

# ***Resisting Assimilation: survival and adaptation to 'alien' accommodation forms: The case of British Gypsy/Travellers in housing***

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## **Abstract**

This paper consists of discussion of findings from a series of empirical studies conducted in London and southern England. A central concern of these studies was to explore the collective responses and adaptations of Gypsies and Travellers to post-war (1945) government legislation which has aimed to eradicate nomadic lifestyles and in so doing, to settle and assimilate this group into the general population. Despite these policy objectives Gypsies and Travellers through utilising forms of cultural resilience have resisted enormous pressures to assimilate, managing to live within a wider culture while rejecting its values and social institutions and recreating traditional collective lifestyles (as far as possible) within 'bricks and mortar' accommodation.

The authors outline contemporary forms of resistance to assimilation and, by drawing on qualitative and ethnographic data, demonstrate how relations between the state and Gypsies and Travellers is characterised by a cyclical relationship of domination, resistance and resilience. As legislation is enacted to restrict the mobility of Gypsies and Travellers and 'settle' them, so these groups develop innovative strategies to evade or minimise the impact of legislation, thus instigating a new phase of policy development.

Cultural resilience in this context therefore encompasses active resistance to externally imposed changes that are perceived as antithetical to traditional lifestyles. Drawing on Acton's (1974) typology of adaptive strategies the authors illustrate how recourse to culturally grounded strategies of resistance has allowed Gypsies and Travellers to maintain a sense of social cohesion and group identity, which assists in minimising the more damaging impacts of legislation.

**Keywords:** *Gypsies, Travellers, Housing, Resilience, Communities, Assimilation, Adaptation*

## **Introduction**

This article draws upon a series of interlinked research studies previously published as both discrete themed papers (Greenfields and Smith, 2010, 2011, Smith and Greenfields, 2012) and a monograph (Smith & Greenfields, 2013) which examines in depth, the accommodation 'careers'

and impacts of enforced settlement from quasi-nomadism into 'bricks and mortar' housing as experienced by 278 English (Romanichal) Gypsy and Traveller<sup>1</sup> households.

The studies comprised materials drawn from commissioned research undertaken on behalf of a social housing provider in the South East of England which is known to have a substantial number of Gypsy and Traveller tenants; a focused project on housed Gypsies and Travellers in South West England as well as a series of Gypsy, Traveller Accommodation (and other Needs) Assessments (GTANAs) carried out between 2006-2013<sup>2</sup>. In addition to survey data, other materials were gathered by undertaking a series of focus groups (comprising 40 participants) and 55 in-depth interviews (South East England and London) convened specifically for the purposes of exploring the impact of policy on the accommodation options available to Gypsies and Travellers in England.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of *this* paper and in line with current cultural and policy usage in the UK, 'Gypsies' is used to refer to members of the English Romanichal community whilst 'Travellers' is used both to refer to ethnic minority groups such as Irish and Scottish Travellers and as a generic term to encompass all other groups of *nomadic* people, or those of nomadic heritage. In the current UK usage this definition excludes the people identified as 'Roma' who are classified in UK policy documents as migrant populations from Europe who share a cultural/linguistic heritage with English (Romany/Romanichal) Gypsies but who by dint of their relatively recent migration are perceived of as 'other' than Gypsies and Irish/Scottish Travellers who have a history in mainland Britain of many hundreds of years. While the use of the word 'Traveller' is not unproblematic (given its origins as an identifying marker for those nomads of Irish, Scottish and Welsh descent as well as those formerly sedentary members of the community who have adopted a nomadic way of life in the previous three generations) it is increasingly accepted as a politically inclusive term which permits all nomadic people, whatever their ethnic origins, to acknowledge some form of collective identity whilst recognising the structural constraints and common experience of prejudice and racism encountered by all currently nomadic people as well as those who are 'ethnically' Gypsies or Travellers albeit living in housing.

<sup>2</sup> Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments arose as a result of considerable policy interest amongst the New Labour Government of 1997-2010 into the causes and solutions to wide-spread discord between Gypsies/Travellers and mainstream society over site provision, as well as substantial anecdotal evidence from registered social landlords that significant numbers of housing placements of Gypsies and Travellers broke down fairly rapidly. Accordingly an amendment to the Housing Act 2004 required that each local authority with housing duties should seek to ascertain the preferences of members of the above communities in relation to accommodation type. See further Cemlyn et. al, 2009 for an extensive discussion of findings, methodologies and policy approaches to site and accommodation provision for Gypsies and Travellers. Greenfields was co-author with Robert Home of the first GTANA undertaken in the UK ('The Cambridge Project') see further Cemlyn et. al. 2009, op. cit.). That study and a follow-up commissioned small scale projects into the accommodation preferences of Gypsies and Travellers who had been required to move into housing provided by a local authority in the South West of England identified core issues around clustering of families in social housing contexts. Subsequently both authors of this paper have worked on a series of GTAAs in both urban and rural areas culminating in their major research study into the experiences of housed Gypsies and Travellers (Smith and Greenfields, 2013). Quotations in this paper have been drawn from a number of sources – e.g. various GTAAs on which the authors have worked; Smith and Greenfields, 2013; and Gypsy/Traveller health needs assessments in rural areas (Greenfields with Lowe 2013).

Given that the legislation which underpins the GTANA process<sup>3</sup> requires that a sample of housed Gypsies and Travellers are interviewed to ascertain their accommodation preferences these relatively recent large-scale surveys of Gypsies and Travellers provide an unprecedented body of data which provided information on the accommodation situation of Gypsies and Travellers at local, regional and national levels. Accordingly we were able to data mine in excess of 200 GTANA questionnaires for outline information on housed Gypsies and Travellers' residence prior to moving into housing, to enable us to triangulate our findings with those of other extant public sources of information in addition to the in-depth materials outlined above (focus groups and targeted surveys of housed Gypsies and Travellers undertaken by the authors). Overall, the household data reviewed was selected from a pool of over 700 respondents, although only materials pertaining to individuals living in housing at the time of interview were treated to in-depth analysis.

The comparative studies undertaken at different localities enabled the authors to consider variables pertaining to peri-rural and urban dwelling; inter and intra-ethnic relationships and the ethnicity/culture of participants. In the two localities in Southern England reported in this article the majority of participants are Romany (English) Gypsies, albeit a small sample of Irish Travellers and New Travellers are also included. In contrast, the majority of those interviewed in London were of Irish Traveller heritage (see further below for a discussion on specific locality based stressors associated with access to sites and housing).

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<sup>3</sup> As a result of a change of UK Government in 2010 when a Centre-right coalition came to power which proved significantly more interventionist in relation to accommodation of Gypsies and Travellers and seemingly more hostile towards the former administration's commitment to 'facilitating a nomadic lifestyle' (see further National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups (NFGLG), 2014) at a local level GTANAs have become considerably 'watered down' and subject to individual local administration control, with a reduced requirement to take account of unmet need when planning whether and how to provide accommodation for members of these communities. In May 2015 a newly elected single-party Conservative administration came to power who have expressly indicated that there will be changes in policy approaches to the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller sites as concern has been expressed that these communities are treated disproportionately favourably vis a vis other populations with regard to location and format of planning applications (see further, European Roma and Traveller Forum, 2015). At the time of writing it is unclear precisely what measures will come into force although concerns have been voiced by UK civil society organisations that there are likely to be significantly more stringent regulation of sites and tightening of regulations regarding obtaining planning permission, based upon the Government's manifesto pledges and policy statements see further: Travellers Times blog 06-05-2015 <http://travellerstimes.org.uk/Blog--Comment/What-do-they-say-about-Gypsies-and-Travellers.aspx>.

Drawing upon data gathered from these distinct communities whose access to ‘traditional’ site accommodation is impacted by both histories of migration to the UK and the period at which settlement first occurred, as well as the degree to which they retain a tendency to travel either seasonally or on a more permanent basis for occupational reasons (see further Cemlyn et. al. 2009; Smith & Greenfields, 2012; Ryder & Greenfields, 2010). These considerations permit an analysis of whether and how ethnicity variables impact resilience and resistance to enforced sedentarisation.

### **Gypsies, Travellers and Accommodation in the UK**

It has been estimated that there are over 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the UK with as many as two-thirds resident in conventional housing (Commission for Racial Equality, 2006; Cemlyn et. al., 2009)<sup>4</sup>. Whilst as evidenced by Smith and Greenfields (2013) and Cullen et. al. (2008) some respondents have entered housing voluntarily (often for health reasons, to obtain a stable education for their children or as a result of age or infirmity) it is incontrovertible that the pace of transfers from caravan sites into housing has increased in recent years due to the closing off of traditional stopping places (Greenfields, 2013); a shortage of pitches on council caravan sites (Cemlyn et. al., 2009); difficulties gaining planning permission to develop private sites (NFGLG, 2014; ERTF, 2015) and a sustained legislative assault on nomadism, in particular with the enactment of wide-ranging punitive powers under the 1994 Criminal Justice Act (CRE, 2006; Crawley, 2004; Cemlyn et. al., 2009).

In the UK a higher percentage of Romani and Traveller populations (estimated at between one quarter to one third of the population, CRE, 2006) still reside in ‘traditional’ culturally congruent forms of accommodation (caravans) than are found elsewhere in Europe. In much of Europe Roma communities have predominantly been forcibly settled for longer than have British

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<sup>4</sup> Whilst the UK’s 2011 Census for the first time included the option for respondents in England and Wales to self-identify as either a Romani Gypsy or a Traveller of Irish heritage (Roma or Scottish Traveller was excluded as option) only 57,680 respondents identified as being a member of these ethnic groups, representing – based upon GTAA data - an absolute minimum undercount of 54% of these communities (Traveller Movement, 2013). The Traveller Movement moreover posited that those least likely to self-identify in the Census were likely to be Gypsies and Travellers resident in housing or experiencing extreme marginalisation and exclusion, such that they were neither registered to be enumerated in the census or experienced fear of identification as members of these ethnic minority groups: <http://www.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Gypsy-and-Traveller-population-in-England-policy-report.pdf>

Gypsy/Traveller populations, (see Picker, Greenfields and Smith, forthcoming, 2016; Matras, 2014; Taylor, 2014). In both contexts, the cumulative impact of legislative and policy pressures to sedentarise throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries have had a profound and increasing impact on both mode of residence and community structures.

Mayall's (1995) classic text on nomadism and the impact of legislation and state policies enacted in England to repress such 'unruly' behaviour associated with both ethnic Gypsies and Travellers and homeless travelling groups, was published just as the bitterly disliked and fiercely resisted Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) came into force. That volume documented not only centuries of repression in the UK, with nomadism at times practised on pain of death or expulsion, but also detailed the impact of rapidly changing social organisation, industrialisation and the declining position of Gypsies and other mobile workforces as demand for casual labour and tolerance of 'difference' declined. The accumulation of policy responses which sought to enforce settlement through simultaneously targeting nomadic families via educational and public health policies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Smith & Greenfields, 2013), escalated as a result of a dramatic decrease in farm labour opportunities and the closure of traditional stopping places in the immediate post-World War Two years,. In addition, restructuring and rebuilding projects across the UK led to ever more regulation and social control of nomadic lifestyles (Picker et al, forthcoming, 2016).

By the late 1950s the national project of building a modern nation state which sought to sweep away the 'squalor' of unregulated camps (both occupied by Gypsies and Travellers and other citizens who had increasingly taken to living in caravans in response to a national housing crisis) led inexorably to the passing of rigorous legislation and control over where and how caravans could be stationed, and who was able to reside in such accommodation. The impact of the 1960 Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act which curtailed many opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers to reside at formally accessible locations, coupled with mass evictions from traditional or 'tolerated' stopping places which had become increasingly overcrowded in response to the processes described above, meant that many Gypsies and Travellers were condemned to a cycle of repeated, and often aggressive, police-led evictions from road-side stopping places.

## **Assimilatory Accommodation Policies**

It was at this point that the first large-scale movement of Gypsies and Travellers into housing commenced, in response to a programme of explicit sedentarisation and assimilation (see McVeigh, 1997; Smith & Greenfields, 2013; Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Hawes & Perez, 1996). Despite the appalling hardship experienced by many Gypsies and Travellers at this time (repeated evictions at short notice sometimes resulting in the destruction of property and homes, physical violence to household members and threats (sometimes enacted) to remove children into public care on the grounds of 'neglect' if families refused to move into housing). Many clung tenaciously to their traditional way of life, often sliding deeper into poverty as they were unable to find places to stop and access work, and indeed casual labour opportunities for populations who were often illiterate, declined sharply.

In 1968 after many years of lobbying by a small group of public spirited and determined Parliamentarians and civil rights activities, the public outcry at the sight of hundreds of homeless Gypsies and Travellers parked on the edge of dangerous roads with nowhere to go and facing repeated eviction, led to the passing of the 1968 Caravan Sites Act which for the first time required local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers who wished to reside in caravans. In this paper it is not possible to explore the many ramifications and unintended consequences of this benevolently intentioned piece of legislation, although much has been written about the impact of ferociously policed regulations on local authority sites, the complex bureaucracies; often dangerous or polluted locations at which they were grudgingly built and the complex political negotiations and manoeuvres implicit in negotiating such provision (McVeigh, 1997; Kenrick & Clark, 2006; Richardson, 2006; 2009; Powell, 2007; Cemlyn et. al., 2009; Greenfields & Smith, 2010; Smith & Greenfields, 2012; Greenfields & Brindley, 2015)

In theory, members of nomadic communities who wished to remain living in caravan accommodation were afforded legal protection (and indeed the recognition in both UK domestic and European human rights law of the need to protect Gypsies and Travellers from enforced sedentarisation and loss of cultural heritage occasioned by ever more rigorous anti-

nomad policies<sup>5</sup>). In practice, the persistent shortage of site provision and increasing difficulty in gaining access to such 'authorised' sites for Gypsy and Traveller households has, over the last four decades, led to a significant transition from caravans to conventional accommodation for members of these communities.

The enactment of the CJPOA in 1994 (by a Conservative Government) has indeed been recognised as the most recent 'low-point' in enforced sedentarisation, firstly by repealing the duty on local authorities to provide Traveller sites and secondly by enacting provisions making it illegal for Travellers to move or stop in 'convoys' of more than six vehicles. Third, police powers were enhanced making it possible for police enforcement action to lead to the forcible seizure of the caravans (homes) of anyone in breach of the legislation (O'Nions, 1995; Richardson, 2006; Kenrick & Clark,1999). Inevitably, despite profound resistance, often in the face of overwhelming odds, and widespread public criticism of such sedentary impositions, this far reaching piece of legislation impacted dramatically on opportunities for nomadism and led to an increased move (often as a last resort) into 'bricks and mortar' accommodation for Travellers and Gypsies who vociferously protested at these restrictions on their culture and traditions.

Despite the far-reaching impacts and profound human cost of these cumulative legislative enactments, Gypsies and Travellers' cultural resilience and resistance persisted in the years following the passing of the CJPOA. Whilst initially there was a retreat from nomadism and a steep decline in households living at 'unauthorised encampments' following the passing of the CJPOA<sup>6</sup>, within a few years it was widely recognised by public bodies, (including police authorities who expressed their dismay at being required to play 'cat and mouse' and

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the legal situation in the UK and the impact of Human Rights legislation see both the paper by Pratchett in this journal edition, and also Johnson and Willers,eds. (2007)

<sup>6</sup> Longitudinal data sets are available from the DCLG website mapping trends since the 1990s. These show the ebbs and flows of caravan numbers at different 'types' of site (self-owned authorised and unauthorised, roadside/unauthorised encampments and local authority provided authorised sites). The most recent data set (July 2014) [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/376736/Traveller\\_Caravan\\_Count\\_release\\_-\\_July\\_2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/376736/Traveller_Caravan_Count_release_-_July_2014.pdf) demonstrates that there has been a decrease in both overall numbers of caravans occupied by Gypsies and Travellers in England and more specifically a decline in caravans stationed at 'unauthorised' encampments in the year since 2013, a trend which may potentially reflect harsher policies in recent years in relation to difficulties in obtaining planning permission for such sites. Despite this trend, (which should be contrasted with an increase in some former years of residents at 'authorised sites' ) it is noteworthy that 16% of all such caravans (perhaps accounting for 3000 individuals) are still stationed on unauthorised encampments/developments and as such residents are thus technically homeless households at risk of eviction and enforcement action.

repeatedly evict homeless Gypsies and Travellers who had nowhere else to move to) that the policy was a failure (see Greenfields, 2008). A significant number of households were unwilling or unable to access housing and preferred facing the hardships of living 'on the roadside' to moving into 'bricks and mortar' accommodation.

Indeed amongst those families who did attempt to settle into housing it was noted that as many as 50% of such placements broke down rapidly, with families either returning to roadside life or (in breach of site planning regulations) sought to 'double up' and squeeze onto already often dangerously overcrowded authorised sites (Davies, 1987; Niner, 2003). The resultant public concern over the failure to diminish numbers of highly visible unauthorised encampments despite harsh policy measures, led to significant disquiet in both human rights and political circles as well as considerable media comment on the 'Gypsy problem' which refused to go away.

Shortly after the election of a Labour government in 1997, in recognition of the considerable negative consequences of the CJPOA, a wide-ranging policy review was announced which set out to consider how best to deal with the increase in unauthorised encampments and the widespread public hostility to granting planning permission for either local authority provided, or 'self-provided' (on land owned by Gypsy and Traveller families) sites for members of these communities (Erfani-Ghettani, 2012). Ultimately, in 2006, as part of an series of incremental policy enactments aimed at reducing community tensions over unauthorised encampments and enhancing the wellbeing of Gypsies and Travellers who were increasingly recognised as experiencing extreme exclusion across multiple domains (see further Cemlyn et. al, 2009) the then Government amended the Housing Act 2004. This required local authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in their area (through the mechanism of GTANAs) and move towards the provision of sites where need was identified. It was as a result of these new duties that for the first time attention was paid to the experiences of housed Gypsies and Travellers who has in essence become 'de-ethnicised' and forgotten once they had moved into housing and ceased to feature within the twice yearly caravan counts.

As noted above, the genesis of this series of studies is thus intimately connected to the relatively enlightened policy focus on Gypsies and Travellers which commenced under a Labour Government in 1997 and which has largely been superseded by a more punitive approach since

2010 when a Conservative led coalition came to power. At the time of writing and following the recent election of a majority Conservative government in May 2015, it is unknown precisely what policy approach will exist in relation to these ethnic minority groups. Nevertheless, based on the findings of our studies we fully anticipate that forms of cultural resilience will continue to evolve in line with the trends noted below. Indeed as we outline in subsequent sections of this paper, evidence demonstrates that a transfer into housing does not simply lead to assimilation and a homogenised culture of 'white Britishness' but often creates as many (if different) problems for housed families as they experienced when 'on the roadside' which in turn are met by a new and dynamic cultural turn.

### **Social Invisibility and Routes into Housing**

One striking finding from the GTANAs was that local authorities overwhelmingly had very limited information or knowledge of the size or ethnicity of the housed Gypsy and Traveller populations living in their localities. Indeed even in situations where researchers identified (often to their own astonishment) that a significant number of housed Gypsies and Travellers lived in a specific housing estate or locality, the communities were typically 'invisible' to the housing authorities who had simply subsumed the population into the category of 'White British' tenants. Commonly there was a failure to recognise (or confusion regarding) the concept that Gypsies and Travellers retained in law their ethnic identity and protected 'minority status' regardless of the fact that they no longer lived in caravans. Such was the lack of recognition of the populations by public authorities that in our work on early GTANAs we typically only became aware of populations of housed Gypsies and Travellers as a result of 'snowballing' of contacts from the more visible 'sited' members of the communities, who were then able to refer us onto their relatives and wider networks who had moved into 'bricks and mortar' social housing.

Once contact was initiated with housed members of the populations in the localities where the qualitative studies were undertaken, a rich source of data rapidly became self-evident which revealed both stark challenges (including enacted racism and highly gendered isolation) experienced by many housed Gypsies and Travellers, as well as vibrant resilient networks of social capital and operationalised resistance to assimilatory pressures.

Legislative and policy induced pressures to settle was the primary reason for movement into housing with 40% of our sample of housed Gypsies and Travellers reporting that they had moved into housing as a direct result of a lack of authorised sites. Typical narratives were as follows:

*“We were stopping on the marshes. The council said if you go in houses just till we’ve built you a site so we went in houses but the site was never built for us they only built a site for the roadsiders that hadn’t gone into housing when us lot did”* (Male, South-East England)

*“We was forced out [of the local authority site] when it was shut down but it wasn’t how we was brung up not to be in a house – but it was that or go on the road again and we couldn’t do that with our son being disabled and me being pregnant again.”* (Female, South-West England)

A further 10% had moved into housing following failed applications for planning permission in situations where they had bought their own land to live on (often collectively purchasing land with family members). In these latter cases respondents typically reported many years of legal challenges and resultant stress before they were forced to sell or move away from their land and into housing to avoid eviction or even threat of imprisonment for being in breach of planning permission. One Romany Gypsy couple interviewed in the South East who have been housed for six years after failing to obtain planning permission observed that:

*“The councils make it nearly impossible to get planning permission and that’s because they don’t want us round here”.*

Contrary to media claims and political rhetoric that Gypsies and Travellers have a favoured status in planning law, one respondent reported angrily:

*“I’ll tell you the difference between us and you. You can put in for planning permission. You haven’t gotta say who you are. We put in for it, we’ve gotta put in as a Gypsy. Then, you’ve gotta turn round and prove that you are a Gypsy. Now you tell me if that happens anywhere else?”.*

Since a household is considered homeless if they reside in a caravan but have no legal place to live in it the decline in authorised sites has resulted in a drift into housing as a result of homelessness with 21% moving into housing after being accepted as homeless:

*“We wanted a place on the site where my mum and brothers are but there were no places I’m down on the list but we’re stuck here ‘cos there’s nowhere else to go”*

A further 20% reporting entered housing primarily for ‘family reasons’ typically to live close to family, to obtain a stable education for children or to ensure that relatives could access health care or social services support which was unavailable to ‘roadside’ nomadic households.

*“I don’t like this house its not how we’ve lived. But we’re getting older now and need to be here so I can get seen by a doctor when me or the wife’s poorly”.*

*“The chavvies [children] need an education. A lot of them [schools] won’t take them from the roadside so you need an address to get them into school. I want mine to get an education not grow up and not read and write like me. We were on the road when I was growing up and I never got any schooling”.*

The remainder of the sample <9% reported that they had either grown up in housing, had “always fancied giving it a try and wanted a change from trailers” , had married into a family where their spouse or extended family already lived in ‘bricks and mortar’ accommodation or had other ‘private’ reasons for making the transition.

The sense of enforced assimilation and an assault on a traditional way of life came through respondents’ narratives extremely strongly and this held true regardless of the age or ethnicity of respondents or even the duration of their residence in housing. Gender however (see further below), was a key variable in the depth of isolation expressed by respondents. Thus a female focus group member who has been housed for over ten years commented that:

*‘all the other groups in society are allowed to keep their way of life so why not us? I hate it here in this house but where can I go? There’s no pitch on the site and they won’t give us planning [permission] if we buy our own land.’*

Levels of dissatisfaction with housing were strikingly high. Somewhat shockingly, when asked to discuss the compensatory factors associated with living in housing, 16 per cent of

respondents were unable to find a single positive element about residence in 'bricks and mortar':

*"Nothing at all. All I need I could have in a caravan on a site, or on my own land."*

*"I hate it. Want to be on the site with mum and dad".*

### **Dislocation and Cultural Trauma**

During a focus group interview, one young woman in the South West of England expressly related the loss of traditional nomadic lifestyles to increased rates of depression, unemployment and disillusionment amongst her relatives:

*"the older ones, no offence like but they don't have a job, they're all on the dole and sit around all day and have kids and basically that's it",*

Such comments reiterated findings from a focus group undertaken by one of the authors of this paper during which a participant noted (Richardson et. al., 2007: 114).

*"You have a drive down the High Street and have a look at the boys I grew up with...they're either out of their head on drugs or on Tennants Super [strong beer] because they're getting rid of the day, there's no point in them having a day...They're all stuck in houses now, all stuck in the council estates, they don't want to be there but where they going to go?"*

In relation to the above quotations on depression and nihilistic self-destructive behaviour (see Cemlyn et. al., 2009 for a discussion on high suicide rates among young Traveller men) it is relevant to consider on one hand, the sense of "cultural discontinuity" (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998) and ensuing "cultural trauma" occasioned by rapid disruption of a traditional culturally cohesive lifestyle and quasi-colonial imposition of new modes of behaviour (Alexander et al 2004). On the other hand, is the ambivalent and volatile relationship with 'settled' or 'gorje' [non-Gypsy] society experienced by Gypsies and Travellers living in housing. The relationship with 'gorjes' amongst whom settled Gypsies and Travellers were expected to reside after making the transition into housing, has historically been characterised by both an employment-focused

symbiotic relationship, and centuries of experiences (and prior expectations) of racism, discrimination and derogatory ethnicity based stereotyping (see further Smith & Greenfields 2013). As such it is unsurprising that tensions and mistrust were common amongst settled Gypsies and Travellers compelled to live amongst 'others' with whom they had typically had very little contact outside of carefully bounded working contexts.

Female respondents in particular, (who as a result of gendered and cultured behavioural expectations which frequently precluded working outside of the home or having contact with non-relatives) repeatedly reported having had very limited prior contact with non Gypsies or Travellers before settling into housing. As a consequence of their confinement to the home and immediate neighbourhood they typically commented on the fact that the transition from living on a site or in a caravan was particularly isolating and traumatic.

*"It's one of the loneliness things that can happen to a travelling woman. It's alright for the men 'cos they can go off to the fairs and everything else. It's the women, men aren't in the house 24 hours, the men probably won't come in until 8pm and they've been out all day and they just go to bed but we've been there all day. It's been really, really hard."*

*"I'm among strangers here. I don't feel safe there's no family nearby".*

*"On a site you are never alone – there's always your sister, your cousin, your Aunty, your Nan – someone to have a cuppa tea with or tell your troubles – but here you don't see them [neighbours] even over the fence from day to day and they're that unfriendly if you do say something – they just want to keep to themselves and anyway they think you're a dirty Gypsy"*

In such circumstances it was therefore unsurprising that many respondents reported no meaningful contact with non Gypsy or Traveller neighbours and a retrenchment into isolated

anxiety which was in no way alleviated by experiences of cold unfriendliness, or even overt hostility or racist abuse which a significant number of respondents recalled<sup>7</sup>.

### **Adaptive Resilience and secure cultural identity**

In situations such as those above where limited agency existed in relation to satisfying accommodation preferences it was noteworthy that a high number of respondents reported reformulating, as far as possible, 'traditional' community life through the activation of networks of kin living in close proximity (see further below and Greenfields and Smith, 2010; Smith and Greenfields, 2013).

One particular mechanism for recreating such clusters of relatives and community members was through the utilisation of deliberate 'swaps' of accommodation between Gypsies and Travellers anxious to live amongst their kin (even if this involved moving from a more 'desirable' location to a run-down housing estate). In turn as specific localities became known as 'Traveller areas' with a high concentration of the community living locally, it was reported by several respondents that non-Gypsies or Travellers would seek a transfer away to a different area, unless they had networks of friendship/relationships with Gypsy or Traveller co-residents. Thus over time spatial concentrations of Gypsies and Travellers developed enabling the recreation of a close-knit community such as pertains on traditional Traveller sites.

Local authority housing officers interviewed for the studies commented on the high degree of organisation and mobilisation of social capital which could exist and which enabled family members to relocated near to their kin networks:

*"Through the exchange system they are very mobile within housing and don't stay put for long, they're moving around and using houses like wagons, the lifestyle doesn't stop just because they're in housing".*

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<sup>7</sup> See further the full Smith & Greenfields monograph (2013) and Greenfields (2013) for a discussion of more positive relationships which could and did accrue when *gorje* neighbours were identified as being familiar with Gypsy/Traveller culture or where long-standing personal relationships existed, which for example had been forged in (often male) working environments or through school.

One male interviewed as part of a focus group in south east England observed that

*“As much as people try to separate Gypsies in housing in this area, they’re wheeling and dealing to be in houses near their own families, so then you end up around this area with estates full of travellers, and people don’t understand why they want to be together. But it is that family network ...”*

In all of the key study areas most housed Gypsies and Travellers were concentrated in specific neighbourhoods as part of close knit, cohesive communities, often located near to former stopping places. In London, in contrast, where respondents were most likely to be Irish Travellers with a shorter history of residence in the UK and a more recent history of nomadism, clusters of residence were still noticeable but these related less to traditional site locations and were more often associated with employment opportunities or following a move near to a relative who lived in a particular London Borough. Even in London though, it was still noticeable that there was considerable contact between housed respondents and other Travellers resident at local authority sites in the vicinity.

It has been noted that spatial concentrations of specific ethnic minorities can bring important social and cultural benefits to those populations, most noticeably informal social support systems that help residents cope with social exclusion, racism and prejudice (Bauder, 2002). In all of our study locations the presence of other Gypsies and Travellers in the neighbourhood served to mitigate some of the problems outlined above, by reproducing traditional communities and social networks through which distinct cultural identities, within the context of the local communities, are maintained. For women in particular, access to networks of support could assist in alleviating isolation as well as offering practical support with child care or assistance with looking after aged or ill relatives. A frequent theme concerned the protection of having other community members in close proximity.

*“There are a lot of Travellers round here and that’s a good thing, we’re always in and out of each other’s houses”*

*“This estate’s full of them [Gypsies] it’s good ‘cos we look after each other”.*

*“I got family all over this estate there’s so many of us the gorgers wouldn’t dare give us any trouble that’s the best thing about being here me aunts and cousins are always in our place”.*

The ability of Gypsy and Traveller groups to adapt cultural practices and identities to new environments has been observed by several authors (Gmelch 1977; Acton 1974) and during the focus group discussions it was apparent that although behaviours and practices retain traditional cultural traits and identity markers, Gypsy and Traveller communities were also evolving in response to the new environment in which they find themselves. Despite the lack of cultural continuity there was clear evidence of strong adaptive practices and cultural resilience in the face of assimilatory pressures. One focus group participant, commenting on the housing estate where she lives observed

*“Because we have 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> generations on the estate, there is a culture that is evolving...so you’ve got the Travellers of 30, 40 years ago that originally came onto the estate all those years back, and now you’ve got the generations coming on. And the culture is evolving”.*

This participant went on to speak of the generational tensions which could exist between younger members of the community and older Gypsies and Travellers whose attitudes were sometimes crystallised and focused on traditional models of behaviours and expectations (such as early intra-community marriage). Conservatism made them both less adaptable and unwilling to accept with equanimity residence amongst gorgers and the differing educational and employment opportunities which were available for young people growing up in housing. However despite her culturally adaptive approach to gendered roles and opportunities this young woman’s firm belief that there was *“still going to be Gypsy culture in one hundred, two hundred years – just different from how it was”* recalls Norris et al’s (2007) definition of community resilience as a process linking change and adaptive capacity in the aftermath of significant disruption. In this case the rapid large-scale enforced sedentarisation of Gypsy and Traveller communities experienced over the last half century.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

As we have demonstrated, the relationship of Gypsies and Travellers to the state is characterised by a cyclical relationship of domination, resistance and resilience. Whenever

legislation is enacted to restrict the mobility of the communities and 'settle' them into a state approved simulacrum of sedentarisation, so members of these communities begin to develop innovative strategies to evade or minimise the impact of legislation and enforced acculturation. We suggest that great tenacity has been shown by Gypsies and Travellers throughout history in resisting assimilation and retaining autonomy (Sibley, 1981). The examples outlined above pertaining to innovative approaches to subverting enforced sedentarism within housing are merely the latest versions of such innovative adaptation.

Acton's 1974 typology of Gypsy/Traveller resistance to state control suggests four key modes of adaptation: The **Conservative approach** (minimise contact/withdraw in); such as can be identified in some of the examples in this paper, most specifically where respondents resolutely resisted contact with Gorjer neighbours and withdrew into a sense of traumatised, angry loss which offers little scope for either resistance or resilience. Secondly he refers to **Cultural Disintegration** (a breakdown of traditional culture and values) which can be seen in references to depression and substance misuse<sup>[WU1]</sup>. The third strand of Acton's typology consists of "**passing**" (competing on equal terms in mainstream society and disguising ethnicity) and again in a number of cases we found evidence of this, where respondents were not known to their neighbours or work colleagues to be Gypsies or Travellers and where they took particular care taken not to 'perform' the role of 'Gypsy' as perceived of in popular discourse.

Perhaps of most interest to the current discussion however is the final model outlined by Acton. He proposes that **Cultural Adaptation** (bricolage) consists of adapting and adopting those strategies which will prove most favourable and likely to enable a positive outcome for the individual and community as a whole. It is this set of behaviours at which Gypsies and Travellers excel. As such we argue that flexible adaptation represented by the recreation of traditional communities in a new context (such as we have outlined in this paper) is in itself a form of cultural **resilience** which in the context above can be perceived of as encompassing **active resistance** to externally imposed assimilatory pressures.

Whilst at first view, accepting and adapting to residence in bricks and mortar accommodation could be perceived of as antithetical to traditional lifestyles and thus as representing the death of both nomadism and Gypsy and Traveller culture, we suggest instead that it merely represents a pragmatic response to an irresistible (State) power. Accordingly such quietly resistant practices are at the intersection of cultural adaptation/community resilience (Scott, 1985). These collective practices provide additional protective factors for those without the resources to access a secure authorised site (should they wish to live in such a manner) but who are able to adjust to a new (and perhaps not entirely congenial) mode of living in housing. Thus we concur with the interviewee who stated her belief in the evolving nature of Gypsy and Traveller identity and suggest that the more profound impacts of co-residence may, in the long run, perhaps be felt more by the gorgers learning to share communal space with their resistant, resilient, adaptive neighbours.

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