

## Book Reviews

### ***Gypsies and Travellers in Housing: the Decline of Nomadism*, by David Smith and Margaret Greenfields.**

**Bristol: Policy Press, 2013.**

In 1988 a Salford local paper described a group of journalists' encounter with two Traveller families who were about to move into the just-built local campsite: "In an exclusive interview with three Traveller women [...] we discovered their thoughts about Salford, their present life here and their hopes for the future". This kind of sensational "exclusivity" was by no means foreign to the public discourse on Travellers of that time, and it reveals the widespread voyeuristic approach toward "discovering" Gypsies and Travellers' "thoughts about Salford", "our" locality. Since the 1968 Caravan Act, state pressure on local authorities to sedentarise nomadic populations has intensified, providing the majority with an additional motivation for that kind of approach: From that moment on, Gypsies and Travellers might well have become neighbours.

Smith and Greenfields' book focuses on that sedentarisation process, adopting an opposite approach. The study aims to "examine the decline of nomadic lifestyles among Britain's Gypsy and Traveller population and 'rehumanise' the debate" (p 1). The thorough and intimate knowledge that the authors gained from analysing the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTAAAs), as well as from interviews and focus groups, provides them with a precious empirical source for avoiding mystification and "dehumanisation" in all forms. Moreover, the rich and well-articulated theoretical and historical framework sheds an accurate light on the empirical analysis and is essential in contextualizing it. These two parts, theory/history and data analysis, provide a solid ground for putting forward a series of informed policy recommendations in the conclusion.

The structure of the book is clear, allowing for a smooth reading. In the foreword, Okely highlights the most meaningful findings of the study against the background of Britain's current political discourses and institutional practices addressing Gypsies and Travellers. The first two chapters

discuss theoretically (Chapter 2) and historically (Chapter 3) the relationships between Gypsy and Traveller populations and their housing conditions. The historical chapter is particularly innovative, as it is one of the first detailed, comprehensive overviews of local histories of Gypsies and Travellers across Britain. For this reason, highlighting more clearly the connections between the theoretical and historical framework and the subsequent empirical part would have given the study a more solid and harmonious shape. Chapter 4 discusses the research design and presents the data on which the study is based. The next five chapters discuss the main finding of the study, including personal motivations for moving into housing (Chapter 5) and the consequences of this on Gypsy and Traveller individuals and families (Chapter 6).

Chapter 7 discusses the relations between Gypsies, Travellers and "gorjers", i.e., non-Gypsies and non-Travellers, focusing on "the complexity of neighbourhood dynamics [and on] the shifting and overlapping nature of kin and friendship patterns at the micro-level" (134). The analysis suggests that, while sedentarisation is rather imposed than chosen, living in proximity with other travelling families is often a preferred option, due to the often-conflictual relations with "gorjers". This may contradict top-down and well-intended assumptions about knowing what communities need. This argument is discussed more in-depth in Chapter 8, entitled "Recreating community", which is an in-depth analysis of micro strategies of adaptation, resistance and resilience. Through a rigorous thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups, the authors discuss several themes including "cultural resilience", which is "the capacity to develop adaptive trajectories and maintain minority lifestyles and practices in spite of adverse changes designed to limit and oppress those lifestyles" (165). The two pivotal analytical dimensions are gender and age, the latter largely discussed in Chapter 9, "Young people in housing". The

accent on young people allows an examination of broader issues such as the role of marriages and inter-marriages in choosing housing solutions (Chapter 8); masculinity as a dominant feature of assertive responses to racism (Chapter 7); and gendered views of their own identity among young Gypsies and Travellers (Chapter 9). The conclusion hosts seven precious policy recommendations, in brief 1) involving Gypsies and Travellers in monitoring processes; 2) reviewing homelessness strategies regularly in order to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers; 3) reconsidering current approaches to “mainstreaming” of services meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers; 4) outreach and support agencies’ engagement with Gypsies and Travellers who move into housing; 5) a consistent and formal monitoring of incidents of racist abuse against Gypsies and Travellers; 6) supporting Gypsy Roma and Traveller History month; 7) actively promoting Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

Thanks to its in-depth empirical analysis, theoretical contextualization, and instructive historical framework, this book is an excellent resource for putting the housing trajectories of Britain’s Gypsies and Travellers in perspective. Yet, I would not recommend it only to those interested in British contexts, but to everyone concerned with social change among urban(ised) communities over the last 40 years. Besides references to other groups such as Australian homeless people (p 139), Finnish Roma (p 163)

and American Roma in California (p 62), the authors discuss conditions of urban marginality that, at least since the 1970s, can be found in several peripheries across Europe and beyond. We are told that “two-thirds of participants across all study areas estimated that their economic conditions had worsened since moving into housing” (p 111) and that consequences of relocation include a “feeling of confinement” and “asthma” (p 113).

One of the most important findings of this study is that “the main ‘push’ factor in the transition from nomadism to sedentarisation has been policy relating to accommodating Gypsies and Travellers on one hand, and legislation concerning the management of unauthorised encampments on the other” (p 158). Since over the last 40 years policies for the urban poor have increasingly moved from offering economic and social provisions to concentrating on individual behaviours and attitudes – following Thatcher’s philosophy that “economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul”<sup>1</sup> – Smith and Greenfields show clearly what the consequences of that move are today. They also add to this a nuanced analysis of the ways in which housed Travellers and Gypsies try to adjust, resist and/or circumvent their new housing conditions, in many cases maintaining their traditional lifestyle.

*This book was reviewed by Giovanni Picker (CEU-IAS)*

***Gypsies and Travellers: Empowerment and Inclusion in British Society, Joanna Richardson and Andrew Ryder, eds.***

**Bristol: Policy Press, 2012.**

Roma often find themselves cast as passive subjects in paternalist social policy or helpless victims of discrimination. The volume edited by Joanna Richardson and Andrew Ryder, in contrast, offers a comprehensive overview of the struggles of British Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller organisations to influence policies affecting their lives and to challenge deeply entrenched forms of racism.

The book focuses on contemporary history often contrasting the policies of the New Labour Government (1997-2010) with those of the present Conservative-led coalition promoting its “Big Society” programme of decentralisation and philanthropy. Covering several aspects of Gypsies’

and Travellers’ lives, the volume is divided into policy areas, namely: housing, health, education, social policy, economic inclusion, justice, history education, participative research and media representation. In addition, the first chapter provides a useful introduction to the contested relations amongst Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers’ identities. The last chapter offers a thorough critique of the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies measured against the principle of inclusive policy development.

All the authors have been involved in the discussed struggles in some form, several of them being of Romani, Gypsy, or Traveller origin. As a result, the studies go well

1 Interview with *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1981.