CHAPTER 2

History and Identity

Abstract  This chapter provides a historical account of Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives in the UK in the late modern period in order to contextualise the subsequent chapters. In providing that context the chapter addresses how existing legislation and research frames Gypsies’ and Travellers’ identities in terms of their cultural nomadism and ascribed ethnicity. The chapter identifies who the Gypsies and Travellers are that live in the UK in the twenty-first century.

Keywords  Mobility · Accommodation · Culture and identity · Race and ethnicity

This chapter sets out existing accounts of Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives in the UK in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in order to contextualise their experiences of hate harms by framing the tension that exists between Gypsies and Travellers and wider settled society. The chapter initially addresses the culturally nomadic nature of Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives in the UK and how their propensity to nomadism has been perceived and used as a mechanism to set them apart from sedentary society. It then goes on to consider how processes of racialisation (Murji 2017) have informed their experiences and the treatment of Gypsies and Travellers by non-Gypsies/Travellers. Subsequently the chapter identifies

© The Author(s) 2020

Z. James, *The Harms of Hate for Gypsies and Travellers*, Palgrave Hate Studies, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-51829-3_2
some of the key issues that research has evidenced as negatively impacting Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives, specifically focusing on their capacity to access accommodation. In order to understand Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lived experience of hate it is necessary initially to traverse this existing knowledge, to take account of the problematisation of Gypsies and Travellers within UK society. Detailed accounts of Gypsies and Travellers lives are available elsewhere (for example, Okely 1983; Fraser 1992; Power 2004; Clark and Greenfields 2006). However, in order to consider how and why Gypsies and Travellers have been marginalised, socially and economically excluded, and subject to hate, it is necessary to understand the variable nature of Gypsy and Traveller communities and lifestyles, how they interact and conflict with wider society and each other.

Gypsies and Travellers have long been considered atavistic ‘folk devils’ in a modernising society (Cohen 1972; Richardson 2006). In the nineteenth century they were referred to as ‘vagabonds’, considered feckless vagrants, and numerous laws were passed in the UK to limit their movement and prevent them from camping on their traditional Atchin Tans or stopping places (Firth 2013). The development of multiculturalism in contemporary society and its accompanying liberal ethos largely failed to provide inclusion for Gypsies and Travellers (van Baar 2011), who Cemlyn et al. (2009) described, in their comprehensive review of Gypsy and Traveller experiences of inequality, as the most socially excluded minority in the UK. As in the nineteenth century, in the twenty-first-century Gypsies and Travellers remain subject to legislation that has limited their freedom of movement or ability to stop and stay in any one location temporarily or permanently. And while it would appear that contemporary equalities legislation has gone some way to facilitate inclusivity, the complexity of defining Gypsy or Traveller identity in law belies those gains (James and Southern 2019). If the concept of ‘identity’ in late modern usage can be bisected into the personal and the social (Moran 2015), so the prejudice and exclusion Gypsies and Travellers have suffered is likewise twofold. Later in the book, at Chapter 4, I will consider how hate has affected Gypsies’ and Travellers’ personal identities—that is their individual subjectivity, as a consequence of the harmful production of their social identities, that are the identities that they have been ascribed to and/or that they ascribe themselves to. Here I will set out how the social identity of Gypsies and Travellers has been moulded within late modernity to create a marginalised and racialised ‘other’, whom Ryder refers to as ‘insular minorities’ who have been ‘systematically disadvantaged’ (2011: 40).
The subjugation of Gypsies and Travellers and their association with vagrancy and thus poverty has a lengthy history (Taylor 2014) that is based in racism towards them and tied-up with their propensity to nomadism, as will be discussed further below. The allusion to Gypsies and Travellers living poorly, and therefore being unclean in some sense, or dirty, has been argued as one of the key tools used to stigmatise them and thereby set them apart from ‘normal’ society (Sibley 1988). It has also been important in providing an argument for the settlement of Gypsies and Travellers, or their assimilation within sedentary society (McVeigh 1997), wherein they can live more ‘ordered’ lifestyles in housing. Media accounts of Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives have commonly referred to Gypsies and Travellers as ‘dirty’, leaving rubbish on sites and causing damage to land. Parliamentary debates on Gypsy and Traveller sites have also often devolved to similar denigration of Gypsy and Traveller communities (Turner 2002). Sibley (1988) utilises the work of Douglas (1966) on ‘purity and danger’ in order to unpack societal responses to Gypsies and Travellers. In doing so he notes the need of people to make sense of the world through processes of classification, and that those who cannot be classified are identified as pollutants, ‘as a threat to the integrity of the collective’ (Sibley 1988: 410). The threatening nature of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK is twofold, firstly by living nomadically or having a predisposition towards nomadism they pose a threat by subverting the order of places maintained by sedentarism. Secondly, and in association with their nomadic habit of life, Gypsies and Travellers pose a threat to the norms of society by the ephemeral nature of their cultures that are closely guarded and illusory. While settled people romanticise the notion of the free nomadic Gypsy in some contexts, such as in art and music, in real terms they are fearful of this ‘traumatic intruder’ whose capacity to embody the full joy of freedom is felt as a theft of what settled people see as rightfully theirs in a neoliberal capitalist society (Žižek 1993, 2008).

**Nomadism**

The culturally nomadic nature of Gypsy and Traveller cultures in the UK is borne of historic tradition and economic necessity. As noted in the introduction to this book, Gypsy and Traveller communities are multiple and as such vary in their ways of living and traditions. However, their commonality is found in their desire to be nomadic, either in practice or in perception (Shubin and Swanson 2010). In other words, Gypsies and
Travellers commonly want to travel as part of their lifestyle or they see travelling as part of their identity, even if they are not mobile in practice. Their enforced movement and lack of places to stop and stay, which will be elaborated on in due course, complicate the travelling part of the identities of Gypsies and Travellers. Suffice to say, the notion of travelling or mobility, is central to the identities of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. It is important to note here that nomadism is not necessarily relevant or important to all Roma, Gypsy and Traveller peoples in Europe, and in reality is often over-stated as a mechanism to imply Roma are stateless peoples (Yildiz and De Genova 2018). Van Baar (2011) has referred to this over-statement as constituting a process of nomadisation for Roma.

For those Gypsies and Travellers in the UK who are mobile, they may be so for a variety of reasons and may travel for different periods of time, either encircling a particular locality or moving far and wide. Commonly Gypsies and Travellers are on the move in order to work as a commercial necessity. Acton (2010) notes the important difference between nomadism and migration, as nomadism refers to travelling for a purpose, rather than as a single action, in pursuit of a commercial aim. He argues that the conflation of nomadism with migration has aided the stigmatisation of Roma in Europe who were racialised and homogenised as an ethnic group in the eighteenth century and as such were vilified, executed, enslaved, and subjugated (Alliance Against Anti-Gypsyism 2016; Achim 2004). Subsequently nomadism has served as a historic tool to racialise and subsequently pathologise Roma, rather than recognise their historic nomadism as a positive economic enterprise in response to their poor social living conditions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the contemporary era, the free movement of people between European Union states has notably again been distorted when it comes to Roma who are stigmatised as migrants when they move beyond their home countries. The stigma they experience in this sense is imbued with racialised connotations of Roma as non-citizens that are closely linked with notions of their nomadism (Howard and Vajda 2017). The difference between various Roma, Gypsy and Traveller cultures and communities is highlighted by this matter, and potentially challenges the idea that European Union wide policy and practice can be applicable for all those communities, as if their lifestyles, wants and needs are similar (James 2020b, forthcoming; Kóczie and Rövid 2012).

The mobile nature of Gypsies and Travellers lives in the UK has been culturally developmental in Acton’s (2010) construction. In the twentieth
and twenty-first centuries, Gypsies and Travellers in the UK have lived nomadically in order to work in seasonal occupations such as hop-picking, flower picking or to run fairgrounds or work at music festivals. They may travel all year round to work on road-building schemes, to trade, carry out manual labour or sell crafts, but it is likely that such movement would be localised around a particular area. Traditional work in Gypsy and Traveller communities has focused on male self-employment, though women have increasingly entered the labour market in the twenty-first century and lack of employment opportunities have impacted on Gypsy and Traveller communities as much as their sedentary neighbours, if not more (Cemlyn et al. 2009). Other reasons for mobility among Gypsy and Traveller communities has focused on family activities, so births, deaths and marriages are particularly important occasions for traditional Gypsy and Traveller communities, wherein extended families would travel long distances in order to participate in celebrations and commemorations.

The nomadic lifestyles of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK, that are informed by commercial and familial needs, are somewhat distorted by the lack of space provided for them to stop and stay on as noted above. Many Gypsies and Travellers have settled into housing, but for those who have an aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation (Murdoch and Johnson 2020) it has been estimated that their accommodation needs in the UK equate to approximately one square mile of land in total (EHRC 2009). And yet, accommodating Gypsies and Travellers is considered highly problematic by sedentary communities, local authorities and parliamentarians. Negative depictions of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers are presented in national and local media which serves to amplify the perception of Gypsies and Travellers as problematic and deviant (Sibley 1981; Tremlett et al. 2017) and augments protests against their settlement. Such protests have been given greater legitimacy since the Localism Act 2011 in England and Wales that actively encouraged inclusion of local views on planning matters (Ryder 2011). While local authority planning officers have often presented inclusive approaches to accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers, this has not resulted in accommodation provision as local councillors, reliant on the support of sedentary communities in elections, have given tacit support to community objections against plans for Gypsy and Traveller sites in order to win votes (Erfani-Ghettani 2012). As Kabachnik (2010) has suggested, it is Gypsies’ and Travellers’ desire for place that ignites settled communities’ fears rather than their mobility.
As previously noted, Gypsies and Travellers in the UK may choose to live in housing, but their cultural affiliation with nomadism means that they have often resisted assimilationist housing policy, preferring to live according to their cultural norms. Generically, Gypsy and Traveller accommodation spaces are referred to as ‘sites’, but they may constitute spaces containing a single home, or many homes together, they may be rural, suburban or urban. Legally recognised sites can be used as residential permanent living spaces; they can be used as transit sites where Gypsies and Travellers reside temporarily; or, they can be used as temporary stopping places that are safe shorter stay sites for Gypsies and Travellers to stop-over as they are travelling. Legally recognised sites may be on land owned by local authorities or privately owned land with planning permission. Unauthorised sites, on the other hand, describe settled sites on any land that does not have planning permission, including land owned by those occupying it themselves, and these sites may or may not be tolerated by local authorities. Very high proportions of planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller sites fail (Morris and Clements 2002). Unauthorised encampments are places that have been occupied, generally on the roadside, for relatively short periods of time. They are distinct due to their temporary nature and the illegitimate use of space that they often comprise (such as playing fields, car parks and lay-bys). Local authorities have not provided sufficient spaces to Gypsies and Travellers to live on resulting in what Cemlyn et al. (2009) referred to as an accommodation crisis.

Historically, Gypsies and Travellers use of places to stop or to stay on were dictated by their nomadic needs. Since the Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth century Gypsies and Travellers utilised common land as traditional stopping places. However, in 1960 legislation closed the commons and by doing so, prevented Gypsies and Travellers from easily identifying places on which to rest or stay. In 1968 the Caravan Sites Act had required local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers to stop and stay in their areas. However, local authorities failed to fulfil their requirements under the Caravan Sites Act because, similar to now, councillors were unwilling to support site provision that would risk their likelihood of electoral success amidst popular prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers (Casciani 2004). Gypsies and Travellers therefore increasingly resorted to stopping places that local authorities did not formally recognise. Tensions between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community consequently
increased in the post-1968 period, as Gypsies and Travellers found themselves relying on places to stop and stay that encroached on settled communities’ lifestyles (Murdoch and Johnson 2004). So, for example, Gypsies and Travellers stopped and stayed in public spaces such as parks, community fields and car parks that caused disruption and confusion to the settled population. Settled communities felt subsequently unable to use those spaces and they were considered a mess because local authorities refused to provide services such as rubbish collection. The crisis of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers has been exacerbated by the extensive eviction actions taken by local authorities and police to move Gypsies and Travellers out of their geographical areas and beyond their responsibility (James 2006, 2007; James and Richardson 2006).

Traditional debate has placed nomadism in direct contrast to sedentarism (Cresswell 2006), proposing that the civilising project of modernity is exemplified by the settlement of communities within geographically bounded areas. However, the process of sedentarisation was never simple or smooth, nor is it irreversible or mutually exclusive (McVeigh 1997). Kenrick and Clark (1999) particularly note the post-war period as a time in the twentieth century when Gypsies and Travellers lived relatively harmoniously alongside settled people in the UK. Further, Holloway (2005) and Sibley (1981) identify the variable nature of some media reports on Gypsies and Travellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that appear to show elements of acceptance of some Gypsy and Traveller communities. Indeed, in my own research it has been apparent that Gypsies and Travellers can live amicably alongside sedentarists (Southern and James 2006) and research by Shelter (Cullen et al. 2008) has suggested that there are large numbers of Gypsies and Travellers living in housing. Therefore, to create a great divide between Gypsies and Travellers as nomads and non-Gypsy/Travellers as sedentarists is potentially false and may in fact serve to increase tensions between communities. Thus, van Baar’s (2011) discussion of the nomadisation of Roma in Europe is pertinent in the UK context. Nomadisation has served to problematise Roma as distinct from other people who require specific policies and practices to support them, which has subsequently reiterated Roma as a problem community. As van Baar’s point evidences, the tendency to romanticise nomadic lifestyles as in opposition to sedentarism, with nomads perceived as the ultimate transgressor of boundaries and order (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987; de Certeau 1984), may in reality be an academic response to a far-more complex interaction
between communities that intersect on multiple levels. In a contemporary society that celebrates the mobility, fluidity and impermanence of individuals and communities through complex technologies, it seems incongruous to place the stigmatisation of Gypsies and Travellers as solely a response to their nomadic propensity.

It may therefore be more appropriate to consider nomadism as one aspect of the cultures of Gypsies and Travellers that challenges social norms, and is used to signify their difference by the communities themselves and by those who wish to manage them as problematic communities, particularly within the political project that is the European Union (Kóczé 2018). Further, Gypsies and Travellers utilise their nomadism to place virtual and physical boundaries between them and, in their perception, a malignant society that is hateful of them. Gypsies and Travellers move through spaces in a fluid manner, whereas sedentarists spatially striate their environment physically, socially and cognitively (Halfacree 1996). A sedentarist binary logic to Gypsy and Traveller cultures denotes that nomadic people are those that are constantly mobile without stopping, and non-nomadic people are those who stop and will never be mobile. This approach to nomadism has dictated UK governments’ policies and guidance (and those in the EU) on defining who constitutes a Gypsy or Traveller, as well as who can stop and stay in particular places as set out below. However, by taking account of the non-linear relationship between Gypsies and Travellers and their nomadic identity, it is possible to acknowledge their cultural nomadism, which refers to their predisposition to think and act in a boundless fashion. Simplistic analyses of nomadism equate it to mobility, whereas studies of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma have long-recognised the nuanced and variable nature of cultural nomadism that includes a range of approaches to living that are bound up with notions of freedom and autonomy (Halfacree 1996; Levinson and Sparkes 2004; Acton 2010; Shubin 2010).

The mobility of Gypsies and Travellers may discombobulate sedentarists generally and prove challenging to control agencies who aim to manage them within particular geographically determined boundaries. But it is the obfuscating nature of nomadism that is most confusing to sedentarists. When Gypsies and Travellers attempt to identify places to stop and stay on, the challenging nature of their mobility becomes more threatening according to Kabachnik (2010) who describes Gypsies and Travellers as place invaders in the public imagination. Kabachnik argues that the UK media represents Gypsies and Travellers as in conflict with
the rest of sedentary society as they have no place to go to and there is nowhere to send them home to. Rowe and Goodman (2014) note that their perceived lack of place heightens the social exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers as it serves as a mechanism by non-Gypsies/Travellers to excuse their prejudice. Kabachnik (2010) argues that media representations of Gypsies and Travellers use three exclusionary tools to vilify Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles. So, they are presented as aesthetically problematic by their sites making places appear less attractive, they are presented as economically threatening as their sites reduce local house prices, and they present a crime problem as they partake in anti-social behaviour by leaving mess, rubbish and disruption and are associated with criminality. While a critique of the capacity of the media to wholly inform public perceptions of Gypsies and Travellers will be considered later, it is necessary now to return to the notion of Gypsies and Travellers as unclean and pollutant to sedentary communities and therefore threatening (Sibley 1988).

Race, Culture and Exclusion

Race scholars (Cloke 2004) have long identified the racist use of analogies of uncleanliness for exclusion of people of colour. A number of articles and papers within Gypsy and Traveller studies have utilised the notion of racism as a determining factor in the prejudice and discrimination experienced by Gypsies and Travellers and therefore have acknowledged the historic and contemporary processes of racialisation that have impacted Gypsies and Travellers over time (for example, Greenfields 2006; Richardson 2006; Marcus 2019). Racialisation has been a contested term (Murji 2017; Goldberg 2005), however it is useful when refined to encapsulate discourses that create, ‘racial categorisations, racial explanations, racial evaluations and racial prescriptions’ (Reeves 1983: 174) that are multi-layered and multi-dimensional (Rattansi 2005). Within Romani studies there has been a tension between those who focus on the integrity of Roma identity and thus essentialise, and those who focus on the economic precursors for Roma exclusion and thus negate racialised experience (Yildiz and De Genova 2018). Here it is important to note that the racialised experience of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK over time is acknowledged and challenged. However, it is necessary to carefully consider how contemporary racialisation processes have functioned, rather than to assume a simple linear relationship between race and exclusion, as will be further discussed later in the book in light of the
contemporary impact of neoliberal capitalism. A critical appraisal of the literature in UK Romani Studies identifies that racialisation has served to augment the problematisation of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK, as well as Roma in Europe. Arguably a process of re-racialisation has occurred (Balibar 2009). The complexity of that process is perhaps best evidenced through scrutiny of relatively recent reports on Roma, Gypsy and Traveller exclusion in the UK. As I have noted elsewhere (James 2020b, forthcoming) the conflation of ‘Gypsies, Travellers and Roma’ into one categorised community of difference within official reports and academic writing over the past fifteen years has failed to acknowledge the significant differences between those communities, their cultures and ways of living. Again, this sort of aggregation of different racial or ethnic groups has been noted within race scholarship for a long time (Phillips and Bowling 2008), and has been justified in terms of ensuring statistical representativeness of small groups of people. However, this aggregation serves to negate the lived experiences of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, particularly through a lack of discussion of the aggregation itself. In the UK, an important report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC 2019), ‘Is Britain Fairer?’ and its associated reports, including a Spotlight Report on inequalities faced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in England (EHRC 2016), acknowledge and challenge the discrimination faced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma and their associated poor outcomes in terms of health and welfare. Written within a stated discourse of anti-racism, these reports specifically distinguish between the White majority and Gypsies, Travellers and Roma as a racialised other, and in doing so they compare their research findings to a previous Equality and Human Rights Commission report (Cemlyn et al. 2009) to make their point that Gypsy, Traveller and Roma exclusion has been unremittent. However, the 2009 report did not include Roma, who have largely travelled to the UK as migrants in the post-war period and whose cultures and lifestyles vary considerably from Gypsies and Travellers in the UK, particularly their propensity to nomadism as noted above. Thus comparison between these reports and aggregation of these peoples is highly problematic. This is not uncommon, in many reports and academic writings the conflation of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma occurs casually, with limited thought or consideration of whom these monikers represent or how their experiences differ (James 2020a).

While there is arguably power in the solidarity provided by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma grouping together, and the capacity of that will
be discussed later in the book in relation to systemic and symbolic hate harms, the point here is to identify to whom conversations refer explicitly and carefully, with a mind to caution in defining categories of people. As noted by Murdoch and Johnson (2020), legislatively there has been an on-going debate about how Gypsies and Travellers should and can be defined, with the historical tendency of legislators to use economic purpose as the defining feature of Gypsy and Traveller identity in relation to planning particularly. This has meant that a paradox has occurred wherein planning law recognises Gypsies and Travellers according to their mobility (that is related to this notion of economic purpose) whereas equalities legislation alternately defines Gypsies and Travellers in terms of race, as noted below. The implications of this for Gypsies and Travellers is harmful, as those Gypsies and Travellers who are vulnerable and consequently unable to travel potentially have their homes placed at risk, despite their ethnic status as a Gypsy or Traveller (James and Southern 2019). The application of these either/or definitions that pitch some groups of Gypsies and Travellers as more legitimate than others and in competition with each other, simply feeds the narrative of the ‘ideal Gypsy’, that serves processes of exclusion, rather than inclusion (Kenrick and Bakewell 1990) and does not address inequalities (Howard and Vajda 2017). This draws us to the need to outline who the Gypsies and Travellers in the UK are that this book aims to provide a voice for, and to acknowledge that they are not all legally recognised racial groups, nor should they necessarily be.

Overall it has been estimated that Gypsies and Travellers constitute 0.6% of the UK population (ODPM 2006), though such an estimate has been contested for its reliance on annual caravan counts carried out by local authorities (Niner 2004). Annual caravan counts generally measure numbers of caravan dwellings that are fixed or on sites in local authority areas and therefore do not take into account Gypsies and Travellers living in more hidden locations, those on the move or those living in bricks and mortar accommodation (i.e. housing). Additionally, caravan counts often do not record Gypsies and Travellers living on their own land nor do they record numbers of people, but rather, they record numbers of ‘caravans’. The completion of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments by local authorities in England and Wales, in response to the requirements of the Housing Act 2004, aimed to resolve the lack of information on Gypsy and Traveller numbers and in doing so intended to provide comprehensive information on the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. During this moment of progressive government action on
Gypsy and Traveller inclusion, there was significant optimism that provision of appropriate accommodation would materialise for communities. However, the ability of the assessments to do so was questioned (Brown and Niner 2009) largely because the data gathered differed across county or area boundaries, resulting in an inability to effectively estimate numbers of Gypsies and Travellers. Despite some initially excellent accommodation assessments (Home and Greenfields 2006), in time local authorities became increasingly unwilling to spend their funds on assessing the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers comprehensively, and private research companies began completing the assessments by using caravan counts as their core data to reduce costs. Subsequently, the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments lost their capacity to shed light on the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers or the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers within particular areas. Gypsies and Irish Travellers were included within the 2011 census for England and Wales as a categorised ethnic group. However, it also failed to provide any reliable statistics as only 58,000 people noted this ethnicity, likely due to a lack of Gypsies and Travellers taking part, and a historic tendency of those communities to hide their identity from formal agencies (Ruston 2013; Taylor 2014). The ability to quantify numbers of Gypsies and Travellers is therefore difficult, but a general estimate of the literature in this area might suggest that approximately 1–1.5% of the UK population are Gypsies and Travellers, either living nomadically, on sites or in housing.

Of all Gypsies and Travellers, Romany Gypsies are the largest group in the UK (Clark 2006). They are recorded as having lived here since the fifteenth century, having originally travelled from India. The Indian origin of Romany Gypsies has been debated among academics, particularly focusing on the degree to which Romany Gypsies remained racially distinct, with dark hair and brown eyes, by the time they arrived in the UK (for example, Okely 1983; Hancock 2000; Matras 2004). Romany Gypsies are often perceived by non-Gypsy/Travellers as the most legitimate group among Gypsies and Travellers and romantic notions of their culture, style and ways of living are evoked through media images that are bound up with the idea that the ‘real’ Gypsies are Romany Gypsies. However, Romany Gypsies in the UK often have lighter hair and blue eyes, many Romany Gypsies have married sedentarists or people from other Gypsy or Traveller groups. What maintains the Romany identity is more bound up with their culture: their ways of living and moral
values. Romany Gypsies are family focused and they live according to relatively strict moral codes which are patriarchal in essence, though women increasingly work in paid employment and girls are encouraged to attain a good education. Central to Romany Gypsies’ way of living is following a strict hygiene code called ‘mochadi’ (meaning ‘unclean’) that requires individuals to ensure that they are clean and consider cleanliness at all times. This means regular hand washing, use of appropriate tools to carry out tasks, rather than mixing them, and generally living with an awareness of dirt at all times. Examples of such living include: ensuring hands and food are not washed in the same bowls, shoes not being worn indoors, and importantly, bodily functions being recognised as unclean and kept well away from the home. The rules of mochadi explain why Romany Gypsies have an aversion to living in housing, because central plumbing systems mean that waste and thus ‘dirt’ is in the home (Foley 2010).

 Also of Romany heritage are the Welsh Kale, a very small group of people in North Wales whose origins are Romany. Argument suggests that the Kale represent the more ethnically distinct Romany Gypsy, ‘Kale’ meaning ‘black’ in Romany language and representing the darkness of Welsh Kale skin. However, debate even ensues regarding whether the Kale exist at all (Clark 2006). Romany Gypsies are recognised as an ethnic group under the Equality Act (2010) in England and Wales, following case law in 1989 (Greenhall and Willers 2020).

 Irish, or Pavee, Travellers are recognised as having mostly come to the UK since the nineteenth century, though there are numerous records of Irish Travellers in the UK prior to that date. The history of Travellers in Ireland reaches back to the fifth century (Murdoch and Johnson 2020). Irish Traveller culture is similarly organised to Romany Gypsies, being family oriented and following patriarchal moral values. Indeed, Irish Travellers have similar rules around cleanliness to those of Romany Gypsies. Their identities are distinct however, and research has shown that they have rarely mixed as communities (Clark 2006). Irish Travellers gained recognition in England and Wales as an ethnic group in 2000 following case law, and previously in Northern Ireland within the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Act (1997) (Greenhall and Willers 2020).

 Scottish Travellers or Gypsies live throughout Scotland and are linked culturally to Romany Gypsies, particularly by their language in parts of Scotland. There are records of Scottish Travellers in Scotland from the fifteenth century, similar to English Romanies. Scottish Travellers again, follow similar cultural norms to other traditional Gypsies and Travellers
of Romany, Irish or Welsh cultures. Likewise they have been recognised as an ethnic group by the Scottish government via case law since 2008 (Greenhall and Willers 2020).

It is notable, from the descriptions above, that the majority of Gypsies and Travellers have ethnic identities that are recognised in equalities legislation across the UK. Although culturally similar, the key distinction between groups of traditional Gypsies and Travellers is their different languages and their close familial ties within their own ethnic groups. As noted by Clark (2006) it is common for non-Gypsy/Travellers to confuse the groups of traditional Gypsies and Travellers living in the UK, including in media representations of them, in research reports by local authorities, in research reports more broadly and in government policy. This is because there are similarities between the communities, particularly those who are mobile or who live on Gypsy and Traveller sites. These similarities have been amplified by policies and practices that have aimed to be inclusive of all Gypsies and Travellers. In real terms this accretion, akin to the aggregation of Roma with Gypsies and Travellers, does not represent Gypsies and Travellers effectively or appropriately and can also serve to reduce those communities to one archetypal notion of the ‘Gypsy’ that is not real or representative of all. In doing so, it simply augments othering processes by distinguishing between Gypsies and Travellers as ‘them’, and non-Gypsy/Travellers, as ‘us’ through what Powell (2008) may refer to as (dis)identification.

Problematic perceptions of race have created a hierarchy of Gypsy and Traveller legitimacy that places Romany Gypsies as the authentic, romantic nomad, as previously noted. Holloway (2005) carried out research on white rural residents’ responses to Gypsies and Travellers attending Appleby Horse Fair in England. In her research she found that Gypsies and Travellers were divided in the perceptions of the white residents as either a ‘true Gypsy’ or a ‘hanger on’ and distinctions were made between them via a racialising process of using bodily and cultural markers. So, the true Gypsies were perceived as having darker skin, with women dressed in long skirts and gold earrings and the men being self-employed for example. The Gypsies and Travellers who were whiter in appearance and did not wear traditional dress, were considered the ‘hangers on’ or ‘fake Gypsies’. Therefore, the process of racialising some Gypsies and Travellers proved a positive, legitimising process for those who conformed to the false phenotype of the Romany Gypsy, but those who did not were denigrated.
The lack of understanding of different Gypsy and Traveller communities is exemplified in popular television programmes such as ‘My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’, which drew the largest television audience ever for a Channel 4 documentary on airing in 2010. More recently in 2020, another Channel 4 documentary ‘The Truth about Traveller Crime’ drew the ire of Gypsies and Travellers, their support organisations and academics alike for its inaccurate portrayal of Gypsies and Travellers and invalid research claims about crime. Despite the titles of these programmes, they largely tend to focus on Irish Travellers (who often live in the greatest poverty and exclusion of all Gypsies and Travellers, which will be discussed in due course) and completely fail to account for the reality of the lived experience for all Gypsies and Travellers. Television programmes that have explored the apparent reality of Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives conflate their identities and enforce racist and prejudicial discourses of Gypsies and Travellers as exotic curios or villainous miscreants. Further, such programmes show the fascination of sedentary communities with Gypsies and Travellers, who have eluded close inspection through their mobility and nomadism noted above. Media portrayals of Gypsies and Travellers identify some of the key ways that sedentary communities fail to understand traditional Gypsies and Travellers. For example, the public stigmatisation of Gypsies and Travellers as dirty in some way when in reality their cultures evidence their commitment to cleanliness. Further, the public sexualisation of Gypsy and Traveller young people via bodily markers of dress and dance (Jensen and Ringrose 2014), when in reality their cultures evidence a commitment to strict social engagement rules. These contemporary misrepresentations of Gypsies and Travellers confirm historic stigma, and aligned with their association with crime and deviance, are likely to have informed, and justified (Rowe and Goodman 2014), negative public perceptions of their communities and associated racist behaviour, including hate, against them.

The relatively recent protection provided to traditional Gypsies and Travellers within equalities legislation has provided some recognition for Gypsies and Travellers (James 2020a) who have suffered centuries of racism as noted above (Taylor 2014; Cressy 2018). However, it has been argued that processes of racialisation have not only served to problematise Gypsies and Travellers, as per Acton’s (2010) analysis, but it has also enhanced the romantic myth of the traditional Romany Gypsy as more legitimate than other groups of Gypsies and Travellers. Defining
racial identity is a complex process that can be reductionist and ethnocentric (Marsh and Strand 2006) and its legal negation can serve as a tool to exclusion (Clark 2006). The variable and slow application of legal recognition of ethnic minority status for Gypsies and Travellers in the UK has increased competition and suspicion between Gypsies and Travellers themselves and with non-Gypsies/Travellers. In their discussion of inequalities experienced by Roma Howard and Vajda (2017) refer to discrimination as occurring both horizontally via social relations between families and communities, and vertically via the imposition of exclusionary policy and practice. While this book commonly and largely refers to vertical discrimination, it is relevant to note here the capacity of discrimination to function horizontally. Horizontal discrimination impacts hierarchies of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK significantly, as will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

New Travellers are the most recent people to take up a nomadic style of living in the UK, having come into being in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The New Travellers, or ‘New Age’ Travellers as they were originally known, were borne of the music festival culture of the 1970s, inspired by traditional Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles. However, research has shown that they were often originally pushed into a travelling lifestyle through poverty or social exclusion (Martin 2002). They are now acknowledged as a diverse group (Webster and Millar 2001), included in Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments (Southern and James 2006; Home and Greenfields 2006), and they have been nomadic for more than a generation (Clark 1997). The tendency of legislators to define Gypsies and Travellers according to their economic purpose, rather than their racial identity, means that under planning law New Travellers are recognised as a Gypsy and Traveller community, and hence their inclusion in Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments and associated planning processes and provision (or lack thereof). Their position in the hierarchy of legitimacy of Gypsies and Travellers is however at the bottom due to their lack of racial authenticity. Indeed, many academics, policymakers and researchers do not consider New Travellers within their discussions of Gypsy and Traveller inclusion, or they simply negate them despite their presence in local, regional and national reports. Historically traditional Gypsies and Travellers have perceived New Travellers as interlopers, who should bear responsibility for the introduction of Draconian legislation in the late twentieth century that served to criminalise trespass
(James 2006). This tension between traditional Gypsies and Travellers and New Travellers identifies how protective those communities have had to be of the limited resources and spaces available to them in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Interestingly, New Travellers often conform to notions of the archetypal Gypsy stereotype, as they tend to live low-impact lifestyles, including living in horse-drawn vehicles. The use of the horse-drawn vehicle, the ‘vardo’, is strongly associated with traditional Gypsy and Traveller cultures. In contemporary times however, it is often likely that New Travellers would live in such vehicles as many traditional Gypsies and Travellers prefer to live in modern caravans. Further, New Travellers may live in ‘benders’, which are tents made from bent hazel twigs covered by canvas, that traditional Gypsies and Travellers used before the vardo. Hence, the stigmatising of New Travellers as fake Gypsies (Murdoch and Johnson 2020) is confused by their alignment to ways of living that are perceived as legitimate by those who romanticise Romany Gypsy lifestyles.

Travelling Showpeople were the first community to introduce the vardo as a mode of living and transport. Showpeople are commercial Travellers who move from town to town in the fair season between February and November (Clark 2006). Showpeople have had ancient charter to hold fairs since the twelfth century and in the summer there may be as many as 250 fairs in UK towns at any one time. The Showmen’s Guild acts as representative of Showpeople in the UK and govern the large majority of fairs that run. Showpeople have similar cultures to other Gypsies and Travellers, particularly in relation to their familial bonds and cultural expectations. In law however they are treated distinctly: Showpeople are not recognised as a racial group as they are considered ‘occupational Travellers’ (Greenhall and Willers 2020: 518), but they are provided with some protection for their settlement in planning law. Showpeople require particular places, referred to as yards to stop and stay on in the winter months, wherein they can store their fairground rides. Because of their specific occupational accommodation needs, and subsequent local planning delivery, discussions of provision often leave out Showpeople. Throughout the fair season Showpeople can generally reside on land set out for their fairgrounds. However, the Showmen’s Guild has expressed concern that Showpeople, similar to other Gypsies and Travellers, have suffered a crisis of space provision in recent years for their winter yards. In addition is has been noted that changing patterns of fairs (and now the coronavirus pandemic) have impacted on Showpeople’s need of space,
meaning that they are likely to travel less far and are more likely to need their yards for accommodation throughout the year (Cemlyn et al. 2009). Interestingly, the exclusion of Showpeople from much research and discourse on Gypsy and Traveller issues may be impacted by their relative economic security, access to education and better welfare outcomes (Cemlyn et al. 2009). Acknowledgement of their positive outcomes may not serve the purpose of othering discourses, either those that purport to want inclusion, or those that exclude. The negation of different Gypsy and Traveller voices is discussed in the next two chapters.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has detailed some of the existing literature on the lived experiences of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. In doing so it has set out how Gypsies’ and Travellers’ social identities have been formed and framed by their historic categorisation, as nomads and as ethnic groups, and how this has often negated the rich and varied bricolage of cultures represented by the limiting moniker of ‘Gypsies and Travellers’. As I have alluded to throughout this chapter, Gypsies and Travellers have suffered racialisation, marginalisation and exclusion throughout their history, resulting in their subjugation. Their outcomes in terms of health, education and welfare are very poor and some excellent research has been done in these areas as will be discussed further in due course (Brearley 2001; Wilkin et al. 2010; Frazer and Marlier 2011; Greenfields and Brindley 2016). The commonality between different Gypsy and Traveller communities is often oriented around their experiences of marginalisation and the precarious nature of their daily lives. Embedded within that precarity is the tension that exists between Gypsies and Travellers and sedentary communities that can bleed into and inform tensions between different Gypsy and Traveller communities themselves. In order to fully appreciate the lived experiences of Gypsies and Travellers the next chapter will address the reach and span of the harms of hate in contemporary society.

**REFERENCES**

Achim, V. (2004). *Roma in Romanian History*. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Acton, T. (2010). Theorising Mobility: Migration, Nomadism, and the Social Reconstruction of Ethnicity. In *Romani Mobilities in Europe Conference*. University of Oxford.
Alliance Against Anti-Gypsyism. (2016). Anti-Gypsyism – A Reference Paper. Available at: www.antigypsyism.eu. Accessed on: 17/04/17.

Balibar, É. (2009). Foreword. In N. Sigona & N. Trehan (Eds.), Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilisation and the Neoliberal Order. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brearley, M. (2001). The Persecution of Gypsies in Europe. American Behavioural Scientist, 45(4), 588–599.

Brown, P., & Niner, P. (2009). Assessing Local Housing Authorities’ Progress in Meeting the Accommodation Needs of Gypsy and Traveller Communities in England. London: EHRC.

Casciani, D. (2004). Prejudice Defeated Gypsy Reform. BBC News. Accessed at: www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3704167.stm. Accessed on: 21/10/04.

Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., Burnett, S., Matthews, Z., & Whitwell, C. (2009). Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review. London: EHRC.

Clark, C. (1997). “New Age” Travellers: Identity, Sedentarism and Social Security. In T. Acton (Ed.), Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Clark, C. (2006). Who Are the Gypsies and Travellers of Britain? In C. Clark & M. Greenfields (Eds.), Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Clark, C., & Greenfields, M. (Eds.). (2006). Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Cloke, P. (2004). Rurality and Racialised Others: Out of Place in the Countryside? In N. Chakraborti & J. Garland (Eds.), Rural Racism. Collumpton: Willan.

Cohen, S. (1972). Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Cresswell, T. (2006). On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World. London: Routledge.

Cressy, D. (2018). Gypsies: An English History. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cullen, S., Hayes, P., & Hughes, L. (2008). Good Practice Guide: Working with Housed Gypsies and Travellers. London: Shelter.

de Certeau, M. (1984). The Practice of Everyday Life. London: University of California Press.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. London: The Athlone Press.

Douglas, M. (1966). Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Purity and Taboo. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

EHRC. (2009). Gypsies and Traveller: Simple Solutions for Living Together. London: EHRC.
Howard, J., & Vajda, V. (2017). *Navigating Power and Intersectionality to Address Inequality*. IDS Working Paper. 2017:504. ISBN: 978-1-78118-412-7.

James, Z. (2006). Policing Space: Managing New Travellers in England. *British Journal of Criminology, 46*(3), 470–485.

James, Z. (2007). Policing Marginal Spaces: Controlling Gypsies and Travellers. *Criminology and Criminal Justice, 7*(4), 367–389.

James, Z. (2020a). Gypsies’ and Travellers’ Lived Experience of Harm: A Critical Hate Studies Perspective. *Theoretical Criminology, 24*(3), 502–520. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480620911914.

James, Z. (2020b, forthcoming). Roma, Gypsies and Travellers as a Community of Difference, Really? Challenging Inclusivity as an Anti-Racist Approach. *Critical Romani Studies*.

James, Z., & Richardson, J. (2006). Controlling Accommodation: Policing Gypsies and Travellers. In A. Dearling, T. Newburn, & P. Somerville (Eds.), *Housing and Crime*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing.

James, Z., & Southern, R. (2019). Accommodating Nomadism and Mobility: Challenging the Application of a Sedentarist Binary Approach to Provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 39*(3/4), 324–336.

Jensen, T., & Ringrose, J. (2014). Sluts that Choose vs. Doormat Gypsies. *Feminist Media Studies, 14*(3), 369–387.

Kabachnik, P. (2010). Place Invaders: Constructing the Nomadic Threat in England. *The Geographical Review, 100*(1), 90–108.

Kenrick, D., & Bakewell, S. (1990). *On the Verge: The Gypsies of England*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Kenrick, D., & Clark, C. (1999). *Moving On: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Kóczé, A. (2018). Race, Migration and Neoliberalism: Distorted Notions of Romani Migration in European Public Discourses. *Social Identities, 24*(4), 459–473.

Kóczé, A., & Rövid, M. (2012). Pro-Roma Global Civil Society: Acting for, with or Instead of Roma? In M. Kaldor & H. L. Moore (Eds.), *Global Civil Society 2012: Ten Years of Critical Reflection*. Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan.

Levinson, M. P., & Sparkes, A. C. (2004). Gypsy Identity and Orientation to Space. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 36*(6), 704–734.

Marcus, G. (2019). *Gypsy and Traveller Girls: Silence, Agency and Power*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Marsh, A., & Strand, E. (Eds.). (2006). *Gypsies and the Problems of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested*. Istanbul and London: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul and I.B.Tauris.
Martin, G. (2002). New Age Travellers: Uproarious or Uprooted? *Sociology, 36*(3), 723–735.

Matras, Y. (2004). The Role of Language in Mystifying and Demystifying Gypsy Identity. In N. Saul & S. Tebbutt (Eds.), *The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter-Images of Gypsies/Romanies in European Cultures*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

McVeigh, R. (1997). Theorising Sedentarism: The Roots of Anti-Nomadism. In T. Acton (Ed.), *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Moran, M. (2015). *Identity and Capitalism*. London: Sage.

Morris, R., & Clements, L. (2002). *At What Cost? The Economics of Gypsy and Traveller Encampments*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Murdoch, A., & Johnson, C. (2004). Introduction. In C. Johnson & M. Willers (Eds.), *Gypsy and Traveller Law*. London: Legal Action Group.

Murdoch, A., & Johnson, C. (2020). Introduction. In M. Willers & C. Johnson (Eds.), *Gypsy and Traveller Law* (3rd ed.). London: Legal Action Group.

Murji, K. (2017). *Racism, Policy and Politics*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Niner, P. (2004). *Counting Gypsies and Travellers: A Review of the Gypsy Caravan Count System*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

ODPM. (2006). *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments: Draft Practice Guidance*. ODPM: Gypsy and Traveller Unit.

Okely, J. (1983). *The Traveller-Gypsies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, C., & Bowling, B. (2008). Racism, Ethnicity and Criminology: Developing Minority Perspectives. In B. Spalek (Ed.), *Ethnicity and Crime: A Reader*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Powell, R. (2008). Understanding the Stigmatization of Gypsies: Power and the Dialectics of (Dis)Identification. *Housing, Theory and Society, 25*(2), 87–109.

Power, C. (2004). *Room to Roam: England’s Irish Travellers*. London: Action Group for Irish Youth.

Rattansi, A. (2005). The Time/Spaces of Racialization. In K. Murji & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reeves, F. (1983). *British Racial Discourse: A Study of British Political Discourse about Race and Race-Related Matters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richardson, J. (2006). *The Gypsy Debate: Can Discourse Control?*. Exeter: Imprint Academic.

Rowe, L., & Goodman, S. (2014). ‘A Stinking Filthy Race of People Inbred with Criminality’: A Discourse Analysis of Prejudicial Talk About Gypsies and Travellers. *Romani Studies, 24*(1), 25–42.

Ruston, R. (2013). *The Impact of Discourses of Authenticity on the Development and Application of Statutory Definitions of Gypsies and Travellers: A Study of*
Their Legal Access to Accommodation in England and Wales Since 1959. Ph.D. thesis, University of the West of England.

Ryder, A. (2011). Big Bang Localism and Gypsies and Travellers. *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 2(2), 27–45.

Shubin, S. (2010). Where Can a Gypsy Stop? Rethinking Mobility in Scotland. *Antipode*, 43(2), 494–524.

Shubin, S., & Swanson, K. (2010). “I’m an Imaginary Figure”: Unravelling the Mobility and Marginalisation of Scottish Gypsy Travellers. *Geoforum*, 41, 919–929.

Sibley, D. (1981). *Outsiders in Urban Societies*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sibley, D. (1988). Purification of Space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 6(4), 409–421.

Southern, R., & James, Z. (2006). *Devon-Wide Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment*. Social Research and Regeneration Unit, University of Plymouth.

Taylor, B. (2014). *Another Darkness, Another Dawn: A History of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers*. London: Reaktion Books.

Tremlett, A., Messing, V., & Kóczé, A. (2017). Romaphobia and the Media: Mechanisms of Power and the Politics of Representations. *Identities*, 24(6), 641–629.

Turner, R. (2002). Gypsies and British Parliamentary Language. *Romani Studies*, 12(1), 26.

van Baar, H. (2011). Europe’s Romaphobia: Problematisation, Securitisation, Nomadization. *Society and Space*, 29, 203–212.

Webster, L., & Millar, J. (2001). *Making a Living: Social Security, Social Exclusion and New Travellers*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Wilkin, A., Derrington, C., White, R., Martin, K., Foster, B., Kinder, K., et al. (2010). *Improving the Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils: Final Report*. Research Report DFE-RR043. Department for Education.

Yildiz, C., & De Genova, N. (2018). Un/Free Mobility: Roma Migrants in the European Union. *Social Identities*, 24(4), 425–441.

Žižek, S. (1993). *Tarrying with the Negative*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Žižek, S. (2008). *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador.