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## Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and Social Integration: Childhood, Habitus and the "We-I Balance"

Ryan Powell\*

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**Abstract:** »Gypsy-Reisende/Roma und soziale Integration: Kindheit, Habitus und die 'Wir-Ich-Balance'«. Norbert Elias provides a very useful theoretical framework for understanding long-term changes in childhood-adulthood relations at the societal level. Key processes central to this theorization include: the increasing separation of the social worlds of children and adults; the increasing distance between childhood and adulthood; the partial defunctionalisation of the family; the civilizing of parents; changes in the 'we-I balance' towards the 'I'; and the gradual conversion of social constraints into self-restraints. Yet variable trajectories are under-developed in Elias' work: the differing nature of these interrelated social processes for different 'outsider' groups in society were not systematically addressed by Elias. However, this paper argues that Elias' theories on childhood do provide us with a very useful conceptual framework from which to understand these variable trajectories. It applies his theories on childhood and individualization to Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups in Europe and situates them within a long-term established-outsider figuration. The paper argues that the above processes differ markedly for many groups and, coupled with the existence of a very strong group orientation and long-term stigmatization, are central to accounting for their relative lack of social integration. That is, differing processes of childhood and family socialisation are crucial in explaining how Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups have maintained their own group identity and cultural continuity under intense pressures to assimilation and conformity.

**Keywords:** Gypsy-travellers/Roma, Norbert Elias, established-outsiders, childhood, individualization, socialization, social integration.

*Whereas previously people had belonged [...] to a certain group forever, so that their I-identity was permanently bound to their We-identity and often overshadowed by it, in the course of time the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme*  
(Elias 2001, 196-7)

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*In some cultures, the balance [between individual and group] is tipped slightly in favor of the group, for the cultural ideals inculcate a readiness to place the group's benefit above the wishes of the individual.*  
*In other cultures, the individual seems to take precedence over the group. The Rom have, to a large extent, an individualistically oriented culture, but nevertheless the Gypsy group manages to preserve through time.*

(Gropper 1975, 123)

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## 1. Introduction

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In a 1984 lecture in Amsterdam on assimilation and integration<sup>1</sup> Norbert Elias stated that the assimilation of immigrant groups “is a task which takes at least three to four generations” (Elias 1984, 3). For Elias, assimilation refers to “a certain uniformity of conduct,” involving both behaviour and sentiment: immigrant groups gradually and increasingly orientate their behaviour towards that of the dominant groups in society and their prevailing standards of conduct. Integration is closely related to the process of assimilation but involves “being accepted and accepting completely identification with the nation” (Elias 1984, 7). This, Elias suggests, might require “contact with care” in order “to give [the immigrant group] the feeling that they are not despised, because very often they suffer from their outsider situation and resentment” (Elias 1984, 6). This is a rare foray for Elias into the realms of practice, offering some tentative “therapeutic suggestions” on a social problem. It is all the more notable given how close he was to this problem personally and how his membership of a “stigmatized outsider group” as a young Jew in Weimar Germany played a role in shaping his unique sociological way of thinking (Kilmister 2007, 26). The experience of an, at times barbaric, group stigmatisation process inevitably leaves its mark on group members. But what of outsider groups for whom stigmatisation and a perceived inferiority from the outside are almost perennial and universal aspects of their asymmetrical established-outsider relations? For whom “contact with care” is not characteristic of their wider relations? European Roma can be positioned as one such group (Powell and Lever 2016; Thornton 2014). Exploring this issue through a figural lens can shed much light on the peculiar outsider status of Roma and, conversely, aid the extension of Elias’ theorizing on established-outsider relations and the social integration of outsider groups.

In particular, Roma provide an empirical example of the way in which established-outsider relations function at a *range of different spatial scales*, but are shaped by very similar discourses, sentiments and processes. From a micro

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Mennell for bringing this lecture to my attention and for forwarding the manuscript which was transcribed by Cas Wouters.

focus on neighbourhood relations and their figural dynamics à la Elias and Scotson (1994), through to the *transnational relations* and narratives which contribute to the group stigmatisation of Roma across Europe. The example also shows how established-outsider relations can persist over the *very long-term*: the relative lessening of power differentials experienced by many outsider groups over time, through functional democratization,<sup>2</sup> is much less apparent in the case of Roma. Viewing the long-term *group* stigmatisation of Roma as part of an established-outsider figuration therefore maintains a focus on power in analyses and directs attention towards the mechanisms, processes and relations which maintain the sizeable power imbalance characteristic of Roma (outsider) and non-Roma (established) relations. As Elias notes, group stigmatisation is itself a powerful force in maintaining the status quo (1994) and it is a key factor in shaping the relative lack of social integration experienced by Roma. At the same time, the particular case of Roma can contribute to the refinement of the theory of established-outsider relations. The analysis that follows suggests that the response of the stigmatised group is neither “paralysing apathy” nor “aggressive norm and lawlessness” (Elias 1994, xxviii), but rather a strategy of avoidance and retreat into the sphere of the family à la Wacquant’s account of the ghetto (2008a, 2012). Within this strategy the group serves a protective function for its members while also ensuring cultural preservation, underscoring the ambivalence on this particular figuration.

Contemporary research on Gypsy-Travellers/Roma<sup>3</sup> in Europe invariably takes a present-centred and policy-orientated approach in highlighting their ‘social exclusion’ from ‘mainstream’ society (van Baar 2012; Powell and Lever 2016). What is required is more suitable accommodation that should meet their cultural preferences, and facilitate access to services in the realms of health, education and social care; and would better connect them to the formal labour market and address the multiple inequalities that they face (Niner 2002; Greenfields and Smith 2010; Van Cleemput 2004, 2008; Richardson and Ryder 2012). This would bring them into the mainstream fold and facilitate their social inclusion (Cemlyn et al. 2009; Richardson and Ryder 2012). This body of research has made a crucially important contribution to our understanding of the negative *outcomes* of state interventions for Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and highlights the gulf between policy rhetoric and lived realities. More recent research also details positive recent developments in terms of initiatives to

<sup>2</sup> Functional democratization refers to the “long-term, unplanned process of the lessening of the power gradients and social distance between interdependent groups in societies that have become increasingly differentiated” (Kilmister 1998, 151).

<sup>3</sup> I use the term ‘Gypsy-Travellers/Roma’ throughout to denote the difference between indigenous Gypsy-Travellers such as British Romani Gypsies and European Roma (see section two). Many groups in the UK prefer the term ‘Gypsy,’ whereas in some European countries it is considered derogatory.

foster greater interaction and desegregation across the EU (Rostas and Ryder 2012; Ryder, Rostas and Taba 2014); and the multitude of organisations and projects involved all over the continent illustrates a “will to turn the tide for the Roma in Europe” (van Baar 2011a, 1). Although, these transnational developments have been convincingly problematized from a Foucauldian perspective (see van Baar 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2015; on internal group tensions and the ahistoricity of EU policy see also Rostas and Ryder 2012).

However, many contemporary accounts also tend to display in-built moral-political assumptions about what *should* be done in addressing inequalities, with the possibilities of “assimilation with the dominant groups of the host nation or a separatist celebration of their own group ethnicity” (Kilminster 2007, 6) not considered. This is clear from the consistency in language and terminology common to these accounts such as, ‘capacity-building,’ ‘bridging social capital,’ ‘empowerment,’ ‘community cohesion,’ ‘participation’ and ‘social inclusion,’ to cite but a few seemingly omnipresent terms. This present-centred and policy-centric endeavour, which seeks to explicate what should be, has inevitably drawn attention away from the empirical pursuit of understanding what is: “the domination of ought over is” (Kilminster 2007, 7). This, in turn, leads to the taken-for-granted, normative assumption that Gypsy-Travellers/Roma *ought* to be incorporated into mainstream society with individualization (inevitably involving a weaker group orientation) *the route to emancipation* (see Powell 2011). But what of “groups that don’t want in” (Gmelch 1986), or prefer to live on the social periphery? (Sibley 1998).

What has arguably been lacking from research on Roma is an adequate power perspective oriented towards an investigation of *how it is* that Roma can be so vilified over such a long period. An approach which can account for the dynamism of interdependent social relations, as well as the persistence of *very long-term processes* of disidentification and stigmatisation, which have manifested at various times in regulation, control, persecution, expulsion and extermination (Breadley 2001; Cahn and Vermeersch 2000; Lucassen et al. 1998; Mayall 1988; O’Nions 2011; Richardson 2006; van Baar 2011c, 2012). That is, any understanding of the position of Gypsy-Travellers/Roma within contemporary European nations must acknowledge the long history of negative social relations with wider society (including, but not confined to, the state) in seeking to unpick the longer-term and ongoing processes which contribute to their positioning as an inferior group and which shape their habitus (Powell and Lever 2016). Such a standpoint begs two key questions: (i) Why are Roma stigmatised so vehemently and consistently throughout European history? (ii) How have Roma managed to maintain such a degree of relative autonomy and cultural continuity in the face of myriad pressures to conformity and assimilation? That is not to say that nothing ever changes. Rather, Roma *adaptation* to social change and the *reproduction* of specific cultural practices deemed “un-

civilized” by the dominant groups in society suggests a remarkable resistance to, and rejection of, assimilation (Cretan and Turnock 2008; Powell 2011; Sibley 1998) (see also Brenner (1996) and Kilminster (2007, ch. 2) on the notion of “dissimilation” relating to young Jews in Weimar Germany). As Sibley (1987) notes, Gypsies adapt to social transformations in order to *stay the same* rendering static binaries, such as inclusion/exclusion, social care/social control, of little theoretical use (Vanderbeck 2005).

Adopting a figural framework, this paper focuses on the hitherto neglected process of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma childhood and the related We-I balance as central factors in explaining the maintenance of emotional and social distance between Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and the wider society. It first situates Gypsy-Travellers/Roma within a very long-term and peculiar established-outsider figuration (Elias and Scotson 1994) which, it is argued, is pivotal to the elucidation of the nature and maintenance of the persistent power inferiority they experience across Europe. Secondly, Elias’ theories of childhood are applied to Gypsy-Travellers/Roma in arguing that the childhood processes he detailed at the societal level differ markedly for many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups. Key processes central to Elias’ theorization include: the increasing separation of the social worlds of children and adults; the increasing distance between childhood and adulthood; the partial defunctionalisation of the family; the civilizing of parents; changes in the ‘we-I balance’ towards the ‘I’; and the gradual conversion of social constraints into self-restraints. It is posited that the different nature of these group processes, coupled with the existence of a very strong group orientation (we-image) and related (dis)identifications produced and reinforced by a stigmatised outsider status, are central to accounting for the *relative* lack of social integration experienced by many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups. While Elias touches upon these differentiated processes for specific groups (Elias 2001, 2008), they are not systematically addressed in his extensive writings.

However, Elias’ theories on childhood *do* provide us with a very useful conceptual framework from which to understand the variable trajectories of childhood to adulthood characteristic of different social groups in society. “Elias stressed the need, when looking at processes of habitus- and identity-formation over long periods, to think in terms of ‘changes’ in the We-I balance” (Mennell 1994, 194). It is simply (and frustratingly) the case that, despite the breadth and depth of Elias’ writing, he did not go into any great detail on the different childhood trajectories of what he referred to as “successful outsider groups” (Elias 2001). Rather, he appears to leave the door open for others to follow, which is exactly what this article attempts to do. For:

A closer investigation of the educational processes that play a decisive part in the formation of I- and we-images of young people would readily throw more light on the production and reproduction of I- and we-identity over generations (Elias 2001, 210).

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## 2. Gypsy-Travellers/Roma as a Very Long-Term Outsider Group

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Roma are a very diverse group dispersed across Europe, and indeed the wider world, with different dialects and variations in customs (see Hancock 2002; Matras 2014). This can create tensions among Roma activists and academics when speaking of Roma as a collective group. Yet, in long-term view, there are collective aspects of their shared culture, socio-economic characteristics, internal organisation and of their experiences of stigmatisation. More recently, the “Europeanization of the representation of Roma” (van Baar 2008, 2011a, 2015) has also played a significant role in terms of the European governance of Roma as a collective group since 1989. Of course, there are significant differences between the different groups categorised, both within and between different European nations, and in terms of differentiated positioning, levels of integration at the national level and socio-economic function (Gmelch 1986; Lucassen et al. 1998). The differing political contexts of east and west are obviously critical here (Cretan and Turnock 2008; Matras 2000; Fox and Vermeersch 2010; Vermeersch 2012; Vincze and Rat 2013). Yet, despite these variable contexts, it is possible to empirically observe a key commonality across Europe in terms of their *long-term positioning as an inferior, outsider group* (Lucassen et al. 1998). As Matras notes,

it has become fashionable among some civil servants, politicians and academics to emphasize the diversity of Romani groups and even to deny that they have much in common beyond their traditional image in the eyes of the majority population [...] Despite the differences among them, they share a sense of solidarity and common destiny. They are aware of similarities in language, customs and values, and in attitudes to family, work, shame and honour (Matras 2014, 28-9).

In this respect there is a strong sense of *mutual identification* developed from a shared history, language and customs which instils a particular habitus and we-image. This has been expressed in terms of ‘Romani nationalism’ and symbolised in the Romani flag and national anthem developed by the International Romani Union in the 1970s (van Baar 2011a). Mutual identification and a shared history also find expression in the ongoing struggle for Holocaust remembrance (see van Baar 2008, 2011a, 2011b). Persistent stigmatisation and hostility from outside the group also plays a central role in reinforcing the sense of shared culture *inside* and *disidentifications* from those on the outside (Powell 2013; Wacquant 2012). Furthermore, spatial separation (e.g. ghettoisation, educational segregation, mutual avoidance behaviour) supports the maintenance of physical, social and emotional distance (Cretan 2015; Cretan and Turnock 2008; Wacquant 2012; Powell 2013; Vincze and Rat 2013). This shared history and mutual identification among Roma also extends, to differing

degrees, to indigenous Gypsy-Travellers in the UK who share a Romani heritage. That is not to downplay the heterogeneity of the collective group, national differences, or divergent experiences and attitudes (see Discussion section). Rather the purpose here is to explore the reasons underlying the common experiences of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups across Europe in terms of their group stigmatisation and relative lack of social integration.

A configurational perspective is particularly useful in understanding the weak position of Roma within European societies due to its emphasis on power, interdependence and long-term social processes (Powell 2007, 2008; Powell and Lever 2016; Thornton 2014). From the standpoint of established-outsider relations (Elias and Scotson 1994) Roma can be positioned as a peculiar, long-term outsider group for whom social integration has proceeded at an extraordinarily slow pace, especially in comparison to other outsider groups (Powell and Lever 2016). Given the long, long history of stigmatization, marginalization and hostility any approach to investigating the relations between Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and the wider society must account for the persistence of attitudes and sentiments which construct the former as inferior: as of lesser human worth. This demands a level of detachment from present-centred concerns (see Elias 1994, xxi) and an orientation that goes beyond seeking explanations in economic, cultural or ethnic terms towards a consideration of human relations ‘in the round.’ For example, van Baar notes how the treatment of Roma under Nazism in Europe “was not due to socioeconomic and cultural mechanisms of exclusion, but simply to a group characteristic” (2008, 384). A focus on power and interdependence in terms of the way in which groups are bonded together in particular configurational contexts is therefore central. As Elias notes in his introductory essay to *The Established and The Outsiders*:

the ability of one group to pin a badge of human inferiority on another group and to make it stick was a function of the specific figuration which the two groups formed with each other...At present one often fails to distinguish between, and relate to each other, group stigmatisation and individual prejudice. In Winston Parva, as elsewhere, one found members of one group casting a slur on those of another, not because of their qualities as individual people, but because they were members of a group which they considered collectively as different from, and as inferior to, their own group (Elias 1994, xx).

At both the UK and European levels all Gypsy-Travellers/Roma are associated with the “minority of the worst” of that group informed by stereotypes reproduced through ‘blame-gossip’ (Elias and Scotson 1994), which in the contemporary period operates at a higher level through the rapid dissemination of media representations and images (Richardson 2014). Such a perspective is able to account for the succession of barbaric responses and policies enacted against Gypsy-Travellers/Roma across time and space. Historically – from sixteenth century European monarchs to Nazism and Eastern bloc communism – these have included: persecution; expulsion; extermination (Holocaust);

programmes for the sterilization of Roma women; and the forced removal of Gypsy children from their parents (Brearley 2001; Lucassen et al. 1998; Matras 2014; Mayall 1988; Jordan 2001). More recently Roma populations have been subjected to: regulation; sedentarisation; the problematization of their mobility; enforced segregation; criminalization; harassment; racism; and ghettoization (Clark 2014; van Baar 2011a; Cretan 2015; Marinaro 2003, 2015; O’Nions 2010, 2011, 2014; Picker 2010). Furthermore, these practices are discernible across nation-states with Roma increasingly seen as a European minority (van Baar 2011a). While the precise nature and techniques of governance and control have altered over time alongside wider social and technological shifts (van Baar 2015), the predominance of the perception that Gypsy-Travellers/Roma are inferior has remained relatively static (Powell and Lever 2016). Indeed, it has been argued that efforts towards integration and Roma ‘inclusion’ at the level of the European Union have actually produced negative unintended consequences in the form of ‘backdoor nationalism,’ whereby “old nationalist ambitions” are more openly expressed in some Central and Eastern European countries (Fox and Vermeersch 2010). Similarly, what appear as genuine efforts to address aspects of Roma marginalization at the national level in western Europe have been abandoned in the face of fierce public pressure and hostility (Marinaro 2003).

Identification, “a cognitive and emotional process in which people increasingly come to experience others as similar to themselves” (de Swaan 1997, 105), is less apparent among relations between Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and wider society. Rather, *disidentification* predominates (de Swaan, *ibid*). These sentiments have led to fears and strategies of mutual avoidance on the part of both established and outsiders: Gypsy-Travellers/Roma in a bid to avoid harassment, contamination and to preserve cultural practices central to their we-image; and majority society in avoiding contamination and interaction with an imagined deviant, lazy, criminal, ‘uncivilized’ and inferior group (Powell 2007, 2013). Praise-gossip and blame-gossip maintain this position through the power of group controls and sentiment with group members fearing the loss of internal group opinion, which serves to ensure avoidance behaviour (Elias and Scotson 1994). To paraphrase Elias on the expulsion of the Huguenots from France: “there is no ill that is not laid at the Roma door” (cited in Goudsblom and Mennell 1998, 21). Indeed, elites and politicians engage in the mobilization of disidentifications in seeking popular support (Cretan 2015; Nacu 2012; Picker 2010; Sigona 2003). The nature of these relations – the way in which the two groups are bonded together – has produced a peculiar functional interdependence historically based on the traditional economic practices of Gypsy-Travellers/Roma which require the wider population as customers (Gmelch 1986; Okely 1983; Sibley 1981). That is, “work provides the principal, and often exclusive, environment where Roms have contact with non-Roms” (Mat-

ras 2014, 58). Sibley (1998) calls this “mixing without integration” and argues that Gypsies adapt in order to stay the same (Sibley 1987). In this sense the history of relations can be seen as a long-term, dynamic struggle to ensure cultural continuity, and the remarkable success in doing so points towards a particular habitus reproduced through the generations.

For Elias the pace of change in the social habitus of individuals is extraordinarily slow in comparison to relatively rapid shifts in integration, but “resistance in the name of the tribe cannot succeed in the long run” (Elias 2001, 214). In the case of Gypsy-Travellers/Roma however, we-identity can be seen to be reinforced due to their perennial outsider status, stigmatisation and power inferiority, which means that *the group serves a particular protective function* in the face of external, hostile and threatening pressures to conformity. This process is further accentuated by the long-term spatial separation of many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups and the predominance of an inter-generationally transmitted oral history (Hancock 2002; Okely 1983; Powell 2013; Powell and Lever 2016). The process of childhood is central to the reproduction of such a strong we-identity and to the formation of habitus. Yet Roma childhood has received little attention in accounts of Roma integration, beyond some important work on attitudes towards education, educational access and segregation (Igarashi 2005; Jordan 2001; Liégeois 1987; O’Nions 2010; Ryder, Rostas and Taba 2014; Vanderbeck 2005). The remainder of this paper focuses on this neglected area with reference to Elias’ theories on the process of childhood and established-outsider relations.

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### 3. Norbert Elias and Long-Term Childhood Processes

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Elias details six key and interrelated processes in expounding general, long-term changes in the process of childhood within western European nations: the increasing separation of the social worlds of children and adults; the increasing distance between childhood and adulthood; the partial defunctionalisation of the family; the civilizing of parents; changes in the ‘we-I balance’ towards the ‘I’; and the gradual conversion of social constraints into self-restraints. They are integral to the process of civilization (Elias 2000) but are also developed and detailed, in characteristically consistent fashion, in relation to other themes addressed by Elias (Elias 2001, 2008a, 2008b). These six processes<sup>4</sup> are refer-

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<sup>4</sup> The first three of these processes are each discussed in turn under specific sub-headings: the increasing separation of the social worlds of children and adults; the increasing distance between childhood and adulthood; and the partial defunctionalisation of the family. The civilising of parents is discussed in relation to the examples provided at the end of that section. The remaining two processes – changes in the ‘we-I balance’ towards the ‘I’ and the

enced in outlining Elias' unique perspective and are then set against evidence on Gypsy-Traveller/Roma childhood in illustrating how the latter diverges from the dominant, general trend.

As is often the case with Elias' sociology, his approach to childhood differs markedly from the convention that was prominent at the time he wrote his essay on *The Civilising of Parents* (2008a [1979]). In it he is critical of the work of the influential French historian Philippe Ariès who locates the "discovery of childhood" between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Elias' *sociogenetic perspective* it is clear that this process is ongoing. He writes:

The discovery of childhood is ultimately the discovery of its relative autonomy – in other words, the discovery that children are not little adults, but only gradually become adult in the course of an individual social civilizing process which differs according to the developmental state of the society's pattern of civilization (Elias 2008a, 15).

Childhood, then, should be viewed as a process bound up with shifting power relations and the changing position of children within society. It gradually changes in accordance with the growing demands of societal membership (placed on both children and parents/adults) within an increasingly complex, differentiated and interdependent society. As we shall see however, Gypsy-Traveller/Roma childhood has retained a more family-oriented character relative to that of the wider society due to: the protective function of the group in the face of external hostility and stigmatisation; its crucial importance in the transmission of culture and oral history; and its function in preparing young people for their role in that continuing, intergenerational process.

### 3.1 The Separation of the Social Worlds of Children and Adults

As Elias extensively details in *The Civilizing Process*, long-term changes in behavioural expectations, driven by advancing thresholds of shame, embarrassment and repugnance in the psychic make-up of individuals, have dictated that many matters of social life should be kept from the public sphere, and therefore children (Elias 2000). Today, the very mention of sexual relations in the company of young children can instil shame and embarrassment for example. Yet, in previous eras sexual relations were a far more public matter and only became more and more private in conjunction with "the specific standard of shame which slowly became predominant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," and which necessitated that "everything pertaining to sexual life was concealed to a high degree and dismissed behind the scenes" (Elias 2000, 150). Previously there was no "segregation of sexuality in social life" and it

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gradual conversion of social constraints into self-restraints – are broader trends and cut across the discussion of the aforementioned processes, and that of the following section.

was therefore natural for children to be familiar with such matters. The desire and need for the segregation of children and adults in particular contexts and on particular taboo subjects developed in tandem with standards of shame: adults became gradually conditioned over generations to adhere to this secrecy in the presence of children (Elias 2000).

Changes in living arrangements provide a very clear and observable example of the increasing separation of the social worlds of adults and children (Elias 2008a). It was not until the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century that specific children's rooms emerged in the homes of wealthy households, and later still that this arrangement spread to the lower strata of society. Until then children had slept together with their parents. However, "slowly during the early modern period, children were removed from the adult world and their lives isolated on their own island of youth within society" (Elias 2008a, 24). This separation of social worlds also extends into the period of 'adolescence,' with intergenerational mixing gradually decreasing over time alongside changes in the structure of the relationship between children and adults. In sharp contrast to the child of earlier eras then, in the current period:

Biologically mature people remain socially immature. They are boys and girls, teenagers, callow youth or whatever they may be called, no longer children and not yet men and women. They lead a separate social existence, having a 'youth culture' – a world of their own which diverges strikingly from that of adults (Elias 2001, 123).

In Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups however, this separate social existence is much less apparent given the far greater degree of intergenerational mixing among siblings and extended family members from birth (Jordan 2001; Liégeois 1987; Okely 1983; Matras 2014). Moreover, where families are resident on designated sites or camps this living arrangement makes generational segregation virtually impossible in any case: "Babies are rarely more than four feet away from some older person [...] and are kept in the midst of daily activities, exposed to a continuous stimulation of sights, sounds and smells" (Gropper 1975, 132). The extended family is the primary site of socialization and this is the task of all members. Emphasis is placed on learning through participation and family-based learning is crucial to cultural continuity and the intergenerational transmission of an oral history (Hancock 2002; Jordan 2001; Liégeois 1987; Okely 1983). Thus, in Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups:

children participate in virtually every social activity within the family with the exception of sex. They are present not only at meals and celebrations but also during disputes. They attend funerals and wakes [...] they are not asked to leave when the adults are arguing, negotiating, drinking or mourning. It is exceptional for children to be excluded from conversations or for their daily routine to be regulated any differently from that of the adults (Matras 2014, 52).

Although participation in formal schooling has increased in recent years, many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups express an aversion to institutionalised education beyond puberty, especially for young girls. This relates to: experiences of bullying and racism (from pupils and teachers); fears over moral contamination from wider society; and the association of the broader youth cohort with promiscuity, drugs and other taboo behaviours deemed shameful to young Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and their families (Okely 1983; Matras 2014; Powell 2008). More fundamentally, formal schooling can be seen as at odds with Gypsy-Traveller/Roma culture and a threat in terms of an external influence on children, with the potential to dilute customs and traditions (Matras 2014; Powell 2011). The absence of a formal secondary education for many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma children marks a key difference in the socialization process (Vanderbeck 2005) and the shorter distance between childhood and adulthood.

### 3.2 The Growing Distance between Childhood and Adulthood

As the social worlds of children and adults gradually become ever more separate the distance between childhood and adulthood simultaneously increases (Elias 2000). Over the long-term as societies become more complex – driven by urbanization, the division of social functions, social differentiation and specialization – there is a corresponding complexity in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Over many generations, 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, 42-3). Even in the relatively short timeframe (in Eliasian terms) of the last 100 years this process is clearly discernible when we consider: the raising of the school leaving age; the mass expansion of higher education; and the countless age restrictions and social prohibitions introduced for young people negotiating their way to adulthood. Over the long-term “more people are forced more often to pay more attention to more other people” (Goudsblom, quoted in Mennell, 1990, 209), which places psychological pressures on individuals as they must control their affects and comport themselves differently in different settings and situations: emotions become rationalized and ‘psychologized’ (Kuzmics 1988, 153).

In the development of individual self-steering, the civilising of individual people, an intermediate stage of ten to twenty years now intervenes between childhood and social adulthood – an unusually long period of schooling and learning. The lengthening of this intermediate stage has resulted, among other things, in a divergence between biological maturity and social adulthood. Formally, this intermediate stage is used for acquiring the extensive specialist knowledge a person now needs to fulfil the functions of a normal adult in these societies. Considered less formally, this long learning period of each in-

dividual person also includes the development of a capacity for self-steering which is highly complex, variable, stable and many-sided (Elias 2008b, 12).

The gradual increase in this transition period has not been as lengthy for many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma children, especially those who do not continue in education beyond primary school. Rather, their preparation for adulthood involves a directness not usually seen in contemporary society. Elias gives the example of Eskimo children “in the time when Eskimos still lived undisturbed by the expanding influence of industrial societies” where “a developmental line from children’s games to adult practices” could be discerned (Elias 2008a, 30) – a relatively less autonomous childhood. This developmental line is more discernible in Gypsy-Traveller/Roma childhood and relates to the particularly marked gendered division of labour.

From the age of eight to ten, depending upon the child’s demonstrated abilities and inclinations, the adults increasingly include the youngsters in the ordinary adult routines. Boys are invited to accompany their fathers and male relatives on economic enterprises [...] the girls take over household duties (Gropper 1975, 138).

This division of labour reflects imbalances in power between men and women within Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups, but also supports cultural continuity and the preservation of internal social organisation (see Casey 2014). For example, pre-marital sexual activity is a strict taboo for young women which would bring shame on them and their family and lower their status in the eyes of the group. In comparison, it would have no impact on the status of a single young man and his family (Matras 2014). The behaviour of young girls is therefore regulated by group mechanisms of control (e.g. removal from formal education post-puberty; only being able to leave the home in the company of other Gypsy-Traveller/Roma girls) and also discourages contact with those outside the group (Gropper 1975; Matras 2014). Blame- and praise-gossip, and a different line of childhood development and socialization for boys and girls, help maintain these taboos on social contact.

### 3.3 The Partial Defunctionalisation of the Family

For Elias, the fact that a significant degree of the education and socialisation of children for adult life now takes place outside the family is “a symptom of the partial defunctionalisation of parents” (2008a, 31).

Everything points towards how little the family is an autonomous figuration within the surrounding figuration of the state society. Indeed, throughout this century the latter has acquired more and more social functions which used to fall to family units (Elias 2008a, 36).

The gradual development of the modern state bureaucracy and welfare arrangements has decreased the reliance on the family over the long-term (e.g.

early years provision, education, social security and social care). Family members increasingly lead individualized lives and follow their own individual paths throughout the life-course.

More than ever before, all family members tend to live a life for themselves as individuals, to take on tasks and develop human relationships independently of other members of the family (Elias 2008a, 38).

This process of the partial defunctionalisation of the family is even more partial in application to Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups. The family is central to the internal social organisation of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma society. As noted, the extended, intergenerational family grouping performs specific and important functions in terms of socialization, cultural transmission and protection from stigmatisation. The latter further reinforces that function as external hostility can result in the retreat into the sphere of the family made possible through spatial separation and confinement – *a la Wacquant's ghetto* (Wacquant 2010, 2012; Powell 2013; Powell and Lever 2016). Many Gypsy-Travellers/Roma stay within their extended family groupings their whole lives and young women are expected to join their husband's extended family group on marriage. Of the general trend in the defunctionalisation of the family Elias notes:

The decisive change which occurred in we-identity and in the corresponding emotional orientation towards the family is largely due to the fact that the family is no longer inescapable as a We-group (Elias 2001, 203).

Yet for Gypsy-Travellers/Roma emotional orientation towards the family and the We-group as the primary identification unit is instilled from birth. This remarkably strong group orientation is maintained and facilitated by emotional, social and spatial separation from the wider society reinforced by a long-term, stigmatised outsider status. The struggles of Romani history, symbolised in the contemporary and ongoing struggle for Holocaust remembrance, reflect the Roma “as a ‘people without history’ in the narratives of the west” (Trumpener, cited in van Baar, 2008, 374).

The resistance to the merging of one’s own survival unit with a larger unit – or its disappearance into that unit – is undoubtedly due in large part to a particular feeling. It is the feeling that the fading of a tribe or state as an autonomous entity would render meaningless everything which past generations had achieved and suffered in the framework and in the name of this survival unit (Elias 2001, 222-3).

The sharp contrast in the childhood processes discussed within Gypsy-Traveller/Roma childhood can be usefully illustrated through the perspectives of welfare professionals working with and for the Gypsy-Traveller/Roma

community. The following is a quote from a Health Worker<sup>5</sup> working on a Gypsy-Traveller site, which neatly captures the distinction between ‘Western,’ normative conceptions of childhood and that of some Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups (see also Powell 2011; Vanderbeck 2005).

They go from sucking a bottle to smoking a cigarette almost in the same week! [...] 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.

The exaggerated and emphasized pace of the transition to adulthood for Gypsy-Traveller/Roma children informs of how far this deviates from expectations and is related directly to the strong family orientation and intergenerational mixing. The *civilising of parents* that Elias details in which the power differential between children and adults decreases is less apparent, as Gypsy-Traveller/Roma children are relatively more powerful in their relations with adult group members from the outset (Gropper 1975).

Secondly, the quote below from a British Romani Gypsy woman<sup>6</sup> articulates differences in each of the three processes discussed through an encounter with social services.

I'm actually *frightened of the social services* [laughs] [...] because my Mum and Dad had a run in with them once. My little brother's got ginger hair and he gets sun burnt really easily, but my Mum's always whacking on cream and we had the social services down to us and they were very like mardy<sup>7</sup> about it [...] then like they went into, you know we've got these little coal fires, and [the social worker said] 'you should have this round and that round,' but Mum were trying to explain that *these babies had been always brought up with it*, so they know not to touch it [...] And in such a small confined place like a trailer or a wagon you can see what everybody's doing all the time, *there's no privacy* [...] more or less a hand's reach away from each other.

The respondent notes the “small and confined” space of the trailer and the lack of privacy. The differing conception and experience of childhood is expressed in the social worker’s anxieties over the presence of the “little coal fire.” While the social worker sees danger and insists on safety precautions, the Gypsy mother is wholly confident in the group socialization process, which means Gypsy children have a relationship with fire from a much earlier age and are very much prepared for it (“they know not to touch it”). And, in any case, should they deviate

<sup>5</sup> This quote is taken from a transcript of an interview with a Health Worker working on a Gypsy-Traveller site in West Yorkshire, UK in 2007 (see Powell 2011).

<sup>6</sup> This quote is taken from a transcript of an interview with a Gypsy woman conducted in Lincolnshire, UK in 2006 (see Powell 2008).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Mardy’ is a Northern English word meaning ‘moody’ or ‘sulky.’

from this expectation then constant intergenerational mixing means that an adult family member is virtually always on hand to step in. The fear of social services expressed at the start of the quote is based on direct experience. Hostile and antagonistic encounters with state bureaucrats, officials and services are common throughout Roma history and continue across Europe (Cemlyn and Briskman 2002; Marinaro 2003; Nacu 2012; Picker 2010). Consequently, many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups engage with state and welfare services on their own terms (Sibley 1998; Vanderbeck 2009). In this regard, the long history of negative relations with the state apparatus – from everyday harassment and prejudice through to the barbarism of genocide and the forced removal of children – mean that the partial defunctionalisation of the Gypsy-Traveller/Roma family is much less discernible: the nation-states of Europe have historically done little for Gypsy-Travellers/Roma. It is certainly the case that this process has not developed to the extent it has among the wider society, evidenced by the fact that access to, and take up of, key public services is a consistent policy concern (Cemlyn 1995, 1998; Liégeois 1987; Richardson and Ryder 2012).

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#### 4. Ambivalent Outsiders and Weak Integration: The Centrality of the We-I Balance

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The preceding discussion has highlighted distinct differences in the process of childhood for Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups relative to the dominant, long-term trends within European societies detailed by Elias. Yet it certainly does not follow that Elias' framework is of little use in understanding the divergent experiences and dynamic positioning of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups. On the contrary, this section argues that Elias' concept of the we-I balance is central to explaining the different nature of childhood interdependencies, patterns and trends observed within Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups; both in comparison to the wider society and internally over time. Within this context, the relatively weak level of social integration and how this may be changing in the current phase are also touched upon.

Within his extensive writings Elias does refer to a few "special cases" where a "pre-state society survives embedded in a state society while preserving a good part of their pre-state form" (Elias 2001, 215); groups for whom the we-I balance still tilts towards the we despite their encapsulation within the larger, dominant state society. Writing in 1987, Elias cites old Christian sects in North America and the American mafia as fairly successful outsider groups, where the group still retains a strong function for its members (Elias 2001). To differing degrees, most such groups also perform a function for wider society. The most important factor that these groups have in common however is:

the greater, often lifelong permanence of many human relationships, if not all, and a we-I balance in which the we has clear preponderance over the I and which often demands the unconditional subordination of the I to the we, of the individual to the we-group (Elias 2001, 216).

It is this feature of many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups which has enabled their preservation and cultural continuity, despite the persistence of asymmetric power relations and assimilatory hostility from wider society. The maintenance of a distinct Gypsy-Traveller/Roma culture over the long-term is dependent upon the reproduction of a very strong we-image. In general terms, the we has the upper hand over the I resulting in a strong group orientation and the maintenance of the extended family as the primary unit of identification throughout the life-course. For each of the general childhood processes detailed above, the divergence within Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups plays an important function geared towards the inculcation of a particular habitus in ensuring the continued survival of the group and its way of life. Intergenerational mixing ensures immersion in the activities and practices of the group; the preference for family socialization and an aversion to secondary school limits interference from the outside; the shorter distance between childhood and adulthood involves a more direct preparation for the expected family-centred and gendered roles of adult life; and an engagement with the state and public services on their own terms, reinforced by experiences of oppression and hostility, guards against a creeping defunctionalisation of the family. All of these differences feed into the creation and cultivation of a very strong feeling of attachment to the we-group and a disidentification from those on the outside. The importance of the long-term, stigmatised outsider status of Gypsy-Travellers/Roma within European societies cannot be over-emphasised here. Indeed, understanding Gypsy-Travellers/Roma as a long-term, stigmatised outsider group and adopting a dynamic established-outsider configurational perspective enables the identification of that outsider status as itself a critical element in shaping contemporary processes and relations.

The intergenerational process of cultural transmission proceeds in the context of the social and physical marginality of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups, which often translates into enforced spatial separation (e.g. ghettoization, educational segregation). Separation means that the psychologisation of individuals' image of other people – an image permeated more by observation and experience (see Mennell 1995) – is a relatively weak process as face-to-face contact with Gypsy-Travellers/Roma is often limited for the vast proportion of the majority society (see de Swaan 1995, 1997). The long-term and deep-rooted stigmatisation of Gypsy-Travellers/Roma thereby shapes relations with wider society: widespread external hostility informs avoidance behaviour and cements the protective role and solidarity of the we-group. External pressures towards conformity and assimilation serve to reinforce the we-image of the

group for, “where competition with outsiders is enough to pose a threat to the security of people’s way of life, emotional identification with one’s own unit is likely to be strong” (Mennell 1995, 188-9). In short, *the differing childhood processes geared to producing a particular we-image in Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups are intrinsically linked to the long history of stigmatisation and inferior treatment*: sociogenetic and psychogenetic processes are interdependent (Elias 2000). The long-term product of this often conflictual figuration is a we-I balance wherein the I is more often subordinated to the we, in comparison with the dominant trend in wider society.

Yet unlike the apathetic or aggressive responses of outsiders in Elias and Scotson’s (1994) account of Winston Parva, the figural dynamics for Gypsy-Travellers/Roma have led to mutual avoidance, spatial and social separation and internal group cohesion built on the extended family (and wider group) and a strong we-image. This strategy, shaped by the peculiar, long-term established-outsider figuration, helps protect the group from external stigma and ensures the intergenerational transmission of cultural traditions. In a footnote, Elias states that “one of the factors that can modify the impact of their situation upon members of outsider groups is the possession by such a group of a cultural tradition of its own” (1994, xxix). The case of Gypsy-Travellers/Roma suggests that spatial separation can be a further ambivalent factor in mitigating the impact of the group stigmatisation process (see Wacquant, 2008a, 2012).

This argument has been made with reference to *long-term general trends* in sentiments and practices towards Gypsy-Travellers/Roma in Europe. Within that long-term trend however, many counter-trends, differing patterns and civilising and decivilising processes can be observed across both time *and* space. It is also important to note that Gypsy-Travellers/Roma have always “intermingled” to a degree, with coexistence relatively more harmonious at times (Lucassen et al. 1998). And not all Gypsy-Traveller/Roma lives are characterised by extreme stigma and marginality: there are different relations with wider society and different levels of integration in different temporal and spatial contexts. Yet, today, even where Roma are relatively ‘rich’ and reside in conventional sedentary dwellings in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, hatred and stigmatisation are never far away (Cretan 2015). Moreover, while the communist period is sometimes seen to be a period of greater social integration for Roma in eastern Europe (Cretan and Turnock 2008), this is of course *relative* to the pre- (genocide) and post-communist (segregation and ghettoization) contexts in many of those nations. Gypsy-Travellers/Roma are, in the main, still treated as a subordinate, inferior *group*. The images from Naples in 2008 of “sunbathers continuing as normal with a day at the beach despite the bodies of two Gypsy girls who had drowned being laid out on the sand nearby” (Hooper 2008) are a powerful reminder of that.

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## 5. Conclusions

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This article has argued that childhood, habitus and the we-I balance are central to explaining the maintenance of a separate and distinct Gypsy-Traveller/Roma culture. Yet these processes must be understood in the context of a very long-term established-outsider figuration, which functions at a range of spatial scales and produces remarkably similar dynamics in different contexts. The *process* of childhood has received little attention from scholars researching the social integration of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups. Yet Elias' framework illuminates its centrality to processes of identity-formation – of the development of I- and we-images and the we-I balance. Alongside a long-term, stigmatised outsider status they are pivotal to any understanding of social integration. The example of childhood shows quite clearly how the sociogenesis of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups shapes the psychogenesis of its group members. The relatively weak level of social integration experienced by many Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups across Europe cannot be understood without reference to these long-term, intergenerational processes.

The directness of the preparation of many young Gypsy-Traveller/Roma children for adult life differs markedly from that of the dominant ‘Western’ childhood process. Yet this process too has undergone gradual changes in tandem with the changing structure of relations, brought about by the increasing differentiation and complexity of society. While the attitudes and public sentiments prevalent within wider society seem remarkably consistent, Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups themselves *have* changed. They have had to. These changes are ongoing of course. To list just a few examples: there is a growing movement for Roma minority representation involving participation in democratic structures at the EU level (van Baar 2011a); it is more and more difficult for Gypsy-Travellers/Roma to pursue the traditional, flexible and informal occupations they prefer (Greenfields, Ryder and Smith 2012; Powell 2013; Richardson and Ryder 2012); more children now attend formal education institutions through to secondary school (Foster and Cemlyn 2012; Matras 2014); the number of women participating in the labour market is increasing (Greenfields, Ryder and Smith 2012); and Roma women are increasingly involved in Roma activism, aided by the plethora of organisations operating Roma-related projects across Europe (van Baar 2011a).

The continuation of this handful of trends alone would indicate a gradual shift in the orientation of Gypsy-Traveller/Roma (and particularly women (see Casey 2014)) towards wider society, and a shift in the we-I balance towards the I. This remains to be seen however, given the slow pace of changes in social habitus and the long-term persistence of a strong we-image. It is, in any case, too early to assess the longer-term impact of these recent developments. It would be tempting to suggest that we are in the midst of a transitional period

for Gypsy-Traveller/Roma integration. Yet, considering the history of ingenuity and adaptation in the preservation of their distinct culture in the face of persistent group stigmatisation, this period will arguably be a very gradual and ambivalent one. Whatever the trajectory, Elias' theory of established-outsider relations provides us with a dynamic framework that can be operationalised at a range of spatial scales in understanding these shifting relations across time and space. Implicitly, Elias' processual framework also provides a much needed critique of the present-centred and policy-centric accounts which tend to predominate in much contemporary research on Gypsy-Travellers/Roma.

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