewed “an adolescent’s level of hygiene within the limits of the situation” as “an external manifestation of the family’s internal order.”⁶⁷ Dirty, begging, tattered Gypsy children thus fit with preconceived notions about nomadic criminality and loose family morals, both undesirable traits in the New France under construction. In Janailhac the “mistreatment” of the children thus led some residents to believe that the Loustalot children would be better off in the care of a charitable organization or in a government-run internment camp.

For other Limousin residents, the moral and material filth in which nomads raised their children also demanded some form of administrative action. Many people residing near the Gypsies deplored the tendency of the nomads and *forains* to drink, as well as the lurid scenes that resulted. Firmin Delaire, a neighbor of the Mayer family of *forains* stationed in Sauviat-sur-Vige, complained about living next to the family of eleven: “From time to time, domestic scenes erupt between the hus-

⁶³ SHGN, box 12725, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 196 (June 1, 1942).

⁶⁴ Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*, 50–51.

⁶⁵ SHGN, box 12725, BT Nexon, procès-verbal 196 (June 1, 1942).

⁶⁶ Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*, 50.

⁶⁷ Fishman, *Battle for Children*, 97. Julian Jackson makes the same connection for Vichy, where “moral hygiene was inseparable from social hygiene” (*France: The Dark Years, 1940–1945* [Oxford, 2001], 329).

band and wife, during which indecent remarks are exchanged, to such a point that I had to forbid my children from going near their home. Moreover, the Mayer children are repulsively dirty.”⁶⁸ The fields, roads, and neighbor’s yards around the Gypsies’ wagons, littered with excrement and garbage, engendered fears of epidemics. Residents of Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat complained that the nomads and *forains* using the fairgrounds as a campsite “drink daily at the public fountain and leave all kinds of filth around the faucet.” With dozens of people refusing to use the “toilets located fifty meters from their wagons,” the mayor of Saint-Léonard viewed the nomads as a serious threat to the public health of the entire surrounding community.⁶⁹ “Real” French families faced danger from living in proximity to the Gypsies, and the danger needed to be removed.

Although the April 29, 1940, circular restricting nomadic movement during the war advised against creating concentration camps, this policy quickly changed following the French defeat. After the armistice with Germany in June 1940, Nazi officials requested the establishment of concentration camps for Gypsies throughout France under French administration. Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon estimate that over forty such camps (mainly in the northern zone) existed during the war, housing between three and four thousand Gypsies, while Marie-Christine Hubert places the number of nomads (90 percent with French nationality) interned in France during the war at between 6,061 and 6,500.⁷⁰ In March 1942 the Vichy government decided to move all nomads assigned residence in the free zone to a new camp in the town of Saliers (Bouches-du-Rhône). The camp in the Camargue had a specific political agenda. The camp’s architect wrote: “Above all, the Saliers camp must be a governmental propaganda argument. This argument consisted of giving a concentration camp the look of a village and of allowing family life there and respecting the customs and beliefs of the internees.”⁷¹ Like many other aspects of Vichy’s propaganda campaign,

⁶⁸ SHGN, box 12754, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 115 (Mar. 24, 1942).

⁶⁹ SHGN, box 12753, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 384 (Aug. 22, 1941). Traditions and taboos concerning cleanliness and ritual purity were, in fact, often stricter among Gypsies than among non-Gypsies. See Kenrick and Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*, 36–37. See also Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*, 13; and Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*. Kenrick and Puxon report that Gypsies “regard the indoor lavatory with suspicion as a source of infection, and its use by both men and women as most undesirable if not immoral” (*The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*, 38).

⁷⁰ See Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *Gypsies under the Swastika* (Hatfield, UK, 1995), 66–67; and Marie-Christine Hubert, “L’internement des Tsiganes en France, 1940–1946,” *Etudes tsiganes* 13 (1999): 14. On French camps for nomads, see esp. Peschanski, *Les Tsiganes en France*.

⁷¹ Cited in Mathieu Pernot, ed., *Un camp pour les Bohémiens: Mémoires du camp d’internement pour nomades de Saliers* (Arles, 2001), 5.

the camp failed to live up to its purpose. The villagelike atmosphere combined with familiar jobs was meant to convince Gypsies to give up their nomadic ways, but the abominable living conditions led to escape attempts. Families were separated and locals again complained about the presence of undesirables in their town.

Justifying internment as being “for the good of the family” gave residents a legitimate reason to call for the removal of undesirables from the area. No longer just a material nuisance, nomads and *forains* constituted a threat to future generations, and the government’s duty was to protect all children—Gypsy and non-Gypsy alike. Vichy actively promoted the family as a central element of the National Revolution, but even if one did not fully support the Vichy regime, it was easy to find other advocates that promoted a return to traditional family values. Third Republic politicians, scientists, demographers, and Catholic leaders all called for stronger families.⁷² Therefore one could reject the legitimacy of the Vichy government while remaining complicit with some of its ideas about the family, especially in the case of Gypsies. While overall support for the regime was eroding at this time, it is clear that the government still had enough authority for local residents to turn to the administrative system in the attempt to rid themselves of the Gypsy “nuisance.” Both the government and ordinary citizens supported the internment of nomads before and after the creation of a concentration camp specifically for nomads. In camps Gypsy children would be educated, parents would be forced to work in productive enterprises, and everyone would be closely monitored, thereby preventing future crimes that affected the material situation of “true” French men and women.

Ironically, the strong familial tendencies of the Gypsies, forged through years of discrimination and persecution, became evident once they were interned in camps. The Gypsies ate together, slept together, and always remained within the family unit. A visitor to the nomad camp at Montreuil-Bellay, established in the occupied zone after the armistice, wrote in the weekly *Toute la vie* that, “above all things, the Gypsies [*les Gitans*] have basically the family feeling.”⁷³ Scholars’ assessments of Gypsy culture echo the visitor’s observations: “In the life of Gypsies . . . everything revolves around the family, the basic unit in social organization, the system of family groups, the economic unit in

⁷² See Miranda Pollard, “‘We Are Beaten’: Women, Natalism, and Familialism from the Third Republic to Vichy,” in *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France* (Chicago, 1998), 9–41; and Jackson, “Reconstructing Mankind,” in *France*, 327–53.

⁷³ Cited in Christian Bernadac, *L'Holocauste oublié: Le massacre des Tsiganes* (Paris, 1979), 47.

which work is carried out and working solidarity exercised, the educational unit which ensures social reproduction and security, and protection of the individual.”⁷⁴ Yet the Gypsies’ understanding of family did not have a place in the moral order of the New France being developed under Vichy.

According to the regime, authorities in Gypsy camps had a “moral and social obligation” to alter the existing Gypsy family culture. The camp experience should “inculcate then develop family feeling,” but it was to be a different kind of family feeling than Gypsies had experienced in the past. To change attitudes and bring nomads more in line with other French families, officials needed to “keep in check parents’ habit of exploiting . . . their children (especially the youngest) for their profit; to require that parents treat their children humanely and that children respect their parents; to see to indoor cleanliness and create emulation . . . [and] improvement by rewarding the families that keep things cleanest with special meals; to make families feel solidarity in good and bad times.”⁷⁵ Cleanliness, the external manifestation of internal moral worth, would be rewarded with food, a strong incentive in this period of increasing scarcity. Yet the government often did not live up to its promises, because it could not adequately supply the camps. The difficult living conditions and shortages in the camp then became a justification for removing children from the camps and placing them with nonnomadic families or aid organizations. Such placements aided in Vichy’s goal to socialize, sedentarize, and assimilate nomads into French culture by destroying traditional family bonds and reshaping impressionable children.

Patrie: Homeland and Assimilation

For Vichy officials, the assimilation of Gypsy culture into the French mainstream still remained the ultimate goal. Third Republic legislators carefully avoided using racial definitions in the laws of July 16, 1912, and April 6, 1940, and the measures did not apply to sedentary Gypsies. The establishment of Marshal Pétain’s government did not change the situation. Neither settled Gypsies nor *forains* of Roma heritage faced the sanctions or threats reserved for nomads, nor were these segments of the population subject to internment. By conforming to accepted ideals, domiciled Gypsies avoided persecution; the laws of the Third Republic and the Vichy government’s ideals disseminated in internment

⁷⁴ Liégeois, *Gypsies and Travellers*, 54–55.

⁷⁵ Cited in Bernadac, *L’Holocauste oublié*, 71.

camps urged other Gypsies to follow suit. The desire to instill nomads with a particular sense of community was also made explicit in camp instructions. Officials were to “inculcate and then develop the idea of the possibility and the necessity of society by organizing the camp like a civilized hamlet . . . where each person contributes as much as possible to the improvement of the community’s fate, by making it felt in practice that all efforts are worthwhile, not only for the general interest, but above all for the individual.”⁷⁶ Theoretically, once nomads changed their work habits and acquired a new idea of family and society, they could reenter the French national community.

Though conditions in the camps were difficult, living behind barbed wire in France was preferable to being deported to the death camps in Poland. The French camps, often without running water or bedding, provided inadequate amounts of food and fuel for the internees. Suffering from cold, hunger, and isolation, most nomads did not receive outside assistance, unlike other internees, whose relatives sent packages or visited the camps. A few charitable organizations did try to ameliorate the poor living conditions for nomads, but overall the privations did little to encourage assimilation.⁷⁷ In fact, nomads like Berthe Lafleur, Irène Blanvin, and François Reinhardt all told the arresting gendarmes in the Haute-Vienne that they had illegally fled Saliers because of hunger.⁷⁸ Other Gypsies cited their “Frenchness” and their patriotism, demonstrated by their willingness to fight and die for France, in letters asking for their release from internment camps.⁷⁹

While local residents called for the internment of Gypsies, many nomads in the Limousin continued to live with their neighbors in their areas of assigned residence rather than adjusting to life in camps. Even after the German invasion of the southern zone in 1942 and the creation of Saliers, most did not face the mass internment experienced by their counterparts in the occupied zone. Instead, nomads felt daily discrimination because they did not look or act like other French men and women, and the Vichy regime’s commitment to the ideals of “Work, Family, Homeland” provided ample justifications for exclusion.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ On conditions in the Gypsy internment camps, see esp. Hubert, “L’internement des Tsiganes,” 14–15; Guy Hantarrède, “Les Tsiganes au camp des Alliers (novembre 1940–mars 1946),” *Études tsiganes* 13 (1999): 120–31; and Kenrick and Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*, 103–7.

⁷⁸ Extracts from procès-verbaux rpt. in Pernot, *Un camp pour les Bohémiens*, 75–77.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., the letter from Paul Reinhardt to Philippe Pétain cited in Emmanuel Filhol, “L’internement et la déportation de Tsiganes français sous l’Occupation: Mérignac-Poitiers-Sachsenhausen, 1940–1945,” *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah: Le monde juif*, no. 170 (2000): 148.

Gypsies and Jews: A Comparison

Gypsies and Jews have often been connected in historical accounts of World War II due to the similar nature of their persecution under the Nazis and, by association, under the Vichy regime. On the surface, there appear to be many areas where their experiences overlapped. Before the war, French lawmakers did not view Gypsies and Jews as races and considered the assimilation of both populations possible. Anti-Semites questioned Jewish patriotism because the Jews were seen as a nation within a nation. The Gypsies also raised concerns about loyalty, because they regularly crossed various countries' borders and failed to display any national allegiances. During the war years the Vichy government subjected Gypsies and Jews to restrictive laws and harsh punishments for infractions, and both groups faced internment.

While acknowledging these parallels, scholars must also explore and try to explain the distinctions made by authorities and ordinary citizens. Hindsight allows historians to make connections between Gypsies and Jews and comparisons between the kinds of persecution they faced, but it is important to recognize that contemporary French did not associate the two groups. In fact, official policy toward these segments of the population varied considerably, and natives reacted differently toward each group. Authorities hoped that internment and regular work would turn the Gypsies into "French" people at the same time that French Jews faced accusations of being an inassimilable population forever outside the national community.⁸⁰ Although officials argued for the cultural assimilation of Gypsies, anti-Gypsism (often based on racial stereotypes) pervaded society. The degree of local anti-Semitism proved much harder to determine.⁸¹ Gypsies, a considerably smaller group within French society, faced assigned residence and internment earlier than their Jewish counterparts, bore the brunt of accusations for stealing, and received no support from Limousin residents.

The image of the begging and thieving Gypsy remained the traditional stereotype associated with nomads during the war. The allegations against Jews also reflected specific, though different, stereotypes. Anti-Semitic propaganda accused Jews of monopolizing the French economy and wielding untoward power in society. Therefore, when authorities and individuals blamed Jews for material infractions, the

⁸⁰ François Bédarida and Renée Bédarida, "La persécution des Juifs," in *La France des années noires*, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, 2 vols. (Paris, 1993), 2:134.

⁸¹ On shortages and anti-Semitism in the Limousin, see Shannon L. Fogg, "Refugees and Indifference: The Effects of Shortages on Attitudes towards Jews in France's Limousin Region during World War II," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21 (2007): 31–54.

accusations usually revolved around the black market. According to widely held perceptions, Jews were rich and only wanted to increase their wealth. They allegedly corrupted the peasantry by offering huge amounts of money for coveted items and then resold the food at even higher prices. In reality, the Vichy regime's Jewish Statutes forced hundreds of thousands of Jews into unemployment, and by 1942 over half the population had no means of regular income. Jewish aid organizations provided some monetary and material assistance, but their legally prescribed inability to earn money suggests that Jews had more incentive to steal than nomads who could still practice a trade within designated areas.⁸² Public opinion reports are filled with mentions of Jewish black market activity, but not of Gypsy thefts. It is likely that thefts were so widespread that the government could not single out a particular group without acknowledging its own failure to supply the nation adequately. However, this did not stop authorities from blaming Jews for black market activity despite evidence that the Germans and peasants held the greatest responsibility.

While the assignment of specific residential areas to Gypsies in the Limousin inspired a rash of popular complaints and petitions for internment, Jewish refugees' appearance in the region did not create the same reaction. The stereotype of the rich Jews—as opposed to the thieving Gypsies—may have actually helped facilitate local acceptance of Jews. Jews and non-Jews established mutually beneficial relationships that undermined Vichy's attempts to convince the public of the so-called Jewish problem. Shopkeepers, building owners, and farmers all profited from the arrival of refugees, who bought rations, paid rent, and hoped to purchase additional food in outlying areas. Nomads' circumscribed areas of residence further encouraged them to turn to illegal activities, such as begging and stealing, which further alienated them from the native population. In both cases, material concerns were intimately linked to politics and the treatment of outsiders.

Though the concentration of nomads in camps provided a large population that could have been used to meet deportation quotas imposed by Nazi officials, no Gypsies were deported from French camps. Despite Heinrich Himmler's order of December 16, 1942, demanding the deportation of all remaining Roma in Europe to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the 145 French Gypsies deported to Poland came from a camp in Belgium rather than from one on French soil. Hubert argues that "if the Gypsies of France were not deported, it is in part because

⁸² On the poverty of Jews, see Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France during World War II*, trans. Nathan Bracher (Hanover, NH, 2001), 42.

the Germans could not apply their racial criteria to French Gypsies. France had the sole objective of eradicating Gypsies' nomadism."⁸³ For Hubert, the fundamental differences in German and French attitudes toward Gypsies—racial versus cultural—ultimately determined the population's rate of survival in both countries. There are other possible explanations: Perhaps, to maintain some degree of autonomy and power, the Vichy regime refused to turn over the Gypsies. Perhaps the war's events prevented their deportation; given more time, the interned nomads might have been sent to their deaths. Perhaps the government focused all its time and attention on finding a solution to the so-called Jewish problem. Based on local calls to intern the Gypsies, it is unlikely that the general population would have objected to the deportation of these undesirables.

The questions of internment, race, and assimilation underline the differences between Jews and Gypsies. While both groups were considered undesirables in the French state, the Vichy government maintained different legal stances toward them, did not associate each with the other in its rhetoric, and treated them as separate entities. By conforming to accepted ideals, domiciled Gypsies avoided official persecution and internment, while a failure to conform eventually led to the incarceration of thousands in French concentration camps. Authorities hoped that by learning regular work habits and new ideas about family and community in these camps, nomads would turn into "Frenchmen." Theoretically, these changes would allow nomads to reenter the French national community, a possibility not available to Jews. For Jewish undesirables, camps were temporary only insofar as the ultimate goal was deportation from France. There was no discussion of possible assimilation, especially in the case of foreign Jews, despite the integration of Jews into French society since their emancipation during the French Revolution.

In many ways the treatment of Gypsies by both the government and ordinary citizens was opposite to that of Jews in World War II France. While French officials fought against designating Gypsies as a race despite their visible ethnicity, Vichy law determined the biological basis of Jewishness, even though Jews were more integrated into French society.⁸⁴ Despite the rise of xenophobia in the 1930s and the revocation of foreigners' naturalizations in general (and Jews specifically), the Third Republic and the Vichy regime continued to argue

⁸³ Hubert, "Internement des Tsiganes en France," 16.

⁸⁴ See, for just one example of an explanation of French "racial" criteria in the Jewish Statutes, Jackson, *France*, 359.

for Gypsy assimilability, whereas the strength and tradition of French and international anti-Semitism contributed to Vichy's decision to pursue a racial definition of Jewishness. The size and importance of these two portions of the population may also have had an impact on official attitudes. Jews represented a larger proportion of the population, and through assimilation they had acquired powerful positions in business, politics, and society. This assimilation proved both an advantage and a disadvantage: it made Jews seem more powerful and threatening, leading to laws that excluded them from society, but at the same time, Vichy's laws differentiated between French and foreign Jews. Assimilation provided a degree of protection. During the war the potential for assimilation also shielded nomads from the worst of the Nazis' and Vichy's policies—deportation and extermination.

Traditionally disliked and disparaged, the Gypsies soon discovered that World War II provided sedentary French people with the language and the justifications for further marginalizing them. Though many historians argue that shortages undermined public support for the Vichy government's commitment to a new moral order based on "Work, Family, Homeland," French citizens did invoke these traditional moral principles when they provided some advantage.⁸⁵ In the case of Gypsies, attitudes about work, family, and the nation marked them as outsiders and raised ideological and material concerns for their sedentary neighbors. The nomads' failure to participate in regular, stable work in a period of labor shortages raised questions about their loyalty to the country in its time of suffering and contributed to fears that the nomads would resort to theft to meet their basic needs. The perceived lack of hygiene practiced by the nomads created fears of epidemics ravaging communities already weakened by food shortages and further demonstrated the nomads' shortcomings as parents. Physically, the Gypsies looked different from their "French" neighbors, which reinforced the popular belief that they were a people "without . . . a homeland" and therefore susceptible to spying for the enemy.⁸⁶ Both cultural and racial factors contributed to the exclusion of Gypsies during the war years.

In further pushing nomads and Gypsies to the margins of society, residents of the Limousin also supported and legitimized aspects of the

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Zaretsky, *Nîmes at War*, 176. At the very least, material issues affected the public's support of Vichy and its politics in general. See Veillon, *Vivre et survivre*; Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France*; Lynne Taylor, *Between Resistance and Collaboration: Popular Protest in Northern France, 1940–1945* (New York, 2000); Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation, 1940–1945* (London, 2002); and Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York, 1996).

⁸⁶ Quote from the introduction to the Apr. 6, 1940, law assigning nomads residence throughout France, cited in Peschanski, *Les Tsiganes en France*, 131.

Vichy government's program. That Gypsies did not reflect the ideals of the National Revolution made their persecution easier by providing readily available justifications often further supported by material concerns. Citing the difficulties of the "period that we are going through," permanent residents of the Limousin called for the internment of the undesirables.⁸⁷ The government advocated the internment of nomads based on legal definitions and on the civilizing mission of assimilation. For the ordinary citizen, the racial characteristics of Gypsies and the desire for their expulsion fueled the call for internment. Yet such concerns did not make their way into official reports in the same way that the actions of Jews did. Rarely did prefects mention the activity of Gypsies in their monthly reports to the government at Vichy, while Jews constituted a separate category in these documents.

The events of the Holocaust have often overshadowed the discussion of Gypsies' daily experiences and have linked the fate of these nomads with that of Jews. At the time, however, no one could imagine the horrors of the Holocaust, and the government and the people of France did not make the same connections between Gypsies and Jews. Citing the material difficulties created by living in proximity to the Gypsies, petitions and complaints called for the removal of the undesirable population from towns and villages. In a time of shortage, flouting traditional norms had specific material consequences that further encouraged Gypsies' marginalization. Ordinary French people contributed to the exclusion of nomads from everyday society. The absence of public-opinion reports on attitudes toward Gypsies and the differences between individual and governmental responses to nomads underline the importance of approaching the Vichy period from the perspective of the everyday and the local.

⁸⁷ SHGN, box 12754, BT Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, procès-verbal 115 (Mar. 24, 1942).

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