

Why we need to up our Numbers Game: A non-parametric approach to the methodology and politics of the demography of Roma, Gypsy, Traveller and other ethnic populations

A version of this paper was first presented to the Gypsy Lore Society Annual Meeting in Bratislava in September 2014

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As briefings from the World Bank (2015), show, the illusion that ethnic demography should, and might one day, produce simple stable and reliable enumerations of ethnic groups is slow in dying despite its virtual demolition by the work of Simpson and Akinwale (2004, 2007). Even Simpson's (2014) reiteration after the addition of 2011 census data to the Longitudinal Survey, showing that ethnic identification is profoundly and significantly unstable has failed to make any broad impact on the policy understandings of the United Kingdom.¹ The persistence of the intellectual habits inherited from the era of scientific racism (Acton 2016) are apparent in the UK not only in the absurd

¹ We reiterate Simpson and Akinwale's grateful acknowledgement of the permission of the Office for National Statistics to use the Longitudinal Study and the help provided by staff of the Centre for Longitudinal Study Information & User Support (CeLSIUS). CeLSIUS is supported by the ESRC Census of Population Programme (Award Ref: ES/K000365/1). The authors alone are responsible for any interpretations of the data.

use of essentialised phenotypical labels of “White” and “Black” as *ethnic* categories in the census, but in the recurrent Dutch auctions of illiberality between the political parties over immigration. Deeply embedded assumptions, daily repeated in mainstream media, enable their flat contradiction to be more or less ignored.

This is possible because in practice racist assumptions are actually not too bad as predictors of what people will be like and how they will behave collectively. As long as the majority of people are brought up by their biological parents, and so acquire their language and culture. So “commonsense” stereotypification of “typical” behaviour often goes not only unchallenged, but un-noticed. Of course, ever since the widespread formal discrediting of scientific racism after 1945, in some sense we “know” that ethnicity is acquired during socialisation rather than conception, and remarking on the inter-generational variation in the strength of ethnic feeling in immigrant communities has become a commonplace since the observations of Ballard and Ballard (1977) on Sikhs in Britain. Nonetheless, such knowledge does not cause enough cognitive dissonance to produce more than marginal discomfort at the rhetoric of nation-state politics, as older assumptions persist about “*what is in the blood*”. As long as they don’t seem to be said with malicious intent, the idea that “*white men can’t jump*”, or “*black people have a special feeling for rhythm*” are common cultural clichés whose racist origin and logic, instead of leading to more profound cognitive unease for many groups, can seem comic rather than dangerous.

There is, however, one case in Europe where the persistence of ethnic-essentialist² methodology in demography leads to more profound cognitive unease and uncertainty, and that is the example of the compilation of population statistics concerning Roma, Gypsies and Travellers³. Their apparently arbitrary variation is unsettling rather than funny, suggestive of prejudiced neglect. Rather than examine seriously the wild variations in counts and estimates, analysts have suggested that “mystery” is existentially inherent in the Romani situation, and thus avoid questioning the contradictions in their own thinking about Roma. It saves them having to consider the challenging implications of plausible but un-mysterious possibilities about Romani history. The wide variation in reported numbers of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma populations has been presented as (1) different in kind to the un-mysterious business of counting normal ethnic groups, and (2)

² A polite term to avoid spraying too many accusations of racism around.

³ Appendix II reproduces the reasons for using this portmanteau term, given by Acton (2005).

as an indication of the inherent unreliability of information about Roma, reflecting the unreliability of the Roma themselves, and confirming the intractability of the Roma policy terrain. This paper will argue that in fact (1) exactly the same methodological difficulties in counting Roma apply to all other ethnic groups and (2) once one understands what kind of information an ethnic question elicits, it should be possible to be reasonably precise in giving answers, to calculate the likely margin of error of population estimates at any significance level, and to use them, NOT to calculate how large is the need for special provision for Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, but to gauge what resources are necessary to make general policy provision accessible to them, i.e for monitoring the success of a non-discriminatory policy, not for guessing how large the bandage has to be to cover up the wounds of discrimination; that is to tackle the structures of inequality themselves, rather than merely compensate for them.

The case of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers is, therefore, an example which means the theses of Simpson and Akinwale (2004, 2007) about the mutability of ethnic identification, are not just a comic counterfactual that can be safely ignored by commonsensical policy-makers.

Their work is based on the UK OPCS Longitudinal Survey, which links the individual census records of all the individuals born on four secret days during the year, creating a systematic longitudinal sample of just over 1% of the entire population.. Simpson and Akinwale compared the ethnic self-identifications offered by individuals (or their parents in the case of minors) between the 1991 UK census and that in 2001. Whereas most official statistics show only the size and broad location of ethnic populations, and interpret change over time as the result of births, deaths and migrations, they were able to quantify how individuals changed their ethnic identification between 1991 and 2001.

Their major findings are simply stated:

“While membership of the White category is stable, between seven and nine per cent of those recorded in an Asian group in 1991 have changed to a different group by 2001, while 23% of the Caribbean and African groups have changed.” (Simpson and Akinwale 2004: 1)

It is worth clarifying what they mean by “stable”. Although the water is muddied by the expansion of ‘White’ in order to include ‘Irish’ , it seems just over half a percent of the 1991 Whites – one in 200 - stopped being White by 2001. Over 6% of 1991 Africans and Afro-

Caribbeans became White by 2001, and more than 2% of South Asians (Simpson and Akinwale 2004: 45). By the 2001 census the rate of change had increased: Simpson (2014:2) asserts that in England and Wales “4.0% changed their recorded ethnic group between 2001 and 2011. This is exactly double the instability between 1991 and 2001 (2.0%), in spite of the greater changes to the question during the earlier period.”

Drawing on Salt and Coleman’s (1996) comparison of census practices across the world, Simpson and Akinwale (2004: 4) presented misconceptions about the stability of ethnic group as deriving from the historic practice “in Britain, the US and the Old Commonwealth” of classifying people by their birthplace, and parental and grandparental birthplace, in the way that is still done in France (Tribalat, 2004), and assert:

“Used in these ways, ethnic group classifications imply a stable characteristic that is carried through an individual’s lifetime. The growth, geographical settlement and conditions of populations defined by ethnic group questions, are interpreted as the movement of distinct groups across time and space, and their changing social conditions. However, the instability of ethnic group has been found to be neither insignificant nor random in contexts outside the UK. In addition to the unreliability associated with recording answers, people respond to questions about ethnicity within the constraints of the categories offered to them, aware not only of their personal self-identification but also of the social acceptability of each category.” (Simpson and Akinwale, 2004: 4)

We can go further: the assumption is not just of “stability” but of reliable observability. Perhaps we can make the methodological issues clearer by contrasting them with the statistical treatment of a personal human characteristic which is also (as we have established is the case for ethnic identification) liable to change over time, but which is nonetheless reliably observable: the human visual field as measurable by psychophysical examination. Acton et al. (2011) established both the reliability and validity of a new method (MP-1 microperimetry, Nidek Instruments, Inc., Padova, Italy) of visual field testing, with the additional technology to provide ‘live’ tracking of the retinal image throughout the examination, for improved accuracy. They did this by using the classic methodological belt-and-braces of comparing the results from the new method with conventional visual field examination, using an older device called the “Humphrey Field

Analyzer” (Carl Zeiss Meditec, Dublin, CA),⁴ and then repeating both tests on the human subjects tested to make the initial comparison. The results were reassuring. The “Nidek MP-1” gave the same results as the “Humphrey Field Analyzer”, and furthermore when both methods were used to re-test the same sample of human subjects, the only change that was detectable was a very slight deterioration (on both measures) that biological conditions of the subjects were entirely predictable.

So, just as the methodological textbooks advise, comparison of different tests, and the test-retest methodology establish confidence in reliability and validity of the “Nidek MP-1” method. With this under their belt, Acton et al (2012) were able to use synchronic data from this test to make a contribution, not just to methodology, but to actual empirical scientific knowledge of the deterioration of the visual field in early age-related macular degeneration.⁵

Why cannot we use synchronic ethnic data as a similar indicator of need? Political demographers would just love to be able to treat ethnicity as though it was a human characteristic like the visual field. To drive home exactly why they cannot, let us look at the way data collection on human ethnicity contrasts with data collection on the human visual field.

For the visual field, the different tests produce similar results. For ethnicity, different questions – even between one census and another – produce different results. When we look at data collection methods for ethnic affiliation, different methods produce clearly different results. The different results for different ways of counting Romani ethnicity that we discuss below produce more dramatic divergences than for most ethnic statistics, but they are not different in kind.

But if use of different tests does not assure us of construct validity (after all measurements of human ability suffer the same difficulty), can we at least assure ourselves of the consistency or reliability of particular measures by using the test-retest method, like Acton et al (2011)? Essentially Simpson and Akinwale have done just that and demonstrate that using the census question to measure ethnicity

⁴ The key difference is in the technology, MP-1 gives a ‘live’ image of the retina that can be accurately tracked throughout visual field testing, HFA provides no such tracking, just a simple video camera following the front of the eye (reflexes from the cornea).

⁵ A matter of personal concern, since the Acton’s among the authors of the present paper share an aged relative suffering from macular degeneration. For the curious, James and Thomas are brothers, and Jennifer is their niece.

produces different results for the same individual from one census to another. To sum up: when we measure the visual field we can get the same answer both from different tests at the same time, and from the same test at different times. Neither of these assertions can be made about the measurement of ethnicity, but policy-makers continue to blame this just on the incompetence of demographers. We hope to show that the problem is not, as policy-makers suppose, that demographers have failed to do their job, but that policy-makers have failed to take into account the intimidating and discouraging effects of current or threatened policy on responses to questions.⁶

The key question that then needs to be asked is “What produces this unreliability”. Although Simpson and Akinwale themselves avoid this trap, most of the statistical analysts they discuss continue to operate as though ethnic group was a stable, predictable characteristic of individuals, like their visual field, and any reported variability merely an artefact of the unreliability of the question directed to individuals (or in the case of one UNDP (2002) European survey of Roma, their social workers). The different contexts of historic Roma population figures have been examined many times in the general literature about the Roma. Demographic figures depend not only on who will identify themselves, but on whom the statisticians are prepared to count! In Eastern Europe poor, dark-skinned residents of Gypsy ghettos are more likely to be counted than nomads or light-skinned businessmen, while in England, until the 1980s only nomads living in tents or caravans were counted (Acton, 1979)

⁶ A particularly worrying example of this are the local authority-funded Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Need assessment surveys currently being carried out by the market research firm ORS (Opinion Research Services) to revise downwards the number of “gypsies” in planning law, after new government guidance to eliminate those who they think are merely ethnically Gypsies or Travellers, rather than “of nomadic habit of life”. The interview schedule (misrepresented in publicity as a “questionnaire”) which has been passed to us exhibits logical and methodological flaws. Question F1 asks how many “trips you or members of your family” have taken in the last 12 months”. Then Question 3 asks “What was the main reason for travelling?”, followed by “INTERVIEWER: Please cross one box only.” The choices are “Work”, “Holidays”, “Visiting Family”, “Fairs” and “Others”. Conventionally “work” and “fairs” are indicators of “nomadic habit of life”, but holidays and family visits are not. For most Gypsies/ Traveller who undertake several journeys away from their main base, the main reason for each of the journeys will be different, and include all of the above. By ticking one box only, the interviewers will substantively mis- and under-represent the importance of Travelling to the way of life. This is an example of methodological chicanery serving the interests of the policy-makers who fund it.

The conclusion drawn from this is often, simply, that individuals need to be persuaded to report their own ethnicity more accurately. Let us take an example from Romania. Wamsiedel (2011) a sociologist working with Romani Criss in Bucharest, asserted “political actors, academics, and civil society activists tend to agree that the Roma minority is severely under- represented in the official statistics” and reported research on focus groups where the researchers “explored” with various individuals their reluctance to report themselves as Roma in the Romanian census. This was fairly crucial as the allocation of services like Roma health mentors was conditional on the number of Roma in a locality reaching a certain percentage of the total population. And indeed – what a surprise! - the percentage of people self-identifying as Roma in the 2011 census rose to 3.2% (619,007 individuals) from 2.46% in the 2002 census, while the total population fell from 21.68 million to around 19 million (National Statistics Institute, 2012). It really makes one wonder who all those thousands of people identified in the West as Romanian Roma migrants could possibly have been!

To continue the Romanian example, let us examine the social policy consequences of this. A number of villages, where additional poor people were persuaded to identify as Roma, gained Roma health mentors. On the other hand, since the survey statistics of the ERRC (2013) demonstrate that those who identify as Romanians have much better health outcomes than those who identify as Roma, it is also probable that the decision of individuals to move from Romanian-identification to Roma identification will in itself improve the statistical health of the identified Roma population; instant policy success! Nobody seems to have noted that pursuing such a policy will reinforce ghetto-isation, compared with one of targeting additional resources wherever there are poor health outcomes and poverty, and ensuring all such services are accessible to Roma. Of course one can make a case for better ethnic monitoring, as the 2013 ERRC survey report does; without it one cannot possibly measure the success of equal access policies. But the equal access policies need to be the same, regardless of the exact size of the Roma population; the problem is the existence of discrimination in mainstream services - Romanian racism - not the inevitable inadequacy of special services for the Roma. In fact, it is evident that a model of an ethnic group as a fixed individual characteristic, carrying with it all sorts of special needs, is a statistically unsustainable one because it does not remotely reflect the real world.

Perhaps if we return to the comparison with optometry for a moment, it may be possible to point to a way out of this problem. Acton et al

(2012) were able, as we noted, to make valid and reliable observations about the physical processes of early age-related macular degeneration. But suppose they had included in their research a longitudinal perspective on the extent of degeneration in advanced age-related macular degeneration: we may hypothesise that the extent of the degeneration would be partly dependent of the willingness of the subjects to act on ophthalmological advice (e.g. “Eat a lot of carrots and other orange-coloured food and green leafy vegetables!”) But, as the extensive body of knowledge produced by the sociology of health behaviour shows us, willingness to act on medical or ophthalmological advice by no means correlates simply with the gravity of the physical condition of the sufferer; the general knowledge, cultural attitudes, and self-image and social environment of the sufferer intervene in complex ways. If someone with early age-related macular degeneration just happens to have a grand-daughter among the authors of Acton et al (2012) they are more likely to become extremely serious about eating orange-coloured foods, than another old person who simply gets a leaflet from their optician.

The study of health behaviour thus has to create models within which the physical variables of bodily conditions interact with various social and psychological variables to produce individual health behaviours which can indeed be aggregated to guide policy in health service provision. If we can produce similar models to account for the variations in behaviour, including the stigma/attitudes/elements influencing how individuals identify ourselves, as well as the societal pressures produced by asking individuals about their ethnic identification, then we will more effectively be able to assess the equality of outcomes of welfare policies for diverse populations, just as we do for health policies, and the feedback effects on behaviour of publicised results on statistical changes. Essentially we need to interpret ethnic identification as a complex attitudinal variable like health behaviour, or even political affiliation.

Of course it can change over time, according to context and the zeitgeist. Simpson and Akinwale (2004) draw on a range of feminist theorists of hybridity and intersectionality, such as Anthias (1998) to show the myriad shifting factors which shape the way individuals present their identity (or indeed identities – many “mixed” individuals have perfectly plausible affiliations to several ethnic groups) at any one time. In this model the answers that people give ARE what constitute the empirical variable; the belief that they are merely reflections of some ultimate underlying truth is just one of the chimeras of idealist rationalism, the legacy of Plato’s image that we are like human beings in a cave, seeing the real world only through the

shadows it casts through our fire on the cave's walls. The tallies of the answers to ethnic question are the reality with which we must deal, not the shadow of some ultimate reality known only to God.

That variables are attitudinal (and therefore non-parametric), rather than arithmetical, does not mean they are of no use for prediction or policy. For example it is true that individuals in the UK may tell a pollster they are going to vote Labour, and then actually vote Conservative in the polling booth; but by small scale surveys the pollster can produce a probabilistic correction coefficient to correct the raw data given by large scale surveys,(and indeed have been doing so for decades) and specify the margin of error for any given level of statistical significance. We should not be bewailing the inaccuracy of survey or census results; still less should we be regarding the difference between the outcomes of different measures taken in different contexts as itself a margin of error rather than the result of difference of context. Rather, we should be seeking to identify the relationship between measurements made in different contexts, so that we can use them to predict each other, and the level of need for resources to make provision truly equally accessible.

It can be rather impertinent to demand of anyone that they change their self-presentation. Romani Gypsy and Traveller were included as named ethnic categories for the first time in the UK in the 2011 census. In private discussion, a leading Romani Pentecostal pastor told Thomas Acton that after reading about the way the Nazi government tracked down individuals of Romani descent (sometimes even unknown to themselves) and sent them to concentration camps, he registered his whole family as "White English". This is not a man who denies his ethnicity; he is a leader of a specifically Romani church denomination, and regularly addresses rallies of thousands, and promotes the Romani language. But he does not think it irrational to try to protect his children from the attentions of possible future stormtroopers. This may indicate a certain lack of trust in the will of the state to protect them; but has the state yet earned that trust from Roma, Gypsies and Travellers?

So – how can we use the 2011 UK Census? It was the first time the UK questionnaire included among the ethnic identities proffered an option for individuals to identify as 'Gypsies or Travellers', and about 58,000 did so (ONS, 2014), presenting an interesting profile.

One British stereotype was immediately contradicted, for in this census-identifying population only 24% of them were living in caravans. The Gypsies and Irish Travellers who responded to the

census had the highest proportion (60 per cent) with no qualifications for any ethnic group, compared with that for the population as a whole (23 per cent); they were the self-identified ethnic group with the lowest proportion of respondents who were economically active at 47 per cent, compared to 63 per cent for the population as a whole; and they had the lowest proportion of any ethnic group rating their general health as 'good' or 'very good' at 70 per cent compared to 81 per cent of the overall population (ONS, 2014). Only 12% were born outside the UK, and it is probable that most of these were born in the Irish Republic. It is, however, perhaps understandable that very few of the East European Roma who have migrated here since 1989 would have identified themselves, since most regard the word 'Gypsy' as a bad term (seeing it as a direct translation of 'Cigany', a much more pejorative term.) something that might be borne in mind in the next round of census planning.

How can we work our way from this particular piece of hard data to estimates of how many individuals might identify as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller in the UK under other circumstances? Although we are personally aware of small numbers of intermarriages between Roma and Romanichals (and rather more between English Romanies and Irish and Scottish travellers) over the past century, it is probably wisest to make separate estimates of 'Roma' and the numbers of 'Gypsies and Travellers' (that is, Romanichals, Kale, Nachins, Minceir, Pavees and caravan-dwelling New Travellers).

The only recent serious attempt to work from the Census and other public data to make a minimum estimate of the number of Gypsies and Travellers in England is that of the Traveller Movement (2013). It compared the Census with the numbers revealed by local authority Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs), which in turn take into account the Department for Communities and Local Government biannual caravan counts.

Both of these were likely to undercount a little, since they could be used to help determine local authorities' site provision, although the determination of Traveller Education Service teachers to defend the funding of their inclusive policies acted as a curb on undercounting. The English local authority biannual caravan counts have been conducted since 1979, rising from 8,000 caravans to around 21,000, a growth that reflects both an increasingly reliable methodology and a clear natural population growth. In principle, the forward-looking GTAAs, developed as part of the last Labour government's regional planning strategies, sought to count all those living in caravans now or recently, or possibly desirous of living in caravans. Obviously,

Travellers living in houses who would prefer to be in caravans are more likely to have made themselves known to GTAA interviewers than are those perfectly happy to be in houses; but some of the latter were included. Unfortunately, the GTAAs were contracted out to a range of consultants and universities of varying credibility, each of which decided its own methodology; but since the pressure from the local authorities funding GTAAs (and having to agree their findings) was to lower the numbers needing accommodation, we can treat the Traveller Movement's (2013) calculation of around 120,000 Gypsies and Travellers (ie those whom the EU calls Roma, but don't call themselves Roma) in England in 2011 and 2012 as a reliable minimum figure. To that, of course, we have to add an absolute minimum of 5,000 from government figures for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well trying to get an idea of how much of an underestimate it is.

To do this, we need to go back to the caravan counts and the Census. If we take the most recent caravan counts for each part of the UK in 2013, this gives us at least 22,500 caravans, and if we apply the conventional estimate of an average of three persons per caravan, (Niner 2002, Green, 1991) we have 67,500 individuals. Even if we round this down to 60,000 so as to exclude those New Travellers, who do not identify ethnically as Gypsies or Travellers, this is still more than the Census figure of 58,000 (of whom only 24% live in caravans). That tells us that there are some four times as many identifiable Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans as were prepared to identify themselves to the Census. It also means there are at least 44,000 Gypsies and Travellers living in houses who registered in the Census; and if we assume that they are the same proportion of the housed population normally identified by friends and acquaintances as Gypsies and Travellers as we know to be the case for caravan dwellers, that would give us somewhere between 180,000 and 190,000 living in houses who (sometimes at least) identify as Gypsies and Travellers whom we should add to the minimum of 60,000 living in caravans.

Although this is based on a synchronic rather than a longitudinal comparison, it confirms the conclusion we can draw from Simpson and Akinwale (2007) that identifying as an ethnic group is more like an attitude than a physical characteristic such as height or visual field. Some people identify very strongly and all the time, and others only occasionally. But we can assert with reasonable confidence that the numbers of individuals in the UK who are prepared sometimes to acknowledge Gypsy or Traveller ethnicity outside of their immediate family are certainly not fewer than 125,000, and probably not more than 250,000. In addition, there may be 5,000–10,000 New Travellers.

We would expect to find the same variability among immigrant Roma communities and attempts to count them after their migration to the UK since the fall of East European communism in 1989. Clark (1998) noted how the moral panics in the previous decade changed the policy context of state data-collection agencies across Europe. The present writers know many middle-class Romani families in the UK who are happy to attend, and sometimes even organise, Romani musical or cultural events, but always identify themselves to the authorities as Polish, Slovak, Bulgarian or Romanian. But substantial numbers of poorer families become known as Roma to educational, housing or social services. The first serious attempt to enumerate these through a survey of local authorities was by Fremlova, Ureche and Oakley (2009). In a complex but methodologically transparent process, they counted the numbers of Roma known to local authorities and then, by interviewing those families, were led to other families not known to the authorities, and they too could be asked for details of other families related or known to them, and the size of other communities that they knew about. On the basis of this Fremlova et al asserted there were no fewer than 110,000 Roma in England, while the estimates of some of their Roma informants were as many as one million in the UK. Their own more recent estimate of the likely figure (Fremlova and Ureche, 2011) was 500,000. In various seminars and meetings in 2009–10 discussing the 2009 work, which was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, government advisers and officials (before 2010) privately conceded that 200,000 seemed a plausible estimate. This has recently been supported by a study at Salford University (Brown et al, 2013), following a similar but more limited and less transparent methodology than Fremlova and Ureche's, which came up with the surprisingly specific minimum figure of 197,705 Roma in the UK. Strong criticisms by Matras (summarised in Matras, 2015) from the rival centre of Romani Research at Manchester University led to extended controversy in the e-mail forum of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (Durst 2015). Thomas Acton's contributions to Durst (2015) suggest, however, that Matras is prone to regard lack of methodological transparency, and allegedly "irresponsible" media dissemination as themselves proof of unreliability and validity, while still believing that better data collection methodology, predicated on a better "definition" of "Roma" could provide a solution to the variability of ethnic statistics. The original e-mail controversy in 2014 was one of the stimuli for the writing of this paper.

Despite the scepticism of Matras, and reluctance of some government officials to support such estimates, Ryder, Cemlyn and Acton (2014) argued on the basis of the above estimates that in the current decade

there are no fewer than 240,000 people in the UK at any one time who normally identify as Gypsies, Roma or Travellers, and perhaps around 350,000 who sometimes do and not more than 750,000 who ever do. Note we are *not* saying “There are between 240,000 and 750,000 Roma, Gypsies and Travellers in the UK”. What we are doing is giving predictions of the numbers of people who will self-identify or be identified under different circumstances. If you are a future stormtrooper determined to extirpate every drop of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma blood, you should probably be aiming at the three-quarter million mark. If you are another kind of racist, determined to minimise the population to avoid scaring *Sun* readers, you can probably get away with less than a quarter of a million. If you are looking to see what the total uptake is likely to be for cultural endeavours and community provision which uses, celebrates or acknowledges Roma, Gypsy and Traveller heritage, then 350,000 is our best estimate.

This may seem a rather tasteless way of making our point. We have not, however, failed to notice that the principles we have set out imply that those who confidently seek a single accurate figure for the numbers of ethnic Jews or Roma killed in the Nazi Holocaust are also still trapped in the older modes of thought which saw ethnicity as a fixed and stable characteristic. Indeed, the pre-genocidal situation was precisely when those who could escape the stigma and danger of officially identifying as a persecuted minority did so, (thus pushing one kind of estimate down) at the same time as the Nazi genealogists were energetically seeking out Roma descent even among those who were personally unaware of it (thus pushing another kind of estimate up). Given that, it is unsurprising that if we simply use the official figures of pre-war and wartime administrations it is possible, absurdly, to specify attrition rates for some local Roma populations in excess of 100%. Nor should we forget that there were many individuals killed who were of both Jewish and Romani heritage - those whom we might term "the Klezmer⁷ generations". It is these individuals above all who are dishonoured by those who turn the enumeration of holocaust victims into a competitive sport.

Of the UK Roma, Gypsy and Traveller population, contrary to stereotype, no more than 60-70,000 live in between 22,000 and 23,000 caravans. Around a fifth of the caravan-dwellers live on unauthorised sites and encampments, three tenths on local authority sites and half on their own legal sites (Ryder et.al 2012). Further small-scale surveys (and indeed the next census, and OPCS Longitudinal Survey after 2021) will give us further comparative data

⁷ Klezmer music emerged in the 19th century as a popular form played by both Roma and Jewish musicians.

to calculate a likely margin of error for our predictions at any given significance level using a non-parametric indicator of significance such as chi-square (Ott and Lyman 2008: 500-529). Of course the small scale surveys need to be located to reflect the clustering within the general population of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller, but there are many well-developed methodological techniques for the construction and analysis of cluster samples (Moser and Kalton 1978: 89ff)

This may shock some readers who are used to publications and even official reports confidently giving much more precise and consistent figures. But in truth these have all been based on extrapolations and updating of very limited empirical work. From 1945 until the 1980s the only official estimates of numbers in the UK were of 'nomads' or of 'people of nomadic habit of life'. The annual caravan counts did receive serious critical attention (Drakakis-Smith and Mason 2001), but mainly in relation to their accuracy and internal consistency, rather than ethnicity, a concern echoed recently by the UK Statistical Authority (2015) – Rather than deal with these criticisms, the government is trying to use the current Housing Bill to drop the obligation on councils to conduct any assessments of the need for site provision. Campaigners are fearful this will undermine site provision.

The first attempts to estimate the detailed size and ethnic character of the GRT community were by Acton and Kenrick (1986, 1991), updated at intervals in response to requests from European projects (Liégeois, 1994). In 1986, using official caravan counts and National Gypsy Education Council data, they estimated the size of the English and Welsh Gypsy communities and the Scottish and Irish Traveller communities using different (and somewhat speculative) multipliers for each to get from the caravan-dwelling numbers to the total numbers including house dwellers. They included an estimate of 1,000 for the number of Roma, based on people personally known to Acton and Kenrick, the largest groups of whom were the so-called 'Old London Kalderash', descended from the so-called 'German Gypsies' who arrived in 1906, and the Romungros, who arrived after the Hungarian uprising of 1956. There were also small numbers of other showmen Romungros (although we did not include Showmen's Guild members in any of our calculations), Rudari, Ursari and South European Sinte. This led them to suggest a minimum figure of 88,000, and a possible likely estimate of 90,000–110,000, Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, which they and others updated in the early 1990s according to increases in the caravan counts and the arrival of new Roma migrants after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Some commentators may also have mistaken the figure of ‘90–110,000 voyageurs’, as they became in European publications, as being for ‘nomades’ only, and doubled again to allow for ‘sedentaries’. Others appear not to have realised that Roma were included in such estimates. The widely cited Commission for Racial Equality (2006) report seems to make just such errors. While Clark and Greenfields (2006) are properly cautious and sceptical of such estimates in the introduction to their collection, some of their contributors are not. Most recent European statistics for the UK are offered without justification and seem to be extrapolations of previous figures – which are then often confidently cited by UK writers as independent evidence. This bland and careless confusion imposed on us the re-examination in this paper.

Finally we would reiterate that in no way do we think that Roma, Gypsies and Travellers are in any way statistically methodologically exceptional. Ethnic affiliation is an attitudinal variable. We can actually choose how we identify ourselves. We may sometimes say “You can’t choose who you are”, Some people think they have no choice about their political identity: Mrs Thatcher notoriously said “There is no alternative”. But she was mistaken. There is always a choice. We hope that this essay may provide a footnote to future work based on the Longitudinal Survey demonstrating the creative plasticity of our appropriation of cultural heritage.

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Appendix I: Towards a formal model

a) Definitions

OPCS-based Data (O)

Nc11 = Census GTR tally 2011 = 58,000

Nc21 = Census GTR tally 2021

4Nc/355.75 = Longitudinal Survey sample for any given census year
 (All of these can be disaggregated by district.)

Survey-based Data (S,T)

GTAA_y = GTAA survey results for particular districts (d) in year Y

TES_y = TES survey results for particular districts(d) in year Y

Family Informant Estimates (F)

F_y = Family interview/genealogical enquiry results for particular districts in year Y

Hypothesis: that O will be a fair predictor of S and possibly F

Method

Construct a table

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(\text{observed frequency} - \text{expected frequency})^2}{\text{expected frequency}}$$

	Small Survey Data		
	GTAA	TES	F

OPCS	O ₁	S ₁	T ₁	F ₁
DATA	O ₂	S ₂	T ₂	F ₂
	O ₃	S ₃	T ₃	F ₃

One should then be able to plot the strength of the association between the variables by district, and use non-parametric tests such as chi-square to measure the significance of any association, and the reliability of O and as predictor of S, T and F.

The Chi-square statistic (χ^2) involves calculating differences between distributions of frequencies of variables between which an association is suspected, in different samples. It is calculated by squaring the sum of the difference between the observed frequencies and frequencies expected (on the basis of random distribution) in all cells, or

$$\chi^2 = \sum (o-e)^2/e$$

That is, chi-square is the sum of the squared difference between observed (*o*) and the expected (*e*) data divided by the expected data in all possible categories, i.e in each of the cells in the table above. The larger the numerical value of χ^2 , the lower is the probability that the actual distribution of numerical values in each cell of the original table came about by chance. The statistical significance of the association or coincidence between the the various tests whose values are tabulated is a calculation, using the mathematics of probability, of the chance that that association did not come about by chance. This significance coefficient is normally expressed as a value between 0 and 1, or 0% and 100%. This should enable us to calculate a likely margin of error when we build a model within which, in a particular social context, we use one way of collecting ethnic data as a method of predicting another.

Appendix II: Discussion of the use of the term “Roma/Gypsies/Travellers” adapted from Acton (2005, pp 1-2)

Who are Roma/Gypsies/Travellers? And why does the ontological and epistemological uncertainty besetting the identity of this range of groups lead to such a cumbersome 3-part label to bridge the political contestation of other simpler labels? The classical historical synthesis suggested by Fraser (1992) suggests a population of Indian origin

started moving towards Europe from the ninth century onward, bringing with them an Indian language. They become fragmented because of persecution in the 15th and 16th centuries, so that populations of different sizes are more or less acculturated in different European countries. Where the Romani population is very small it has either been absorbed by, or failed to displace, a local commercial nomadic or “Traveller” minority. Some groups, such as the English Romanichal Gypsies, maintain both a Romani and a Traveller identity. The word “Gypsy” (from “Egyptian”) is theorized as a simple mistake about origins made by Europeans, and tolerated or accepted by Roma.

This synthesis has been challenged, both by Romani-speaking groups who do not call themselves Roma, such as the German Sinte, and by radical social constructionist academics such as Willems (1997) who argue that the whole of this synthesis is an ideology created from the work of Grellmann (1787) in order to racialise a disparate range of marginalized social groups to make them fit new state policies. This in turn is being challenged both by conservative linguists, emphasizing the core Romani language, and another less radical form of historical revisionism suggested by Hancock (2006) and Marsh (2006) suggesting the core bearers of the Romani language were descendants of a multicultural 11th century Indian-led militia originally recruited by the Ghaznavids, who, when they arrived in Anatolia and the Balkans walked into Gypsy stereotypes already established by the Byzantines around earlier Indian immigrants, the Dom. Complexity, variety and difference of perspective are thus inherent in Roma/Gypsy/Traveller self-definition from the beginning, and any simplification of the above would simply mislead.

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