

1925
-2020



Raymond Gurême, 2019, photography: Adèle Mauduit

Raymond Gurême, A path of memory and resistance

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The purpose of this exhibition is twofold: to pay homage to Raymond Gurême and to “continue the path” that he traced.

The path of memory is the one he took the last 15 years of his life to rescue from oblivion his story, that of his family and all those who could not speak or who have not been listened to. The story of more than 6,500 so-called “nomads”, who were arbitrarily detained in internment camps in France during the Second World War.

The path of resistance is that of his fight during the war and his commitment against all injustices throughout his life. The exhibition retraces the personal and family history of Raymond Gurême in the context of the global history of antigypsyism against Roma and "nomads / gens du voyage" in the 20th century in France. By drawing on Raymond's emblematic life story, this history is brought to life and made accessible to the widest possible audience, especially the youth.

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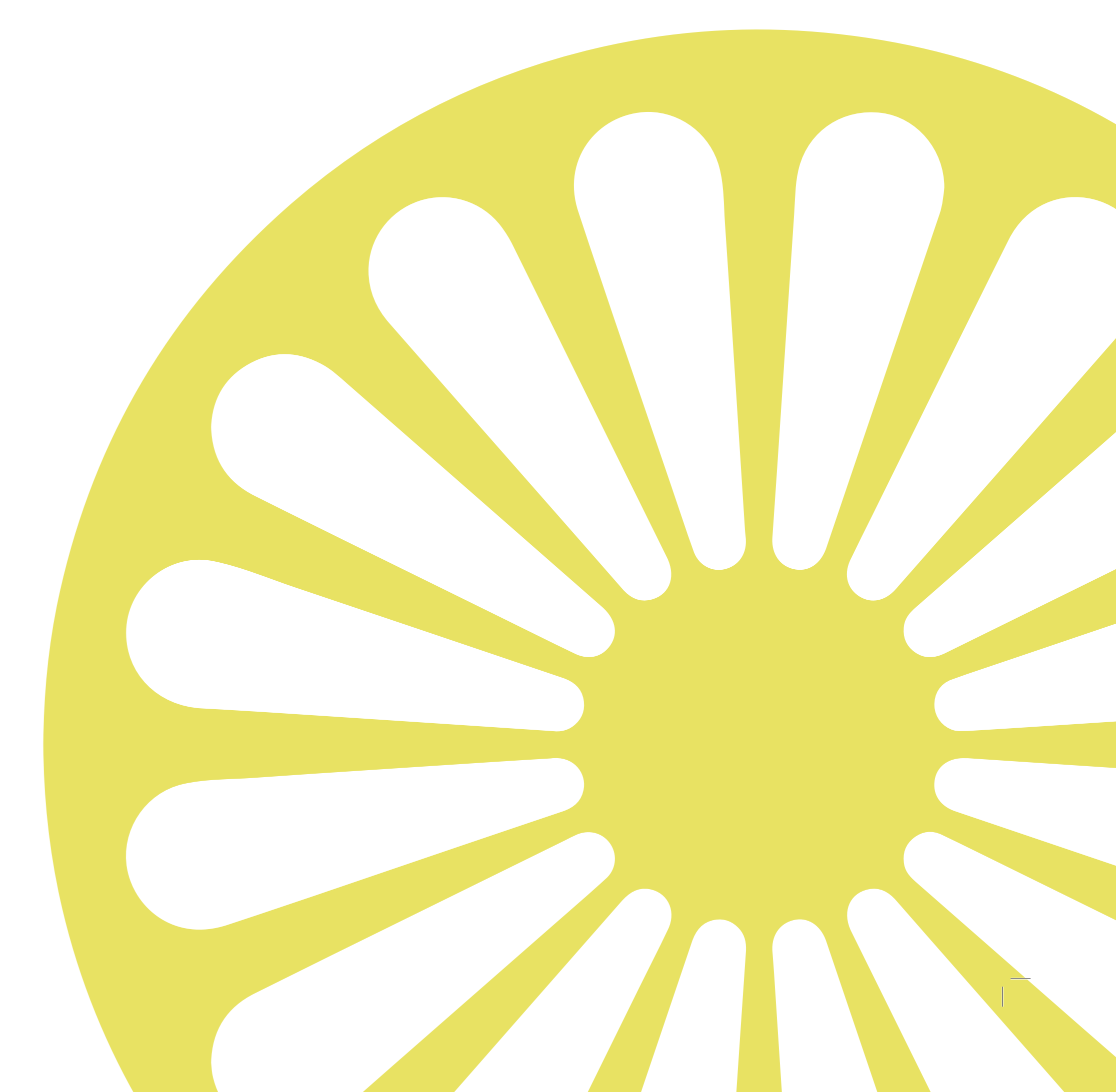
Patronage:

The program takes place in the framework of the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Roma and Sinti under the patronage of the European Parliament and of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.



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The program is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, and the European Union and Council of Europe Joint Programme "Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education - RomaMemory".



1925 - 1940: A Kid of the Stage



11 August 1925
Raymond Gurême is born in Meigneux, a little town about 90 km in South-East of Paris

Raymond bears the surname of his mother Mélanie Gurême, whose Yenish ancestors were basket makers, itinerant merchants, day laborers and musicians.



Gurême family, summer 1937
(Family Archives)

Raymond's father, Hubert Leroux, belongs to a long line of itinerant artists going back five generations. Raymond is the third of nine siblings. René and Henriette preceded him, then Marie-Rose, Carmen, Camille, Solange, Suzanne and Jean.



My stage companion was a black pony called Pompon. I was three apples high and I jumped on him from the runway and paraded around, standing on his back.

I was particularly proud of the clown costume my mother had sewn for me. It was made of blue silk, with stars and sequins. When I went onstage I wore make-up: My mother would burn a cork to blacken my eyelashes, put lipstick on my nose and baby powder on my face.

Under his father's guidance, the training for the acrobatic acts was demanding. This was undoubtedly the source of Raymond's legendary agility and stamina, which enabled him to perform numerous escapes and physical feats throughout his life.

Raymond's memories go back to his early childhood, the day his father hoisted him onto his shoulders and introduced him to the audiences for their family circus as a new, two-year-old acrobatic clown. From pirouettes to antics, Raymond took centre stage with his siblings and his father, an acrobat on horseback.

Under the Gurême-Leroux big top, a cinema complemented the circus. Here again, Raymond's memories are vivid as he describes the organisation of the tours, the welcome they received in the villages, the installation of the big top, the cinema equipment, and the running of the screenings, right down to the manual rewinding of the reels afterward.



Sedentary stopovers were necessary for the health of Hubert Leroux, who was suffering from the physical after-effects of the First World War. It was during a stopover in Saint-Denis that Raymond, who went door-to-door selling haberdashery to feed the family, was caught by the police and locked up in the Montesson reformatory for 'begging'.

First confinement, first escape!

« I wrapped the iron bars that blocked the windows with a cloth, then pulled with all my might to remove them. That was the first of a long list of escapes for me, nine in all, including eight during the Second World War: Not so bad for a little guy! »

When war broke out, the family was on the road in Normandy. Then the decree of 6 April 1940 prohibited the circulation of 'nomads' throughout the country. Raymond's father got a job at a blast furnace near Rouen, where the whole family settled

until that fateful day in October 1940.

Context.

French policy at the beginning of the 20th century was based on the openly stated political will to reduce the mobility of people living on the road.

The legal framework for the internment of 'nomads' was developed at the beginning of the 20th century. Security rhetoric and xenophobic press campaigns stigmatised 'nomads'. Newspapers spoke of 'tidal waves', 'danger' and 'wandering hordes' sweeping across the country. For the purposes of control and surveillance, a census was carried out in 1895 to identify and count 'nomads, gypsies and vagabonds'.

To satisfy public opinion, in 1912 the French legislature drew up a law designed to monitor and punish 'vagrancy in caravans'.

The law of 16 July 1912 defined three categories of individuals:

Travelling salesmen with a fixed address in France who must carry a certificate justifying their status.

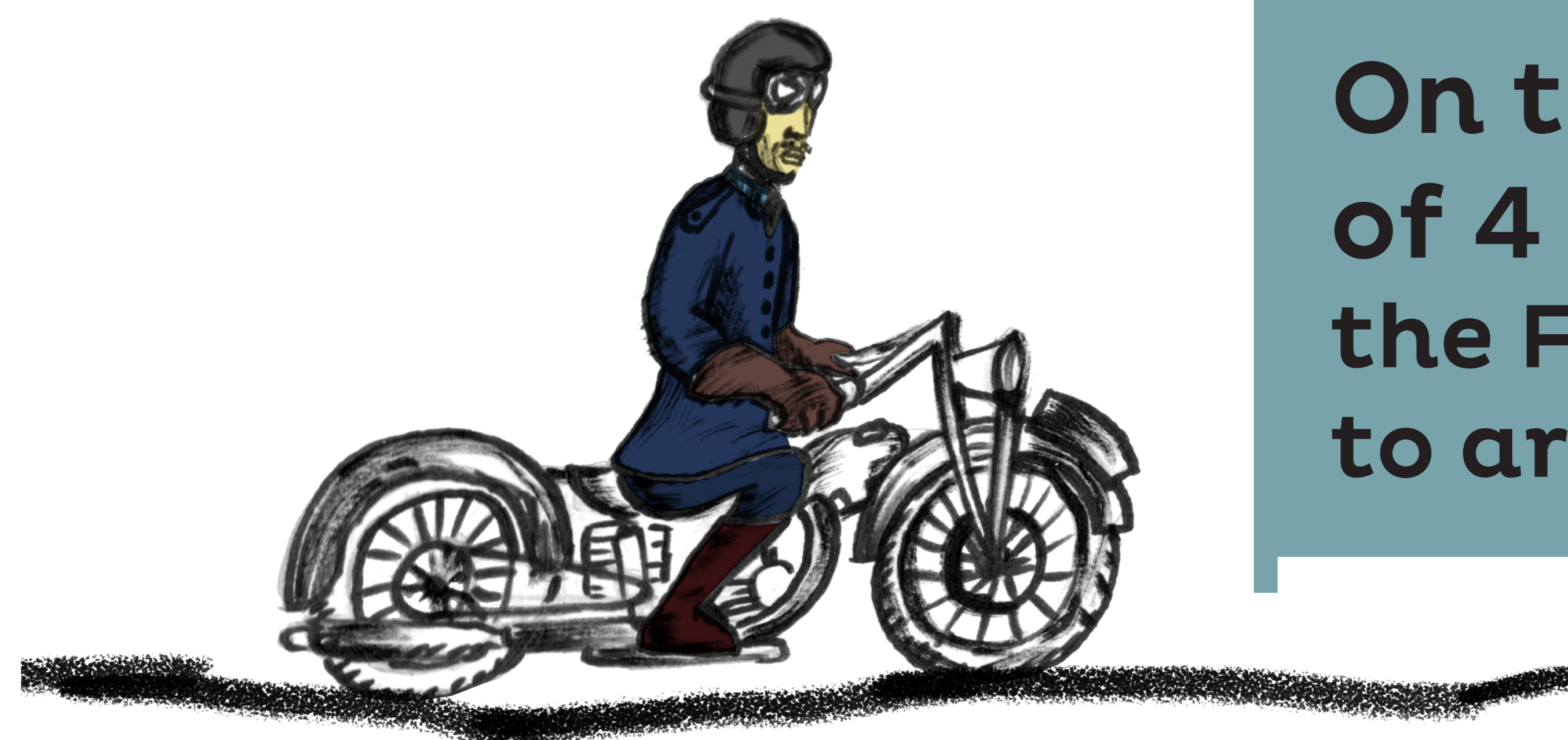
Fairground workers of French nationality with no fixed abode who have a recognised profession and must hold a *carnet forain*.

Nomads of any nationality, of no fixed abode, with no recognised occupation, 'even if they have resources or claim to exercise a profession', who must be in possession of an individual anthropometric *carnet*, a collective *carnet* for the group with whom they travel, and must register their vehicles.

Because of this procedure and the resulting constraints, every move of the 'nomads' is monitored.

1940 - 1941

The end of the travel



On the morning of 4 October 1940, the French police came to arrest the whole family.

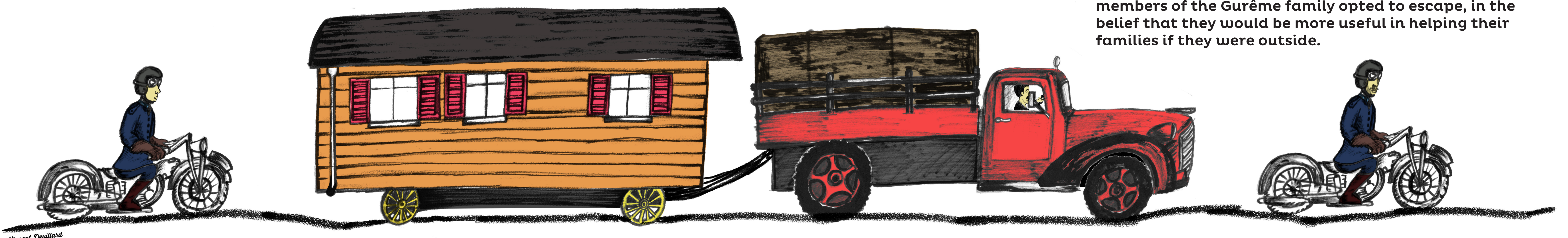
« We were leaving the field where we lived, in Petit-Couronne, near the port of Rouen, for good. René, Henriette and I were in the cab of the lorry driven by my father. My mother and the children were in the back. A policeman was leading the convoy on a motorbike. A fellow constable was bringing up the rear. »

The trailers, vehicles, horses, circus equipment and projection equipment were never returned to their owners.

On the very day that the German decree ordering the internment of 'nomads' in the occupied zone was promulgated, the Gurêmes were arrested by French gendarmes. Transferred to the Darnetal 'assembly camp for nomads' a few kilometres from the centre of Rouen, they were joined by other families who had been rounded up on the roads and grouped together there on the site of a former factory.

At dawn on 27 November, the 200 people locked up in Darnetal were taken by police officers to the marshalling yard at Sotteville-lès-Rouen and crammed into cattle cars. After a day without food or water, police officers took them out at the Brétigny railway station and escorted them to the military barracks of a former motorised cavalry school, the Linas-Monthéry camp.

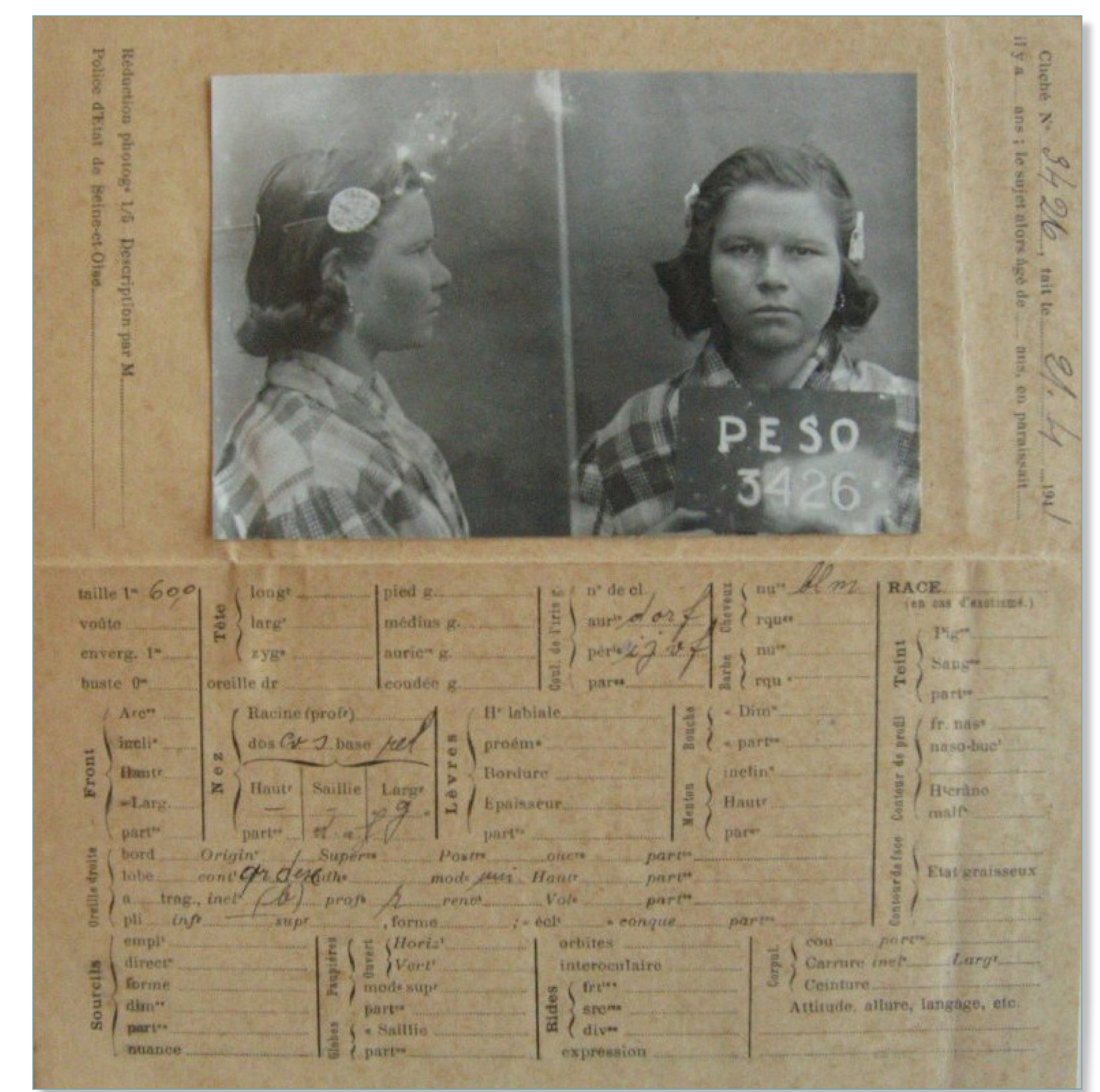
Hubert Leroux and his family were locked up in the camp from November 1940 to 21 April 1942. Cold, malnutrition, vermin, disease and mistreatment by the guards were the daily lot of the internees. Raymond Gurême is the only survivor of the camp to have given his account of this place. The letters from internees preserved in the archives bear witness to their ill-treatment, hunger and extremely unsanitary conditions. All these letters, most of which were written by René Gurême, remain unanswered. The only way out was to escape, but the confinement of the families kept men who were tempted to escape away from their wives and children. Nevertheless, by mutual agreement with their parents, three of the eldest members of the Gurême family opted to escape, in the belief that they would be more useful in helping their families if they were outside.



On 23 June 1941, Raymond's sister Henriette escaped from the camp with Henriette Delage and Anita Cortes. They were recaptured on 21 July and taken back to the camp. René and Raymond escaped on 26 July; they were arrested on 14 August following a tip-off.

Raymond's second escape! took place on 5 October 1941.

« Police and gendarmes were deployed on the ground. They were looking everywhere with searchlights, but they didn't have a dog. I thought: 'Those bastards are searching downstairs, while I'm up here!' »



Anthropometric record for Henriette Gurême

Context.

In France, the persecution of Roma began long before the German occupation.

On 3 September 1939, France declared war on Germany. The movement of 'nomads' was banned in several departments of western France. In Indre-et-Loire, 'nomads' were even expelled. As during the First World War, they were suspected of espionage.

On 6 April 1940, a decree prohibited the movement of 'nomads' throughout mainland France for the duration of the war.

The Interior Ministry instructed the prefects to place persons so designated under house arrest, outside of the built-up areas but close to a gendarmerie station, as stipulated in the implementing circular. The circular also sets out the expected benefits of such house arrest, which would help to 'stabilise the roaming gangs who pose a definite social danger [...]'.

Underpinned by the objectives of territorial security, the declared political will to settle 'nomads' was at work.

After the defeat of June 1940, the occupying forces ordered the opening of camps in which to intern 'Gypsies'. The collaborationist Vichy administration, in charge of the implementation, translated 'Gypsies' as meaning 'nomads'.

1940 - 1944: A teenager in THE WAR & in the resistance



Raymond at 18. (Family archives)

Raymond at 14 when war broke out.

At 15, he spent about one year in the Linas-Monthéry internment camp.

At 16, he was on the road alone, walking hundreds of kilometres to bring food to his family at the Linas-Monthéry internment camp.

At 17, he continued his journey to supply his family at the Montreuil-Bellay camp. He was arrested near the camp and transferred to a reformatory in Angers.



That same year, while working at the hospital in Angers, he came into contact with a Resistance fighter and managed to hijack a German supply lorry for the benefit of the maquisards.

Because the hospital director denounced him to the Germans, he was arrested and taken to Pré-Pigeon prison, where he awaited his sentence and feared execution.

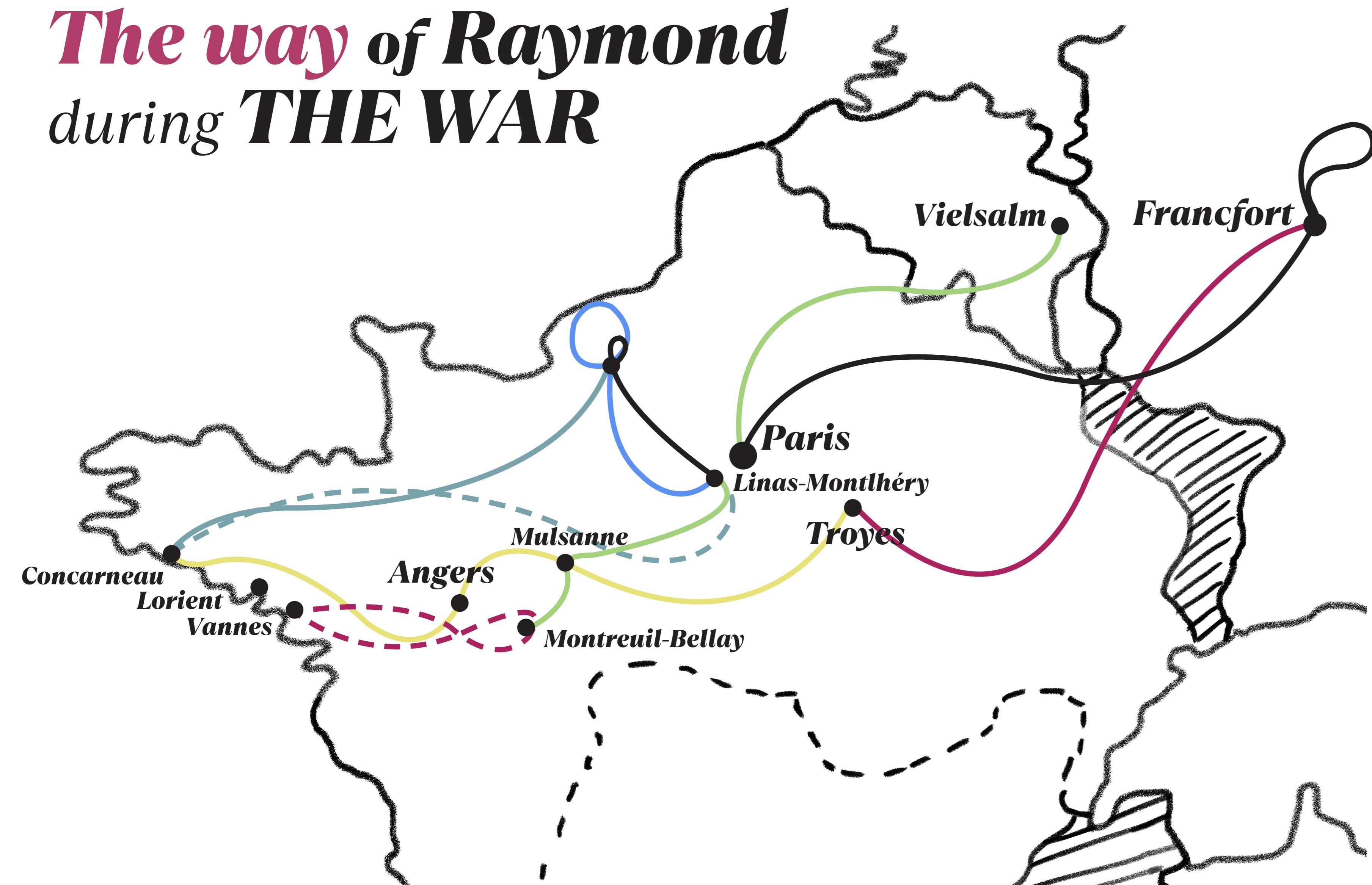
He came very close to death, but despite being considered a terrorist by the Germans, he was finally taken to the Haut-Clos military prison in Troyes, then deported to Heddernheim, a disciplinary camp near Frankfurt, Germany. The beatings rained down on him there as they had in all the places of confinement he had known, but with even greater violence. Daily blows with truncheons were the lot of prisoners convicted of acts of resistance. Raymond took the blows without flinching, taunting the guards with his stoicism.

Once again, he managed to escape.

At the end of August 1943, as he entered his 18th year, he was arrested by the Hitler Youth and transferred to a maximum-security camp in Oberursel. Beaten up for rebellion, he had scars on his skull for the rest of his life where it was bashed in by the guards.



The way of Raymond during THE WAR



4 October 1940, arrest of the Gurême family, house arrest at the Darnétal camp.

27 November 1940, the 200 'nomads' interned at Darnetal are transferred to the Linas-Monthéry camp.

5 October 1941, Raymond escapes from the Linas-Monthéry camp.

21 April 1942, closure of the Linas-Monthéry camp, transfer of internees to the Mulsanne camp, then on 3 August 1942 to Montreuil-Bellay.

During 1942, Raymond travels back and forth between Brittany, where he finds work on farms, and the Linas-Monthéry camp, then travels to the Montreuil-Bellay camp to bring food and clothing to his family.

Early in 1943, Raymond is arrested and placed in a reformatory in Angers, on the grounds of a hospital. He hijacks a truck for the maquisards. He was sent to the prison in Angers, then to another prison in Troyes.

In August 1943, Raymond is deported to the Heddernheim 're-education through work camp' near Frankfurt. He escapes and, when recaptured, is sent to the maximum-security camp at Oberursel. He escapes on 15 June 1944 and returns to Paris, where he joins the Resistance and took part in the liberation of Paris in August 1944.

Completely cut off from his family, Raymond is not reunited with them until 1950 in Belgium.

In the spring of 1944, when he was assigned to unload trains at Frankfurt station, he met a French train driver and on 15 June 1944, with the driver's help, managed to reach Paris, hiding in a coal wagon. As he later recounted, 'If that railwayman, who was a member of the Resistance like many of his comrades, hadn't brought me back, I think I would have been sent to the crematorium!'

Back in France, he joined the Resistance and took part in sabotage and combat actions until the liberation of Paris in August 1944.

Context

At the end of December 1940, around 1,700 'nomads and fairground workers' were interned in 10 camps. In autumn 1941, around 3,300 people of such designations were interned in 15 camps.

In November 1941, the Germans decided to reorganise all the internment camps for nomads in order to reduce operating costs and compensate for the lack of surveillance staff. The internees were transferred to regional camps.

On 8 November 1941, the Montreuil-Bellay 'concentration camp for nomads' was created for this purpose.

In the free zone, the main camps where 'nomadic families' were held were in the south in places originally built to intern Spanish Republicans.

Two other camps reserved exclusively for 'nomads' were set up by the Vichy regime on the Lannemezan plateau and at Saliers. The latter was designed from scratch as a Vichy propaganda tool. Built in the Camargue near the pilgrimage site of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the families imprisoned there were required to carry out traditional activities such as basket-making. This sinister mise-en-scène was undermined by the appalling living conditions there. Almost 600 people spent time in the camp until it was closed in August 1944. There were more than 60 cases of children taken from their families and 'placed' there.

1940
- 1944

Raymond, René-Lucien, Violette, and all the others

Violette et René-Lucien



Violette, René-Lucien Gurême
(Family archive)

René-Lucien is the eldest of the Gurême-Leroux siblings. It was with him that Raymond attempted his first escape from the Linas camp before they were both brought back by the gendarmes.

In April 1942, the Linas internees were transferred to the Mulsanne camp.

René-Lucien taught the children. Among them was Violette Vanhasebroecke and her family.



After the Mulsanne camp, the internees were taken to Montreuil-Bellay, 'the worst camp ever', as Violette put it.

They were starving, plagued by disease and by the harsh guards and nuns who were supposed to help the internees. Violette's father and younger brother died in the camps, and two of her brothers died shortly after their release as a result of their deprivation and ill-treatment. Like many internees, Violette spent time in the 'gnouf', the solitary confinement cell in the Montreuil camp.

At the end of 1943, René/Lucien managed to get his family out and then Violette's family as well.



Violette and René-Lucien (René) Gurême pose next to the 'gnouf' (confinement cell) of the Montreuil-Bellay camp, 1957. (Family archives)

Violette reunited with René-Lucien in Belgium, but their troubles were not over, as they were 'sold' to the Germans and had to flee again to avoid deportation.



Resistance

« Our role in the Resistance has been ignored, even though I came across many Voyageurs in the clandestine fighting in 1944 and 1945., Raymond Gurême told journalist Isabelle Ligner in August 2014. 'Even though we told each other our names or our traveller nicknames, we instinctively recognised each other. I don't hold a grudge against France, which is my only country, but I do hold a grudge against the politicians who never acknowledged the positive roles we might have played and who have dragged us through the mud. »

As historian Lise Foisneau has shown, the Voyageurs succeeded in setting up solidarity and escape networks and, in many cases, taking part in the armed resistance.

Lise Foisneau, Valentin Merlin.
French Nomads Resistance (1939-1946)
Tom Lantos Institute, 2018.

In terms of solidarity, it should also be noted that some families who had managed to escape internment passed food to the internees through the barbed wire, as Raymond did at the Linas-Monthéry and Montreuil-Bellay camps.

Father Jean Fleury, chaplain at the 'Route de Limoges gypsy camp' in Poitiers in 1942, benefited on several occasions when Romani internees aided him by diverting the attention of the guards so he could enter the part of the camp where the Jewish families were imprisoned. In this way, he managed to save many people, particularly children. Father Fleury was the first person in France to be named one of the 'Righteous among the Nations', and he often cited the support of the Roma as crucial to his action.

Context.

A total of 1800 'nomads' were interned over time in the Montreuil-Bellay camp, considered to have been the largest in France.

From 8 November 1941 to 16 January 1945, France used the camp as a concentration camp, in the terminology of the time, for 'individuals of no fixed abode, nomads and travelling showmen, of Romani type', indicating the racist nature of the measure. The maximum number was reached in August 1942 with 1,096 internees.

The internees were victims of the difficult living conditions inside the camp, which were exacerbated by food that was always insufficient and of little caloric value, as well as the deplorable hygiene there. Mortality mainly affected the elderly and newborn babies, who could not be adequately fed by mothers who were themselves undernourished. The Allied bombing raids in June and July 1944 further worsened the situation. The "Gypsies" left Montreuil on 16 January 1945.

These people were then transferred to the camps at Jargeau (Loiret) and Angoulême (Charente), where some remained until May 1946.

The case of the deported French Roma

Among the 'Zigeuner' registered at Auschwitz, 145 French people have been identified, all of whom arrived at the camp on Convoy Z in January 1944.

On 15 January 1944, Convoy Z left Malines with 351 Roma of various nationalities who had been captured in France, Belgium and Holland. Just approximately 10 survivors who were on Convoy Z returned at the end of the war.

Another situation, documented by survivors accounts, concerns the deportation of 'Gypsies' from the Poitiers camp, a group of men transferred to German labour camps, 64 of them deported to Sachsenhausen and 23 to Buchenwald.

Unlike what happened in other occupied territories, the Germans never gave the order to deport the 'Gypsies' interned in France. There were therefore no mass deportations, but individual 'Gypsies' were deported for other reasons, such as arbitrary arrests by the German occupying forces and deportations for forced labour or acts of resistance.

After the WAR: The long journey of remembrance



Back in the family

In 1945, after the Liberation, He survived by working for market gardeners in the Paris region. That was how he ended up in Linas, where he discovered that the manager of the old camp, who had embezzled the internees' ration vouchers for his own personal benefit, had become mayor of the commune. He also discovered that some of the camp guards had joined the gendarmerie and were continuing their harassment of Voyageurs, which Raymond and his family would suffer for decades to come.

In 1951, 10 years after their separation in Linas, Raymond tracked down his family in Belgium even though they thought he was dead.

The joy of the reunion was followed by the sad realisation of the social regression they had suffered, all their belongings having disappeared when they were put in the camps. No aid was forthcoming for the Voyageurs, not at that time and not later. Some of the family returned to France with Raymond. At over 65 years of age, his father, Hubert Leroux, who had always been a showman, was forced to work in the fields as a farm labourer with his whole family in order to survive.



Pauline and Raymond Gurême (Family archives)

That same year, 1951, Raymond met the love of his life, the beautiful Pauline. They had 15 children



Road to the grape harvest (Family archives)

From the 1960s onwards, it became increasingly difficult for Voyageurs to stop off on the outskirts of towns and villages. Police harassment led the Gurême family to settle down, and the Linas camp once again loomed on the horizon of the land Raymond bought in 1968 on the hill at Saint-Germain-les-Arpajon: *'That camp has always attracted me like a magnet, I don't know why... When I look at it, I see my whole family. I remember us all, when we used to go round in circles in the courtyard of that camp, but it also reminds me we have to make it known to those who don't know and to those who prefer to forget.'*

En 1982, in 1982, he applied for a *'political internee'* card. This ambiguous status was the only one that allowed the after-effects of the years of deprivation he suffered in the camps to be recognised. Even today, this designation obscures recognition of the specific nature of the French camps for 'nomads' and their arrests on racial grounds.

In 1983, Raymond was refused this status on the grounds of 'delinquency', which was quite a feat given that this qualification applied to his theft of a lorry load of food from the Nazi occupiers for the benefit of the Resistance at a time when the opposition was doubly motivated by his escape from the Linas camp.

It was not until 2009, 26 years later, that the French administration agreed to rectify this injustice.

On 27 November 2011, a plaque bearing the names of those interned at the Linas-Monthléry camp was inaugurated in the forecourt of the Brétigny-sur-Orge railway station.

That same year, the publication of the book *Interdit aux nomades**, written with Isabelle Ligner, marked an important stage in the process of bringing Raymond's story to the general public.

*Interdit aux nomades Raymond Gurême, Isabelle Ligner, ed. Calmann-Lévy, 2011. Raymond Gurême was awarded the Chevalier des arts et des lettres prize for his book in 2012.



Interdit aux nomades. (Photo Isabelle Ligner)

Context.

1944 was the year of liberation for France - but not for the Roma, who were the last administrative internees to be released in 1946.

In December 1944, 1,000 'nomads' were interned in France. The last 'nomads' were released from the Alliers camp in Angoulême after 10 May 1946. The French authorities still suspected them, which played a role in their late releases.

The government thus unequivocally intended to continue the sedentarisation work which had begun with the decree of April 1940. At the end of the war, the Roma had to reintegrate into everyday life without any aid from society.

At the time of their arrest, the 'nomads' had had to leave everything behind, in particular their means of transport and housing, their work equipment, and their personal belongings. When they returned, they discovered that everything had disappeared, having been looted or even sold. Many families never returned to where they had been arrested and settled near the camps where they had been interned.

Roma have remained absent from the collective memory

The general attitude of the public authorities throughout the 20th century to this history was one of indifference and rejection. Society has, therefore, chosen amnesia rather than making known and recognising what the 'Gypsies' experienced under the Occupation.

Few of them ever received compensation or the card recognizing them as former internees and entitling them to a pension. Many never applied for recognition because they were unfamiliar with the administrative procedures.

Today, associations of former internees or descendants of persecuted 'nomads' are working to bring this history to the attention of the general public and to have it included in school textbooks.

It was not until 2016 that national tribute was finally paid to this history.

2010-2020: Recounting, transmitting



Raymond Gurême, 2010 (photo: Jean Baptiste Pellerin)

At 85, and until his death on 24 May 2020, Raymond remained the courageous, tireless fighter he had been all his life.

He devoted his last 10 years to telling his story, the story of his family, and the stories of all those who could not speak or were not listened to, the more than 6,500 Roma and other associated groups who were arbitrarily interned in around 30 camps in France.

« We must always stand tall, never on your knees, he would say tirelessly. »



Speech of Raymond Gurême on 2 August 2016 at the ceremony commemorating the genocide of the Roma in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration and Extermination Camp

« My testimony is for young people. Don't leave your future in the hands of the puppets. You must resist. We must resist the discrimination, the racism and the violent expulsions to which Roma and Voyageurs are subjected in every country in Europe. We, the elders, have lit the flame. Now it's up to the young people to keep it alive and make it grow so we can be stronger. Young people, stand up. Stay on your feet, never on your knees! »



Raymond Gurême, 2019 (photo Adèle Mauduit)

« Words are stronger than blows »

This is the message that Raymond tried to pass on to young people the world over: Resist at any cost, never give up, never remain silent in the face of injustice. Speak out, avoid the spiral of violence.



Dikh he na bister 2018 (photo: Ludovic Versace)

« Look and don't forget (Dikh e na bister) »

Since 2013, as a member of the ternYpe network, the association 'La voix des Roms' has participated in the Dikh he na bister events with groups of young people. For six consecutive years, Raymond Gurême has accompanied them and played an active part in workshops on remembrance and the fight against all forms of racism and discrimination.



HappyBorders, Illustration: Anna Rabko

As he did every year, on 16 May 2020 Raymond was in front of the Basilica of Saint-Denis to mark Romani Resistance Day.

A few days later, on 24 May, at the dawn of his ninety-fifth year, he passed away, surrounded by his family.

Context.

In 2016 in France, 70 years after the liberation of the last camps, a national tribute was finally paid to the interned 'nomads' and their families.

« This day has come and this truth has to be told at the highest level of the State: the Republic recognises the suffering of the 'nomads' who were interned and admits that it bears great responsibility for this tragedy » François Hollande

On that occasion, the President announced the government's intention to repeal the law of 3 January 1969 as part of a bill on equality and citizenship in order to put an end to the discriminatory treatment of *Gens du Voyage*.

This message of vigilance towards 'people who can be humiliated, stigmatised and excluded' remains highly topical. All too often, the French citizens to whom we paid tribute on 29 October 2016 in Montreuil-Bellay are still victims of discrimination, exclusion or racism today, including on the part of elected representatives of the Republic.

In Europe

Roma and Sinti were interned, forced to work and deported to concentration and extermination camps. The 'Einsatzgruppen' (intervention groups) murdered tens of thousands of Roma and Sinti in the German-occupied East. The Nazis incarcerated thousands of Roma and Sinti in the concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen and Ravensbrück. Thousands were killed in the extermination camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

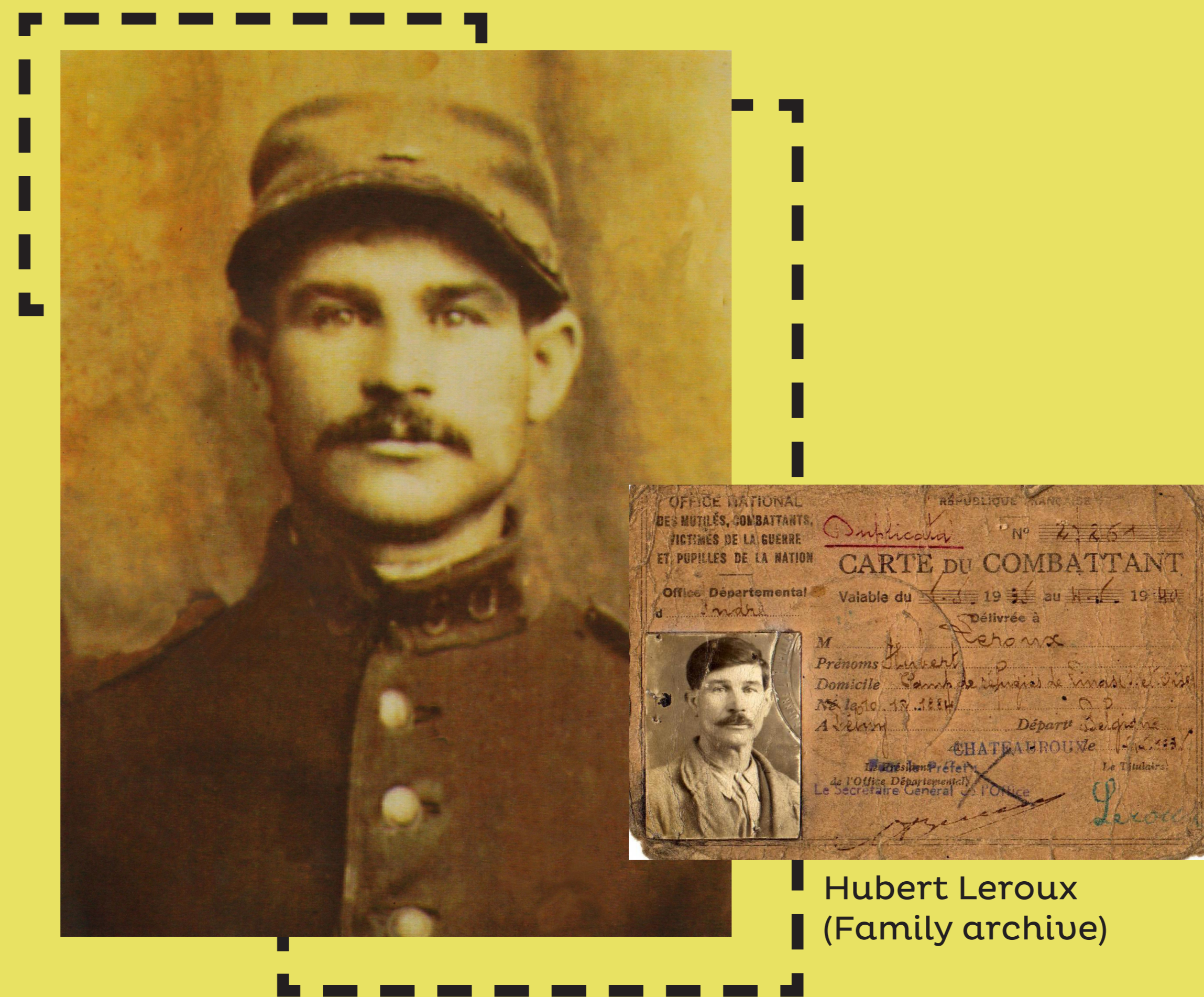
Although exact figures or percentages cannot be verified, historians estimate that the Germans and their allies exterminated between 40 and 90% (depending on the region) of the European Romani population.

The Birkenau 'Gypsy family camp', opened in 1942 and housed 20,000 people. The head doctor at Auschwitz, Dr Mengele, carried out pseudo-medical experiments there, in particular on Romani and Sinti children marked with the acronym 'war material'.

In May 1944, the Germans decided to liquidate the Auschwitz 'Gypsy camp'. As the SS surrounded the camp, they were confronted by people armed with iron bars and ready to fight. The Germans backed down and postponed the liquidation. It took place on 2 August 1944, a night on which 4,300 Gypsies were exterminated. Of the 23,000 'Gypsies' deported to Auschwitz, 19,000 perished.

Annexes

From one war to another



Hubert Leroux (Family archive)

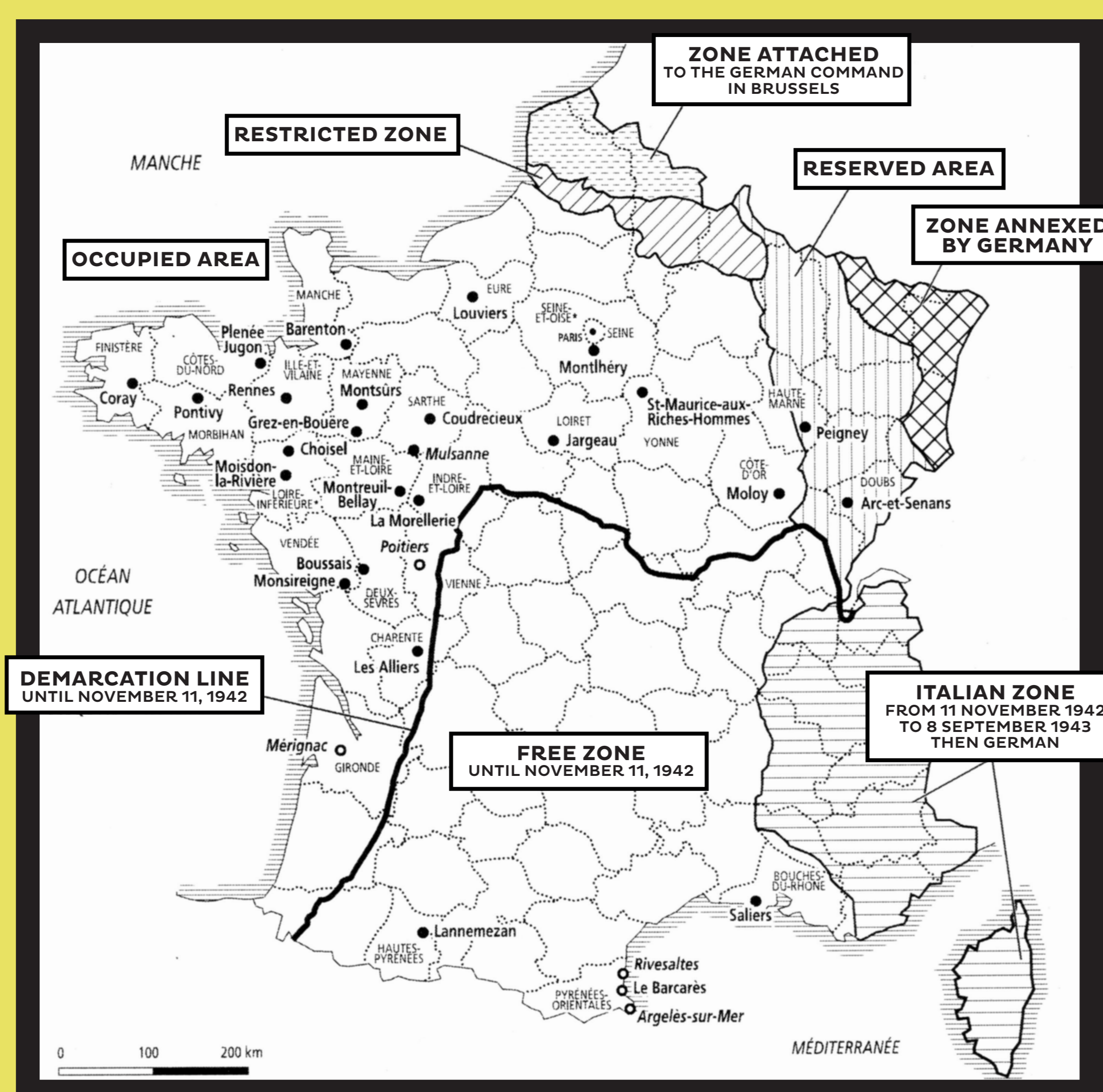
Although his homeland had sent Hubert to fight in the First World War, during the Second World War that same homeland, France, treated him like a nobody, stripped him of all his possessions and interned him in camps specially created for 'nomads' in France.

« I am French, gassed and wounded in the Great War »

this survivor of 1914-1918 kept repeating to his French jailers and to his country's administration.

Extract from 'Portrait de Voyageur. Hubert Leroux, First World War combatant, interned during the Second'; Isabelle Ligner, Dépêches Tsiganes

The internment camps for 'nomads' in France during the Second World War



● Main French internment camps for nomads
○ Internment camps for Jews and gypsies simultaneously or successively (other Jewish internment camps are not shown on this map)
* Department of the time

Map « Les Tsiganes en France, un sort à part, 1939-1946 »
Ed. Perrin, 2009

Raymond's Song



What no man could ever do,
A boy of fifteen has shown able to.
That it was not such a big deal
To run away while in chains.
It was for a 'bagatelle'
That he was put in the cubbyhole
But his anger was so great
That the very evening he left,
He left from Linas-Monthéry.
The gendarmes set out after him,
But they couldn't catch up with him,
They all came back empty-handed,
The leader looked like a dummy!
And God willing,
It's not today, nor tomorrow,
That we'll see our brother again!

Henriette Gurême

Raymond's second escape is not recorded in the archives and the guards continued to read his name at roll call. When they called him, his sisters sang the song they had written in their brother's honour, which Raymond used to sing during his testimonies.

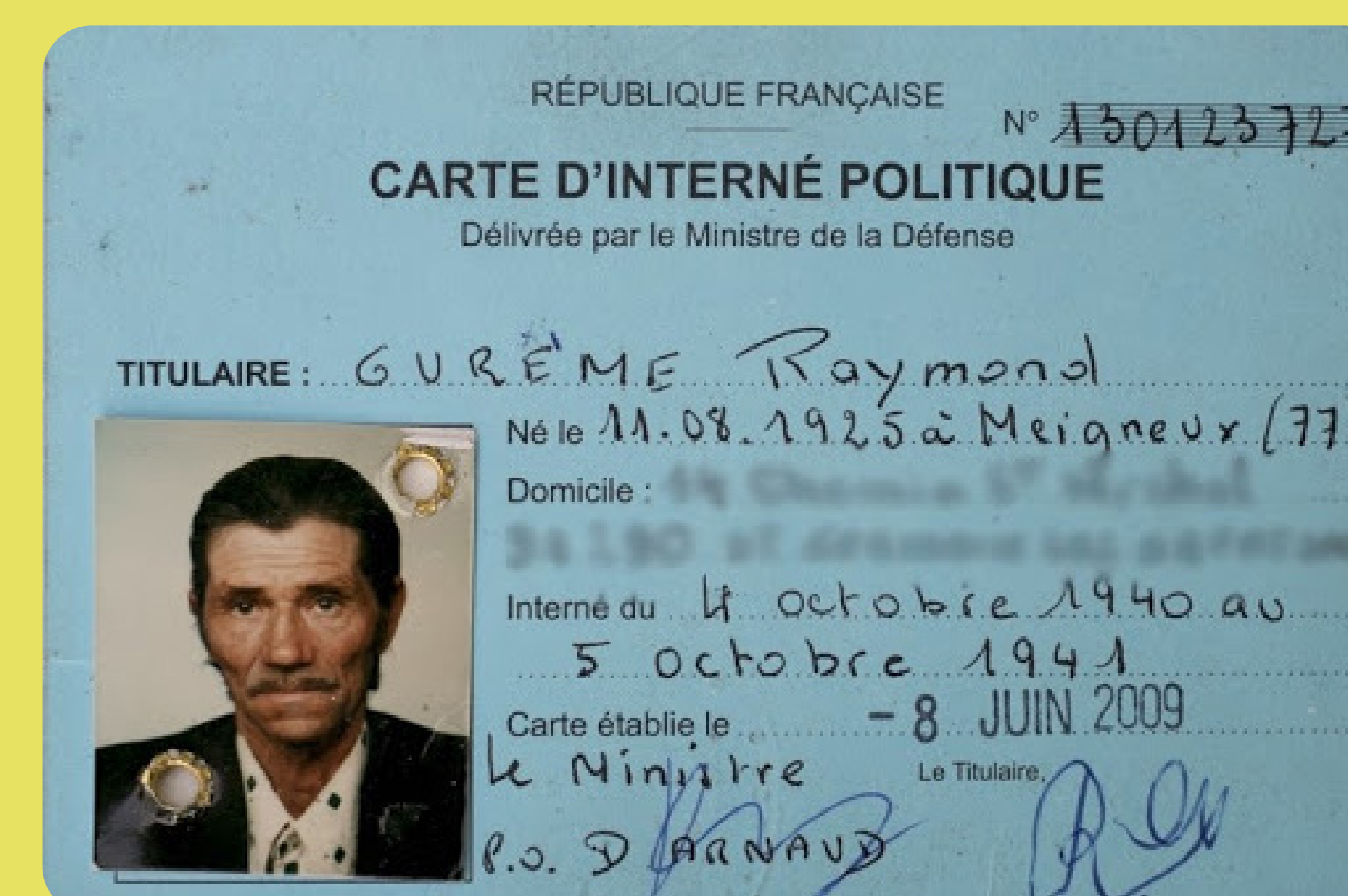
Linas-Monthéry was the only internment camp for 'nomads' in the Paris region.



Camp of Linas-Monthéry (group of internees in front of a barracks), provenance unknown, probably taken by one of the camp guards

The barracks were located on the site of the Monthéry auto drome, on a plateau two kilometres from any built-up area. Behind the barbed wire, from 27 November 1940 to 21 April 1942, 45 men, 35 women, around 20 young people aged between 16 and 20 and around 100 children under the age of 15 were imprisoned. There was no school in the camp, but Raymond's brother René (Lucien) managed to teach the children. The families interned were French fairground workers, Belgian merchants or craftsmen, French basket-makers or boilermakers, or large Romani families from Eastern Europe.

The camp was guarded by around 50 French gendarmes, a director, and an accountant who was accused by the internees of starving them by trafficking in the ration tickets intended for their families. Mortality was high, especially among the elderly and newborns, particularly during the winter of '41. The internees were particularly weakened by hunger, the cold, and the deplorable hygiene conditions, which led to illnesses and epidemics which could not be curbed for lack of medicine.



The internee card issued to them was termed a 'political internee' card.



The king of escapes (1941-1944)

Raymond was still a child when he escaped from the sinister Montesson re-education centre.

It was to be the first of a whole series of his escapes, the others documented in the archives of the various places of confinement from which he managed to flee and even reported in the local press.

First escape from the Linas-Monthéry camp in July 1941

« Two internees escaped from the camp during the night of 26 to 27 July 1941. They were : Gurême René Hubert, known as Leroux, born on 22 August 1932 in Lagny; Gurême Raymond, known as Leroux, born on 11 August 1925 in Meigneux » (Police Inspector Milly Robert, Director of the Linas-Monthéry camp for nomads, to the General Secretary for Police).

René and Raymond took refuge with a cousin in Saint Mard in Seine-et-Marne, where they were arrested on 14 August 1941 after the mayor of their home town turned them in (as part of the measures put in place to catch escapees, the police warned the various local administrations which were likely to receive requests for identity papers).

Second escape from the Linas-Monthéry camp on 5 October 1941

Convicted of rebellion against a gendarme who was mistreating a small child, Raymond was sentenced to a month in solitary confinement. It was there that one evening he decided to 'nacha'. Succeeding in removing his handcuffs, he fled and took refuge in a tree. Thanks to his agility, determination, and mental strength, he balanced himself for hours on a branch until the early hours of the morning, when the gendarmes stopped searching for him.

Spring 1943: Escape from the 'Villa des Roses' in Angers

The 'Villa des Roses' was a reform school for orphans, resistance fighters and 'delinquents'. Raymond was taken there after being arrested on the outskirts of the Montreuil-Bellay camp. There he met another 'boarder', Henri Querouet, with whom he became friends, and soon the two teenagers escaped to Brittany, finding their way back to freedom for a while. They were arrested a few weeks later and taken back to their starting point.

His next escape took place in June 1943.

It followed the hijacking of a supply lorry that he was undertaking on behalf of the Resistance. Denounced by the director of the hospital where he was employed, Raymond had no choice but to flee. The local press reported:

'ESCAPED FROM THE HOSPITAL, one at 6 PM on Wednesday, the other at 1 AM on Thursday, Raymond Gurême and Henri Querouet, aged 18, are wanted by police. Reports have been circulated to all police departments.' Le Petit Courrier, 18 June 1943.

The next stage was Angers prison, followed by Troyes before his deportation to Germany.

At the end of August 1943 he escaped from the Heddernheim 're-education through labour' camp.

Under number '3619', Raymond found himself in this disciplinary camp, struggling with the violence of the SDs, one of the toughest units in the Nazi regime. Taking advantage of a bombing raid, he managed to escape, but was stopped by a group of Hitler Youth and taken back to the camp and then to Frankfurt prison before being transferred to the Oberursel disciplinary camp.

« Left on 15 June 1944 (destination not given) »

This is how the documents of the Frankfurt State police record Raymond's escape.

On his return to Paris, he joined the Resistance.