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The trouble with culture: A speculative account of the role of gypsy/traveller cultures in 'doorstep fraud'

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Introduction

Criminology has a long history when it comes to locating the causes of criminality in aspects of human identity. As is well-known, Lombroso (1884/2006: 175) claimed that for the biologically inferior savage and atavistic races, including Negroes, Gypsies, Aborigines, and Southern Italians, 'crime is not the exception but almost a general rule'. As with habitual delinquents, various physical stigmata could be discerned which had a behavioural corollary in immorality and criminality. Lombroso (1897) also outlined the parameters of the 'race and crime debate' by identifying Negroes as disproportionately responsible for the high homicide rate in the US compared with Europe. Yet, referencing the abject material conditions experienced by African Americans in the post-slavery period, Lombroso also acknowledged their longer imprisonment terms which he attributed to a discriminatory justice system. More problematically, Lombroso talked of the negative biological traits of shiftlessness,

carelessness, primitivism, callousness, and a greater willingness to confess to criminal activity.

Ideas such as the latter ones are now easily dismissed but arguably 'new racism' has simply substituted culture for biology in determining putative hierarchies of inferiority and superiority (Barker, 1981). Critical criminologists, whose intellectual project has been to advance social justice, eschew 'individual' explanations of criminality, privileging the impact of structural inequalities on patterns of crime and criminality and making visible the ideological rationales and means by which only certain forms of lawbreaking, including that most often committed by minority ethnic individuals, comes to the attention of law enforcement agencies (McLaughlin, 2011; Ritchie, 2011).

In the UK discussions of (typically black) culture and criminality have engaged pundits and journalists while vexing academics (Sveinsson, 2008; Starkey, 2011). Hall et al. (1978), Lawrence (1982), and Gilroy (1987) have refuted the notion that

crime is inherent to some pathological essence of subhuman, alien cultures, whose savagery prevent them from appreciating civilized British law. Highlighted instead is the racist criminalization of minority ethnic communities by the state during political economic crisis and their active resistance to authoritarian law and order strategies. Critical race scholars additionally seek to unmask how racialized practices are embedded in laws and policies in liberal democracies which claim colour-blind legal neutrality but where white privilege is upheld (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). The key objective of this paper is to make the case for the *empirical study of culture and ethnicity* and its role in criminality *alongside* structural inequalities and legal bias.

Why Culture and Ethnicity *Might* Matter

Culture is notoriously difficult to pin down and the disciplines of anthropology and sociology have engaged in their own self-criticism of the concept (Brightman, 1995; Gans, 2012). In its early conceptualizations stable systems of symbols and

meaning which regulated behaviour through shared values, beliefs, norms, customs, rituals, taboos, morals, laws and world-views, were foregrounded by anthropologists (Tylor, 1871; Boas, 1904). Subsequently, Geertz (1973) conceptualized culture as 'plans, recipes, rules, instructions' governing behavior (see also Swidler, 1986).

Later this dominant paradigm was displaced by the inclusion of political economy and the'deterritorialization of identity' as globalized trade, conflict and migration occurred. Cultures were no longer seen as isolated with a fixed, unique essence (Gupta and Ferguson, 2007; Barth, 1969). Recognizing the dynamism of cultures and ethnicities as sites of contestation, fragmentation, performativity and transformation, has been an emblem of post-structural scholarship as has reflections on scholars' positionality (Hall 1991/2000; Bhabha, 1994; Abu-Lughod, 1991).

Sewell 's (1999) notion of 'thin coherence' highlights prescribed and distinctive

modes of being among ethno-cultural groups, but also the instability of cultural truths and discourses. Interests, values, beliefs, and practices may be consensually shared within bounded groups creating a culturally distinct interpretation of the social world or they may be widely shared even among culturally dissimilar groups (see also Parekh 2006).

The analytical payoff of considering behaviour through the meso-level lens of culture is that it guards against a structural determinism that sees minority ethnic groups propelled towards criminality by powerful economic and political forces alone – in what Gans (2012: 131) likens to 'Pavlovian responders to overpowering social stimuli'. It acknowledges individual actions, reactions, and interactions are chosen or imposed, but are also embedded within families, communities, and other socio-cultural sites (see also Coster and Heimer, 2017). Politically, this approach challenges the cultural*ist* explanations of ideologues who posit unanchored, individualistic understandings of human behavior (Alexander,

2016).

In the policy field there has long been an acceptance that culture matters, with efforts made to ensure sensitivity to the *culturally unique needs* of service users (Macpherson, 1999; Baskit, 2009). Undertaken comprehensively means interrogating questions of inequality and racism, and politically engaging subaltern expertise (Dutta, 2007). If we accept the validity of this premise it is then implausible to deny the possibilities of culturally specific variations in thinking, living and behaving, which *might* have relevance for criminological research.

Studying culture and ethnicity empirically fits with the move to analyse religion as both an inhibiting and a motivating factor of criminal offending (Cottee, 2014; Walklate and Mythen, 2016; Parmar, 2017). This can encourage thinking of ethnicity as a *resource* or *strategy*, albeit often a response to discrimination (Tomlins et al., 2002; Parmar, 2016). In many European countries there is a rich

sociological literature documenting ethnic enclaves providing access to social networks, finance, and community institutions (Massey, 1985). In the employment field too, occupational niches develop in specific sectors, particularly where racism may bar entry into other roles (Waldinger, 1994). Ruggeiro (2001) has maintained that racial barriers can prevent access to the most profitable, organized, and secure criminal economies too. Negative perceptions of black and Jamaican Yardie dealers by users and distributors kept them in the lower strata of the distribution chain in Ruggeiro's London case study (see also Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). There, the risks of violence and detection were higher, rewards lower, and career advancement limited. Relatedly, Grund and Densley (2012) have documented gang co-offending based on shared Somalian, West African, Jamaican, or Black British ethnic origins.

For McPherson et al. (2001), such ethnic homophily is an essential pattern of human organization where people with shared values, and therefore predictable

behavior, are co-located, creating conditions of trust and loyalty, a key prerequisite also of criminal co-operation (Paoli, 2002). Calverley's (2012) findings of Indian and Bangladeshi advantaged access to family and community employment opportunities assisting the process of desistance, also underlines why culture and ethnicity should not be automatically dismissed (see also Coster and Heimer, 2017).

Of course, any kind of singular cultural analysis carries risks of essentializing or exoticising minority ethnic cultures. Infamously, Lewis' (1959) realist ethnography of the Mexican Martínez, Gutiérrez, Gómez, Sánchez, and Castro families identified as cultural traits, gregariousness, an inability to defer gratification, patriarchal authoritarianism, and violence, producing a 'culture of poverty', discernible among the poor cross-nationally. His work was subject to searing critiques on conceptual, theoretical, methodological, substantive and ethical grounds. Leeds (1971), for example, problematized Lewis' failures to

analyze the role of capitalism in the emergence of these cultural traits, or to acknowledge behaviours such as authoritarianism and violence as common to groups beyond the poor.

A recent symposium on Patterson and Fosse's (2015) book, *The Cultural Matrix: Understanding Black Youth* similarly points up the dangers of a 'kinder, gentler pathologizing' (Fleming, 2016) where unemployment and offending are regarded as the result of individual volition (Alexander, 2016). Certainly, the negative cultural traits of aggression, hyper-sexuality, paternal abandonment, parenting deficiencies, and a disinclination to work, come to the fore in Patterson's (2015) analysis of black 'disconnected street people', 'working class', and the '*ghetto middle class*' over extreme joblessness and infrastructural inadequacies in housing, schools, policing, and the environment. Rather less attention is paid to how cultural practices are conditioned by insidious racism and institutional discrimination in welfare and criminal justice (Wilson, 2010) which undermine a

meaningful sense of belonging to society, cause pain and degradation to the self, whilst also constituting a means of subaltern resistance to unjust power (Rios, 2009; Alexander, 2016).

An Illustrative Case? Gypsy/Traveller Cultures and 'Doorstep Fraud'

Method

This section attempts a first tentative step at navigating this tricky terrain with an empirical example from a small qualitative study of 'doorstep fraud'. 'Doorstep fraud' involves offenders deceiving victims on the doorstep, using false and misleading representations about their professional expertise and the need for property maintenance, and falsely charging for construction or gardening work not completed. It is a specific example of a newly recognized volume crime (xxx; ONS, 2016). In the popular imaginary 'doorstep fraudsters' (or 'rogue traders') are typically of Gypsy/Traveller origin (Dawson, 2000), distinguished from 'authentic', respectable and non-criminal Romany Gypsies who do not 'lop and

top' trees while aggressively exploiting consumers (Taylor, 2008: vii).[1]

Comparative data from offender interviews, mostly conducted in prison in 2015/16 with a male white British sample (n=5) and a Gypsy/Traveller (n=7) sample which included an offender of mixed white and Gypsy/Traveller origin was analyzed.[2] [3] Identified by the Lead of the national Doorstep Crime Project (National Trading Standards Board), using extensive professional networks and an email appeal to all 166 Trading Standards departments, the sample comprised 36% of the estimated 27 men and one woman incarcerated for doorstep fraud and deception offences in England and Wales, much the same gender proportions as for crime generally.[4] This reflects low reporting, recording and prosecution rates – the latter estimated at just 1% of reported doorstep fraud incidents in 2013/14 (Andrews, 2014; Day, 2015). While a small sample, saturation was reached by the tenth interview; completed interviews lasted between 53 and 145 minutes.

The primary motivation of doorstep fraud is acquisitive, but it can involve the

pernicious humiliation of, often vulnerable, victims:

> I would freely say to them, 'You've got ridge tiles that are loose. They don't need doing at the moment, but they could do with repointing because when the bad weather comes and the wind'. Sometimes that story would be true. Sometimes, it wouldn't. I wasn't averse to lying… I suppose there was a little scaremongering there as well, obviously…We charged £40,000 to put a roof on that cost £6,000… Sometimes, we would quote them a price and then after being up there [on the roof] for a couple of hours, we would say, 'There's more damage than we thought, so I'm afraid it's going to have to be this much'. We would sting them, in our words.
> (Brian, Gypsy/Traveller, 50s)

> You'd send someone else to the door the day before, someone else without work uniform on and just say, 'Hiya, I'm buying a house in

> this area,' let them talk to them, and they'll make a judgement on that person, basically, see if they've got their marbles about them, see if they're *compos mentis* and know what's what. If they're a bit forgetful and that, we'll go there and do that job.
>
> (Colin, white British, 20s)

The interview data is used to edge our focus closer to an analysis which sees culture as inseparable from structural relations but not solely limited to them. It cannot fully articulate how Gypsy/Traveller cultural modes of routine interaction and habits of social organisation relate to defrauding consumers on the doorstep. This would necessitate a more immersive research perhaps using ethnographic methods or life histories. Instead, this dataset is used cautiously to provide pointers and future research questions for what an *empirical study of culture* - while retaining the key tenets of critical criminology and critical race studies - can contribute to race and crime scholarship.

Preliminary Analysis

Intriguingly, most interviewees, regardless of their ethnicity, connected doorstep fraud with Gypsy/Travellers. Harry proclaimed Gypsy/Travellers like himself to be 'thieving bastards', noting 'if you're vulnerable, they'll have you', and Len described it as a 'sad truth' that many doorstep fraudsters shared his ethno-cultural group. Billy suggested it 'wouldn't be an unnatural reaction' to stereotype as 'dodgy', 'Traveller looking-type people with tarmac on the back of their lorry driving up and down slowly on a housing estate', while Brian admitted too, 'I don't think it's an unfair assumption to say that most rogue traders are Travellers'. As bluntly, Finn said:

> I learnt [the doorstep patter] off an old Travelling man…no other man can teach you this…once he knew I could get a job and he started teaching me how to price up the work, how to get in there, look at people, what shoes they're wearing...I've been doing that all my life.

(Finn, mixed white British and Gypsy/Traveller, 40s)

Among many of the white British sub-sample, Gypsy/Travellers cultures were also a common reference point, with several claiming they had committed doorstep fraud with Gypsy/Traveller associates. Simon talked of Gypsy/Travellers he knew to be involved in 'ripping people to death' but who had 'never even had a nip' (been detected), including in his case. Colin had learned to present himself as a legitimate trader using leaflets, van signage, embroidered T-shirts, identification badges, and fake reference letters to reassure prospective victims. He would target 'messy bungalows' signalling householder incapacity and absent care by relatives, explaining 'That's how I got taught to do it off of the Travellers'.

How can such perspectives that come 'straight from the horse's mouth', so to speak, be interpreted? As Levi (2008: 408) has observed '[m]any national and religious groups have occupied places in the demonology of crime', but how can

we understand these labelling processes when the 'demons' themselves inhabit and reinforce these stereotypes? Such accounts must first be contextualised by exploring how cultural practices can develop in response to, and in interaction with, structural patterns of racist subjugation and violence by the state (Kuper, 1999; Gans, 2012). A socio-political history of Gypsy/Traveller experience in England reveals a leitmotif of state-sponsored exclusion and criminalization for more than five centuries. As Alexander (2016: 1433) maintains, this is also *cultural* and we must therefore 'turn our gaze upwards and out at the cultures of those in power – whose cultures comprise the norm, constitute the structures, and therefore whose lives, discourses and actions barely register as 'cultural' at all'. This requires framing an analysis of the mutually constituent and reinforcing dynamics of structure and culture in sites of unequal power relations – what Hawes and Perez (1996: 9) describe as the 'process by which prejudice, fear and antagonism to minority peoples becomes fixed in the formal structures of

society'.

A Socio-Political History of Gypsy/Traveller Lives in England

From the 16th to the 19th Century

Originating in the North Indian diaspora, Gypsy migration to England occurred in the late 15th century (Liégeois, 1994; cf. Okely, 1983). Nomadism, self-employment, close-knit family relations, community languages, customs, rituals and taboos linked to cleanliness and pollution, are central features of Gypsy identities, and of Travellers who have indigenous European origins. The two have been conflated, externally through stereotyping and internally because of intermixing (Liégeois, 1994). The frequent self-identification of Travellers as Gypsies in the current study validates consideration of their historical journeys together.

The Egyptians Act 1530 (22 Hen, VIII, c.10) was a response to Gypsies' nomadism

and perceived proneness to commit crime.[5] Their 'greate subtyll and crafty meanes to deceive the people' (Ripton-Turner, 1887: 486) saw them lumped together with 'idle vagrants' in the 'rogue literature' and subject to stigmatization and criminalization (Mayall, 2004). Further Acts legislating for deportation, political repression and economic exclusion using the refusal of alms, corporal, and (rarely) capital punishment followed under Mary I and Elizabeth I, with explicit references to 'rogues' and 'pedlars, tinkers, petty chapmen' Beier (1974: 15). Regarded as exotic yet feckless and threatening the moral and social order, Elizabethan writers perceived nomadic lifestyles to be a cloak for criminality and sedition. However, Beier (1974) found few Gypsies, 'tynkers' or 'pedlars' in 1,159 arrest records during the period1569-1572. Historical and autobiographical accounts from the mid-1600s-1700s do not exist, partly because of Gypsies' illiterate and oral tradition (Mayall, 2004; Okely, 1983).

By the 19th century literary representations depicted Gypsies as a 'strange and

alien race' (Dutt, 1896 cited in Mayall, 2004: 84), as primitive, child-like, volatile, and present-oriented. Mayall’s (1988) historical account revealed the value to sedentary society of cheap goods, repair, and entertainment services provided by Gypsy-Travellers in the informal economy until industrialization and urbanization took hold. Men would manufacture wares which were hawked by women door-to-door. Their mysticism explained their perceived ability to tell fortunes, but the Vagrancy Act of 1824 outlawed fortune-telling and palmistry, traditional forms of Gypsy women's employment (Okely, 1996).

Later, the emergent bourgeois ideology began to perceive Gypsy-travellers as opposed to civilizing forces. ‘{T}heir racial characteristics were thought to incline them towards dishonesty and deceit, heathenism, immorality and a profound disinclination to any form of honest and productive toil’ (Mayall, 1988: 7) – significant because many doorstep frauds occurred during legitimate employment. Yet Mayall’s (1988: 59) contention is that the Gypsy economy was

unquestionably based on hard work as the alternative was starvation and hardship.

Mayall (2004: 125) also cites the work of Macfie (1908) which in the anthropometric tradition, recorded Gypsies' dolichocephalic skull shape, wiry limbs, vivacious movements, small hands and feet, hooked nose, and blue-black hair. Into the 20th century, criminal biologists like Ritter provided ‘scientific’ support for the Nazi genocide of Gypsies, regarding them as ‘the products of matings with the German criminal asocial subproletariat’ and therefore worthy of 'eugenic purification' (Rafter, 2008: 294, 299).

State Exclusion in the 20th and 21st centuries

A further fusing of the link between nomadism, itinerancy, and 'nuisance' for the state and the Gorgio (non-Gypsy/Traveller) sedentary majority is evident across housing, planning, education, public health, employment, taxation, criminal justice, and animal welfare policies (Mayall, 2004). And from a Select Committee

report on the Movable Dwellings Bill of 1909 to the widely publicized eviction from Gypsy/Traveller-owned but illegally-occupied Dale Farm in 2011 - references to Gypsy/Travellers' criminality, violence, disorder, drunkenness, insanitary living conditions, neglect of children, and parasitical dependence on welfare abound. The state has had at its disposal bye-laws, injunctions against landowners, the use of special constables, and various surveillance mechanisms to circumscribe the nomadic lifestyles of Gypsy/Travellers who corrupted essentialist notions of place and belonging (Taylor, 2008; Mayall, 2004; Kabachnik, 2010). Explicitly targeted in the prohibitive Highways Act 1959, Gypsy/Travellers were also disproportionately affected by the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, which marked an era of increasing state regulation as dwellers were required to have site licences or face summary conviction.

While the Caravan Sites Act 1968 positively mandated state provision, pitch

shortages, high costs, inadequate amenities, and oppressive management disadvantaged Travellers (Taylor, 2008). Sites' location on the periphery of sedentary society near rubbish dumps, sewage plants and major arterial roads mark Gypsy/Travellers' physical and symbolic exclusion (Kabachnik, 2012). As Taylor (2008: 195) notes, sites have 'sent a very strong message that Travellers were unwelcome, marginal and deserving of the bare minimum'. Belton's (2004: 138) Foucauldian analysis sees sites as mechanisms of disciplinary control managing 'housing delinquency' and encouraging cultural assimilation. Sites have also reduced the possibilities of everyday - and potentially positive - interaction between Gypsy/Travellers and Gorgios.

The racist disciplining of Gypsy/Travellers was furthered by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994 which criminalized unauthorized residing on the land while removing the requirement for the local state to provide sites. This forced many Gypsy/Travellers into low quality social and private housing,

often in economically deprived areas (D Smith and Greenfields, 2012). James (2007: 374) notes 'monitoring and surveillance, information gathering and sharing, threats, spatial exclusion, disruption, eviction and lack of provision' has characterized the policing of Gypsies and Travellers, rather than inclusionary and legitimate community policing (see also Mulcahy, 2012).

Gypsy/Travellers have fared little better under New Labour administrations, despite their commitment to eliminating institutional racism. Home Secretary Jack Straw castigated criminal Travellers for masquerading as 'law-abiding Gypsies' during a radio interview in 1999. Ideologically, this cemented in the public mind an imagery of danger and threat that necessitated authoritarian responses (Hall et al., 1978). Straw's ignorance of the vexed question of Gypsy authenticity at the same time he embraced the idea that government were 'liable to have procedures, practices and a culture which tend to exclude or to disadvantage non-white people' (Straw, 1999) was astounding.[6] Nomadic

Gypsy/Travellers' continued exclusion from the household (sedentary) Crime Survey of England and Wales reinforced this racialized myopia, leaving us without reliable estimates of criminal victimization and hate crimes *against* Gypsy/Travellers (Lane et al., 2014).

And in the case of Moore and Coates v the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government EWHC 44 (Admin), the High Court found both a breach of the Equality Act 2010 and Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights. The minister had engaged in unlawful indirect racial discrimination by recovering all appeals against the refusal of planning permission on Green belt land, which disproportionately affected Gypsy/Travellers (EHRC, 2016), undermining the liberal notion of legal neutrality. In a barbed riposte the minister wrote to local government and police officials stating that '[p]ublic bodies should not gold-plate human rights and equalities legislation', reminding them of the weighty enforcement powers available to deal with unauthorised

Gypsy/Traveller encampments (L Smith, 2016: 7). These political interventions are complicit in maintaining majority white privilege and their seemingly universal hostility to new sites being established (UK Parliament, 2010). Unsurprising therefore, is the Global Attitudes Survey (2014) finding that 50% of British respondents held negative views of Gypsies/Roma, compared with 26% holding unfavourable attitudes towards Muslims, whose vilification has seen them disproportionately the victims of hate crimes (Pew Research Center, 2014; Home Office 2013).

The Role of the Media

The media may be the primary means by which the sedentary majority interact with Gypsy/Travellers, yet Kabachnik (2010) found negative reporting to be the norm in local newspaper stories during 2002-2007. The provocative and visceral language of war, flood, invasion, and swamping is prevalent in newspapers, further inflaming local racism, with references to welfare dependency, tax

evasion, criminality, including 'rogue trading' and illegal site occupation common (Morris, 2000; LittleJohn, 2009).[7] Such misrepresentations, criticized by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (2010), reinforce an ideological racialization of the Gypsy/Traveller as a contemptible figure that commonsense dictates the law-abiding need protecting from.

Finally, the (mis)representation of exotic gendered, raced and classed Others in Channel 4's *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* juxtaposed authentic *Gypsy* cultures with the 21st century transgressive equivalent of young *Traveller* women, prematurely hyper-sexualized, in gaudy 'princess dresses' clambering into limousines, exhibiting a contemptuous hyper-consumerism (Jensen and Ringrose, 2014). In this sense, Gypsy/Travellers are perceived just like Asians as displaying an excess of an alien, inferior, and insular culture (Benson, 1996).

Structural-Cultural Interactions and Opportunity Effects

Across the five centuries of Gypsy/Traveller presence in England, a political

demonization of nomadism has occurred alongside an increasingly punitive response to Gypsy/Traveller settlement. It is precisely these institutional restraints, and a pariah status, according to Richardson and Ryder (2012), that have been a constitutive element of Gypsy and Traveller identities, highlighting the integral way in which cultural practices are far from autonomous of racialized structural contexts (Alexander, 2016).

In a variation, Unnever and Gabbidon’s (2011: 27) recent theoretical intervention concerning African Americans’ criminality, posits a racialized worldview in which they experience their 'present in light of their past', as humiliated recipients of racist treatment. This, it is contended, produces weak bonds to white-dominated schools and workplaces, increasing ‘externalizing’ behaviours including offending (JD Unnever et al., 2016). Similarly, for Ward (2015: 303), the psycho-social effects of historical state organized 'slow violence' (of African Americans) involving harmful victimization, underdevelopment, racialized

resentment, and identity threats, may 'live on as festering old sores' which are reproduced in the present (Ward, 2015, 2016). 'Microclimates of racial meaning', can foster a cynicism of official authorities, oppositional identities, and potentially, offending and violence. If Gypsy/Traveller life is similarly experienced through the lens of the past and its abject racism, an increased propensity to commit crime may similarly apply. In this vein, Belton (2004) suggests that some Gypsy/Travellers may inhabit the prevalent stereotypes with which they have been branded by some politicians and the media. Without linking this specifically to offending, Belton (2004) applies Fanon's notion of dehumanization and the obliteration of self-worth in which the oppressed uphold the Othered identity imposed on them by the oppressor. Fanon's (1967/2008) work reminds us the pains of racism can deeply penetrate the colonized, becoming even a form of neurotic, internal enslavement. That this self-fulfilling spiral can result in offending is certainly a possibility.

Given this historical contextualization it is unsurprising that the usual indicators of socio-economic disadvantage are also widely experienced. Low educational attainment, high unemployment, long-term sickness, and disabilities, justify the recent EHRC (2016) report entitled *England's Most Disadvantaged Groups: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma*, which also details high infant and maternal mortality, low child immunisation, poor physical and mental health, and lower life expectancy (see also ONS, 2014). The risk factor paradigm would predict greater offending propensity based on a multitude of family, school and neighbourhood-level factors (Loeber and Farrington, 1998). Therefore, a Freedom of Information request showing that in March 2016 Gypsy/Irish Travellers comprised 1% of the prison population but just 0.1% of the general population (ONS, 2014) is unremarkable. Even allowing for undercounting as census respondents may not disclose their Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity (ITM 2013), the degree of prison disproportionality is probably as high or higher than for the black population

about which much more has been written (MOJ 2015; Phillips and Bowling, 2017).

Given the oppression of Gypsy/Travellers for centuries, Bell's (2005: 326) assertion that 'we [scholars] are under an ethical obligation to consider our positions in the light of the likely use of our words' is critical (see also Fleming, 2016), However, an *empirical* examination of cultural practices also means not shying away from their possible relation to criminal offending. Specifically, in relation to fraud and deception, the FOI (2016) request found Gypsy/Irish Travellers comprised 2% of those imprisoned for *any* (including non-doorstep) fraud offences but only 0.1% of the general population. Discrimination by the police and Trading Standards cannot be ruled out as a reason for Gypsy/Traveller over-representation in the current sample, particularly as reporting biases may exist, but doorstep fraud investigations typically arise following reports by victims (xxx).[8] Importantly, among interviewees' there was

no direct mention of racism *per se*, but Harry believed it inevitable that a jury would find him guilty as the only Gypsy/Traveller in the dock, even though he was only indirectly involved:

> it came up I was a Traveller, I live on a site…I think the jury just put me in that circle straightaway. 'Well he's the only Gypsy. He's the only one who's got people around him like that. He's the one who's done it.' (Harry, Gypsy/Traveller, 30s)

Paul was also indignant about the remarks of a 'prejudiced' judge who told him at sentencing, 'I'm setting an example to *your lot*'. Both Aidan and Len felt they had experienced persecution by the police, and not exclusively in relation to doorstep fraud offences.

Comparing now the interview accounts of Gypsy/Traveller and white British men, three illustrations will be used to underscore the value of considering the role of culture and ethnicity in an analysis of doorstep fraud. While scholars have

recognised substantive changes in Gypsy/Traveller lifestyles resulting from state exclusion, mechanisation, and mass production, a resilient and, to use Sewell's (1999) conceptualisation, a 'thinly coherent', culture of nomadism and family self-employment remains. The examples, two of which are drawn from these elements of Gypsy/Traveller cultures, reinforce the value of articulating the *potentially* mediating role of culture within a structure-agency analytical framework.

Nomadic Lifestyles

Levinson and Sparkes (2004: 712) found Gypsies in their study believing nomadism to be almost 'genetically predetermined biorhythms passed between generations'. Romantically associated with freedom and autonomy not available to Gorgios, Brian, the oldest Gypsy/Traveller in the interview sample recalled his nomadic childhood in this way. But Brian also remembered the discomforts of living in cold, cramped conditions, the brutal injustice of being regularly moved

on by the police, and the long hours his father 'worked on the knocker' as a legitimate doorstep trader. Harry's recollection of travelling as a child was even more negative:

> it just messes with your head… Like, I never went to school. I was out fighting and doing all stupid things as a youngster. Do you know what I mean? I didn’t have, like, a childhood like what I should have had… (Harry, Gypsy/Traveller, 30s)

It is this cultural practice more than any other that has been the subject of extreme measures of formal social control. Okely’s (1996) ethnographic insights led her to argue that the unpredictability of where and for how long Gypsies may settle has meant long-term planning is impossible. State exclusion and economic dislocation has seen adaptive cultural practices as Gypsies have been forced to act opportunistically, to be present-oriented, presumably therefore eschewing deferred gratification, a key factor in offending (Cohen, 1955; Gottfredson and

Hirschi, 1990).

Notwithstanding, degrees of nomadism have long been acknowledged, with many Gypsy/Travellers preferring winter settlement and summer migrancy, with others travelling regularly and extensively, and others travelling only occasionally to fairs (Mayall, 1988). Paul and Len travelled but were settled on sites in the winter months, while Harry left his site only to travel to annual agricultural fairs. Paul, who had been doing property construction and maintenance full-time from the age of 15, alluded to regular travelling in which his offending could co-occur:

> see, where we're Gypsies, we moved our caravans into the area…You might be in that area for two weeks, a week; it's how long you can stay there. You get moved on, you might end up right at the other end of the country, you see… we'd just go, we call it, 'Out', It's, 'Out hawking'... and then you stick around until you get something else.

(Paul, Gypsy/Traveller, 40s)

Len too acknowledged that lifestyle and opportunity could combine to facilitate offending while travelling:

> …I suppose it follows the travelling background really. Obviously if you're travelling, if you're on the road, then the only way you're really going to get work is by going around door to door. I suppose it just spreads from that, do you know what I mean? Obviously you might meet somebody, you might come to somebody's door and you think, he looks loaded. I bet he's got a right few quid. Ask him does he want a bit of work…
>
> (Len, Gypsy/Traveller, 30s)

And while no longer travelling himself, Brian recognised the advantages of doing doorstep fraud while mobile – 'you'd think, 'Well, why shouldn't I take £500 here because I'll be over there tomorrow? They'll never catch up with us'. More

blatantly, Colin, of white British origin who had first worked closely with Gypsy/Traveller associates before setting up his own fraudulent business, explicitly linked nomadic lifestyles with the commission of doorstep fraud where he would, with Gypsy/Traveller associates:

> Travel about with a caravan on the back of the van, sleep in the caravan, put the caravan into like a caravan site, pay like £300, £400, stay there for a week, go around ripping people off and then move on to another part for a few months…
>
> (Colin, white British, 20s)

For just two offenders then, a nomadic lifestyle did likely provide a means to commit fraud, and to reduce the risks of detection.

Geographers, studying Gypsy/Traveller 'mobilities', also stress the symbolism of movement, its possibilities as a state of mind as much as its corporeality (see also Shubin, 2011). Echoing this sentiment, Billy noted, 'to be a Traveller, you don't

have to travel. It's in you. It's an ethnicity to an extent. It runs through you.' This is significant given that the large remainder of Gypsy/Travellers in the sample lived in bricks and mortar housing. For these *and the white British* interviewees there were seemingly numerous possibilities for doorstep fraud to be easily committed locally with little risk of detection.

Family Self-Employment

As an opportunity effect, Gypsy/Traveller clustering in doorstep fraud could also be the result of their over-representation in legitimate occupations with routine access to households. ONS (2014) have documented the higher proportions of Gypsies/Irish Travellers (41%) employed in elementary positions and skilled trades compared to other ethnic groups (23%). Similarly, Levi (2008) has observed predominantly white offenders in corporate and financial crimes just as they are over-represented in these industries which are also less visible to law enforcement agents. Levi also highlights research in which Yoruba Nigerians

have been particularly linked to financial crime in regions in Nigeria where entrepreneurial commerce is more common and because of their attraction to this occupational sector.

A cultural preference for self-employment rather than the monotony of wage-labour means that Gypsy/Travellers have long been in 'symbiotic equilibrium' with sedentary society (Acton, 1979: 237). Women's role in hawking has lessened over time, however, and increasingly waged employment has been observed, as has women becoming exclusively involved in domestic labour (Ryder and Richardson, 2010). Otherwise, in the Traveller economy, families often operate as units of production and consumption, which together with strong extended kinship relations, promotes communal working. Although not unique to Gypsy/Travellers, Greenfields et al. (2012) identify reciprocity and redistribution within Gypsy/Traveller networks which ensure the flow of support, goods, services, labour, and expertise to maximize profit.

Okely's (1983) ethnography found Traveller-Gypsies demonstrating considerable occupational multiplicity and flexibility working in fairgrounds, agriculture, fortune-telling, and hawking to sell goods and services, including property maintenance. Having always had to be responsive to market demands, Okely (1983: 58; 1996: 57) claims this has resulted in Traveller-Gypsies being astute at identifying the 'psychological needs and weaknesses' of local populations, where they are not averse to 'pulling a fast one and are certainly ready to exploit their bargaining skills', further believing 'they are entitled to make a living from Gorgios in any way which suits them' (Okely, 1996: 48).

The nature of family self-employment in Gypsy/Traveller communities makes the co-working and co-offending with family members within the interview sample unsurprising. Paul, for example, noted that his sons, also convicted of fraud, had:

> … been in the cab since they were four years old, five and six, helping

> me with bits of rubbish, taking rubbish out…My sons were only small then, they'd go out with me, like I used to go with my dad when I was a child.
>
> (Paul, Gypsy/Traveller, 40s)

Finn, of mixed Gypsy/Traveller and white British origin, dated his leafletting and cold-calling to the age of 11 working with his uncle with his first job at 13 when he left school, noting, 'That's all I've ever done, is door knocking'. Billy also learned about construction from his dad and uncles at a young age, noting, '[i]t's what your dad has done, it's what your grandad has done'.

These experiences also reflect the privileging of informal teaching by adults to facilitate children's knowledge of 'Travellers' craft' over formal educational instruction (Okely, 1983). All of the Gypsy/Travellers in the sample with the exception of Billy had attended school intermittently and had left early without qualifications, reducing access to credentialized labour market opportunities

(Brown, 2001). Billy and Harry were the only offenders to have specific trade qualifications, with the remainder learning informally on the job.

Of the Gypsy/Travellers interviewed, almost all had been employed with family members at one time or another, and for Paul, Brian, Billy and Finn, the offences for which they were currently imprisoned had also involved relatives, with both men and women often money laundering the proceeds. Significantly, this was not true of any of the white British sub-sample. Social learning theory tells us that exposure to, and association with, those amenable to and who model criminal behaviour is more likely to lead to imitation (Burgess and Akers, 1966; Menard and Morris, 2012). Co-working and co-offending was not without its problems, however. Visibly upset during the interview, Billy spoke of his father's authority which ultimately prescribed his actions and which led him and his father to prison for the first time:

> building has always been my dad's game…I was working basically for

> my dad. It was always his word goes…My dad's the person that taught me right from wrong in this world, so I trust whatever he says. 'Can I use your bank account [for money laundering the proceeds of doorstep fraud]?' 'Yes, of course you can, Dad.' No questions asked. I'm not going to ask if that's for a legitimate use or illegitimate use… This was a crime I was never going to go out on my own and commit, if that makes sense. It was something I was dragged into as opposed to an executive decision on my behalf.
>
> (Billy, Gypsy/Traveller, 20s)

Paul too spoke of his shame that his sons had been imprisoned for doorstep fraud alongside him, with one son lambasting his father, telling him ''I blame you, you've done all this…I've never done anything in my life, Dad, I've only helped you out'. Here then too is some limited evidence indicative of the role that the bonds of culture and ethnicity *may* play in motivating criminal actions.

The Rewards of Crime

Finally, while economic and status insecurity is recognised as a feature of late modernity (Young, 1999), for Gypsy/Travellers precariousness, in self-employment, political representation, and further inscribed in social relations with Gorgio society has been apparent for centuries. But even in the early 1970s, Okely (1983) found wealthy Traveller-Gypsies with expensively furnished chrome caravans and cars. More recently, Griffin's (2002: 19) participant observation as a Gypsy/Traveller site warden observed that, '[L]ooking good and being seen to spend are important when means and occasion allow'. And just as the 'reality pornography' of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* saw ostentatious consumption paraded on our screens, similar references to a hedonistic lifestyle were common among offenders.

Finn, attending the interview in a designer T-shirt he did not seem to mind risking in the prison laundry, spoke of 'living like a footballer' from the proceeds

of doorstep fraud. Notwithstanding probable exaggeration, Finn reported spending over £100,000 for his daughter's wedding, lavishing diamond jewellery on his wife, booking expensive suites at London hotels, and purchasing Range Rovers, Mercedes, and Audis for himself and his family. Billy claimed a more modest profit, and Len reported being able to indulge his car-racing hobby. Brian was phlegmatic about his greed which allowed him luxury holidays in Las Vegas and Kenya and regular gambling at casinos. Colin had set up on his own after seeing how the rewards of doorstep fraud bought Gypsy/Travellers 'Range Rovers, Rolex watches and stuff like that'. Sean recalled his Gypsy/Traveller enslavers purchased a new Mercedes car every year and they owned multiple residential properties which he was forced to work on maintaining. Perhaps therefore, as Cottee (2014: 988) suggests in relation to Islamist offenders, we can similarly see Gypsy/Travellers as 'not exotic Others, detached from dominant societal norms and values, but are, rather, the unmistakable product of the

western culture into which they were born and acculturated'. The key point is that criminal lifestyles are not peculiar to Gypsy/Traveller cultures; conspicuous consumption has very wide appeal.

Richard of white British origin, used his £3,000-£5,000 weekly earnings for 'gambling, drugs, partying' and Lucas claimed earnings of £10,000-£15,000 were also used for gambling. Recalling Merton (1938) and Matza and Sykes (1961), such norms and values - if not the criminal way of attaining them - are essentially common to all in society, including the 'leisured elite'. Young (1999) cites ethnographies in poor black and Latino US neighbourhoods which similarly observed an over-identification with the mainstream values of material wealth – what he refers to as the 'bulimia' of cultural inclusion existing alongside anomic structural exclusion. 'In a society', Young (1999: 91) argues, 'where market forces penetrate every corner, particularly in terms of consumerism, one would expect the broad brush of market values to tar every crevice of the social structure'.

Ultra-realist criminologists additionally argue that insecure lives under neoliberalism has created illegal entrepreneurs who seek profits without regard to harms done to others (Hall and Winlow, 2015: 120). These findings of an assimilated individuated competitive materialism support Sewell's (1999) contention that the dynamism of cultures in globalised times means they are not limited to a fixed set of beliefs, preferences and practices, but rather cultural discourses can overlay each other and may be widely shared even among culturally dissimilar groups (see also Foley, 2010).

The tropes of subcultural and cultural criminology (Cohen, 1955; Young, 2007) - thrills, edgework, and transgression to mitigate the mundanity and humiliation of everyday life - may apply too. Okely (1996) contends that for Traveller-Gypsies, confrontations with Gorgio authorities, be they social workers or police officers, requires subservience which carries the risk of painful self-degradation. While not articulated in this way in the offender interviews, Brian's admission of

the exhilaration of the con was telling. It again raises the possibility of the appropriation of cultural stereotypes by Gypsy/Travellers (Belton, 2004) which then permits the mocking and humiliation of Gorgio victims:

> I find myself conning for the sake of it. It's the thrill and not always the money…It really is a buzz. It probably seems terrible, but we would hi-five each other as we drove down the road with our pockets full…I watched an episode of 'The Simpsons' once and old Homer said, 'I love that time in between telling the lie to Marge and the next morning when she susses it.'…We [Brian and his brother] call it 'Simpson Time'… We've been in really tight spots before, and it has thrilled us to think, Right, so how are we going to get out of this, then?
>
> (Brian, Gypsy/Traveller, 50s)

Okely (1996: 99) similarly uses the example of Gypsy women telling fortunes they knew to be a skilful 'confidence trick', regarding this as 'just another

lucrative way of earning a living off gorgios'. As likely perhaps, sentiments such as Brian's could simply reflect the motivations common to many, if not most, offenders. Rather chillingly, Lucas, a white British offender, described his skill in drawing in victims into his fraudulent activities:

> It's just the terminology with your voice and what have you, and getting them to like you or dislike you…It's like putting a frog in the boiling water. If you put it in boiling water, it will bounce out, but if you put it in the cold water and turn the heat on, it's going to stay in there.
>
> (Lucas, white British, 40s)

Conclusion

Claims of deficient cultural practices sustaining patterns of criminality have a long history in the social sciences. For those sympathetic to such explanations, there is perhaps some ammunition provided by the accounts of

Gypsy/Travellers here, especially where they have implicated themselves and others from their ethno-cultural group as typical 'rogue traders'. There are also other ways of interpreting these data. Utilizing the dominant conceptualizations in anthropology and sociology assumes groups do not possess a singular set of values, beliefs, customs, morals and behaviours. Instead of seeing these as part of some immutable cultural norm, unique to some exotic Other, modes of being are more accurately understood, amidst the tumult of globalizing influences and the spread of ideas, cultural products, and diverse peoples, as fluid, dynamic, and ultimately unstable (Sewell, 1999). As Kuper (1999: 243) succinctly puts it, the 'measure of human uniformity is our common ability to learn, to borrow, to assimilate', and this may be as true in the acquisition and exhibition of material wealth and status as it is for any other aspiration that is widely shared under consumer capitalism.

Cultures are also inherently structured through economic, political, and social

relations rather than autonomous of historical context, power relations, and institutional influences (Alexander, 2016). Gypsy/Travellers have been subject to some of the most egregious abuses by the state for centuries. Racialized criminalization of nomadic *and* settled Gypsy/Traveller lifestyles, alongside entrenched structural inequalities and exclusion, political and media bias, and institutional partiality, provide an environment for the emergence of adaptive cultural practices.

Self-evidently, the data tentatively used in this paper can only, in a very limited way, speculate on how Gypsy/Travellers' identities inform their participation in crime generally, or doorstep fraud specifically. Larger and more internally diverse samples to explore Gypsy/Traveller 'racialized [youth] cultures, and with a clear eye on the social, political, economic and affective structures through which these identities take shape' (Alexander 2016: 1433) are needed to understand how resilience is enabled and racism addressed (see also Paik, 2017).

Probing informal social control and collective efficacy *within* minority ethnic communities will also be necessary (Ward, 2016).

I am, however, inclined to agree with Patterson (2000) that to entirely reject the idea that no area of behaviour is a self-perpetuating cultural adaptation to a present or former condition is problematic, given the dynamism of cultures. However, the precise mechanisms must be examined *empirically*. Exploring the possibilities of ethnic specialization in offending could be one approach. Such research will need to consider whether there are opportunities afforded by any particular cultural beliefs, preferences or interests, including of the white majority, the nature of racism and discrimination in the legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures, and whether offending patterns are linked to circular migration, diasporic networks, or ethnic enclaves (R Smith and McElwee, 2013).

Future work will also need to be cognizant of the intersectional aspects of culture

as ways of being are likely to be gendered, classed and mediated through religion, sexuality, nationality, place and generation (Crenshaw, 1989; Potter, 2013; Parmar, 2017). As De Coster and Heimer (2017: 17) note, we must attend to how the ''structures and cultures of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality weave together to create a complex tapestry of opportunities and motivations that shape variation in crime and violence across groups and situations'. It will be testament to the maturity of the race and crime subfield when it is acknowledged that while most members of all ethno-cultural groups are not involved in offending, the few that are may conform to precisely the stereotypes scholars have tried hard to dismantle. Using a multilevel structure-culture-agency analytical framework can enhance our understanding of such behaviour.

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Notes

[1] Gypsiologists developed a hierarchy in which pure-blooded, true Gypsies were at the pinnacle, with mixed-blooded 'didikais' and 'pikies', regarded as degenerate and delinquent (Taylor, 2008).

[2] Ten were in prison, one was on licence and one was a victim of modern slavery.

[3] The paper adopts the nomenclature of Gypsy/Traveller (explained later) except where scholars have used other categorisations.

[4] Sixteen prisoners were not interviewed because of: governors denying access (21%); a failure to locate prisoners (18%); and prisoners declining interviews (25%).

[5]As Gypsies were assumed to be Eastern Mediterranean (Mayall, 2004).

[6] See Note 1.

[7] 'Stamp on the Camps' and 'Sun War on Gipsy Free-For-All' (*The Sun,* 9 March 2005) and 'Gypsy Invasion Closes a Town' (*Daily Express* 21 October 2005).

[8] Reminiscent of distracting the populace from political economic crisis by an authoritarian law and order agenda criminalizing young black men (Hall et al. 1978), Drummond (2012) has questioned whether slave rescue operations at Travellers' sites (XXX) were politically motivated to distract attention from the high-profile but politically difficult eviction of Gypsies and

Travellers at Dale Farm.