Romani Performance and Heritage Tourism

The Pilgrimage of the Gypsies at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

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Every year in May some 10 to 15 thousand Romanies (aka Gypsies) perform a pilgrimage to a remote fishing village in the south of France called Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. They arrive in a rumbling stream of cars, vans, RVs, and camper-trailers that quickly take up the curbside parking spaces and municipal parking lots and nearly fill a vast campground at the village outskirts (plate 1). The pilgrims camp for a period of one to three weeks: They spend the time sitting on folding chairs and grilling meat next to their vehicles, partially privatized by lines of hanging laundry; palavering and doing business with relatives and friends; attending weddings and catechisms; praying to the statue of Saint Sara, the patron saint of all Romanies, in a candle-lit vault beneath the church (plate 2); and gathering at dusk for storytelling, music, singing, dancing, and carousing. Adhering strictly to its annual schedule, the pilgrimage culminates in two religious events: the first, on the night of 23 May, involves lowering a chest of reliquary on a rope and pulley from a trap door in the church ceiling to a throng of miracle-seeking pilgrims; the second event, held the following day, is a procession in honor of Saint Sara.

The procession forms on the village’s acropolis in front of the same 10th-century church where the box of sacred reliquary and the statue of Sara are found. From there it moves on narrow, spectator-lined streets down to the waterfront and to a stretch of beach where about 15 thousand people have gathered, standing on a pair of rock jetties that border the beach on each side, on several boats at sea, and on the strand itself. From these vantage points they watch the boisterous procession cross over the sand and enter the shallows of the Mediterranean Sea (plates 3–5). Leading the way is a 16-member, mounted cadre of local men called les gardians, who wear the traditional black hats of the region’s bull breeders and carry old-fashioned, trident-tipped bull prods (plate 6). The procession is comprised of perhaps two dozen Romanies, several of whom carry the statue of Sara on a platform above their shoulders, while others play music and sing (plate 7) or carry brilliant, flower-covered crosses and banners (plate 8); a thick Bible (plate 9); or iconographic objects of Romani culture, such as a miniature model of a caravan and horse (plate 10). They shout “Vive Sainte Sara!” as they process,
and Romanies in the crowd shout it back. A number of clergymen also partici-
pate, walking in full-length, white vestments, and pronouncing “Vive Sainte
Sara!” into handheld, electric bullhorns. In the seawater, one of the clergymen
performs a symbolic cleansing of Sara’s statue while journalists and tourists swarm
around him. Following this brief service, les gardians escort the procession back
through the multitude on the beach and then to the doors of the church.

Upon first learning of the pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries, I thought of it as an
opportunity to access the secretive world of the Romanies with all its storied
wealth of cultural performances, but once I was actually there—in 2000, with my
wife, Michèle, and our one-year-old daughter, Clémentine—it turned out to be
much more intercultural than I had anticipated. I could not observe the Roma-
nies without also seeing the villagers, in whose little community they convene,
nor disentangle the threads of their ancient and shared history (Romanies ap-
peared in nearby Arles in 1438, and the tradition of Romani pilgrimage to Saintes-
Maries was well-established by 1855, when the oldest-known written reference
to it was made) (Colinon 1975:56–57). Also involved are the thousands of tourists
(and journalists), who bring to the pilgrimage a massive, secular presence and
whose consumerism transforms the village into a crowded shopping mall. Ever
since the procession for Sara was added to the pilgrimage in 1935 (Coupry 1999:33),
it has occasioned a unique convergence of Romanies, villagers, and tourists that
has evolved into the world’s largest Romani performance festival. In addition to
the famous procession, Romani musicians, singers, and dancers perform through-
out the day and evening on the streets and in the cafes of the village. Manitas
de Plata, the world’s preeminent Romani guitarist, attends faithfully every year,
as do The Gypsy Kings and other professional musicians. Most pervasive are
the sightings of “average” Romanies, who are simply sitting on a park bench or
standing in the street, which constitute performances of Romani culture in the
eyes of many tourists and journalists who are looking to take pictures of such
mundane moments in “Gypsy life” (plate 11).

With streets full of pilgrims, tourists, and journalists, Saintes-Maries takes on
a charged, festival atmosphere. The multilingual and multicultural crowds enliven
its ice cream parlors, cafes, bars, bistros, and boutiques. Steaming, oversize skil-
lets of seafood paella lure people into open-air restaurants along both sides of a pedestrian-only street. Flowering vines climb up weathered, stone walls and terracotta pots with red flowers are found on steps, sills, ledges, balustrades, and tiled rooftops. Tree-shaded cafés pulsate with the hypnotic, driving rhythms of Flamenco guitar and the steady palmas (rhythmic clapping) of a packed crowd, punctuated by jaleos (shouts) and the heart-rending voices of the Romani singers. Along the waterfront marina, with its scores of sailboats moored in their slips, the painted horses on a merry-go-round revolve and rise and fall under countless rows of brilliant lights. Sensations such as these, along with the feel of the salty sea air and the currents of warm air flowing over from North Africa, lend themselves to the delicious, festive atmosphere. The village contributes in more formal ways to the pilgrimage-festival, as well; it holds a procession in honor of its two eponymic Saints Marie Salomé and Marie Jacobé on the day after the one for Sara (plate 12), and on the day after that showcases its heritage in major, public events, including the jeux de gardians, folk dancing, and a course de taureaux (a Provençal bullfight) in their small, seaside arena (plate 13). In another case of heritage enactment, several local people stroll about the village in clothes that were typical of the region’s dress in the 19th century, posing for photographs and answering questions (plate 14). Even the horses and bulls used in pilgrimage events are from special, local breeds that emblematize the whole Camargue region (aka “The French Texas”), with its unique mix of cowboys and delta wetlands, and the legendary place where Christianity first took hold in Western Europe. Thus, the pilgrimage-festival at Saintes-Maries is manifestly intercultural, as it presents and performs the regional culture right alongside that of the Romani pilgrims.

The tourism business that drives and shapes so much of the pilgrimage-festival seems at times to eclipse its sacred foundations; since the 1960s, tourism has similarly transformed villages all along the Mediterranean coast of Europe into highly commercial, tourism-dependent economies. And, of course, religious pilgrimages have always had some share of the profane and the secular, as most famously illustrated in Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales ([1387–1400] 2003). In fact, my viewing of the Saintes-Maries pilgrimage as an intercultural event actually corresponds to recent trends in pilgrimage studies in which the mystical experiences of pilgrims are downplayed in favor of the social and material conditions that define each pilgrimage as a unique institution. Following my performance studies orientation, I am mainly interested in the Saintes-Maries pilgrimage as a form of public performance, and in what it may reveal as such about the cultures of the Romanies and the Saintois and their relationships to outsiders, and especially to each other.

Many villagers regard the Romani pilgrimage as an unwelcome invasion and occupation of their community, despite the tourist business that it generates. To understand this, one may imagine the inconveniences and problems for the residents when 10 thousand people camp for weeks on end inside a small village (pilgrims outnumber the locals four-to-one, and on the day of the procession all visitors, including tourists, outnumber the locals nine-to-one [Leroux 2000:2]): the traffic, noise, crowding, garbage, unsanitary conditions, and transgressions against the local customs and territorial sensibilities. Exacerbating this tense situation
are the age-old, intercultural tensions that persist in modern relations between European villagers and Romanies. And because it has the quality of a foreign occupation, the Romani pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries must be distinguished from many other pilgrimages; in classifying it as a social performance a more eclectic category than “pilgrimage” thus becomes desirable.

One option would be to group the Romani pilgrimage together with the other mass gatherings that inundate, disrupt, and to some extent, intimidate a host community. This category might include events such as Spring Break, at which time North American college students descend by the millions on Fort Lauderdale and other places in Florida, Texas, and Mexico; Mardi Gras, which brings two million celebrants into New Orleans’ French Quarter; and Bike Week, which lures half a million motorcycle enthusiasts to Daytona Beach, Florida. Smaller examples would be the major trade shows and the annual meetings of large or-
ganizations, such as those hosted by the Shriners and the Modern Language Association, where participants dominate a hotel environment or an entire city district. Each of these events disrupts the ordinary life of a community by overtaxing its public space, facilities, and services, and incarnates a group-identity in such large numbers that nonadherents often feel discomfited or threatened by it. Socially intrusive by definition, many of these gatherings force the host communities to change their law enforcement practices or to amend their municipal ordinances. In 2001, “an extra 200 riot police and a helicopter” (Godwin 2001:1) were reportedly stationed at the village for the pilgrimage.

The occupation of Saintes-Maries by pilgrims finds its theatrical parallel in the expression, “taking the stage”; both point to an aggressive aspect of performance that is generally ignored in performance and theatre studies, perhaps because scholars in these fields are often partisans to their subject and keenly sensitive to the ways in which performers are and have been the victims of others. But the pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries and the other mass gatherings in its category all exhibit the aggressive side of performance in their culturally themed occupations of public space. I am speaking primarily of the whole presence of each group; although the procession for Sara and various other performances by Romani artists separately assert claims to public space, they do so in a village that has already been conquered, culturally speaking, by the thousands of Romani pilgrims who arrived there weeks in advance. The rank-and-file pilgrims thus provide an important foundation and framework for the whole “performance festival,” even though they are mostly spectators at the events, for they enact Romani culture for the tourists and for the millions viewing them on television in the same way that concertgoers at the Woodstock music festival in 1969 were performing an alternative, youth culture before local and national audiences. The Saintes-Maries pilgrimage, like many of the other mass events in its category, constitutes an amoeba-like performance entity that performs as a whole and in all of its parts, and in any combination of its parts.

Of course, the events that I’ve grouped together present only a limited threat to locals, and are innocuous in comparison to military occupations. These are mainly self-preoccupied affairs, whose participants submit to the internal agendas of the sponsoring organizations. Making relatively few demands on their host communities, these hordes of visitors usually bring their own party and are their own party. Their self-involvement relates to what Victor Turner, writing in 1981, called the liminal element in performance rituals, a playful or nonutilitarian quality that he found to be a universal feature of such rituals (Turner [1990] 1995:11–12). In the case of the Saintes-Maries pilgrimage-festival, its religious and artistic
Raisons d’être effectively negate its potential threat to the local population. Most artistic or cultural performances similarly have a basic, liminal function that prevents them from being an immediate danger to society. This is in the understood, social contract between performers and spectators that guarantees both a short and safe interaction; performance conventions are its standard “clauses,” assigning socially accepted roles and behavioral parameters to both parties. Performance traditions, in this respect, are like all the other social institutions that use codes of behavior to regulate potentially violent interactions: law courts, prisons, banks, shops, restaurants, street intersections, etc.

The assurance of safety that a social contract brings to spectators extends to performers, as well, and Romanies have often found protection in this while living among hostile people. Although they have historically eschewed (or had
closed to them) most of the established, social relationships of Europe, Romanies have long embraced the roles and responsibilities of the performer, sometimes to the point of using the conditions of performance to frame their relations with outsiders in general, adopting them as an internationally accepted, diplomatic protocol for interethnic contact. This may be seen in the way that Romanies as a whole are traditionally associated with cultural performances (e.g., circus acts, bear-baiting, music, and dance); in the evolution of the pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries into a vibrant, performance festival; in the crowds of tourists at Saintes-Maries who press closely around Romani musicians, singers, dancers, and the celebrated Romani procession, but otherwise keep a good distance from the Romani pilgrims. The social prominence of Romani performance has an ancient record, and a leading theory of Romani origins has them as itinerant clans of musicians who migrated from their native India in the fifth century B.C.E. to take work as entertainers in the Persian kingdom (Fraser 1999:33–35). In Europe, the
Romanies have performed professionally since their arrival in the 14th century, and have contributed indelibly to the cultural heritage of every country from Russia to Spain. Despite the popular prejudices against them, the Romanies “have enjoyed a great prestige in the domain of music, of dance and of the other arts involving spectacle” (Vaux de Foletier 1983:145). And their eminence in these fields continues today; The Gypsy Kings, for example, whose members are from an area only a few miles from Saintes-Maries, have sold more copies of their music abroad than any other French musical group in history.

In addition to their various artistic performances, Romanies in Europe have long been associated with the performance of pilgrimages. Upon entering Europe in large numbers in the 15th century, they understood that Europeans had been conditioned to grant privileges to traveling strangers. The great medieval tradition of pilgrimage had created a vast material and social infrastructure for providing the basic needs and safe passage of documented pilgrims. This tradition opened to the itinerant Romanies the whole xenophobic continent of Europe, with all its roads, markets, cities, and wealth. It proved to be one of those curious, interlocking fits that sometimes occur when cultures meet, as when the Aztecs believed that Hernando Cortez, upon his arrival in Mexico, might be the fearful god Quetzalcoatl, whom they had long been expecting. In both of these cases, the interlopers assumed the identities that the indigenous people were prepared to honor. Declaring themselves to be Christian pilgrims, the Romanies announced that, as penance for their sins, they were required to move about from place to place for a certain period of time, typically seven years, and had to beg for their living underway (the alleged sin was usually that of having wavered in their Christian faith) (Fraser 1999:60–78). Thus, by performing pilgrimages, the Romanies enjoyed in Europe many of the same protections and benefits that they had secured in the Middle East as artists and entertainers. When Romanies perform pilgrimages today, such as those to Lourdes, Santiago de Compostela, and Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, they carry on a tradition that, together with that of artistic performance, lies at the heart of their history and social identity in Europe.

Since the time they entered Europe as protected groups of pilgrims, the Romanies have sustained their distinctive cultural tradition, and have kept their sta-
tus as outsiders up to the present day. The extent of their alienation goes well beyond their nomadic lifestyle, which has actually been the exception rather than the rule during their European history. Romanies, to give an example of their foreignness, have traditionally been permitted to settle most of their own conflicts among themselves, and many continue to do so unofficially in a communal court called a *kris*. In another practice that is occasionally resurrected, government officials in Europe, according to tradition, will contact only Romani leaders, who represent small to moderate-size groups of their people. Today, various laws and government programs help to preserve the Romanies’ nomadic ways. For example, since 1990, every French municipality of more than 5,000 inhabitants has been required by law to provide for the Romanies a campsite having potable water and other requirements (Coupry 1999:55). And most European countries have special (albeit, mostly pilot or token) school programs designed to meet the needs of itinerant Romani children. In light of the Romanies’ profound cultural identity and their centuries of resistance to Western culture, it seems useful to make a distinction between the pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries and the other mass gatherings with which I initially grouped it. College students on Spring Break, revelers during Mardi Gras, and the hippies at Woodstock all show a rather superficial connection to their respective group identities when compared to the Romani pilgrims. The ancient Romani culture asserts itself at the Saintes-Maries pilgrimage in significant ways, making it considerably more complex as a cultural performance than most of the other events in its category.

Superficial, distinguishing features of the Romanies, such as their dark skin, eye, and hair color, have set them apart from and made them visually interesting to other Europeans. Cultural differences that visibly distinguish the Romanies from the *Gadže* (in French, *Gadjé*)—a Romani term for non-Romanies—are also seen at Saintes-Maries: women and children walking several paces behind a male head of the family; ubiquitous cigarette smoking; women with long hair without exception; girls, even the very young ones, often dressed in (by Western standards) sexy, tight-fitting clothes, flamboyant in style and color, with flashy jewelry and eye-catching accessories. These observable differences in appearance and behavior help to explain why the Romanies are so fascinating to outsiders, and why everyday Romani life may in itself constitute a strong cultural performance.
Indeed, it was a fad in Paris in the late 19th century to visit a Romani settlement and even to pay its residents for permission to watch them (Brown 1985:20). Surface aspects of the Romani culture have made perhaps their greatest impact on Western culture through their influence on the Romantic artists in France of the 19th century, for it gave rise to the modern ideal of the bohemian lifestyle or subculture (Bohémien was then the popular French word for Romanies), with its many important reincarnations, for example, the Beatniks of the ’50s and the Hippies of the ’60s. It advocated a liminal existence for artists and intellectuals outside mainstream society, indifferent to or actively opposed to bourgeois values and aims, especially materialism and the concern for respectability. Much has changed for the Romanies since Victor Hugo created the exotic, dancing Bohémienne, Esmeralda, in his novel, The Hunchback of Notre Dame ([1831] 1965) or Vincent van Gogh’s execution of the oil painting, Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans (1888). So many singularities and visual distinctions of the Romani lifestyle are now gone. Today’s Romanies are predominantly sedentary, and live more and more like the Gadžé; their traditional trades, such as basket weaving, repairing wicker furniture, horse trading, and tinkering are almost defunct.

Many nonstereotypical and bourgeois sights are seen among the Romanies at Saintes-Maries: luxurious RVs outfitted with satellite dishes; blonde hair and blue eyes; girls and women wearing platform shoes that were trendy in France at the time; a family quietly enjoying a picnic in a village park. But beneath these surface images, whether foreign or familiar, lies a truly profound cultural divide separating most Romanies from the Gadžé, one which only someone versed in Romani culture could really appreciate. Tourists probably don’t notice that the
young men mix more freely with the Gadže than do the young women, who keep themselves apart and in groups; that pilgrims camp in locations according to family affiliation and social position; that family reunions are inordinately treasured by married women, who seldom see their blood relatives after their (usually arranged) marriages, when they are considered to be part of their husband’s family (Vaux de Foletier 1983:93). Strict codes of behavior based on taboos and old feuds between some families may trigger alarms for the pilgrims that are senseless to the Gadže. Many Romanies still speak their own, ancient language, permitting them to communicate in a way that is inaccessible to outsiders, while a widely observed code of silence vis-à-vis outsiders makes for yet another powerful, cultural barrier. In effect, the Romani pilgrims belong to a society that remains, amid all the scrutiny and photographs of the tourists, at once indecipherable to outsiders and fully operational to members.

The discrepancy between Romani culture and its outer appearance has a long history throughout which it has played a significant role in Romani performance and social relations. When the Romanies performed Christian pilgrimages upon entering Europe, for example, it appears that they were also performing in the sense of pretending to be something that they were not. If so, they were participating in still another “performance tradition” with which Romanies have long been associated: performing con games and tricks. The Romanies’ reputation for a ready ability to deceive others—deserved or not—destabilizes virtually all their relations with outsiders, for it opens up a Pandora’s Box of performance reception. That is to say, because the public tends to distrust the representations of the Romanies, they fall into a never-ending, interpretative process by which Romani behavior is seen as always potentially phony. Thus, to the other forms of Romani performance so far reviewed—artistic, religious, and everyday/cultural—that of guile, both real and imagined, may be added. And with the Romanies’ outsider status, foreignness, itinerancy, and social orientation toward performance, the cumulative suspicion of them is great indeed among non-Romanies, which doubtless conjures for the general population a steady stream of imaginary Romani acts of exquisite cleverness, just as the popular suspicion of Jews and African Americans in the United States produces its endless theatre of conspiracy and crime in which these groups are imagined to perform. The fear and suspicion of the Romani pilgrims makes their annual gathering at Saintes-Maries unlike most
or perhaps all other Christian pilgrimages and, again, more like Bike Week and Spring Break.

Michèle and I were seized by an irrational fear of the Romanies just moments after stepping off the bus in Saintes-Maries. We were walking the few blocks to our hotel, weighted down with luggage and pushing a stroller, in which slept our baby, Clémentine, when we soon found ourselves walking along a campground with RVs, vans, cars, and trailers parked in several circles. A hundred yards of open ground separated us from these campsites, but a young boy began slowly to cross the distance on a bicycle. Not wanting to believe that he was heading specifically toward us, our mouths went dry each time he corrected his steering to accommodate the changes in our pace. He advanced slowly, pedaling his banana-seater so rarely that it had to tack like a sailboat just to stay up.

"He’s a scout," Michèle said, using a term we had recently come across for a Romani child who scopes out potential victims for adult Romani gangs. Our minds raced with all the anecdotes and warnings we had read or received from French friends and family before our trip: that the Romanies take offense easily, avenge any harm to their children, have a thousand ruthless tricks, are capable of stealing a child, etc. Even the hotel receptionist, while taking our reservations over the phone, had told us not to take our baby near les gitans. But now it was too late; we had not even reached the hotel. Weary from traveling since five o’clock that morning, we stood and watched as a barefooted, shirtless boy of about 10 years of age came to a stop in front of us. In the thickest of southern French accents, he asked us for the time, and then, leaning against the backrest of his bike, smiled pleasantly and took a drag off a cigarette. I was stunned by his smoking, although it seemed to explain his leisurely advance; since he had been smoking a cigarette, it made sense to ride so slowly. But with all the moralizing and fear-inspiring propaganda against tobacco programmed in my head, and my habit of seeing ages checked in the states for cigarette buyers who look younger than twenty-seven, the sudden sight of this boy having a smoke and speaking with such ease to Michèle and me—violating more state-side propaganda telling children not to talk to strangers—was shocking and disorienting. I felt myself on the threshold of a world outside the law, little touched by the grinding socialization processes of mainstream Western society. Michèle and I breathed sighs of relief and grinned foolishly at the boy, and as we spoke with him, the tension dissipated and I began to hear the cry of seagulls overhead and to feel a pleasant breeze against my skin.  

As my encounter with the boy demonstrates, even simple contact with the Romanies can trigger reactions in the Gadže that are quite out of proportion to the occasion. Popular prejudices naturally distort “actual” perceptions of Romanies, especially in persons who rarely see them. But even between the Romanies and those with whom they have regular contact relations are unordinary. We were told, for example, that the Romani musicians who play at Saintes-Maries have only a verbal agreement with café owners, typically made a year or two in advance, and which they honor with no intervening contact. A bus driver on the route between Saintes-Maries and Arles told us of her wary respect for the “Gitanes.” She said that some Gitanes (women) had recently come to her house and
asked to borrow her outdoor grill, and that she lent it to them, believing that if she had turned them down, saying that she needed it herself but then didn’t use it, they would take revenge and “I would have a big poop on my car or something else.” She said that, “the consequences are in proportion to the wrong” and insisted that, to their way of thinking, the Gitans treat you fairly if you do the same with them. I heard many tales of such unorthodox dealings with the Romanies at Saintes-Maries; most of these tales describe and attempt to decode a sequence of cryptic, Romani behavior.

Quite another view of the Romanies came from the village’s tourist office, where I received a press pass and other privileges extended to journalists, including a private interview with a tourist official to orient me to the pilgrimage events. Michèle and I asked the official if she thought it would be safe to take our daughter to the procession for Sara, but to this and every other question about precautions around the Romanies, we got only an uncomprehending smile, as if she had never heard that they could be dangerous. When we told her of the warnings from the clerk at the hotel, she replied, “ah, bon?” (really?), as if that, too, were some inexplicable curiosity. Her responses immediately exposed a sharp variance
in the village between the official and unofficial views of the Romanies. That she had never heard of the fearsome reputation of the Romanies is quite impossible; as James Goldston notes:

Throughout much of Europe, Roma are among the most hated, misunderstood, and mistreated of people. Their renown as musicians, dancers, and palm-readers is surpassed only by the near-universal belief among the Gadže—or non-Roma—that Gypsies are also liars, thieves and cheats. (2002:2)

Goldston adds that, “In Europe today, negative myths about Gypsies penetrate childhood stories, family legends, and the fabric of everyday life” (2). The official’s feigned ignorance of the Romanies’ notoriety, maintained to a point of infantilism, is the same kind of legally unassailable charade that is now de rigueur in the public rhetoric of the United States.

Outside the tourist office, talk in the village is less guarded, and unspoken tensions are palpable between the locals and the Romani pilgrims; shopkeepers follow them down the aisles, standing over them and watching their hands. As a quasi-insider among the locals—she hails from a southern French village—Michélé asked several shopkeepers for their views on the Romanies. One man, who runs a high-traffic convenience store across the street from a Romani camp called the pilgrims “a lot of trouble.” With great animation, he declared that every time he rings up a sale with the Romanies they insist adamantly that he did not give them the right change. He said “all day long” Romani children enter his store in groups and steal, and that when he catches them, he must be very careful not to insult or manhandle them, or else their adult, male relatives come for vengeance, acts of which may continue for years or decades. Another villager informed us, in the same vein, that one bar has to close during the pilgrimage because some 20 years ago its owner violently tossed out a Romani patron during a melee, and that it gets busted-up if it does open, notwithstanding the fact that it has long since changed owners.

At Saintes-Maries relations between the villagers and Romanies are conditioned by their shared experience with the pilgrimage-festival. The two groups have not bonded in any significant way, despite their brief, annual mélages, but the villagers have a sense of sharing a spotlight with the Romanies, of being together with them on a stage before an audience of tourists and journalists and, to an extent, before humankind and history (as the legendary foothold of Christianity in Western Europe, the village has an active sense of its place in human and divine history). Most of the villagers with whom we spoke struggled to be fair to their annual visitors. For example, several shopkeepers told us that one has to watch the Romanies closely when they enter a store and show them that one is watching, but that they will then behave reasonably well, and otherwise bring little trouble to the village. They added that if trouble does erupt, such as fighting, it is mostly between Romani families that are carrying on old feuds. But some villagers seemed to resent the public’s fascination for the Romanies, such as the desk clerk at our hotel—the same one as before—who said that she had never seen the processions and couldn’t say what they are like, even though she had grown up in the village (it must be allowed that such absurd posturing is part of the French art of conversation and no doubt played a role in the tourist official’s “charade” discussed earlier). The village does have its Romani-philos, such as those in the Association Mosaique Gitane, which sponsors charitable and educational events. Among their projects in 2000 were an exhibition of Romani artwork in the civic gallery and a musical benefit in the village arena, called Nuit Gitane, featuring members of the Gypsy Kings and other musicians, with the proceeds—
along with funds from the village government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—financing the purchase of 100 guitars for Romani children. Some Saintois also profit from the pilgrimage, including many of its hoteliers, restaurateurs, and storeowners; these welcome the annual pilgrims and no doubt urge the tourist office and village government to support them.

On the afternoon of the 25th, Michele and I spoke with Pepe LeFleur, the preeminent Romani leader at the pilgrimage and the patriarch of a family that has conducted the processions for more than 35 years. One of the most famous Romanies in France, LeFleur claims to have two suitcases full of articles about him, but it seems that neither he nor anyone else in his family can read. For at the end of the interview, LeFleur’s nephew brought Michèle a day-old newspaper that had a story about the procession and a photograph of the nephew leading it; seven members of LeFleur’s family huddled around us with heads bowed as Michèle read the story aloud. I was astonished that LeFleur and his family lacked a ready means for having it read to them, despite their leadership position, exemplified by the location of their (reserved) campsite in the parking lot of the village’s Town Hall.

We spoke with LeFleur next to his Peugeot cargo van for about 30 minutes; his wife and nephew sat next to him, and several other relatives stood nearby. It was, of course, a meeting among people of very different backgrounds, and they were as eager to ask about mine as I was about theirs. They were delighted to learn that I was from Texas, and asked me repeatedly about the television series Walker, Texas Ranger. LeFleur asked if there were a lot of land and available drinking water in Texas, saying that he might travel there one day. “Is there water in the cactus, like in the watermelons and cantaloupes?” he asked. “How could I get there in my caravan?” was another question, motioning toward his Peugeot. After an awkward moment, in which I didn’t know quite how to respond, Michèle said to him, “With a boat under it,” and everyone nodded, as if getting the idea. All present took part in the interview, making comments or asking questions at will, but the instant LeFleur cleared his throat to speak everyone else went silent, even mid-sentence; this created an impression of royalty and proved to be one of the most striking instances of cultural differences during the pilgrimage.

In light of the divergent views of the villagers on the Romani pilgrims, I asked LeFleur for his position on the matter. He said that the villagers are overwhelmingly opposed to the pilgrimage, and that at best they tolerate the Romanies’ presence. He finds that the Saintois hold a very negative view of the Romanies, and “do everything they can to avoid having contact with them.” He said it was insulting the way the villagers “barricaded themselves up at night” when the pilgrims are present, referring to the boarding or shuttering up at night of most village buildings and to the villagers’ staying inside at night. Indeed, most village bars and restaurants stay closed for the pilgrimage until the tourists arrive and many people board up their houses and leave during the pilgrimage (some pilgrims camp out in the yards of boarded-up houses). In the shops, he complained, Romanies are treated as common criminals, adding that, ”they call us ‘voleurs des poules’ (chicken thieves).” According to LeFleur, the tourist office and other groups promote the pilgrimage for their own purposes, while doing little to improve relations between the pilgrims and the locals. When Michele asked LeFleur if the villagers had some cause to fear or otherwise find the Romanies unwelcome, he replied that, “it is true that Romanies [gitans] sometimes steal,” but not to the extent that people think. He said that the good qualities of the Romanies are overlooked. They might steal things, usually of little value, he said, but you will never hear of Romanies committing rape: “We may be thieves [voleurs], but we are not rapists [violeurs].” And Romanies, he said, do not tolerate the sexual
abuse of children: “If a Romani [Gitan] committed such a crime, we would take care of it right away,” indicating that the culprit would be summarily killed.

Lefleur and the shopkeepers confirmed that many villagers have a strong aversion to the Romani pilgrimage, despite the tourist office’s reluctance to acknowledge it. But even the tourist office departs from its politically correct line, promoting the Romanies as exotic and romantic figures from the past. The official poster for the pilgrimage depicts Romanies as rustic travelers from a bygone era in an unabashed attempt to rouse such old stereotypes in the public’s mind (plate 15). The poster reveals a marketing ploy to reconcile villagers and Romanies within a romantic vision of the past, and to promote the pilgrimage as part of a village–wide, three-day celebration of local culture. The tourist office wants tourists to stay in Saintes-Maries after the procession for Sara ends, so they mix village attractions in with the more popular Romani events.

The tourist office and those whose interests it furthers are intent on fostering the secondary pilgrimage of tourists that shadows the religious one, principally for the money it brings to the local economy. But as the village’s main tourist attraction, the pilgrimage and its continued performance by the Romanies are of great concern to many in the region’s tourism industry; the pilgrimage is supported through municipal services, such as the cleaning of the campsites, special privileges, such as long-term street parking, and funding for charities, such as the purchase of guitars for Romani youth. The tourist office also markets the pilgrimage in a way that excites the popular imagination, often by casting it in a romantic light. An enormous, romantic painting of Romanies hangs on the wall behind the reception desk in the tourist office, echoing the poster imagery discussed earlier. The tourist office arranges for several Romanies to wear vintage “Gypsy clothing” and to pose for photographs (with no indication that these persons are actually heritage enactors of sorts). Those with press passes are invited to enter a cordoned-off area in front of the church where unobstructed photographs may be taken of the anachronistically clad Romanies, including one woman in a brilliant, shimmering dress, who fans a deck of tarot cards (plate 16). Most journalists were eager to cooperate in this convenient ruse, happy to get dramatic images of pilgrims that “look like Gypsies” for their newspapers, magazines, and television spots. Thus, the media often present the pilgrimage in false images that evoke romantic, colorful “Gypsies.” These same Romanies (including Lefleur and his family) carry out the procession in costume, creating more sensational photo opportunities for both journalists and tourists.

Just as in the 19th century, when Europeans wondered if Romanies were sincere in their faith or were only pretending to be Christians, so today one may question whether Lefleur and his family are sincere pilgrims or are merely actors in a heritage performance for tourists. Such suspicions of deceit haunt the Romanies’ relations with the Gadže well beyond the heritage tourism “con.” Jean-Baptiste Humeau states that, “the theme of the lack of authenticity of the faith of the Gypsies is a truly historical constant” (1996). In fact, one reason for the popularity of the Saintes-Maries pilgrimage among Romanies is that churches as a rule discourage them from attending services and receiving sacraments, treating them, in effect, as persons outside the Catholic faith (1995:196). Even in Saintes-Maries there is a tradition of denigrating the Romani faithful (Colinon 1975:49) and the Catholic Church does not recognize Sara as a saint. But the Church has promoted the pilgrimage ever since the 1950s, in part, it seems, to offset efforts of evangelical proselytizers to lure Romanies over to their faith (Fraser 1999:313–15); supporting the procession for Sara is one way to reinforce the Romanies’ Catholic affiliations. But both the village and the church, according to Lefleur, support a clichéd image of Romanies in their oversight of the procession, and originally chose him to be its leader because—with his bushy mustache and dark
features—he “looked like a Gypsy” (LeFleur 2000). In recent years, he has repeatedly told his contacts in the church that he wants to shave his mustache, but they urge him not to do it. They also objected in 2000 when LeFleur, citing illness, turned leadership of the procession over to his nephew, who has blonde hair and blue eyes. “They didn’t like it,” LeFleur said, adding that his contacts told him that, if his nephew were to lead it again, “he should at least grow a mustache” (LeFleur 2000). Behind the scenes, then, the tourist office, the church, and the press are not only misrepresenting the pilgrimage as a romantic hangover of European heritage, but are actually shaping and sustaining this ostensibly religious event as they pursue their separate agendas.

On the day after the procession for Sara, the pilgrims make an abrupt departure, with most breaking camp early that morning. By noon, the village is transformed into a less crowded and more relaxed place; tourists stroll on the streets licking ice cream, the new cocks-of-the-walk. Restaurants and bars that had been boarded-up are suddenly open, now with awnings extended and tables and chairs out front. Up and down the streets, the windows, walls, and signs of businesses are scrubbed clean, the sidewalks hosed down, and fresh paint is applied to the exteriors of cafes and restaurants. Any evidence of the Romanies’ presence is eradicated; when a late-leaving pilgrim’s RV vacates its spot, for example, a sanitation crew arrives virtually within seconds to clean up after it. It is as if the whole village went in one day from the depths of the off-season right to the first day of summer; the cleaning, painting, and hosing down have all the busy order of a major set change.

The promoters of tourism in Saintes-Maries attempt to win over the tourists in the vacuum left by the Romanies with events and displays that showcase the local heritage: a procession for the two village saints; folkloric dancing; bull-running; equestrian displays by les gardians; tablecloths at restaurants bearing the prints and colors of Provence, and everywhere a regional iconography of bulls and horses. The village and region are well known in France for their cultural distinction. If locals resent the great fanfare made over the pilgrims, it’s not because they themselves have little to offer; they simply can’t match the excitement that the Romanies create. This type of competition is increasingly felt in the tourism industry, and museums, for example, “are experiencing a crisis of identity as they compete with other attractions within a tourism economy that privileges experience, immediacy, and what the industry calls adventure” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:7). The Romanies’ profound outsider status also forces the villagers into the position of a normative society, an unpleasant reversal for a place that prides itself on being a maverick within France and all of Europe.

Three layers of regional culture are found at Saintes-Maries: that of the village (e.g., legends of the saints); that of the Camargue region, whose center is Arles (e.g., bulls, horses, architecture, traditional clothing); and that of the larger area of Provence (language, literature, cuisine, and decorative arts). The special distinction of Provençal culture has to do with its former independence—it did not become part of France until 1481—and with its glory as a cradle of vernacular poetry, the home of troubadours in the 11th and 12th centuries whose love songs in the Provençal language greatly determined the course of European poetry; Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340–1400) are among the writers influenced by them. In the mid–19th century, cultural leaders in the region banded together to form the Felibrige, a group dedicated to celebrating and preserving the Provençal language and way of life. Its leader for 60 years was Nobel-laureate poet and linguist Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914), whose writings immortalized the joie de vivre of the Provençal people.

The Provençal heritage that is displayed at Saintes-Maries has thus been curated by local groups for over 150 years, and numerous artists and celebrities—
Vincent van Gogh, Marcel Pagnol, Lawrence Durrell, Julia Child, and Peter Mayle, among others—have spread its reputation around the world. But the public’s narrower interest in the village of Saintes-Maries may be traced back to the work of one man, Folco de Baroncelli-Javon (1869–1943), the cultural revivalist who masterminded the village’s processions to the sea. Recruiting Romani leaders from the region, and gaining the approval of the church, Baroncelli introduced the procession for Sara in 1935, and established other cultural institutions of the village, such as the groups, les gardians and les Arlésiennes, both of which participate in the processions. Baroncelli used performance rituals as a means to develop the cultural identity of the Saintois, and understood as well their value as tourist attractions. In creating a procession for the Romanies as well as one for the locals, Baroncelli showed his canny appreciation for the intercultural vitality of the Camargue. He valued the Romani presence in the area, and created a ritual to celebrate it in broad daylight and in centre ville. He set in motion an enduring performance tradition over which Romanies have always had considerable control. The procession is at once artificial and authentic, a deliberate creation by one person that was given life when successfully grafted onto an ancient pilgrimage tradition. Like the 15th-century pilgrimages of the Romanies, Baroncelli’s modern procession is a performance marvel that emerged whole from the thigh of Zeus composed of interlocking, intercultural elements. It enacts what came before and invents it anew at the same time; as Joseph Roach points out, a dual meaning of performance is here at work:

The social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit. To perform also means, though often more secretly, to reinvent. (1996:xi)

The legacy of the Felibrige, with which Baroncelli was deeply involved, has accentuated the region’s cultural, as opposed to its religious, heritage. Its promotion of local legends, including those of Saint Sara, reveals a radical attachment to the region, one that favors local culture, heresy, and geography over any larger political or religious ties. Baroncelli and his supporters turned Saintes-Maries into a destination for cultural tourists as much as for religious pilgrims (in contrast to Lourdes), and did so by building on the ruins, as it were, of a former Christian pilgrimage. For underneath the Romani pilgrimage-festival lies another, now dormant, pilgrimage, dating back at least to the sixth century and centered on the two Saint Marys (Delage 1956:8). A tourist pilgrimage now takes place where once a pilgrimage of religious faith was found, like the rites of a new religion that has displaced an earlier one. The ritual symbol of it, the procession, has been co-opted and incorporated into a radically different context, just as the prehistoric (Easter) bunny and (Christmas) tree survive in the holiest celebrations of a newer religion. Few or no religious pilgrims arrive for the procession honoring the Saint Marys, although for many centuries they came in the thousands. And, while Victor and Edith Turner are no doubt correct in saying that pilgrimages never really die and can suddenly be reinvigorated (1978:26–27), it’s also true that today only about five percent of the French people attend Mass on a weekly basis (Bruni 2003:2), so that the modern triumph of tourism over Christianity as the chief basis for pilgrimages seems fairly secure.

As the Romani pilgrims are the major basis of the tourists’ pilgrimage, they double as religious pilgrims and as living exhibits in a heritage spectacle, which presents a challenge to organizers and promoters of the pilgrimage events. To an
extent, the tourist office presents the Romanies (and the villagers) as characters in a romantic fiction, but this runs counter to government efforts to educate the public about Romanies and to integrate them into society. These are pressing social problems in Europe, since many Romanies live on public assistance and have limited access to jobs and other social privileges due to their widespread illiteracy. Romani leaders and reformers, including members of the International Romani Union, are fighting to secure legal rights for their people and to dispel the old stereotypes of the Romanies that impede their social integration. In light of this rights movement, the Saintes-Maries tourist office and village government balance their use of Romani “fictions” by sanctioning no hint of prejudice against the Romanies and by supporting the visiting pilgrims through various municipal services and charitable contributions.

The difficulty in which the tourist office finds itself points to a standard problem in heritage tourism; as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has written:

“That we objectify culture has long been recognized; festivals, however, also objectify the human performers and implicate them directly in this process. This is an inherently problematic way to confront cultural questions, for spectacle, by its very nature, displaces analysis and tends to suppress profound issues of conflict and marginalization. (1998:72)

While the villagers, too, are “fictionalized” in the village’s tourist events and promotions, their case differs from that of the Romanies in that the latter are a despised minority that has known centuries of persecution, including enslavement and genocide. The Romanies not only suffered horrific abuse under the Nazis, but received afterward little sympathy, assistance, or even recognition of it from the international community (only recently has this begun to change). At present, the Romanies are persecuted most notoriously in central and eastern Europe (Bancroft 2001:145), and, once again, with almost no sympathy or aid from anyone. Often in examples of heritage tourism, such as with the tours of southern plantations in the United States, the human torment that was once part of the society on display is excluded from its fictional representation. Most plantation tour guides are in period dress and speak about the architecture, furniture, and anecdotal history of the property, but all evidence of the slave cabins has usually been destroyed and there are no actors dressed as slaves taking part in the heritage “re-enactment.”

The heritage package at Saintes-Maries offers tourists a fictional, 19th-century world that encompasses the villagers and the Romanies, and this fiction—particularly in respect to the latter—commits the tourist office to questionable modes of representation. At the same time, the fictional gloss on the pilgrimage belies the fact that a real village is being inundated with thousands of Romani pilgrims. Many villagers are defensive about having Romanies in their community, “barricading themselves up” at night during the pilgrimage, as LeFleur put it, and seem to resent the vitality of the Romani pilgrimage, while their own lays dormant. This defensiveness has no doubt strengthened the villagers’ resolve to preserve their own cultural heritage and to present it to best advantage to tourists. The activist tradition of the Felibrige, which has championed Provençal culture for generations, survives in the locals’ resistance to the dominance of the Romanies, where once it tried to turn back the cultural imperialism of France. And if support for the right-wing and anti-immigrant extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen in the last election is any indication of a community’s xenophobia, then the Saintes-Maries have it in spades, since 36.7 percent of them voted for Le Pen, compared to 18 percent nationally and 10 percent in Paris (Ministère de l’intérieur 2003). The ability of the Saintes-Maries pilgrimage to attract tourists may derive in part from
the social conflict of an invaded village, and its dramatic value. This could also help to explain the allure of other invasive events, such as Bike Week and Spring Break, mentioned earlier. Are the tourists at Saintes-Maries and those at other mass gatherings willfully participating in the invasion of a community? Does this speak to a destructive or Vandal impulse in mass tourism?

The Romanies are surely less of a threat to the village, to its culture and identity, than are the tourists. These modern pilgrims threaten, particularly in the age of European unification, to diminish even further the distinctive character of all the villages along the Mediterranean coast. At Saintes-Maries, the vast tourist audiences threaten ultimately to destroy the integrity of the rival cultures in performance—those of the villagers and the Romanies—for they have the desire and the power to reduce almost everything cultural in their path to entertainment, and especially to the light and convenient forms of it that cater to consumer-pilgrims, who seem always to leave an economic dependency on this sort of fare in their wake.

Notes

1. I use the term “Romani” and its derivative forms throughout this essay, except for quotations or deliberate, exceptional usage, rather than the common English word, “Gypsy,” in keeping with the preferred terminology of most Romani organizations and the United Nations (Hancock 2002:xxi). At Saintes-Maries, Romanies are generally referred to as “Gitans,” which corresponds roughly to the English word, “Gypsies,” although the former refers strictly to Romanies of North Africa, Portugal, Spain, and Southern France (Coupry 1999:4). Both Gitan and Gypsy carry popular connotations that are used in marketing the pilgrimage to tourists, and in substituting Romani for Gitan my intention has also been to agitate and thus to flush out these connotations in the minds of everyone involved with this study: Romanies, villagers, tourists, journalists, myself, and the reader.

2. As Sara is not officially recognized as a saint, her statue may not be displayed inside the sanctified area of the church; she occupies a small vault beneath it. During the pilgrimage, the three-foot statue stands surrounded by hundreds of burning candles in its windowless crypt, the rock walls, and ceiling black from soot. Written messages and prayers for Sara fill a box for offerings, and layer upon layer of shining raiment lie draped over her, a golden tiara on the hair above her dark face. Sara’s full Romani name is Sara-la-Kâli, or Sara the Black, which...
makes note of her important physical commonality with most Romanies, who for centuries have been discriminated against as dark-skinned people. Legends of her life abound, but most assert that she was the black servant of Saints Marie Jacobé and Marie Salomé, the aunts of Jesus after whom the village is named, and with whom she is said to have arrived in Saintes-Maries from Palestine in a boat. Another version has her greeting the two saints upon their arrival (Delage 1956:13).

3. A growing dissatisfaction with the dominance of structuralism within the field of pilgrimage studies has led since the 80s "towards an investigation of how the practice of pilgrimage and the sacred powers of a shrine are constructed as varied and possibly conflicting representations by the different sectors of the cultic constituency, and indeed by those outside it as well" (Eade and Salnow 2000:5). This echoes my interest in the full spectrum of participants in the pilgrimage-festival, ranging beyond the pilgrims to include the villagers, the tourists, the journalists, and myself (including the field researcher as a subjective participant in a pilgrimage is an important part of the new approach, as well). The above-described trend notwithstanding, the major figure in pilgrimage studies remains structural anthropologist Victor Turner, whose seminal investigations of pilgrimage as a liminal phenomenon have largely determined the development of the field since the 1970s (Eade 2000:x–xii).

4. Turner analyzed the relative harmlessness of performance in a few interesting ways. He drew a distinction between the ritual process and the "judicial, political, or military process" ([1990] 1995:11) as a means of redress in the "social drama" of real life. He argued that liminality lies at the root of both rituals and performances, and that they "derive from the subjunctive, liminal, reflexive, exploratory heart of social drama" ([1990] 1995:13). The non-threatening quality of performance in any immediate sense is suggested further by his association of the liminal with the subjunctive mood:

I sometimes talk about the liminal phase being dominantly in the "subjunctive mood" of culture, the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire [...]. "Ordinary" day-to-day life is in the indicative mood, where we expect the invariant operation of cause-and-effect, of rationality and commonsense. Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities. ([1990] 1995:11–12)

5. The manner in which performances influence "real life" is posited in a theoretical diagram created by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, whereby the "interrelationship of social drama and stage drama" is illustrated in such a way that the latter's "message and its rhetoric feed back into the latent processual structure of the social drama" (Turner [1990] 1995:16–17) and its influence is thus seen as intrinsically indirect by these major performance theorists. In The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance, Schechner makes a useful distinction between "classic carnivals" that "exhibit little structural antipathy between ruler and ruled" and the "revolutionary carnival" of major political demonstrations (1993:86). The pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries fits clearly into the former category, but, along with the other events grouped together in this essay, it pushes the envelope of "harmless" social provocation.

6. Some linguistic evidence also suggests that the Romanies were professional musicians before leaving India; this is based on the Syrian and Persian Romani word "dorn," meaning "Romani man," which corresponds to Sanskrit and Modern Indian words. Scholar Angus Fraser presents the point succinctly:

There are references to Doms as musicians as far back as the sixth century. In Sanskrit the word took on the sense of "man of low caste living by singing and music." In Modern Indian tongues the corresponding words have a variety of similar meanings: e.g., "caste of wandering musicians" (Sindhi); "menial" (Lahnda); "strolling musician" (Panjabi); "low caste black-skinned fellow" (west Pahari). The name could preserve for us the original caste and status of the ancestors of the Asiatic and European Gypsies [...]. (1999:25)

7. Angus Fraser maintains that the Romanies’ claim of pilgrimage status was a ruse that will go down in history: "In the entire chronicle of Gypsy history, the greatest trick of all was the one played on Western Europe in the fifteenth century" (1999:62). Their assertions at the time do seem rather dubious in light of what is known of Romani history today, especially their claim of being from Egypt (whence the misnomer, Gypsy), and Europeans in early
contact with the Romanies found their behavior unbefitting to pilgrims; most objectionable was their reputed stealing (Fraser 1999:72). In fact, towns and cities often paid them to go away, which was a legal alternative to hosting them. The documents that brought the Romanies their recognition as pilgrims were almost surely forged, since there is no record of them in the relevant papal or imperial archives (von Soest 1979:25), and a black market in such papers was well established. By the mid-16th century, with the tradition of mass pilgrimages drying up, Romanies ceased to be pilgrims, and became known thereafter principally as itinerant musicians, fortune-tellers, horse traders, and thieves (Fraser 1999:127).

8. I relate this encounter with the boy in part to include myself in the presentation of my field experiences, a practice generally accepted now in anthropological research, and used with increasing sophistication (Dubisch 1995:6). It should illustrate that I arrived in Saintes-Maries neither as an anthropologist nor as an expert on Romanies, but as a relatively uninformed outsider, an American theatre professor interested in the performance aspects of the pilgrimage. The incident made an especially strong impression on me because I was a new parent at the time, and was at once sensitized to danger and receptive toward children. The Romanies’ reputation for stealing children, which was brought vividly to my attention many times, was “promoted widely in the press” during the 19th century in France (Brown 1985:25).

9. For readers not persuaded that the Saintes-Maries tourist official must have known of the Romanies’ reputation for danger, note Peter Godwin’s observation upon visiting the village in the same year that I did, that—referring to a story from a café owner about losing an eye to a knife-wielding Romani—“Almost everyone here has a story like that, some incident designed to italicize the casual violence and unsteady tempers of these roving visitors” (2001:1–2). An account of long-standing tensions in the village between the locals and the Romanies appears in René Soulès d’Hérault’s Gitans et Saintois (1973:85–87).

10. The temporary closing of businesses is no doubt a standard response to invasive, mass gatherings. A lawsuit was filed on 20 May 2003, “against the city of Myrtle Beach, SC, and various businesses, accusing them of discrimination during Black Bike Week, the biggest African American biker rally in the country” (Gettleman 2003:1). During the rally, which has an attendance of nearly 400,000, 28 restaurants are said to have “shut their doors last year or cut back on hours” (2).

11. LeFleur’s version of his relations with the Church and village could not be independently confirmed, neither by the clerical leader of the procession, Abbot Thierry-François de Vré-gillé, nor by Madame Thérèse Chevalier, the head of the pro-Romani group L’association des amis des gitans. Both of these local leaders insisted that the Romanies participate freely in the pilgrimage events and do so entirely in their own way (Vré-gillé 2003; Chevalier 2003). These differing versions of their relations speak to the lack of communication and understanding between the Romanies and the Saintois. Still, LeFleur’s general contention that pilgrimage organizers promote a stereotyped image of the Romanies wins credence in view of the other, exploitative promotional practices discussed in this essay. And it makes sense that the organizers would prefer to have Romanies who “look like Gypsies,” since that is what the tourists are led to expect. The question over which of the Romanies will be in the procession hints at larger problems regarding its control and maintenance over time. As Joseph Roach has written, in reference to the “custom of self-definition by staging contrasts with other races, cultures, and ethnicities,” “the process of surrogation continues, but it does so in a climate of heightened anxiety that outsiders will somehow succeed in replacing the original peoples, or autochthons” (1996:6).

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