

Gypsy students in the UK: the impact of ‘mobility’ on education

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Abstract

This paper argues that Gypsy students in primary and secondary education in the UK are marginalised because of ambiguous understandings of their ‘mobility’. Drawing on research conducted on the South coast of England it examines Gypsy families’ experiences of education. Despite often describing their identity in relation to travelling or mobility, few families’ lifestyles were characterized by actual movement or nomadism. Teachers and educationalists meanwhile cite the need to deliver a ‘mobile’ rather than a ‘sedentary’ education for Gypsy students. The Department for Communities and Local Government recently defined Gypsy ethnicity in direct relation to a nomadic lifestyle (DCLG 2015). This is problematic as the association between Gypsy ethnicity and nomadism is itself questionable and may be better understood in more nuanced terms reflecting the relationship between identity and ‘mobility’. This paper argues that ‘mobility’ is understood to define Gypsy difference in a way that excludes students.

Keywords

Mobility, Sedentarism, Cultural boundary, Nomadism, Gypsy, Traveller

Introduction

This paper argues that Gypsy¹ students in primary and secondary education in the UK are marginalised because of ambiguous understandings of their ‘mobility’. It draws on research conducted on the South coast of England that examines Gypsy families’ relationships with their neighbours. Unsurprisingly, given the association between Gypsies and nomadism (Hancock 1987; Mayall 2004), one key theme to emerge in the research was mobility. Although mobility was an important factor in many aspects of Gypsy families’ lives, it often materialised in ambiguous or nebulous ways.

These findings are considered in the light of policy affecting Gypsies that has frequently used nomadism within its terms of reference. Recently the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) defined Gypsy ethnicity in direct relation to living a mobile or nomadic way of life (DCLG 2015). This is problematic on at least two counts. Firstly the association between Gypsy ethnicity and nomadism has long been a questionable assumption (Acton 1987; Bhopal and Myers 2008). D’arcy (2016) also makes a specific link between misrepresenting ‘stock stories’ including those about Gypsy mobility and educational experiences. Secondly, mobility itself can be better understood in terms of an axis between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles in which few individuals or groups are positioned at either diametric pole and in which more complex understandings of mobility may be codified (Cresswell 2006). Acton (2010) outlines how Gypsy and Roma populations in Europe have historically adopted a mixture of nomadic and sedentary lifestyles. It

¹ ‘Gypsy’ and ‘Traveller’ are contested terms; historically and in contemporary usage both are often used pejoratively. In the UK they are also used as terms of self-ascription (Okely 1983). In this research most families referred to themselves as ‘Gypsies’. The term ‘Roma’ was understood by respondents to refer to people from Eastern Europe; whilst ethnic links were identified between ‘Gypsies’, ‘Travellers’ and ‘Roma’, no families in this research referred to themselves as ‘Roma’.

should also be noted that policy defining Gypsy identity in relation to nomadism or mobility is neither unique to the UK nor to Gypsies *per se*. Bidet (2010) describes how French republicanism mitigates against policy that refers specifically to ethnicity but has contrived to create an, “administrative category of the ‘people who travel’ (*gens du voyage*)” (2010, 23). Understandings of mobility can also be a factor in how schools manage other groups of students including both indigenous nomadic groups in Australia (Prout Quicke and Biddle 2017) and migrant students (Moskal 2016).

Gypsy identity and its relationship to mobility: a backdrop to educational experiences.

Gypsies in the UK

Gypsies are a diasporic people who originated in the North of India and migrated west before settling across Europe in the 14th Century (Hancock 2010; Matras 2004; Mayall 2004). Since arriving in the UK they have been regarded as an itinerant population characterized in terms of dirt and criminality (Mayall 2004; Okely 1983) and subjected to continuous regimes of legislation to control their movement and settlement (Bhopal and Myers 2008; Mayall 1997; Myers 2013; Taylor 2013). Some later legislation sought to redress earlier failures to treat Gypsy families equitably. The 1968 Caravan Act was intended to provide greater provision of sites for accommodation, but generally failed to do so as a result of its local implementation (Niner 2003). In 2006 the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) issued guidance requiring local councils to deliver more favourable planning decisions, but

this was generally not implemented locally. Most recently the 2015 DCLG Policy placed greater restrictions on planning applications for new Gypsy Traveller sites.

One consequence of such policy-making has been the tendency for Gypsy lives to be shaped by issues of social injustice and inequality (see Cemlyn et al. 2009). The historic failure of policy to provide adequate accommodation has not only left many families effectively homeless but it also directly linked to inadequate health care provision and is a significant factor in the difficulties faced when accessing education or schools (Derrington and Kendall 2008).

Many Gypsy families identify problems in sending their young people to schools including fears of safety often related to racism and bullying; concerns about cultural erosion and a curriculum that does not reflect Gypsy culture or values; and, poor parental memories of their own schooling experiences (Derrington and Kendall 2008; Levinson 2015; Myers, McGhee and Bhopal 2010). School's often limited understanding of such cultural boundaries contributes to poor achievement and exclusion (D'arcy 2017; Derrington and Kendall 2008; Wilkin et al. 2010). Despite this there has been a significant increase in school attendance since the 1960s when as few as 4% of children attended to a present day figure of around 70% (Bhopal and Myers 2009) possibly reflecting a pragmatic approach to changing economies and employment opportunities (Myers, McGhee and Bhopal 2010; Casa-Nova 2007). Levinson (2015) argues that despite these changes many Gypsies still wish to retain a sense of their own individualised culture and identity that in part relates to nomadism and travelling, (even if it is not overtly reflected in their daily routines). As a result many families still do not expect their children to attend school and there is a

noticeably high drop out at the transitional period between primary and secondary school and the onset of adolescence (Myers, McGhee and Bhopal 2010; D'arcy 2014).

UK schools have adopted a number of measures to provide educational opportunities for Gypsy students that acknowledge differences between nomadic and sedentary education including allowing students time away from school to attend family events and the support of Traveller Education Support Services (TESS). The TESS work within local authority education departments to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families engagement with schools. They have a wide-ranging remit that encompasses encouraging attendance and supporting achievement; they also often support families more widely and work to challenge racist and exclusive behaviours within schools (Derrington and Kendall 2008; Bhopal and Myers 2008). Vanderbeck (2005) notes that whilst policy makers in the UK and Europe often privilege the importance of empowering Gypsy lives through education and schooling; this is rarely matched by policy that seeks to redress wider, interconnected inequalities such as those relating to accommodation. In many respects the TESS role met that need but funding for this service has always been sporadic and subject to change (Derrington and Kendall 2008); and, since the 2010 Coalition government has been significantly reduced reflecting wider educational policy tending to fund schools directly rather than through local authorities (Foster and Cemlyn 2012).

Other measures introduced to improve the educational experiences of Gypsies have included the collecting of data through the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) against categories of 'Gypsy/Roma' and 'Travellers of Irish Heritage'

ethnicity categories since 2004 (Myers, McGhee and Bhopal 2010). The usefulness of this data has however been cast in doubt by the government department responsible for its collection who highlighted that it is incomplete with many families not wishing to self-identify as Gypsies (DCSF, 2009).

Mobility and ambiguity

Malkki (1992) describes how “widely held common-sense assumptions linking people to place, nation to territory, are not simply territorializing, but deeply metaphysical” (1992, 27). She notes the almost botanical potency framed in the use of language such as *roots*, to underline the connection between individuals, nations and the land. Such deeply felt attachments become unsettled when groups of people become *uprooted* or displaced as refugees. Malkki also distinguishes between the chaotic movements of refugees, (often portrayed as criminalized and endangering); compared to the orderly understanding of colonial expatriates, packing their bags and moving abroad. Bauman (2000a, 2000b) goes further describing a globalised polarisation of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’: ascendant elites free to pursue their consumer driven desires unrestricted by borders or territory, whilst those at the bottom are often powerless to stay where they want and when they do travel,

‘their destination, more often than not, is of somebody else’s choosing and seldom enjoyable; and when they arrive, they occupy a highly unprepossessing site that they would gladly leave behind if they had anywhere else to go.’ (2000b, 18)

Within a sedentarist worldview the importation of outsiders within ‘*our*’ borders is disturbing but when ‘*we*’ travel abroad that is a natural extension of ‘*our*’ everyday ability and right to colonize. Reflecting on his earlier work Bauman (2012) notes the unstoppable rise in numbers of the ‘uprooted’ and their fragility in a world in which politics and power are increasingly separate (2012). Politically the economic need for immigrants is overridden by the rhetoric of maintaining strong borders and the fear of the ‘other’ (2000a). Power to deliver on such rhetoric meanwhile, lies in the hands of a small elite who create re-envisioned versions of ‘community’ that bear little resemblance to the Enlightenment’s conception of communal living but rather keeps,

the other, the different, the strange and the foreign at a distance, the decision to preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual commitment, is not only conceivable, but the expectable to the existential uncertainty rooted in the new fragility or fluidity of social bonds (2000, 108)

by deploying wealth and privilege to maintain personal spaces gated, surveilled and defended against everybody else.

Cresswell (2006) suggests that just as Malkki describes a sedentarist metaphysics there is also a nomadic metaphysics; one that specifically seems to encompass a more modern outlook or post-modern playfulness. Cresswell cites amongst others Bakhtin’s (1984) writing on carnival, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) rhizome and Thrift’s (1994) ‘feeling *mobility*’. Both ‘sedentarist’ and ‘nomadic’ metaphysics go beyond place to account for identity: in the former embedded in the fixity of land and in the

latter borne out of movement, speed and change. Whilst a 'sedentarist' account appears more traditional, the 'nomadic' view feels fresher, modern and the shape of things to come.

Kabachnik (2010), identifies the normative importance of *place over mobility* in maintaining the *status quo*. Nomadic people, (for Kabachnik this encompasses a very broad group of mobile people), always pose a threat; both in sedentarist terms as agents of disruption, but also from a postmodern perspective based on nomadic metaphysics as agents of resistance. One consequence is that, "Place is reduced to a traditional, reactionary organ of state control" (2010, 102). In other words it's not just the border that has to be protected but the characteristics of what is contained within the border. MacLaughlin (1999) unpicks the historic development of the importance of place in Europe's transition from feudal into industrial societies identifying how non-sedentary 'others' become identified as both unwanted and threatening.

It could be argued that rather than expressing vastly differing accounts, both sedentarist and nomadic metaphysics are embedded within each other grappling with a deeper ambiguity. This is apparent in Simmel's (1971) description of the *stranger*, which introduces ambiguity in terms of the relationship between the insider (the native) and the outsider (the immigrant), whose lives are closely entwined despite their intrinsic cultural difference. He introduces further ambiguity by highlighting the economic and creative advantages that strangers introduce into their new homelands. The *stranger* is unsettling because his continued presence, amongst the native population, demands their continuing engagement. Bauman (2005) notes the 'company of strangers is always frightening' because unlike other natives, (be they

friends or enemies), ‘their intentions, ways of thinking and responses to shared situations are unknown’ (2005, 76); in this sense they represent unpredictability and risk. Simmel seemingly acknowledges both a sedentarist and a nomadic perspective; his immigrant retains the potential for further movement, whereas Acton (2010) would draw a clearer distinction between migrant and nomad.

Despite being described as the perfect example of Simmel’s *stranger* (Clark and Greenfields 2006), Myers (2015) has suggested Gypsies represent an ‘exaggerated’ form of the *stranger*. This is in part because of the remarkable persistence since the Middle Ages of unchanging stereotypes about Gypsies such as their criminality, uncleanliness and nomadism; and in part, because there is a disjunct between such stereotypes and knowledge about Gypsies. Not only do they represent the closeness of the *other* living amongst the natives; they also possess a persistent aura of mobility from one unknown place to another unknown place. They are not travelling from A to B; they are simply mobile. Their mobility is not the *clever* mobility of a modern cosmopolitan world; they are not representatives of a new generation of jet setters or technophiles who are compressing and overriding traditional borders. Schools are one setting where greater contact between Gypsies and non-Gypsies occurs and as a consequence can be the setting for exaggerated fears of the unknown or misunderstood ‘stranger’ to materialise (Myers 2013, 2015).

Policy, mobility and nomadism

The DCLG’s 2015 policy for new Gypsy traveller site development specifically identified Gypsies in terms of nomadism; stating,

1. For the purposes of this planning policy “gypsies and travellers” means:

Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family’s dependents’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.

2. In determining whether persons are “gypsies and travellers” for the purposes of this planning policy, consideration should be given to the following issues amongst other relevant matters:

- a) whether they previously led a nomadic habit of life
- b) the reasons for ceasing their nomadic habit of life
- c) whether there is an intention of living a nomadic habit of life in the future, and if so, how soon and in what circumstances.

(2015, 9)

The policy conflates a mobile nomadic identity with the characteristics of someone who can be granted planning permission; and, in doing so, undermines the position of Gypsies in society. It does this in two ways: firstly restricting successful planning applications to a type of Gypsy that in many respects is closer to a figure of imagination than a real person; and secondly, for the many Gypsy families unable to demonstrate such nomadism, effectively positioning them as being not real ‘Gypsies’.

Such policy impacts directly on educational experiences, falling within a pattern of holistic failings noted by Vanderbeck (2005) in which,

British policymakers and practitioners continually stress the importance of empowering young Travellers and creating 'choices' for them, yet much less attention is given to how addressing the spatial controls on Travellers could in fact help create choices for young Travellers (which could potentially help some Traveller families to counter exclusion on their own terms). Can state educational policy ever legitimately be constructed as empowering when it is offered (or, indeed, compelled) under conditions of state spatial control and ghettoisation? Can practices of schooling (and the access to paid employment they are believed to provide) justifiably be considered as an extension of 'inclusion' when other state practices increasingly foreclose the viability of alternatives? (2005, 90)

State intervention in the lives of young Gypsies says less about a desire to engage them with educational opportunities, and far more about the means of regulating and controlling a community that is understood to be problematic. This often finds a justification within discourses around citizenship; Marshall's (1950) description of education as a citizen's duty rather than a right presupposes the value of a social contract in which homogeneity is privileged. Inclusion is constructed in terms of schooling that educates individuals to adopt the values of the normative, sedentary population (Lund 1999).

Gypsy families are faced by seemingly contradictory patterns of policy-making: historic legislation restricting mobility against planning laws restricting the development of new Traveller sites, and educational inclusion measures that sit amongst more exclusionary practice. One reading for this is that policy *per se* is not simply the strategies imposed by government but rather symptomatic of processes of sociation. Arguing that the ambiguities of mobility are closely linked to the ambiguities of the normative, sedentary population Bærenholdt argues that “social relations among people and the political making of societies only come together through the technologies of circulation and connection, materially constructing societies, governed through mobility” (2013, 31). Whilst understandings of Gypsy lives remain ambiguous, their impacts are often clearly delineated; Sibley suggests understandings of the self and of stereotypes are social and cultural constructs and that, ‘[t]he sense of border between self and other is echoed in both social and spatial boundaries’ (Sibley, 1995, 32).

The research discussed in this paper explores the construction of such boundaries by Gypsies living on the South coast and their neighbours. It examines the sense of mobility that materializes when borders or boundaries are routinely crossed in many aspects of daily life including when Gypsy children attend schools.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative, ethnographic approach using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 32 Gypsy families living on the South coast of England.

Families rather than individuals were chosen as the base unit for the research, in order that a more holistic picture of the views of parents, children, grandparents and extended family could emerge. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and some included detailed written notes taken during the interview. The context in which the research took place was flexible, hence qualitative research and grounded theory analysis were seen as the most suitable. Data analysis was understood as a dynamic process, taking place during and after data collection (Charmaz 2006). The process of grounded theory included identifying patterns of behaviour and events described in the interviews. This was followed by a development of specific concepts which occupied a central position in the context of the development of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1992). Three different types of coding were used in the development of theory; open and axial coding of pre-identified themes used in the interview schedules such as education, space/accommodation, work and family and as the story of the research emerged, selective coding around themes such as boundaries and belonging (Strauss 1990). Through a process of working through and refining the codes, the principles of the theory were developed until a process of theoretical saturation was reached (Flick 1998).

Access was negotiated directly with families who were already known to the researcher following two previous projects that examined Gypsy families' experiences of education and relationships with schools in the same geographical area. The families who participated in the research represented a broad mix of different types of Gypsy families. 24 families defined themselves as English Gypsies, 6 as Irish Travellers and 2 as Fairground Travellers. Families lived in a variety of

accommodation 11 families living on local authority owned Traveller sites, 10 on privately owned sites or land, 10 housed and 1 family was effectively homeless and living on the roadside. 14 families lived in static caravans, 7 in mobile caravans and 11 families lived in houses. In addition there was a wide range of different income sources for families and a significant spread in terms of wealth. All but one family had school-aged children. This paper also draws upon interviews with practitioners, (teachers and Traveller Education Services), working with the families. For a more detailed discussion of the research methodology and data analysis see Myers (2013).

School attendance, mobility and crossing boundaries

Non-spatial, cultural boundaries

When interviewed about understandings of mobility, nomadism and travelling many family members described ambiguous accounts of what such movement might look like and the impact it had on their lives. Often this related to how understandings of boundaries between Gypsies and non-Gypsies were constructed. One mother, described the local primary school at which her daughter was a pupil and which her two older sons had previously attended;

We're travelling people. I could get up and go tomorrow. The school doesn't see that, they just see all these estates and the kids on the estate they just want what's best for them. But we're different. We can always just go. (Mrs Taylor, English Romany-Gypsy)

Mrs Taylor's comments mirrored those of many other families in the research; she identified a difference between her family and non-Gypsy families, she acknowledged the good work of schools but contextualised it as being in the best interest of other

‘kids on the estate’, and she identified her family being different because they were ‘travelling people’. Mrs Taylor’s account of her own life did not however map neatly onto the chaotic understandings of an uprooted or mobile person suggested by Malkki (1992) or reflect the lack of agency and power ascribed to refugees in late modernity by Bauman (2000). Instead she described her contentment at having recently moved from one rented accommodation into a newly-built Housing Association property on an out-of-town development characterised by peacefulness and pleasant neighbours. She identified boundaries between herself and non-Gypsies in two specific areas. Firstly, despite maintaining friendly relationships with her neighbours she would not invite them into her house or make reciprocal visits. Secondly, as discussed, she identified a particular boundary associated with the school. When asked how schools might understand Gypsy culture Mrs Taylor suggested,

They don’t *see* Gypsies. They don’t *see* us in the street or the school. We’re invisible to these people. They think we come in. We fight. And then we disappear. Do you know what I’m saying? They can’t *see* us. (Mrs Taylor, respondent’s emphasis italicised)

Mrs Taylor’s descriptions of her own children’s experiences of education tallied with much of the literature around Gypsies and schooling (Derrington and Kendall 2008); she described bullying from pupils and staff, concerns about safety and, to a slightly lesser extent than other families, concerns about cultural assimilation. Her main critique of the school however was clearly determined by both her identification as a ‘travelling’ person at odds with the schools provision of education for sedentary residents. This distinction remained a boundary between the family and the school despite Mrs Taylor’s own biographical account of having lived in ‘bricks and mortar’ housing almost all her life and her intention of staying in her current accommodation for the foreseeable future. The boundary line identified by Mrs Taylor was a non-

spatial, cultural boundary line to be crossed when her children attended school. D'arcy (2017) argues school's stock stories often 'imply a causal relationship' between Gypsy culture and underachievement or non-attendance. This mirrors Mrs Taylor's description of schools identifying the same cultural boundaries but defining them differently around a 'travelling' identity demarcated within stereotypes of Gypsy families arriving, fighting and then disappearing. So although a shared boundary line was identifiable it was shaped by ambiguities, laying the groundwork for the unpredictability associated with strangers by natives identified by Bauman (2005).

A recurrent theme of families interviewed in this research was their belief that a 'travelling' identity was seen as problematic by schools. Mrs Newton described how she felt a good relationship with a Head teacher at another primary school became compromised. At the head's request her two children were recorded on the school records as being 'Gypsy, Roma or Traveller',

He said it meant he could get more money for the school and also that my two would be able to go on holiday (i.e. they could officially take time off school). Then he said the only problem was he would probably never see us again. I know it was a joke. But my two have perfect records at that school. Not 100% maybe but 98% attendance. Suddenly he thinks we might vanish or go to Florida on holiday?

Identifying Gypsy identity as problematic because of stereotypical understandings of mobility again shapes a non-spatial boundary framed within ambiguity. In the Newton's experience it also reflects wider policy that provides additional funding in relation to being identified as a Gypsy, (an identity that in the school setting is potentially labelled problematic). The 2015 DCLG planning policy makes some exceptions to its requirement to demonstrate an ongoing mobile lifestyle including, families who temporarily cease to be nomadic in order for their children to attend

school. In principle this addresses the concern that the education of Gypsy children has been compromised by a failure to address wider inequalities such as poor accommodation (Vanderbeck 2005). However, it possibly does this by reinforcing homogenised identities on Gypsy families reflecting normative values rather than accepting heterogeneous identities, such as those discussed by Levinson (2015) in which mobility remains an important ingredient of identity despite living characteristically settled lives. It also reinforces the discourse that appears to materialise from schools that Gypsy families are disruptive and unreliable partly as a consequence of mobility or nomadism.

Spatial boundaries

Educational and school experiences also emerged against a backdrop of other spatial boundaries. Many families interviewed in this research lived on local authority maintained Traveller sites that were invariably located in inaccessible places, generally in industrial areas, often near to rubbish dumps or sewage treatment farms (this reflects a wide body of previous research e.g. see Niner 2003; Cemlyn et al. 2009). They tended to have very poor public transport links and were often situated a considerable distance from local shops. Many of the sites were surrounded by high fencing and respondents reported that local authorities wanted to install CCTV cameras against the wishes of the residents. Mrs Davies, a mother living on a local authority site described this in terms of the physical aspects of the site;

That fence. They (the local authority) built that fence. It's a concentration camp and we have to live inside a 16 foot fence. Last week they wanted to put CCTV cameras up. Watching us go for a wee. Coming and going. They can't be that interested in what we do, we're almost in the sea here but they want us to feel we're different.

This suggests policy designed to both demarcate space and control those within the site; the surveillance and overt physical boundary of industrial fencing criminalising and controlling Gypsy families. It also reflects the historic patterns identified by Mayall (1997) and Sibley (1981) in which greater visibility of mobile people beyond rural settings is seen as a criminal threat. This can be interpreted as a failure of Gypsies to present themselves within an acceptable public narrative in which they are doubly distanced; both 'out of place' and 'out of time' as argued by Sibley (1981, 2003) and Bhopal and Myers (2008).

The positioning of sites on the 'edge of town' highlights the sense of a boundary between Gypsy and non-Gypsy space. One consequence of this positioning was that unlike other urban residential areas, Gypsy sites were situated within a 'municipal register'. The types of concrete and tarmacking used on roads and pavements, the signposting and street architecture, what street lighting was used, what health and safety measures were enforced: these all reflected municipal or industrial usage rather than residential. This actively reinforced a sense of a boundary when travelling to or from a site. To engage in routine daily tasks, such as visiting local shops or taking children to school, Gypsy families were required to cross this very specific border. Gypsy schoolchildren were freighted with the baggage of living within one spatial register that marked them out as different and potentially criminal; and having to leave this behind, in order to move into a different, (and more generally privileged), spatial register of the school.

The identification of crossing a boundary by entering or leaving a site was highlighted in relation to other aspects of family life. Many respondents described how they took

active measures to hide their Gypsy identity in order to secure work or would travel outside their immediate locality to access non-Gypsy spaces such as supermarkets where they would be less identifiable. Mr Morris (a tree surgeon) and his wife, whose family lived on a local authority site on the south coast discussed some of his daily routines;

Mr Morris: I always drive into London. To South London. That's 40 miles? I know enough people there so I can always get work. I don't work here (e.g. locally) because people would know who I am. She can't do that though. She's goes shopping and...

Mrs Morris: In the Co-op they just follow you around. I sent (8 year old son) to get some milk and they made him pull his bag open. They said he was nicking stuff. My daughter had a go at them. He was really upset.

Mr Morris: But she still has to go there and he has to go to school and some little fucker says he's been nicking sweets.

Mrs Morris: He wouldn't steal. But he carries that with him. Someone will say something, they always do.

The Morris family owned one truck that Mr Morris used for work. During the day the family had no other access to transport. When asked about being mobile Mr Morris suggested his travel arrangements to work were indicative of his Gypsy nature. Asked whether he identified a boundary between his life and non-Gypsy lives Mr Morris suggested there were obvious differences and when pressed on how the site featured in his understanding he suggested,

It's separated. I always say I bounce all over that cattle-grid. When you're really tired that grid wakes you up. The van jumps all over. But it's a good thing because it's separate. Bounce, bounce, cup of tea, something to eat, what's on TV. Relax and forget everything outside.

Descriptions, such as Mrs Davies of her site, partly mirror the experiences of Bauman's (2000a) 'have nots' crossing difficult spatial borders to reach unfavourable locations; and to some extent this was reflected in the Morris's unwanted engagements with local shops. Mr Morris however, provides a more positive account of identity within his home; despite the need to move back and forth, he still

identified deeper attachments that resemble Malkki's (1992) sedentarist metaphysics. For pupils crossing the boundary of site and school a range of ambiguous identifications emerge in which their identities have to reconcile not just the ambiguities in their own and their family's lives but also those on the outside.

Education and Mobility

Many different facets of family lives were understood in terms of ambiguous accounts of mobility reflecting not the movement between places but between Gypsy and non-Gypsy culture. Whilst this might entail literal movement such as working or shopping at a distance from their homes, it more often related to the crossing of boundaries that represented very small physical movements but at the same time represented significant cultural movement, particularly when attending school. Such mobility rarely corresponded to standard typologies of nomadism (e.g. hunter-gatherer, pastoral or commercial nomadism) (Okely 1983).

School attendance was understood by Gypsy families as being a very real border: one that reflected moving from within the Gypsy community and crossing into the non-Gypsy world. School attendance was almost always described by parents as being good for 'them', (their children), but bad for 'us', (the wider family and Gypsy community). Mrs Clark described how she recognised the importance of her children learning new skills, which could not be taught within the family, in order to be economically successful in the future. However, she reflected that,

It's too easy to say they lose all their Gypsiness if they go to school. They don't. Obviously they don't; but they do lose something. But that's the way it goes. It's the way of the world that things change and we change as well. But every time they go to school they lose a little bit more of us.

In this respect it appeared that the process of education (through schooling) not only taught students the necessary skills and knowledge related to supporting them in the future but also inducted them into non-Gypsy culture. According to her husband, Mr Clark,

They should learn the Gypsy ways in school. All the kids not just the Gypsy kids. Show them how to catch a fish. They get taught your (i.e. non-Gypsy) stuff. Which we need but there are other ways.

Mr Clark was unusual in offering a very sentimental account that perhaps accorded with narratives of rural Gypsy identity described by Mayall (1997) and Sibley (1995). He discussed fishing at length, suggesting that it was important his children learned how to survive 'on the road'. The explicit reference was not mirrored in the family's personal circumstances; they were living in a house on a large estate (though Mr Clark described a very mobile childhood until the age of about 10). Discussing their forthcoming holiday arrangements to go camping in Devon, both Mr and Mrs Clark suggested this was a reengagement with a travelling lifestyle and that part of the appeal of the journey was to pass on skills, like fishing, to their children. In many respects the Clarks adopted both pragmatic and adaptable approaches to changing economies (Casa-Nova 2007; Myers, McGhee and Bhopal 2010) whilst actively maintaining the nomadic understanding of Gypsy identity within their family as suggested by Levinson (2015).

Much research (Cemlyn, et al. 2009; D'arcy 2014; Myers, McGhee and Bhopal 2010) has shown that Gypsy families find attending primary schools (5-11 years of age) to be less problematic than secondary school (11-16 years of age) and this was confirmed in this research. Primary schools were regarded typically as smaller, safer institutions where parents and teachers made closer personal links and less

controversial, more useful subject matter such as basic literacy and numeracy was taught. Secondary school's were associated with concerns about the permissive behaviour of non-Gypsy students and also a time when adolescent Gypsies would often adopt gender specific adult roles: boys becoming economically active, girls assuming greater domestic responsibility.

Some more affluent families withdrew their children from school in order that they could work within the family business. Other families however identified secondary school as the necessary means to achieve specific skills including qualifications. One respondent whose son (aged 15) was attending secondary school explained:

They go into a different world. I can't remember school. I never went. So it's a different world. It would be better if they had a Gypsy school. One that taught our ways.

He described his discomfort around non-Gypsies and had considered not letting his son continue into secondary education. The decision to allow his son to stay in school was driven by his son's desire to remain in school. Despite describing his pride at his son's academic ability and ambition, he continued to describe the school as a foreign place and one that could unbalance his son's relationship to his culture. In some respects his descriptions echoed the unsettling relationship of Simmel's *stranger*; the son acquiring attributes of a foreign culture and bringing them back into the family home. Simmel (1971) suggests the role of the *stranger* is often associated with developing trading relations and creativity; that the *stranger* is a useful role. The family's ability both to recognise but accept the discomfort around a strange culture perhaps exemplifies the pragmatism and adaptability essential for economic survival.

Schools and Mobility

Ambiguous accounts of mobility were also apparent in discussions about schooling with teachers and education professionals. The importance of ‘mobility’ was regularly cited in relation to how education should be delivered to Gypsy students. Many teachers and educational professionals explicitly distinguished between providing ‘sedentary’ and ‘mobile’ education. They stressed the necessity of providing a ‘mobile’ education to meet the needs of Gypsy students and the difficulties implicit in providing such an education within ‘sedentary’ schooling. One primary school deputy head described how,

We work so hard to meet the needs of all the children. It’s one of the pleasures working here. When I started here the intake was very different. All the children had similar backgrounds. They were local and white working-class. That changed a lot ten years ago – more middle-class parents and then again five years ago. About five years ago all the Poles came. Which has been good. It means we are genuinely more diverse. We’ve always had Gypsy children here. So we adapt to all their needs.

When asked specifically about educating Gypsy students, she explained how the school’s approach had changed;

In the past I think we just expected everyone to take what was on offer. But we are much more adaptable now. We pay more attention. With the Gypsy children we recognise that they lead a different lifestyle and we try to reflect that. It’s obvious really and if we recognise their difference, that feeds into everyone else’s learning. So our children now know a bit more about being a nomad or about travelling because there are Gypsy kids here.

Most of the Gypsy students however, had little or no literal relationship to a mobile lifestyle; most lived in static caravans on sites or in housing and their families were not engaged in work that involved travelling. A range of working practices were identified amongst the families including more traditional self-employed occupations

such as building work, gardening and raising horses; additionally one respondent was an antique dealer and another worked in a supermarket. A significant proportion of families (38%) relied on state benefits.

One TESS support officer noted that whilst student's mobility was rarely characterised by actual movement or nomadic lifestyles; it was often cited in terms of family's identity characteristics,

There are some very mobile families. There are homeless families as well. But most are quite settled. But they still say 'we're the Travellers' and its part of who they are.

In other words Gypsy culture was distinguished in terms of a wider understanding that Gypsy families may in the past have travelled, or that they were part of a wider nomadic community, or that they might travel in the future.

Whilst TESS officers described nuanced accounts of Gypsy identity reflecting their close relationships with families, they also described how less subtle understandings emerged in school. One observation being that teachers' use of the term 'mobile education' was a distinction almost only ever made in relation to Gypsy education. The same professionals when solely discussing non-Gypsy education never qualified this as being 'sedentary' education. A TESS officer suggested that one consequence of this framing of mobility, was that non-attendance was equated wrongly within narratives of families 'moving on',

...talking to a teacher they will turn round and say they feel it's a waste of time teaching the Traveller kids because they will just disappear. They'll leave in a puff of smoke. Where do they think they go? The kids stop coming to school but they don't go anywhere.

It was hard not to conclude that the literal nomadism of Gypsy families was probably known by most educational practitioners to be not representative of their practical daily routines. However, different practitioners persisted with accounts that suggested mobility or nomadism had a more significant practical impact in their dealings with families, (rather than perhaps understanding mobility and nomadism in terms of families' identities). In this respect the sedentary population frames Gypsy identity and behaviours within the chaotic or disruptive movement associated with the *uprooted* described by Mallki (1992) even though this does not resemble actual lives.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Okely (1983) describes how Gypsies cannot escape the 'gaze' of non-Gypsies. How a minority group is seen by the dominant society is in part a means of control (hooks, 1997; Bhopal and Myers 2008). The perception of Gypsy nomadism or mobility informs how Gypsies are defined against and within British society. In schools it materialises in terms of providing a 'mobile' rather than a 'sedentary' education and this often feels as though the school is simply addressing identifiable concerns about Gypsy students' poor experiences of schooling. The 'mobility' in a 'mobile education' is a refraction of the non-Gypsy gaze which has absorbed D'arcy's (2016) 'stock story'. These constructions of identity feed into a continuum of knowledge about Gypsies that identifies them negatively and is used to limit their opportunities. The 2015 DCLG planning policy making it harder to demonstrate Gypsy identity and therefore live on a Traveller sites is not a new phenomenon, but rather a repeated historical pattern (see Okely 1983)

Whereas mobility is often understood positively for British citizens; for Gypsies it is constructed as at best something that is ill-conceived and ambiguous, or at worst, as something that threatens the stability of the civic world. These ambiguities are distanced from the sedentarist and nomadic metaphysics described by Malkki (1992) and Cresswell (2006) respectively. Gypsies are *uprooted* both metaphorically as the inheritors of an often misunderstood diaspora; and literally, as the inhabitants of the wrong place or the wrong site. Historically Gypsies do not signify Cresswell's bright, post-modern future, but rather inhabit the spaces of Bauman's (2000) 'have nots'. In such accounts D'arcy's (2016) 'stock story' of mobility is indicative of the absence of place and absence of belonging. This paper has explored the direct and indirect impacts these understandings have in terms of Gypsy experiences of schooling and education.

There is a direct practical link between having secure accommodation and being able to access effective education and schooling (Bhopal, et al. 2000; Cemlyn, et al. 2009) but as Vanderbeck (2005) makes clear there is a failure to link school policy to wider structural inequality. The current legislation makes some allowance for families with children of school age but in reality fewer sites will be built and fewer Gypsy families will have a secure basis from which to access schools. Bearing in mind the history of Gypsy children not accessing schooling this is a retrograde step. Whilst many Gypsy families have in the past home educated their children and taught them effectively the means of economic survival, there is clear evidence that many families believe new skills are required that are best accessed from outside the community (Bhopal et al. 2000; Levinson 2014;). Furthermore there is evidence that some of the families least

able to provide an education, (because of a combination of factors including; a lack of literacy and numeracy skills, being unemployed, or living in extreme poverty), resort to home education because of difficulty accessing schools (Bhopal and Myers 2016; D'arcy 2014).

Gypsy identity understood in terms of mobility emerges from discourses, (national policy and local practice), in which Gypsy difference is identified and classified by non-Gypsies. Whilst it may be admirable for schools and teachers to actively attempt to address identifiable failings in the historic education of Gypsy students; this is undermined when the basis for such practice is the re-imaginings of stereotypes that originated 50, 100 or 500 years ago. There is evidence (Acton 2004; Bhopal et al. 2000) that has highlighted the importance of 'good practice' in building relationships with Gypsy communities to foster better understanding of student's daily lives. The ambiguities associated with mobility often include sedentarist fears of chaos, disorder and disruption. These are readily framed as being disorientating or the source of fear for the native population in terms of Simmel's *stranger* or Bauman's *uprooted*. When 'mobile' education practice materialises in 'sedentary' schools this appears as an adaptation within Malkki's (1992) sedentarist metaphysics; it is a means of controlling and minimising disruption to the school population. It is not a practice that engages with the ambiguities of mobility understood by Gypsy students and their families. It does not, for example, mirror Cresswell's (2006) accounts of post-modern, playful nomadic metaphysics or better still reinvent new accounts of student's identity based on their lived experiences.

The widespread fear that schooling contributes to cultural assimilation and a loss of Gypsy identity seems justifiable when schools teach citizenship values that fail to engage with both the realities, and the ambiguities, that shape student's lives. The sedentary metaphysics that shape the school ethos often are based on a perception of mobility that bolsters the dominant population's understanding of their rights as citizen's but does little to embrace an alternative world view. Many citizens, including tourists, Malkki's expatriates and Bauman's wealthy elites, anticipate the right to travel in all aspects of their daily lives. In part this is premised on firmly held perceptions of national identity *rooted* in place (Kabachnik 2010); where the occupation and ownership of place, (and consequently the shaping of identity), is managed through discriminatory state legislation. Belonging to the 'right' place or the 'right' nation delivers the right to travel and to move freely. For Gypsies however, their mobility is constructed as ambiguous and indicative of their difference; they do not 'belong' and therefore do not possess the same rights as other citizens.

Gypsy student's experience of mobility is also different from non-Gypsies' on a daily and local level. It entails crossing and re-crossing both spatial and non-spatial, cultural boundaries in order to attend school. The constellation of local and global fears of Gypsies as disruptive or criminal agents of chaos contributes to an exaggerated sense of their strangeness. Mobility that might be commonly understood in terms of movement between identifiable points of departure and arrival, between home and work or between homeland and a foreign country are endlessly disrupted. The long-standing presence of Gypsies in the UK, the misunderstanding surrounding their historic migration and lack of awareness of daily lives all contribute to

ambiguous and unsettling accounts of Gypsy identity retaining credibility and currency within schools.

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