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Gypsy-Travellers and welfare professional discourse: On individualization and social integration

Paper in Final Format for *Antipode*

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Abstract

This paper examines the subtle ways in which welfare professionals in the UK construct Gypsy culture as subordinate to the dominant Western concept of 'civilization'. Qualitative empirical evidence is presented to show how notions of a resistance to processes of individualization and social integration - which draw on conflicting interpretations of childhood and a perceived lack of aspiration amongst Gypsy-Travellers - are seen as legitimate grounds for state and social welfare intervention. The paper argues that a strong group orientation and a more marked gendered division of labour are constructed as being at odds with these dominant social processes. It is posited that the 'civilizing' project against Gypsy-Travellers ignores cultural norms and values resulting in the perception that they are undeserving. The paper suggests that theoretical accounts of social processes at a society wide level require revision in order to understand their varying impact on peripheral minorities in specific spaces.

KEY WORDS: Gypsy-Travellers; social welfare; civilizing; individualization; social

Introduction

> '*Let there be no mistake: now, as before, individualization is a fate, not a choice; in the land of individual freedom of choice, the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is emphatically* not *on the agenda*.' (Bauman, 1999, p.xvi)

The view that Gypsy-Traveller communities in Britain need more interaction with mainstream institutions and wider society is a long-standing one prevalent in policy and academic discourse (Cemlyn, 1995; Cudworth, 2008; DCSF, 2008; EUMC, 2006; Ofsted, 2003). The response to these claims on the part of scholars can be broadly defined as taking two forms (Vanderbeck, 2005). Firstly, some accounts have taken a critical stance in emphasizing the *assimilationist* character of social welfare policies towards Gypsy-Traveller communities. Secondly, a number of academics and educationists have rejected this notion and drawn attention to the "opportunities" provided by the state as a means of *empowerment*. This paper builds on a small but critical literature in human geography which has sought to problematize these debates by rejecting binary distinctions (e.g. assimilation versus empowerment; social control versus social care) and emphasizing the complexities of power relations between Gypsy-Travellers and mainstream society (Sibley, 1998; Vanderbeck, 2005, 2009). While these critical accounts have focused on discrete spaces such as education, the economic sphere, and the voluntary sector, this paper takes a wider perspective in emphasizing the interrelationships between dominant social processes, the perceived (non-)responses of Gypsy-Travellers and the resultant construction of Gypsy culture as deficient.

The paper also responds to criticisms of a lack of empirical grounding with regard to these debates (Vanderbeck, 2005, 2009). Drawing upon in-depth qualitative interviews with social welfare professionals engaged with Gypsy-Travellers it focuses on the way in which they construct Gypsy culture as subordinate to the dominant

Western concept of "civilization". Analysis of this data highlights particular reference points around which this discourse is constructed: processes of social integration and individualization; and the way in which these social processes are perceived to be different/deficient to societal norms in the context of Gypsy-Traveller communities. The empirical evidence presented shows that conflicting interpretations of childhood and a perceived lack of aspiration, linked to the traditional gender roles within Gypsy society, are seen as legitimate grounds for state and social welfare intervention. The paper goes on to discuss the "civilizing" project against Gypsy-Travellers which ignores the validity of cultural norms and values resulting in the perception that they are "undeserving" and responsible (at least in part) for their own marginal position within society.

The paper begins with a discussion of how the concept of civilization has come to signify the dominance of the Western middle-classes expressed as the "self-consciousness of the West" (Elias, 2000). This brief discussion provides an historical context within which to understand the state's intervention in the lives of groups which are deemed "less" civilized. Social processes relevant to my argument are then briefly outlined with particular attention paid to theoretical accounts of individualization (Bauman, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Elias, 2000, 2001; Giddens, 1990, 1991) and the civilizing process (Elias, 2000). Given the wide ranging coverage of these theories the paper focuses on aspects relating to conceptions of social integration, changing family relations and childhood, and in particular, the distance between childhood and adulthood. Drawing on empirical evidence, the paper then explores welfare professional discourses, situating these within existing critical debates and linking them to wider social processes. The paper concludes that the perception of a strong family and group orientation among Gypsy-Traveller communities is constructed by welfare professionals as at odds with the interrelated "emancipatory" processes of individualization and integration.

Consequently Gypsy-Traveller culture is deemed deficient and provides the legitimation for the civilizing project against Gypsy-Traveller society.

Societal Responses to Gypsy-Travellers: Civilizing, Assimilating and Integrating

A Note on Civilization

In order to understand the context in which attitudes and sentiments towards Gypsy-Travellers are constructed and maintained it is necessary to take a wider perspective which can aid an understanding of their ambivalent position in British society. There is a growing literature on Gypsy-Travellers and their relations with the wider society. This literature is universally negative with historical accounts of the persecution of Gypsy-Traveller populations emphasizing extermination, expulsion and criminalization (Brearley, 2001; Lucassen *et al*, 1998; Mayall, 1988) and a geography literature concerned with processes of regulation, assimilation, modernisation and stigmatization (Sibley, 1981, 1986, 1987, 1998; Halfacree, 1996; Vanderbeck, 2003; Holloway, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Powell, 2008). From the arrival of the first Gypsies in Britain, fantasy-laden images and constructions of them as a collective group have been at odds with the dominant society and a threat to it, giving rise to 'intense persecution, prosecution and harassment' (Mayall, 1995:43). Mayall contends that successive monarchs and subsequently the British state have 'viewed Gypsies as persistent and irritating thorns in their flesh' from the sixteenth century on due to their apparent 'defiance of the laws of the land and of contemporary trends to sedentarisation and *civilisation*' (1995:88 – my emphasis). A common theme underpinning state and wider societal responses is the desire to disperse, contain and, most importantly, to *transform* (Sibley, 1987:76).

Elias' (2000) concept of civilization as a process provides a useful perspective in conceptualising the response of state and society to outsider groups who are deemed in need of corrective treatment. In charting the emergence of the term from the earlier courtly concepts of *civilité* and *courtoisie*[i], he argues that now the general function of the term "civilization" is that the concept expresses the "self-consciousness of the West" (2000):

> *'The civilization which we are accustomed to regard as a possession that comes to us ready-made, without our asking how we actually came to possess it, is a process or part of a process in which we ourselves are involved'* (Elias, 2000:52).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, *civilisation* became infused with two central ideas: first, it stood as a courtly concept in opposition to "barbarism"; and second it constituted the notion of progress with a goal: 'Anything from trade to education, within which barbaric practices could be discerned, came under the province of reform in the name of *civilisation*, involving the refinement of manners and the internal pacification of the country by the kings' (Elias, 2000:41).
This formed the basis of what has been described as a "civilizing offensive" (Fletcher, 1997:9). Reform in the name of civilization applied equally to the subjects within one's own territory who had yet to "achieve civilization" in the eyes of the middle classes as it did to the colonial project. Thus, to the middle-classes of the West the concept of civilisation indicates that the *process* of civilization has been completed and forgotten: '…the politicians of the eighteenth century had no use for the idea of "civilisation". "Civilising" was what they were after: lifting fellow human beings to a new level of existence' (Bauman, 1985:7). This civilizing project however, has been shown to be inherently ambivalent in relation to other marginalized populations with accounts emphasizing the way in which civilizing offensives (and indeed civilization) can themselves exhibit a *decivilized* character (Burkitt, 1996; Powell and Flint, 2009; van Krieken, 1999;). The contention of this paper is that such a civilizing project is evident in welfare professional discourse on Gypsy-Travellers; a discourse

constructed around the watchwords of civilization, individualization and social integration. The arenas of education and social welfare have been heavily implicated in this civilizing project in more recent times and it is useful to examine the existing critical literature with regard to Gypsy-Traveller interactions with these two policy domains.

Gypsy-Travellers, Childhood and Social Integration

Conflicting interpretations of childhood are an important factor punctuating welfare professional discourse on Gypsy-Travellers. Vanderbeck (2005) argues that 'educational discourse constructs young Travellers as needing greater involvement with the "mainstream" education system' and continues to 'reflect long-standing notions of cultural disadvantage and deficit' (pp.72-73). This stems from the notion that 'constructions of childhood are heavily intertwined with discourses which label particular spaces as appropriate for children, while other spaces are seen as conflicting with the requirements of "modern" childhood' (Vanderbeck, 2005:72). This discourse emphasizes the integral role of schools in the development and *socialisation* of children (Cudworth, 2008; DCSF, 2008; Ofsted, 2003). Schools are thus seen as crucial mechanisms for social inclusion but poor attendance from Gypsy-Traveller children is viewed as an impediment to empowerment and self betterment. The separation of children from families (through institutionalised schooling) is used as an important tactic for influencing them, but among Gypsy-Traveller families there is often a preference for greater age mixing among siblings and other family members (Liégeois, 1987). As others have argued (Liégeois, 1987; Okely, 1983; Vanderbeck, 2005) Romani communities emphasise learning through participation and socialisation from the family and community rather than formal schooling in an institutionalised setting. Furthermore, within Gypsy-Traveller communities family-based learning is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of the groups' social and cultural identities (Jordan, 2001:62) as

children, particularly young boys, are expected to accompany their Father to work from an early age and learn the traditional family trade passed down from one generation to the next.

In an ethnographic study of the spaces of social welfare for young Gypsy-Travellers in England, Vanderbeck notes how voluntary sector welfare discourse is also 'permeated by normative assumptions about the desirable forms that childhood and youth should take' (2009:27). In this respect the agency of welfare professionals involved the interpretation of state ideas and the translation of discourse and policy into social welfare practice. This interpretation was characterised by ambivalence between two conflicting approaches: user-led versus assimilation. Vanderbeck (2009) points to two broad viewpoints with regards to attitudes towards Gypsy-Traveller engagement with education which he refers to as narratives of *assimilation* and narratives of *empowerment*. The second of these represents the view that the state, through education and other mainstream institutions, provides opportunities for Gypsy-Travellers which can 'empower' and integrate them and address issues of social exclusion (Kiddle, 1999). These accounts emphasize the need for formal schooling in order to take advantage of opportunities beyond traditional Gypsy-Traveller economies and enable Traveller children to "meet their full potential" (Cudworth, 2008). Conversely, narratives of assimilation reflect the critical position of writers such as Okely (1983; 1997) and Sibley (1981; 1998) who argue that educational and welfare policies towards Gypsy-Travellers are essentially assimilationist in character in the sense that they 'intervene in the raising of Traveller children, disrupt Traveller cultural practices, and ultimately contribute to the sedentarisation of Travellers' (Vanderbeck, 2005:75-76). Indeed, the view that Gypsies are in need of corrective treatment is long standing with Gypsies seen as 'potentially available for change and rescue from what is seen by non-Gypsies as a lost future' (Okely, 1997:72). This viewpoint has resulted in brutality in the form of

the forced removal of Gypsy children from their families (Brearley, 2001; Jordan, 2001; Okely, 1997) – a clear example of the ambivalence of the civilizing offensive against Gypsy-Travellers. While the strategies employed in the attempt at "purging" this ambivalent group (Bauman, 1991) have changed through time, stigmatization and the ultimate goal of assimilation have remained consistent. McVeigh (1997) observes a change in the level of discourse through time but argues that the outcomes in terms of an erosion and even "genocidal" effect on Gypsy culture are the same as previous, more overtly barbaric practices: 'extermination and expulsion are solely concerned with the interest of sedentaries while assimilation is *presented* as being in the interest of sedentaries *and* nomads' (McVeigh, 1997:23). There is a commonality in the goal of both in terms of the eradication of the "Gypsy problem" and in this respect McVeigh sees assimilation as little different from extermination.

The focus here is on Gypsy-Travellers in Britain but similar processes are evident throughout much of Europe (Bancroft, 2005; Brearley, 2001; Liégeois, 1987) and can also be applicable, to some extent, to the situation of Roma populations across the continent (EUMC, 2006; Sigona, 2003). Comparisons have also been drawn between the social welfare experiences of Gypsy-Travellers in England on the one hand and Australian Aborigines on the other by Cemlyn and Briskman (2002). They focus on the problems of the social welfare system in dealing effectively with difference; problems which are compounded by an history of oppressive policies which have resulted in extremely negative experiences of welfare intervention and a response which is most often characterised by fear and suspicion (Cemlyn, 1998). Cemlyn and Briskman find common themes in the treatment of the two groups citing persecution, racism, assimilation and genocide 'as reflected in the state's disregard of differing traditions and relationships with land and its treatment of children' (2002:51). This comparison with Australian Aborigines can be usefully complemented by the work of van Krieken (1999). His analysis of the cultural

genocide instigated against Australian Aborigines focuses on the state's forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and raises important questions about the "violent character of civilizing offensives". He argues that the barbarism identified in the case of Australian Aborigines was attempted in the very name of civilization suggesting that the process of integration into civilized societies is an inherently ambivalent one: 'These policies and events were not the result of the *dis*integration of society and state, but precisely part and parcel of processes of *integration*. They thus constitute a particular form of barbarism *explicitly within* civilization and the formation of modern citizenship' (van Krieken, 1999:299). van Krieken's problematization of social integration processes therefore calls for a more prominent role for the theory of civilizing offensives in aiding an understanding of the effects of integration on minority cultures.

Sibley (1986; 1987) highlights the inappropriate conceptions of modernisation theories with regards to Gypsies and argues that the supposedly inevitable outcome of acculturation to the modern society and resultant integration is a particularly ethnocentric view. He asks 'how we can make appropriate responses to people living on the margins of society, apparently excluded, if our only models of social justice are based on the idea of social integration, making us captive to an inclusionary view of society?' (1998:94). He argues that in reality, some governments and communities can be hostile to certain kinds of difference and 'exclude minorities perceived as transgressive, those assumed to move into spaces they do not belong' (Sibley, 1998:94). Sibley distinguishes these "transgressive others" from other marginalized groups who are seen as "more deserving". This distinction lies in their abject representation by the dominant society and in their autonomous endeavour, to create "spaces for themselves". Sibley questions the individualized conception of the "concrete other" (Benhabib, 1992), a vision in which 'the unfortunate, the deprived, are seen to belong (to the community) and schemes to

reduce their material and social exclusion are justified on the grounds that an obligation to care extends to all members of the community' (Sibley, 1998:95). For Sibley the problem with this idea is that some groups do not want to be part of the wider community or only wish to engage on their own terms. For instance Vanderbeck's (2009) ethnographic account of the spaces of social welfare for young Gypsy-Travellers notes how service users were not "passive recipients of *gaujo*[ii] agendas" they made use of the services on offer to "further their own agendas", accepting some aspects and rejecting others (p.32). In the case of Gypsy-Travellers many 'occupy marginal spaces in order to secure their difference' (Sibley, 1998:95). In this sense Sibley views the spaces occupied by Gypsy-Travellers not as "spaces of exclusion" per se but as alternative cultural spaces facilitating "mixing without integration" and thus not having to accept the apparent dominant values. This mixing is of an interdependent, albeit functional, nature relating to the alternative economies of Gypsy-Travellers in which the sedentary society are the customers (see Sibley, 1981, 1998).

Thus there is an existing literature which has sought to problematize notions of childhood (and engagement with education in particular) and social integration in terms of Gypsy-Traveller interaction with the state and social welfare. This literature points to the importance of childhood and social integration in contemporary discourse and how they are constructed as prerequisites for "inclusion" and "empowerment" (Cemlyn, 1995; DCSF, 2008; EUMC, 2006; Ofsted, 2003). Not addressed in this literature however, is the function of the concept of individualization to this discourse. The bulk of the remainder of this paper presents empirical data to suggest that the concept represents a third interrelated and overlapping watchword around which discourse constructs Gypsy-Traveller culture as deficient. The data reveals that welfare professional narratives of Gypsy-Travellers draw upon notions of a strong group orientation, a gendered division of labour and a shorter distance

between childhood and adulthood as impediments to the supposedly empowering and "emancipatory" social process of individualization. It is first necessary however, to elaborate on the concept of individualization.

Individualization

Exponents of the theory of "individualization" (Bauman, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1990) argue that the disintegration of traditional social forms such as class, gender, family and neighbourhood are outcomes of the postmodern (or late modern) era, with the nature of today's contemporary Western European societies conspiring against immutable identities (Bauman, 1999). This individualization of society, characterised by the determinants of ability and performance, implies choices and mobility. It is asserted that identities are a reflexive project, emphasizing their multiple, fluid and unstable nature which Giddens (1991) refers to as the "project of the self". Previously fixed identities centred round family, class and work have become fragmented as the nature of today's society and capital relations act against the formation of stable identities due to the uncertainty and doubt that characterise modern life. Individuals are thus required to construct a coherent sense of self-identity in order to "find" a place for themselves in an increasingly fluid social world (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 2000). Theories of individualization also focus on the changing nature of social solidarities, the opening up of social and geographical space and thus opportunities to develop social relationships beyond place (Allen et al, 2007).

Given the space constraints here it is necessary to focus, albeit briefly, on the assumed impacts of individualization processes in relation to the social forms relevant to the empirical findings presented below: the changing nature of the family, gender relations and childhood. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) outline a discernible general movement away from "living for others" towards "a life of one's

own" on the part of women. As women were increasingly released from direct ties to the family, the female biography underwent an “individualization boost”:

> *‘[I]t is still women who bear the brunt of family tasks, but they more and more display expectations and wishes that extend beyond the family. This begins with the “little freedoms” of a more independent everyday life and leads onto the big words: autonomy, self-realization and “emancipation”’* (2002:56).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) draw attention to profound changes for women across the interrelated spheres of education, work and sex and relationships. The importance of education is emphasized by the way in which it is assumed to have raised a new private and political self-awareness which starts with educationally privileged women and then spreads more widely. Changes in the relationship between motherhood and paid work have resulted in a significant increase in female employment since the 1970s and have resulted in women electing to have their first child later in life and having fewer children than previous generations. Increased educational opportunity then enables access to the labour market and gives women greater autonomy:

> *‘..money allows and educates for greater autonomy than women could achieve while financially dependent on parents or a husband…The availability of money creates the basis for escaping parental control; it is an entry ticket to ‘the world outside’, to experiences and contacts beyond the family, to the things on offer in the leisure and consumption society…to be unemployed and penniless means to remain confined within the family’s internal space, dependent on parents or boyfriend’* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:62).

Similarly, in terms of sexual relations the authors point to a gradual process of liberation from parental control in contrasting the strictly "protected" and "supervised" daughters of the nineteenth century with the clear commands and prohibitions emanating from parents in the mid twentieth century; and, more recently, a "more open and diffuse space" which brings with it more freedoms but also more contradictions, risks and individual responsibility. ‘Without a strict “no” imposed from outside, they must increasingly find their own rules and behaviour’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:69). The importance of changes in sexual relations to the

individualization process is captured by Cisler: ‘Without the full capacity to limit her own reproduction, a woman’s other “freedoms” are tantalizing mockeries that cannot be exercised’ (quoted in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.70).

In examining the impact of the individualization process on childhood it is useful to turn to Elias for a perspective which resonates with the empirical discussion that follows. In *The Civilizing Process* (2000) Elias analyses documentary evidence from the medieval period onwards to show how in previous eras ‘childhood’ represented a much shorter period of an individual’s life. In the modern era however, increased economic and social differentiation, integration and interdependence have placed greater demands on individuals such that ‘emotions become rationalized and “psychologized”’ (Kuzmics, 1988:153) as ‘more people are forced more often to pay more attention to more other people' (Goudsblom, quoted in Mennell, 1990:209). Consequently the distance between childhood and adulthood has gradually increased over many generations as the ‘requirements of societal membership become more demanding, so that childhood requires more time and effort in socialization and education prior to the achievement of adult status through entry into the workforce’ (van Krieken, 2005:42-43). A second impact of childhood relates to the increased demands on adults in terms of their investment of time, effort and emotions in child-rearing making children more ‘demanding and precious at the same time’ (van Krieken, 2005). The evidence and implications of the changing relations between adults and children can be seen in the shift towards negotiation with children as they are increasingly viewed as citizens with rights (Elias, 2000); a shift from a more disciplinarian mode of parenthood characterized by instant agreement to parents’ wishes to ‘family life in the modern era, in which the power of the patriarch is weakened and the rights of women and children are proclaimed’ (Kitchens, 2007:461). Over the long-term this has involved the general reduction of violence in adult-child relations and a growth in the general societal concern with the welfare of

children (Elias, 2000). van Krieken points to the inherent contradiction in these social processes. Namely that the "civilizing" of children and parents as part of the overall, long-term civilizing process has placed greater demands of self control on both parents and children while the process of individualization would appear to counter these trends as parents, particularly Mothers, increasingly desire and expect "a life of their own".

Savage (2000) has criticised the "oversimplified" claims of Giddens, Beck and others for their lack of empiricism. He argues that 'individual identities and relational identities are more closely interrelated than theorists of individualization suppose' (2000:102). In contributing to Savage's critique, the remainder of this paper presents empirical evidence in order to show how a perceived rejection of individualization and social integration – manifested in a strong "we-image" - are used by welfare professionals as reference points in constructing Gypsy-Travellers as being at odds with late modernity.

Gypsy-Travellers and Welfare Professional Discourse

The empirical data presented in this section draws on in-depth interviews conducted with 26 welfare professionals in the North of England in 2007. Interviewees were employed in a range of occupations within local authorities and the voluntary and community sector and were engaged with Gypsy-Travellers on a day-to-day basis. Though the professional backgrounds of interviewees and their engagement with the Gypsy-Traveller community varied all were employed in a social welfare capacity to some degree. These included: Traveller Education Service (TES) Teachers, Children's workers, Family workers, Health workers, Gypsy Liaison Officers and

Housing Officers. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and two hours, and were recorded and transcribed. Ethnographic methods and sources, such as informal discussions and attendance at local authority and voluntary sector meetings, were also used to generate data. Indeed the paper draws on experiences of researching Gypsy-Travellers over the last four years, which have resulted in various engagements and exchanges with welfare professionals, and these also inform the analysis and conclusions presented here. The findings highlight how Gypsy-Traveller lifestyles and culture are constructed in opposition, and as resistant, to the dominant empowering process of individualization, which is perceived to have permeated much of wider society to differing degrees. Related to this construction are overlapping discourses on the perceived shorter distance between childhood and adulthood among Gypsy-Traveller communities and a lack of social integration, which are seen as detrimental to the individualized "project of the self" expressed as a lack of aspiration.

On the Distance Between Childhood and Adulthood

As mentioned above it is widely asserted that the distance between childhood and adulthood has gradually increased over the long-term as society has become more differentiated and complex requiring greater time and effort in the socialisation of children (Elias, 2000). This process was seen to differ quite markedly in the context of Gypsy-Traveller children however as Kathleen[iii], a Traveller Services Manager for a local authority, noted:

> **Kathleen:** "You don't see children playing on there [the site], you know it's like they get to a certain age and their behaviour levels are far in the extreme of what I'd expect from my children. I think they become adults really, really quickly but I think it's also controlled. When you look at all these issues they all can be quite controlled issues can't they? It's the whole thing about keeping everything in control, not letting it all go out and choices and aspirations, it's all controlled and it's all very narrow like

that and there's no sort of break away into anything different and I don't' think it's ignorance at all, I just can't explain it very well."

Kathleen's perception of a quicker transition to adulthood is derived from contrasting the behaviour of Gypsy-Traveller children on a site with that of her own which draws attention to the imposition of the dominant Western concept of childhood on Gypsy-Traveller communities (Vanderbeck, 2005). Implicit in the above quote are narratives of deficient parenthood and a resistance to the individualization process. The notion of control is used to articulate a view that choices for Gypsy-Traveller children are limited by parents and the community, which in turn contributes to a lack of aspirations beyond the traditional roles within the community ("anything different"). These views were gendered and the links between discourses of "anti-individualization" and gender inequality were sometimes explicit in the data.[iv] Reflecting on the notion of a strong group orientation Kathleen continued:

> **Kathleen:** "I mean like the domestic violence issue, I remember one of them saying 'well in our community it's all right to give your woman a slap, we think that's all right' and it's that whole sort of individual understanding of what the community thinks is ok rather than what you think as an individual's ok".

Similarly, Christine (Traveller Services Officer), in reference to Gypsy-Traveller girls, expressed the view that not being able to follow an individualized trajectory and move away from the traditional gendered roles was unfair:

> **Christine:** "If at the age of 13 your childhood's going to be over and then in a few years time you're going to be married with children of your own then I don't think that's entirely fair so I think that's the difference. I think it's all right if it's in the context of being able to do other things, having other choices, because I think it's down to choice a lot of the time, if those choices are taken away from them I think it is unfair"

Again, Christine uses similar reference points to arrive at this viewpoint: a shorter childhood and the implication of a lack of education and choices. Both of these perceptions run counter to the individualization process outlined above in which many women have been able to secure "a life of one's own" through increased education, starting families later in life and the resultant opening up of opportunities within the labour market (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The implicit perception of these professionals was that the progress towards gender equalization in wider society[v], an increasing hallmark of "civilized" society for the Western middle classes, had not been matched in relation to Gypsy-Traveller communities.[vi] There was also an inherent contradiction on views about the shorter distance between childhood and adulthood however. While some respondents, like Kathleen above, emphasized the controlled nature of this transition others drew attention to the responsibility placed on children in terms of everyday decision-making processes. TES Teacher Linda expressed frustration at the power afforded to children in terms of decisions about whether or not to attend school:

> **Linda:** I think it's inevitable, if a child is doing well, I often think of education as a socialisation process, it's something that we…I think we socialise our kids from an early age, this is what you do, go to school and with Traveller families quite often it's 'are they happy?' they ask their kids 'are you happy? Would you like to go to school?' we don't do that, we say 'you're going' when things are going wrong we'll try and sort them out and sometimes it is very frustrating because you want to say 'hang on you're the parent, you're in control here'."

Thus the control of children and their choices is perceived to be exercised in order to prevent a move away from the immediate family and community and constructed as the management of aspirations. Yet, in a similar vein ceding control and affording children a say in decision-making about school attendance is also seen to result in the same outcome: Linda's "frustration" stems from the lack of importance that

parents attached to formal schooling and is based on normative judgements about the benefits that are being foregone. For Linda, more parental control is required to *ensure* educational attendance. While Gypsy-Traveller school attendance is a perennial issue for welfare professionals it is important to acknowledge that many Gypsy-Traveller children do attend school, and many interviewees were encouraged by gradual but discernible shifts in attitudes towards mainstream education.

Group Identity as an Impediment to "Aspiration"

This narrative of early adulthood was typical among interviewees who often expressed the view that a very different socialisation process, outside the formal educational setting and centred on the extended family, was a key factor in this distinction. As Helen, an on-site Health worker for a local authority noted:

> **Helen:** "They go from sucking a bottle to smoking a cigarette almost in the same week!"
>
> **Author:** **"**What sort of implications do you think that has?"
>
> **Helen:** "I think that when they go out into, because they're much more closely part of a family group, in physical proximity, they overhear a lot of adult conversations and they often talk I think in a more, what would be seen as sophisticated or precocious way, they're more direct in their communications with adults because they're used to that, it's not seen among the community as being cheeky, but it is outside, do you get me?"

The strong family orientation and the inclusion of children in more aspects of family and social life were also prevalent in the narratives of other interviewees such as Joe, a Housing officer within a local authority, with experience of community development with the Gypsy community.

> **Joe:** "I've done a couple of horse management schemes for Gypsies in bricks and mortar in terms of keeping the tradition if you like and I think that was one of the first

lessons I learnt there early on was that that, the history and the ties between all age groups and how to approach that, and how to treat people if you're talking, it's almost talking to a child as an adult and an adult as a child, and that's not being derogatory, it's just getting that right you know, because what that does is it helps you understand what's valuable to them"

The freer age mixing among siblings and the extended family among Gypsy-Traveller communities is not a new finding (see Vanderbeck, 2009) but it does resonate with an anti-individualization discourse whereby a strong group orientation as opposed to an individual one can be constructed as at odds with late modernity;[vii] a strong rootedness to family running counter to individualized notions of mobility and the "pursuit of opportunity". This group orientation characterised by strong identifications with the Gypsy-Traveller community, and by extension a disidentification from aspects of non-Gypsy culture viewed as threatening (see Powell, 2008), was often articulated by welfare professionals as being a form of internal social control and seen to permeate parental decisions within families such as whether or not children should continue through the education system beyond primary school. Donna a voluntary sector Family Worker stated:

Donna: "I do quite often come across this and I did have a mother who said to me she would like her children to continue right through but the father insisted that they left at 11 and then helped out with his job with the horses and so on. And the mother explained it to me as you can't step outside the circle, she'd had a mixed upbringing so she had a bit more education, she had one traveller parent one not, she said 'if you do step outside the circle they pull you back in'. Maybe that's a community because it's been despised has turned inwards so it's seen as a threat. Travellers will often call someone who has moved away from their culture 'well they're not really a Traveller any more'".

In this case it is suggested that the rationale for this perceived group control emanates from the threat of outside influence and stigmatization which in turn produces an inward-looking mentality. In this narrative, the group orientation is seen to impede parental decisions on what is best for the child: a formal education. Such views were prominent among respondents and are captured by Patrick's, a TES worker, views on the perceived aversion to secondary education.

> **Patrick:** "I think that's part of the reason why they do pull their children out of school at a young age, I think it is so that they're not influenced by wider society…But I really do feel that's where education comes in…because their understanding is pretty much centred around what happens in the travelling community, they don't really see outside of that ….just a lack, or a fear about a lot of things just because they don't know".

Patrick's view summarizes much of the discourse typical across respondents and articulates the interrelated nature of views on education, aspiration and social integration. The perceived Gypsy-Traveller aversion towards secondary education is viewed as stemming from a fear of pollution or threat of outside influence but this perspective could be "corrected" by more engagement with the mainstream education system (see Vanderbeck, 2005). A narrow socialisation process, closer proximity and contacts with family and the immersion within the Gypsy-Traveller community are seen as being detrimental whereas "opening up" to the influence of wider society would convey knowledge and allay "fears". Implicit in this view is an individualized perspective whereby education leads to a new private self-awareness (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and social integration, which in turn raises aspirations in line with dominant social norms. The degree of parental control over young Gypsy-Travellers, and especially women, was seen to run counter to this. Michael, a Traveller Liaison Officer for a large local authority, put it simply:

Michael: "It's such a big world out there, so many choices for a lot of people but I think if you're a woman in the travelling community a lot of your choices have been taken away".

Yet again, this contradicts notions of the pervasive individualized society in which young women are able to take more control over their everyday lives with decisions affecting them subject to negotiation and compromise with parents. The idea that choices had (or are) been taken away was typical among respondents and many spoke of the "frustrations" of this. For many of the professionals interviewed parental control was not only exercised in relation to choices about education but also with regards to other aspects of social life. John, a council Gypsy Liaison Officer, spoke of the community's protection of young girls.

John: "It's tradition I suppose, it's just the way they are, protective of the girls, although they do allow them to marry at a young age but that's a different issue rather than sort of being able to go in the wide world, but they, it would appear that the education is education for life as a Gypsy Traveller, once they've got to that sort of age."

This view articulated was prevalent amongst interviewees. Young women from the Gypsy-Traveller community were seen to be subject to much more parental control than their counterparts in the wider society. This "education for life" was said to involve taking on responsibility for domestic duties within the household from a relatively young age. The lack of alternative options and social interaction beyond the immediate site and community led some respondents to the conclusion that boredom was rife which in turn was said to contribute to mental health issues.

Christine: "Well I don't know about the men because they'll go off and work, I don't know how they feel in terms of their recreational time but I'd say the women and children are bored but that's just my opinion."

Author: "What do the women on site do during the day?"

Christine: "Clean, cleaning, lot of cleaning and looking after children, I think a lot of them are bored personally."

Helen: "I think it's (depression) an issue here on the site, I've noticed it quite strongly here, kind of empty nest thing, what are they left to do, what is their role in life you know, and if say their family are all in Ireland, which is true of a few people, they don't have a great deal of social contact. And again depression is not seen as something that you admit to easily, it's rather a taboo about it, it's almost a bit of a failing."

Though the importance of family and kinship, derived from the tightly knit immediate community, was valued highly by welfare professionals, there was thus a suggestion that some taboo issues such as depression, were indeed individualized for fear of "internal group opinion" (see Powell, 2008). The dominant discourse of interviewees however, implied that for young girls 'their experience and training reinforced nurturant, affiliative, and domestic skills, not skills that would enable them to assume the responsibilities of heading a family' (Kohen quoted in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:73) and take on an economic role through formal labour market engagement.

The "Problem" of Social Integration

The interpretation that the persistence of a group mentality and a strong we-image, reinforced by cultural autonomy (Sibley, 1986), is an impediment to aspiration and social integration was manifested most clearly with regards to welfare professional perspectives on education, childhood and the gendered division of labour. This ethnocentric view becomes particularly problematic when it permeates official policies on the needs and wants of the Gypsy-Traveller community. Simon, a local authority Gypsy Liaison Officer, was sceptical of welfare professionals and groups acting in a supportive capacity towards the Gypsy-Traveller community in his locality:

> **Simon:** "These people have a right to life and it's only fair that the government does take steps to ensure that they have the same options, but I also think that there is a small danger of cancelling out what has been a sort of, a culture for hundreds and hundreds of years of the travelling community and I think that there's a risk really of rather than listening to what people want, sometimes when [accommodation] assessments are done it ends up telling them what they want."
>
> **Author**: "Are you saying that ideas about what is best for the community are imposed on them sometimes?"
>
> **Simon:** "I think it can be and I think with a lot of the supportive groups that are in place, they're sort of saying 'you should have this so you've got to have it, you're entitled to it so you've got to have it' and you know my feedback from what people say on the sites… they say 'well we're happy as we are, we don't really want to be drawn into this' you know."

The last comment here suggests that some well-intentioned interventions into the lives of Gypsy-Travellers are unwelcome and assimilationist. If perspectives on what is best for 'the community' are derived from normative assumptions based on the empowering potential of dominant social processes such as individualization and social integration, then they may well be inaccurate or misguided. This resonates with the idea of a Gypsy-Traveller preference for "mixing without integration" (Sibley, 1998) cited above: the maintenance of a functional economic relationship with wider society without being integrated into a sedentary mode of existence which, in turn, enables the maintenance of a distinct culture.

A perceived lack of integration was problematic for some welfare professionals and was closely related to the traditional gendered roles which discouraged mixing and socialisation beyond the Gypsy-Traveller community (see Helen's quote below).

> **Helen:** They see self education as dad's responsibility to teach the young men how to be self employed and to go out with them and the young women well they're not going to work in the future outside the community, they're going to be housewives or caravan wives and mothers. So they put their barriers up to integration themselves which is disappointing.

For a minority, this separation had become normalized as a fact of everyday life, as in the case of Martin, a local authority Site Manager.

> **Martin:** Now the view of the Gypsies on people, they just don't want to be involved with them, they want to be here on their own, they want to go about their own business… they don't want people interfering. I can never see it changing, it's always going to be that divide.

For many interviewees the causes of these "parallel lives" were often related to a spatial segregation of Gypsy-Traveller communities arising from local authority policies on Gypsy-Traveller site allocations. The development of sites in marginal locations ran counter to government rhetoric on mixed and sustainable communities; a rhetoric which most professionals were acutely aware of but found difficult to square with the peripheral location of Gypsy-Traveller sites. The comments of Alison, a local authority Housing Officer, epitomize this view.

> **Alison:** There's no feeling of being in the community, there's no shops, you can't walk to a school, you can't…. you know all communities need to feel part of something don't they? And I think well how does that fit in with all the sort of targets and all the things that people are asking you to do, walk to school, be part of the community, all the sort of cohesion, I think well why would you want a site in the middle of nowhere? So I think in terms of access I think there's an access issue because they're not part of anything.

Not at all common was the perspective that this situation suited the Gypsy-Traveller community (Sibley, 1986). For the majority of interviewees social integration and socialisation with wider society were seen as the route to inclusion, empowerment and improved social relations which could challenge stigmatization and improve the collective circumstances of Gypsy-Travellers. Half of professionals were of the view that if Gypsy-Travellers were employed in "professional" occupations (typically citing Doctors and Solicitors) then this would have a "positive" impact on the community and on its image in the eyes of non-Gypsy-Travellers.

The data presented in this section has highlighted the interrelated nature of welfare professional perceptions on Gypsy-Traveller childhood, aspirations and attitudes towards social integration. These perceptions have been shown to form part of an overall narrative which constructs Gypsy-Travellers as being at odds with the perceived dominant and emancipatory process of individualization. In most cases the perception of a resistance to individualization and social integration ignores cultural norms and values and provides the legitimation for the civilizing project against the Gypsy-Traveller community. It should be noted however that issues such as gender inequality and educational opportunity for instance, cannot easily go unchallenged by welfare professionals working within specific policy frameworks which emphasize equality and diversity. It is in the complexity of the interpretation and translation of policy where these aims can be problematic in application to peripheral minorities such as Gypsy-Travellers. The need to sensitize approaches to cultural needs while maintaining a degree of consistency in policy objectives appears to be a particularly problematic task.

Conclusions

The evidence presented here contributes to debates in human geography which have often lacked an empirical grounding. Previous accounts of Gypsy-Traveller engagements with the state and social welfare have drawn attention to binary oppositions and cultural differences which are perceived to limit interaction with "mainstream" society. This paper has argued that Gypsy-Traveller resistance to dominant social processes and the maintenance of a distinct culture and economy, in the face of myriad pressures towards integration and assimilation, are viewed in a negative light by welfare professionals engaged with the community. For welfare professionals, aspects of Gypsy-Traveller culture which run counter to dominant and pervasive societal individualized values are to be overcome: the gendered division of labour and the perceived lack of opportunity for Gypsy-Traveller children being cases in point. Theses discourses appear to support Bauman's claim (1999) that opting out of individualization is *not* on the agenda, as individualization is *the* route to emancipation and the escape from stigma.

The civilizing project against Gypsy-Travellers in Western European societies has a long history, emerging alongside the actual concept of civilization as we know it today. This governance project has itself undergone a civilizing process: from one of brutality and barbarism towards more subtle processes of stigmatization and assimilation in which education and social welfare have a prominent role. Evidence presented here suggests that, for welfare professionals at least, this "civilizing" project against Gypsy-Travellers is to be continued, albeit altered alongside dominant social processes. The discourse of welfare professionals is constructed around empowering notions of individualization and social integration; social processes which appear to be resisted or rejected by Gypsy-Traveller society. Thus, assimilation can be understood as an offer to overcome stigma, presented as an opportunity 'to take their fate into their own hands and make it as good as they can'

(Bauman, 1991:69). In this respect the distinction between narratives of assimilation and empowerment are not so clear cut for welfare professionals (see also Vanderbeck, 2009). For them, the path to empowerment requires the abandonment of cultural values and practices impeding the individualization process, which is essentially the ultimate aim of assimilation. Anything less appears as a rejection of the assimilationist offer (Bauman, 1991). State institutions, including local authorities and social care services, cannot envisage an integrated future for the Gypsy-Traveller community unless they stop "being" Gypsy-Travellers and shift away from those cultural values and practices deemed incompatible with the modern era (e.g. (semi-)nomadism, a traditional and alternative economy, centrality of family relations in socialisation). In this respect the importance of ambivalence in civilizing processes (Burkitt, 1996; van Krieken, 1999) is affirmed: the civilizing offensive against Gypsy-Travellers actually exhibits *decivilized* characteristics in terms of the affect on Gypsy-Traveller culture and lifestyle.

Bauman suggests that, 'cultural strangers are tempted to embrace the liberal vision of group emancipation (erasing of a collective stigma) as a reward for individual efforts of self-improvement and self-transformation' (Bauman, 2001:71). The data presented here indicates that in the eyes of welfare professionals engaged with Gypsy-Travellers the opposite is true: they perceive the rejection of an individualized "project of the self" in favour of a group orientation that brings security to Gypsy-Travellers (Sibley, 1998) where they (welfare professionals) see only exclusion. The perceived rejection of self-improvement and lack of responsibilization (e.g. parental enforcement of formal education) results in Gypsy-Traveller culture being constructed as deficient. Essentially, the wider society cannot understand or accommodate an alternative culture in Bauman's schema as the ambivalent position of Gypsy-Travellers is incompatible with dominant social norms and welfare discourse, which fail to acknowledge or even countenance that a place of exclusion could be a place

of security. As Sibley notes, "living on the edge" is viewed by mainstream culture as a form of deviance which can lead to spatial exclusion and social confinement: ‘peripherality may then be an ambiguous condition, reflecting both the power of the state and the preferences of groups which benefit from peripheral locations’ (Sibley, 1998:5). This ambiguous condition exists alongside the ambivalent position of Gypsy-Travellers in the perceptions of welfare professionals, which in large part reflect those of dominant discourses in wider society. Gypsy-Travellers would appear to occupy particular "sites of exception" not only in terms of their spatial marginalization, but also in relation to both social welfare discourses and dominant social processes; sites where cultural autonomy is maintained but within ‘a kind of spatiality suspended in between “exclusion” and “inclusion”’ (Diken, 2004:99).

A further implication of these findings is that while theorizations of social processes may hold true at a general societal level, there is a need to understand how they differ or need to be revised in application to marginal groups and settings and geography can make a significant contribution here. For traditional Gypsy-Traveller societies the individualization thesis (Bauman, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1990, 1991) appears inadequate in explaining the social relations of the family. The contention that the long-term civilizing process leads to increasing webs of interdependence between different social strata, social integration and a consequent mutual identification between different peoples and classes (Elias, 2000) also requires revision in the specific case of Gypsy-Travellers. Certainly, the increasing complexity of society; the differentiation of economic and social functions; and the corresponding increase in social interdependencies have inevitably impacted on Gypsy-Traveller society. Yet, the *extent* of social integration and mutual identification which follow in Elias' account appear more debatable in terms of Gypsy-Traveller relations and interactions. The difference that space and alternative

cultures make to these social processes, and vice versa, therefore requires detailed investigation. Empirical research on peripheral minorities should pay attention to the effects of social processes on minority culture while emphasizing the complexity of power relations and the subtlety with which power is exercised. Where professional discourse translates into policy and action this could prove damaging to Gypsy-Traveller lifestyles and culture, and to that of other peripheral minorities.

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[i] Discussing the standard of good behaviour in the Middle Ages Elias (2000) notes: 'the concept was an expression and a symbol of social formation embracing the most diverse nationalities...The situation, the self-image, and the characteristics of this society found expression in the concept of *civilité*' (p.47). And he continues: 'The concept epitomizing aristocratic self-consciousness and socially acceptable behaviour appeared in French as "*courtoisie*", in English as "courtesy"' (p.54).

[ii] "Gaujo" is the term used by Gypsy-Travellers to refer to non-Gypsy-Travellers. The spelling varies and the word sometimes appears as "gauje", "gajo" or "gorgio".

[iii] All names of respondents have been changed.

[iv] It is important to note here that welfare professionals are operating within an environment and policy framework which emphasizes equality, diversity and opportunity for all. Where more traditional gender roles are perceived and/or encountered, these can be problematic and difficult to square with policy directives. This should be borne in mind throughout the empirical analysis which follows. Though beyond the scope of this paper, there is also the need for a better understanding of gender equality issues within Gypsy-Traveller society, an issue which appears to be neglected in both academic and policy discourses.

[v] Obviously this process varies greatly from one context to the next, but in general there has been an increase in power for women in Western societies, albeit characterised as an intermediate stage of "no longer" and "not yet" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

[vi] While traditional gender roles are more discernible among some Gypsy-Traveller communities there are differences from one community and family to the next and it is important to note this heterogeneity in attitudes.

[vii] van Krieken (1999) also makes this point in reference to constructions of Australian Aborigines.