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[romani] PROJECT

A Study Investigating the Cultural Traditions and Customs of the Romani Community in Gorton, Manchester

Coursework submitted for

Romani Linguistics (LELA30191)

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by

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1. Introduction

The Romani language originated within the Indo-Aryan language family separating ‘...during the transition period from Middle to New Indo-Aryan, in early medieval times or in the second half of the first millennium CE’ (Matras 2008:3). The Romani population migrated during the 15th-16th centuries. The population migrated across Europe resulting in many different Romani communities settling. It is extremely difficult to estimate the Roma population as governments often fail to include this information within censuses. Furthermore, many field experts outline and suggest how some Roma will not openly discuss their ethnicity for fear of discrimination (Matras 2008).

This report shall investigate the extent to which traditional and modern cultural customs form an integral part of the Romani community within Gorton, Manchester. Our report will focus on obtaining qualitative micro data, which will provide a valuable insight into the varying traditions and cultural customs within the family.

We propose to investigate how family events such as weddings, funerals, engagements, and child birth are celebrated. We will also conduct further readings and research to enable a cross comparison with other Romani communities throughout the world. This cross comparison will enable a detailed exploration of the traditions or customs which are distinct to the community and to what extent cultural celebrations can vary within different Rom communities.

Furthermore, this report shall investigate the customs which comprise part of daily life. The family unit is a renowned aspect of Rom culture. Rom families are not characteristically ‘nuclear’, as the closely knit extended families form an integral part of Rom culture.

This report aims to provide answers to the following questions focusing upon family life;

- The division of labour implemented within the family. To what extent do women fulfil domestic duties? To what extent do males contribute towards these responsibilities?
- How disputes are settled such as divorce or money matters. Is there is a head-figure within the family, or are there numerous authority figures? Are the males considered ‘bread-winners’?
- Do the family have a family-run business? This is central to many traditional Rom families.
- How do the Gorton community interact with other Rom families in the surrounding areas (if they do so)?

We shall also examine ‘taboo’ subjects, hopefully gathering data on controversial issues such as; pre-marital sex, divorce, and the separation of the upper and lower body. We shall also investigate how women are viewed after pregnancy, examining if women are treated differently and ostracised after birth. This report will attempt to grasp the reasoning behind such practices, as these issues are pertinent to our research.

2. Method

2.1. Gaining the data

Our investigation is a collaborated study with a Rom representative who has been allocated to us on behalf of The University of Manchester. Our Rom representative will help us gain access to this quite exclusive community, and will prove invaluable with regards to gaining and processing the audio recordings.

We propose to conduct in-depth interviews within the Rom community, hopefully enabling the collection of rich, qualitative data. A carefully compiled list of questions will be used throughout the interviews. We do not want the interviews to be too rigid, or structured as this can ultimately restrict responses and impact upon potential data gathered. Thus, we propose to utilize open ended questions, and our questions will be a ‘guide’ to help gain data.

Arguably, this will allow the informants to express their opinions, giving a valuable insight into their culture. We aim to ensure our informants feel comfortable with the interviewers and the interview process. This will help yield open honest answers. We shall achieve this by the guided but non-restrictive open ended questions. This will make the interview process more like an informal conversation allowing the informants to add any information they feel relevant. The interview questions (see appendix 1) have been produced in collaboration with our Rom representative.

We have specifically scrutinized the wording of questions, to minimise the risk of subjecting our opinions onto the informants, and ensure the questions are viewed as neutral and non judgemental. We do not wish, nor intend to offend anyone in our study and fully acknowledge that different cultures have different taboos and opinions on what is deemed appropriate. Our informants will remain anonymous, due to the sensitive nature of our research.

We aim to utilize cross sectional research, which involves the study of several different people of varying ages. VanderStoep et al outline that cross sectional studies enable the identification of potential age, and gender differences existing within behaviour and attitude. It is often viewed as the most efficient way to identify the age at which social and psychological factors occur. The subsequent disadvantages occur when differences are present not because of maturation but because of ‘cohort effects’, an example of this type of effect is generational differences plus many other factors fall into this category. (VanderStoep et al 2009:41).

We have gained access to a high quality recording device to record the interviews of the informants; this ensures good sound quality and clarity for the recordings.

2.2. Advantages

We have chosen to incorporate in-depth interviews as it will permit the face to face contact with respondents, and will arguably: ‘...yield the richest data, details and insights...’ (Frechtling and Sharp 1997:23). This type of interview will also enable us to explore topics in more detail, whilst allowing for any clarifications which may be necessary, increasing the likelihood of useful responses.

The advantages of face to face interviews are outlined by Russell, who states that: ‘...they can be used with people who otherwise could not provide information:- respondents who are illiterate or otherwise non-literate, blind, bedridden or very old for example’ (2006:256). Furthermore, if an interviewer senses a respondent does not understand a question, then the interviewer can probe for more information. Face to face interviews allow for different interview methods to be employed for example open ended questions, visual aids and even questionnaire booklets may be employed. Russell rightly outlines how respondents will take more time in answering face to face interview questions than questionnaire’s which may arrive by post etc. (Russell 2006:257). The interviewer will also maintain more control over the situation and will be aware of whom they are interviewing. This is of importance because the age or gender of the interviewee may have sociolinguistic importance. For example a young female interviewee may be less likely to answer questions relating to taboo subjects with male interviewers.

2.3. Disadvantages

However, we also acknowledge and identify the potential disadvantages and pitfalls associated with using this method. Poor interviewing skills, poor phrasing of questions, and inadequate knowledge of the informant’s culture, may result in a collection that obtains little useful data. The User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations (Frechtling and Sharp 1997:23) outlines further disadvantages, such as how ‘...flexibility can result in inconsistencies across interviews, and how ‘the volume of information collected may be too large’ which can result in difficulties when trying to reduce the data. There is also the problem of the observers paradox which outlines that; ‘...the observation of an event or experiment is influenced by the presence of the observer/investigator, and the outcome which the informant expects that the investigator is expecting to gain’ (Frechtling and Sharp 1997:3-1) This also applies to in-depth interviews because the interviewee may distort information through recall error, selective perceptions or the desire to please the interviewer. The ‘interview effect’ could also pose a problem because respondents may become biased in what they are saying as to not wanting to insult the interviewer.

Russell rightly outlines how face to face interviews can be ‘intrusive’ and ‘reactive’ (Russell 2006:257). It requires a skilled interviewer to create a questionnaire and not inadvertently tell people how to answer.

2.4. External Variants

We acknowledge that there may be substantial variation in the interview settings. Interviews generally take place in a wide range of settings limiting the interviewer’s control over the environment. Interviewers may have to contend with disruptions and other unexpected problems that may inhibit the acquisition of information. We are aware that the surroundings in which the interview is conducted may influence the interviewee; therefore we propose to carry out the interview within a neutral environment such as a library, interviewing in the home can be somewhat intrusive. This will hopefully make the situation less artificial and allow the natural answers to occur. It will allow privacy for the participants, where there are no distractions and it is easy to hear respondents speak. It will be a comfortable environment and if possible, seating arrangements will be devised to encourage involvement and interaction. We are aware that using a sound recorder is more accurate than writing notes; however, we intend to take notes in addition to the aforementioned recording. This is important for the interviewer for a number of reasons: to check if all the questions have been answered, in case of malfunctioning of the tape recorder, in case of the interviewer making any mistakes or being inaccurate.

We recognise that there may be a ‘large gap between the respondent’s knowledge and that of the interviewer’ (Frechtling and Sharp 1997:24). However, we aim to overcome the cultural and possible language barrier with the aid of our Romani representative at university. If we are unsure of any possible meanings or cultural references, our representative will be able to outline any potential misunderstandings. The research we conduct prior to the interviews will enable us to somewhat minimise this gap.

We aim to interview four different respondents; younger male and a female, and an older male and female, in order to observe gender and age stratification. We recognize that male informants believe it inappropriate to discuss taboo issues with a female interviewer and vice versa, however we shall still attempt to gain data. We recognize also that the older informant may well be more difficult to interview, as very few of the traditional, older generation speak English. However, our Rom representative can help us overcome this difficulty through aiding translation.

As we have cited, the surroundings can influence the interviewee and the answers they give, we will ensure that the female will be interviewed separate from the male. The reasons behind this decision can be attributed to the belief that female Roma may be more inclined to speak candidly without males present. Furthermore, if the respondents are of a similar age to the interviewers this should create a more relaxed and beneficial interview. In addition, male respondents may worry about causing offence when answering our questions openly and so

may hinder collection of information on taboo subjects. Interviewers shall be respectful, professional and non judgemental when discussing sensitive issues.

3. Background Research

There are many different Rom communities; mass migration resulted in variance from within the culture. However, that is not to suggest that migration resulted in the watering down of Rom culture. Weyrauch et al outlines how ‘the determination not to assimilate into a dominant society has been crucial to their survival as a separate population’ (2001:29). This resulted in a rich, diverse culture, which ultimately varies according to the clan and location. This consequently caused differences in beliefs. Before commencing the interviews, we need to have some knowledge of these differences. This knowledge will also enable us to draw comparisons between the differences which exist within varying branches of Romani culture. For example, our previous knowledge informs us that, for some Romani communities travelling has become a thing of the past, whereas some communities still actively travel.

3.1. Major Celebrations and Events

3.1.1. Parties

Romani parties are quite extravagant, and the music goes on throughout the night. Regardless of the occasion, the celebrations are all similar. There are long tables where the guests sit and a head table for the immediate family. The long tables are covered with plates, silverware, cups, and bottles of soda, wine and beer. Smartly dressed waiters bring out numerous platters of food along with trays loaded with shots of ‘rakia’, a popular strong alcoholic drink. Whenever guests leave, their space is cleaned and re-laid for someone else to occupy. In one corner of the tent is the entertainment, such as a band, singer or musician, whilst elsewhere there are people dancing and enjoying the party atmosphere (Matras 2008).

3.1.2. Funerals

Gender role differences are often highlighted through religious ceremonies such as birth, marriage and death. For example, women are not likely to travel alone to represent their families at an event such as burials, if they wish to attend they will accompany their husbands (Matras 2008:4).

Stewart (1997:218) outlines the way in which a particular Hungarian Romani tribe commemorate the passing of one of their extended family unit. The body of the deceased is washed by female relatives of the deceased, redressed in finest and most favoured clothes; placed in the inner clean room; covered with a white sheet; surrounded with an uneven number of candles; and arranged feet facing the door. Straw is then spread on the floor, and coins are placed on the deceased’s eyes. All these are ritualised ways of sealing the body and stopping the deceased soul from returning. The actual ceremony and burial are conducted by

the priest and other officials as would be the case at a non Rom funeral. After the burial has occurred, for one year until the final mass is read, the family are to behave as though their bodily state was linked to that of the deceased. This means that men are to refrain from shaving and women from cutting their hair, acts such as these make the body 'abnormally ugly'. In addition to this, the festivities which took place at the wake are forbidden for one year. This ban is lifted after one year as the belief is harboured that after this time the corpse has been reduced to its bones. A final feast of remembrance is held at the home of the deceased (the 'pomana'). This celebration and the food which is served are intended to signal the end of the life of the deceased and the being of their next life (Stewart 1997:220).

3.1.3. Marriage

Marriage ceremonies involve the parents of the bride giving their consent; this is known to be something which the groom's parents must formally ask for. In traditional communities, a 'bride price' is assembled, as 'compensation to the family' and 'dowries are not uncommon' (Matras 2008:6). Elopements do occur and in these instances the family of the bride issue their consent for the marriage after it has taken place. 'Once the marriage has taken place the bride will become part of the groom's extended family' and a 'special bond' is forged between the mother in law and the bride. It is very unusual for the groom to join the bride's family (Matras 2008:6). Weyrauch et al outlines how 'traditionally marriage for gypsies has occurred early after age nine but usually before age fourteen' (2001: 35).

Differentiation between the sexes is illuminated through circumstances in which occur after a Rom man or a Roma woman marry a 'gažo' (non Rom). In this instance, 'if it is the bride who is non Rom then she is accepted into the extended family of her husband as is the case with any children who result from the marriage...' However, the same is not true of a groom who is not of Romani decent, whereby the bride and her new husband are both 'cast out of the extended family unit' (Matras 2008:7).

3.1.4. Divorce

Divorce requires a trial whereby the grievances of each family are stated publicly and the amount of bride price to be returned is decided (Sutherland 1975:236). This is the most crucial factor, and can be decided between the two families so a trial is not necessary, however an agreement on the amount is very rare since each family supports the actions of their own child. It is very rare for gypsies to have a divorce, however they are 'on the increase in young people' (Sutherland 1975:237). This is because young people want to choose their own groom, which will lead to eloping with their own choice of groom. An elopement or a divorce causes a scandal and requires a settlement of the 'bride price'.

Okley tells us that: 'remarriage and separation occur separately from the Gorgio court (meaning non gypsy or stranger)...usually Gypsy marriages end because precisely one if not both spouses goes on to live with someone else, who will not be referred to as husband or

wife' (1983:159). Children can go with either parent and be absorbed into the social offspring of the new parent. Separation was more frequent than suggested, the 'desertion, separation and divorce are very rare; the traveller marries for life' (as quoted in Okley 1983:169). Already in the 1920's Thompson (as quoted in Okely 1983:169) had recorded evidence of temporary alliances. Thompson also records that 'among English Gypsy's the dissolution of marriage was a purely informal affair that left the parties free to wed again if they chose' (as quoted in Okley 1983:169). Wayrauch et al outlines how 'sexual mores are rigorously enforced and a wife's complaint of shameful practices is ground for annulment as well as a sentence of marime and banishment for the husband' (2009:36).

3.1.5. Court

Acton has held that it is possible to classify three types of community authority structure in the Romani communities: 'the typology I am proposing is ... a kind of triangle with the feud, the Kris and the baro shero being near the three extremities each prioritizing a different value, that is personal responsibility, consensus and tradition, and each society having a different authority figure' (2003: 646). Thus, according to Acton, those communities not practicing the 'Kris' tribunal system might be, on the one hand, characterized by having one dominant, authoritarian leader authority, such as the 'Polska Roma' group. Another broad category in Acton's typology would be those communities with an apparently anarchic community structure, in which blood feuds regulate inter-personal and especially inter-family conflict.

In contrast, Stewart has denied in his study on Hungarian Rom that the 'Kris' has any legal authority whatsoever; 'the judgments given in Kris were no more than the advice of one Romani law in the Timiș county Giambaș community, or more men whom no one was compelled to heed, since the men who gave their opinions did so as individuals, not as representatives of some abstract system or idea of justice. They stood for themselves, nothing more. If they had authority, it was entirely personal and found no support in a system of power relations or means of coercion, since they had no means, moral or otherwise, to enforce their decisions' (1997: 57).

Female roles within many Rom courts may not extend past being witnesses or observers; however the men may be arbiters. In some communities the 'Kris' is so traditional as to forbid women from being involved in the proceedings in any way. This seems indicative of the Romani cultural gender divisions, whilst women may maintain control of certain aspects of their lives such as their economic role within the family and their female relations, men are still in possession of the true symbolic power within the community (Matras 2008:07).

Cahan outlines the proceedings of the Giambaș Cris of Timiș County, Romania. Firstly, each party chooses its own judges (crisinarea) so the standard number of judges in a case is generally two. Large cases may involve three or four judges, yet smaller, simpler cases only one judge respectively (2009:89). Cahan elaborates stating how 'some cases also have a

committee – students whose opinions are heard in the case. The committee are generally family members of the *crisinarea*' (2009:89).

A *crisinari* can refuse to take on a case, and often will, if upon review of the facts he believes he cannot arrive at a decision. The *Kris* may also invite the opinion of persons who would otherwise not have any formal standing before it, such as older women. Most *crisinarea* swear an oath (□*olahal*, pronounced “*tsolakhal*”) at the beginning of proceedings stating that they will remain fair to both sides. However, some Rom regard this as improper and do not □*olahal* at the beginning of the *Kris*. Witnesses are made to swear an oath if there is a clear conflict in facts between two parties. Cahan outlines how ‘the *Kris* will give more value to person who swears an oath before the *Kris*. The swearing of oaths is a key component of the *Kris*, because as a matter of practice, in the heat of the high stakes of a *Kris*, deceiving the court is a very significant threat’ (2009:92). Cahan also states that in *Giambaş Kris* demonstrates a clear link between ‘preservation of language and preservation of the *Kris*.’ (2009:95).

3.1.6. Conflict resolution

Every ‘*vitsa*’ (clan) has a ‘*Rom Baro*’ (big man) commonly referred to as the ‘chief’. The chief is elected for life and the position is not inheritable. Elders are considered particularly relevant for this role because they have a greater knowledge of Romania (Wayrauch et al 2009:40). Each chief manages conflict within his population. When conflicts emerge between different ‘*vitsa*’, a ‘*divano*’ may assemble. This is an informal proceeding in which the two chiefs meet to resolve the source of conflict.

There is a female counterpart to the chief; her power is unofficial but substantial. *Vlax Rom* call her ‘*mami*’, ‘*daki-dei*’ or ‘*dadeski-dei*’ other gypsies groups use ‘*purie-dae*’ meaning ‘old mother’. ‘*Mami*’ ‘is the guardian of the moral code and helps decide matters involving women and children. In important matters involving the entire ‘*kumpania*’ ‘she is the spokes woman for gypsy women’ (Wayrauch et al 2009:41).

3.2. Daily Life

The family unit places high importance and significance upon the ‘closeness of the extended family’ (Acton et al 1997:90). Resources are shared and work is organised in accordance with the extended family unit, such as food preparation. Women frequently ask each other for domestic goods to borrow. Females who buy ‘large quantities of food will frequently find themselves giving some of it away as her friends will send their children round to ask for some of it’ (Acton et al 1997:90). Stewart outlines how ‘almost all domestic labour is a woman’s responsibility, from child care through cooking, washing, and decorating the house each spring...’ (1997:38).

In principle, men should be willing to lend their money to their ‘brothers’ when they are wealthy. However, many males try to hide their money by giving it to their wives or putting it

in the bank and so to save it from the claims of relatives. A gypsy house will cook much more food than that to be consumed by members of that house. Households like to have food ready to offer to visitors, and food that is offered to visitors must not seem like food left over from a family meal. Households must appear to provide for anyone passing through it to eat when they like. Not to have food to offer is 'shameful' and will open up to accusations that the household is 'tight-fisted' with food (Acton et al 1997:90).

It is customary within many families to keep doors open. This is reflective of how members within the extended family are able to move unannounced and uninvited between doors within the shared domiciles. Individual core families may have their own fires within the shared areas, but these fires can be joined by any member of the shared unit at any time (Matras 2008: 4). Matras goes on to say that a 'typical Rom family unit will consist of: the head of the family his wife, their married sons and daughters-in-law (borja) with their own children. Any unmarried family members will also be part of the extended unit plus on occasion divorced or widowed family members will return and live with their clan' (2008:4).

Matras (2008:6) outlines the gender stratification present within 'most Romani households' stating that 'in most Romani households there are certain roles for men and women and gender stratification can be observed. Women are largely responsible for domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning, whilst men are responsible for the production which takes place within the house hold'. Child care is shared responsibility with 'men and women taking care of the children together'. However, other family members are often involved within child care. Acton outlines how '... many gypsy children spend a considerable portion of their childhood being looked after by non-parental relatives.' (1997:90)

Men and women both entertain within the family and professionally; they are actors, story tellers and fortune tellers, however the men are the ones who play musical instruments. Economic earning potential is not reliant upon a single family member, but with the whole family. Men within tend to engage in more specialised forms of making a living such as crafting instruments or offering to perform odd jobs for people. Women are more likely to go begging and collect things which they can sell. Women tend to engage with a larger number of people on a day to day basis than their male counterparts (Matras 2008:5).

In addition to the divisions of gender, age should also be considered, as the elder members of the family are the most respected members within the house hold, because age is synonymous with authority and life experience. Sutherland outlines how 'old people are highly respected and are regarded as essentially moral and clean, compared to sexually active men and women' (1975:263). Old age brings increased status and respect. The death of an elder within a household often results in the household splitting into new households. The life knowledge of the family elders is regarded as the most important source of family information as written documentation is not available to refer to. The inclusion of all ages in family life highlights one highly important aspect of Romani families.

Acton et al (1997:89) outlines how a Rom man will accompany a fellow man when making a trip into the town, because of a fear of getting into trouble with non-gypsy authorities such as

the police. If a gypsy is in hospital, their family will always be present so they will not be left alone with the gazos. If gypsies come across 'stranger gypsies' for example if they are broken down on the side of the road, then they should always offer their assistance. It is a custom for gypsies to help each other, for example, if a gypsy woman sees another gypsy woman without anything to cook or eat, she would say to come to the shop with her to find something to eat, "they like to help each other out...unlike the non-Gypsies. That's not the custom with the non-Gypsies' (Acton et al 1997:89).

3.3. Taboo Issues

The main pillars of Romani are the distinctions which exist between the abstract and symbolic terms of 'shame' and 'honour', the Romani terms for unclean are: (mahrim, maxado, or magardo) (Matras 2008: 9).

According to Elwood Trigg the rules fall into four overlapping categories:

- 1) taboos directly or indirectly related to the fear of being contaminated by women
 - 2) sexual taboos
 - 3) things considered to be dirty or unhygienic
 - 4) disdain of socially disruptive behaviour
- (as quoted in Wayrauch et al 2009:32)

3.3.1. The Separation of the Upper and Lower Body

The separation of the upper and lower body is highlighted through Gypsy law, Weyrauch et al states that 'according to Gypsy law, the human body is both pure and impure; the waist is the dividing line' (2009:30). This relates to the body which is split into halves; the upper and lower. The upper half is without shame, which means parts of the upper can be shown without bringing shame or embarrassing anyone. Stewart outlines how the head and particularly the mouth are perceived as the 'pure' part of the upper body. Stewart claims this is exemplified in the way that many Rom men would kiss each other full on the mouth as a sign of trust and brotherly closeness (1997:208).

In contrast, the lower body is perceived as unclean and thus cannot be revealed to anyone. Contact between the upper and lower parts of the body is avoided, for many Rom communities clothes are not washed together separate wash basins and towels are employed for washing (Matras 2008:9). Acton outlines how gypsies have a system of washing taboos '...the hierarchy of cleanliness is reflected on keeping levels of washing apart; bowls for washing crockery must not be contaminated by bowls for washing one's face and hands and these must not be contaminated by bowls for washing clothes..' (1997:168). Contact with the lower body and food or utensils are considered unacceptable.

Stewart outlines, in his study on Hungarian Rom, the way in which some gypsy women when washing head to toe use washing power or liquid to ensure that no dirt remains on the soap. Gypsy women are not allowed to be seen by men to be going towards a toilet (Stewart

1997:211). Gypsy women are forced to be incredibly private about washing, where as for gypsy men they would avoid washing in front of a respected guest but it is considered acceptable in front of immediate family, male or female.

3.3.2. The Female Lower Body

The female lower body encompasses and forms the centre of many Rom taboos. This is because of the female associations with menstrual blood. A man can be defiled if he makes contact with a woman's skirt or underwear in public. In addition to this reference to menstruation, birth or pregnancy in public can result in dishonour. Stewart outlines how in some Rom communities it is considered taboo to talk about menstruation and it referred to as, 'I have flowers' within the community. The reasoning encompassing the females wearing of aprons from puberty is due to the shame of this bodily process (Stewart 1997:214). Even as young children, females are expected to display 'greater shame about bodily functions', (Stewart 1997:211). Women can be dishonoured if there is any public mention of sexual acts so such topics are not mentioned when men and women are together. Furthermore, in traditional Rom families contact with skirts or aprons can 'embarrass and defile' men and result in 'the loss of male honour' (Matras 2008:9).

The manner in which taboos concerning the female lower body affect the working lives of the Rom is exemplified by Okley (1983:100) when she discusses horse dealing. Only men deal in horses but at the fairs occasional post-menopausal women stand near the horse dealing clusters. These women 'have privileges'. Women are often compared to horses, Gypsy men play at exchanging their wives. This is a striking example of how the females in Rom society are treated as inferior to their male counter parts. In some Rom communities 'a woman must never walk by a seated man because her genitals are at the same height as his face'. (Wayrauch 2009: 33). Similarly a man may not walk under a clothes line where woman's clothes are hanging.

The taboo associated with the female lower body is extended to the birthing process. Prior to the birth, the pregnant female must not prepare food. For some Rom communities it is believed that even a shadow can pollute food (Wayrauch et al 2009:38). The pregnant female is not to sleep in the same bed as her husband (Wayrauch et al 2009:43).

After birth, a mother and her new born baby are in a state of 'marime' (the opposite of pure and clean) and are isolated from adult men for six weeks. After these six weeks, '...a child is considered innocent of defilement, shame or social responsibility' (Sutherland 1975:262). This taboo impacts upon food preparation because '...food cannot be cooked by pregnant women, women who have just given birth and sometimes menstruating women' (Sutherland 1975:271). This is true for many Eastern European Rom and ensures that 'female impurities' do not come into contact with food.

The manner in which pregnancy is dealt with indicates shame is linked to the condition, it is somewhat viewed as an illness. The couple affected are immediately to tell everyone that they know to ensure that any unexpected desires that the female may have are fulfilled without any explanation being necessary. This initial revelation that the woman is pregnant will be the only time it is mentioned both to the outside world and within the marriage. The main reason why pregnancy is viewed in this way is because the woman's form becomes 'tubular' and the upper and lower halves of the body merge (Stewart 1997:215). Women are ashamed of their condition after birth and are confined to the house afterwards; they cannot go near main water supplies as this would pollute it. The child itself has to be christened before it is able to be seen by people as its soul can distance itself from the body. In addition, as mirrors and water are seen as the gateways to the other world, babies cannot see their own reflection or they risk their soul being distanced from their bodies (Stewart 1997:217).

Within more traditional communities women are forbidden to step over utensils, water bottles or wells as this is viewed as unclean. Some middle Eastern Rom have more extreme beliefs, including the forbidding of sexually active women to walk above a man in the house, this is often offered as explaining the preference for some Rom to live in caravans Matras (2008:9). Furthermore, Matras (2008:9) outlines how this allows the family to store water for the lower and upper half of the body in separate containers.

Another considerable taboo is for Rom girls and women to be seen to be making themselves more attractive in covering her lower body with an apron and her hair with a scarf, 'in not trying to make herself more attractive, and in keeping her eyes to the ground away from gypsy men, a girl showed that she is ashamed of her sexual desirability' (Stewart 1997:212). As a woman's hair is viewed as synonymous with sexuality and fertility within the Rom communities, hair is covered out of respect even in one's own kitchen.

3.3.3. Clothing

For many Rom there are certain items of clothing considered taboo. Certain items of clothing such as long coats and one piece dresses are shameful due to their denial of the bodies divisions. Trousers are considered taboo for women but a man's jacket is acceptable. It is considered to be taboo for a member of the Rom to see the opposite sex in a state of undress (Stewart 1997: 209). Stewart outlines how 'men of all ages bare themselves from the waist in hot weather...' as do older women. Whereas, young women are more restrained but may breast feed (Stewart 1997: 209). The division of the upper and lower body is of great importance for the Rom communities. Especially among the United States, clothing has changed among some gypsy women, but skirts typically are still long. Slacks have also become acceptable for women (Wayrauch et al 2009:33).

3.3.4. 'Gaje'

'Gaje' or non gypsies are often considered 'shameless' as they do not acknowledge Rom traditions or culture. Many Rom believe non-Gypsies to be impure because they 'display no

embarrassment about their sexuality, fertility or bodily functions in public' (Stewart 1997:210). Many Rom will therefore not eat food which is prepared by 'Gaje' and any utensils which they use will be disposed of in an attempt to stop any contamination. Sutherland outlines how 'food prepared by Gaje is avoided...' and gypsies will not usually eat in their homes (Sutherland 1927:259). To refuse food in someone's household implies is a serious insult and suggests that you are higher than they are and that you think that they are unclean.

Sutherland elaborates stating gypsies forced to eat food prepared by 'gaje' for example in a hospital, 'are in constant danger of pollution...' In a restaurant gypsies will usually eat with their hands to avoid utensils and will often ask for plastic cups and plates (Sutherland 1975:259).

3.3.5. Taboo within School

Rom societies and the corresponding beliefs and traditions are not static. This is partially due the assimilation process caused by the younger generation attending school. Furthermore, governmental and non-governmental representation is somewhat adding to these changes.

During the 1960s, government legislation passed 'The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act' which led to the closure of sites not fulfilling governmental requirements. This had two effects; the first was that some families accepted housing so were then expected to send their children to school regularly. The second effect was that other families went back on the roadside where possibilities for schooling became even more difficult (Acton et al 1997:130).

Traditional Romanian parents educate their children by allowing them to participate in all family activities. There is no formal testing of the skills or knowledge that children have acquired. In Romanian communities, schools represent everything that outsiders stand for, such as: rules, respecting a person's authority that is not part of the family and the separation of children from their family for long hours.

Mixing with non-Romanian children can run the risk of romantic relationships, which could alienate Romani children from their family and traditions. However, it is now recognised within most Romani communities that it cannot be avoided to send young children to school. As a result of this, children are reluctantly sent to school to learn some key skills, such as basic literacy, which can be useful to the family as a whole.

To avoid the unwanted hostility by non-Romanian children and their parents towards Romanian children, they are only sent to primary school and are often encouraged to skip school to show their loyalty to their family. Most parents withdraw their children from school before they reach puberty for fear of taboo issues being exposed to Romanian children. Such issues include; drugs, violence, alienation from home environment, and most importantly, the fear that girls and boys will participate together in sex education lessons. The lesson content

could bring shame upon the children, which the family would not approve of. At this stage of a child's life, they return to the community where every aspect of their lives will be scrutinised to make sure their behaviour is honourable. Despite the law denoting education up to 18 is mandatory; gypsies are able to keep this information from the authorities by travelling around from place to place.

4. Conducting the research

As previously mentioned, our investigation was designed to be a collaborated study with a Rom representative who has been recommended to us on behalf of The University of Manchester. Our Rom representative would help us gain access to this quite exclusive community, and prove invaluable with regards to gaining and processing the audio recordings. Whilst trying to gain the data, we experienced a few problems, mentioned in 4.1. We have, however, overcome these problems and conducted our study in a slightly different way (4.2). We feel this shows that we have been able to adapt our study around the unexpected problems which have arisen over time.

4.1. Problems

Prior to commencing our research, we were allocated Rom representatives, who agreed to help us as we needed and introduce us to the groups of people we would like to interview to help us research the culture of this Romani community. We initially met the Romani contacts at University exchanging contact details, with the agreement that we would meet to conduct the interviews in late January, to ensure all participants in our group were available after the exam period. In the last week of January we contacted our Rom representative in order to arrange a specific date and time. This was with no luck as his phone was constantly switched off. We continued to try and contact him for two weeks and eventually gave up hope.

We then consulted the list of Rom contacts, provided by the Romani project office. This seemed to solve our problem, as from contacting a further representative we arranged a meeting just a week later. Unfortunately, just a day before the meeting was due to take place, we received a phone call from the representative to inform us that he could no longer meet as he was in London all week. This, again, was a major setback, and we reverted back to the list of Romani contacts. After contacting a few more representatives, we finally arranged another meeting the following week. As we had already been let down twice we decided we should ring them on the morning of the interview to ensure there were no problems. However, they informed us that they could no longer meet us due to a hospital appointment.

Thus, so far three different representatives avoided meeting on three different occasions and we began feel discouraged, especially with the deadline getting closer. We discussed what we should do next and realised that we would not have enough time to arrange yet another meeting, especially to be let down again. We visited the Romani project office and discussed our problems. The Romani office suggested that to ensure we get some data, we should visit an area where there would definitely be a Rom community. We were informed that the Romani community go to church every Sunday afternoon, however before this the whole

community meet in a local park to socialise. We decided to visit the park at this time, along with our Rom representative, to try to interview some of the community. After this, we contacted a number of contacts we had previously arranged to meet and asked if they would be present on this day to introduce us to a few people in their community, as we would be seen as outsiders and this would help us to gain the trust of the interviewees. Two of our previous contacts agreed to help us. We thus managed to interview two young adults, one male and one female.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to interview four informants as originally planned. We originally aimed to interview two older informants, to perhaps demonstrate age stratification however this proved impossible. Many older informants we attempted to contact with spoke very poor English and did not wish to take part in our research.

4.2. Collecting the data

On the Sunday we had arranged to meet in the park, the weather was unfortunately poor and so the community did not spend the afternoon there. One of our male contacts, however, did come along and meet us, enabling us to interview him. He was also with his younger brother, who enabled us to ask him the questions about school as he is aged eleven and so has a current insight into this. We managed to collect a sufficient amount of data from the male respondent, although he was restricted in answering some questions probably because we were female and so he did not want to offend us.

Following this meeting we decided we needed more information to allow us to make a good comparison with our research. As a group we decided it would be extremely useful to interview a female, as this would provide a different perspective. We contacted a female respondent, who we knew was already working with another group and so we were unsure whether she would be able to help us as well. We contacted her that afternoon and luckily she was more than happy to help. We arranged to meet just a few days later to conduct our interview.

5. Findings

5.1. What we discovered

After collecting our data we were able to analyse it against the previous research we had gathered. This enabled us to separate the facts and what we had disproved.

5.1.1. Celebrations

Marriage

Our male informant outlined how "...Romani people get married younger like fifteen sixteen". He further explains that there is no definitive age, and it is "...dependant on (the)

person”. The female informant confirmed this explaining that she was married at the age of nineteen. This contradicts Weyrauch et al who outlined ‘...traditionally marriage for gypsies has occurred early after age nine but usually before age fourteen’ (Weyrauch et al 2001: 35). Apparently, the girl’s age and the clothing is regarded as a way of gauging whether or not she is married. Our female informant outlined how once a girl becomes married, she no longer wears trousers because “only virgin(s) wear trousers”, “if someone fifteen/sixteen I’m not sure (if they’re married) I ask them, how people know I’m married (is) my age”.

The female and male informants both confirmed that arranged marriages still form an integral part within Rom communities. The female informant described her own personal experience stating “...my dad decided I want to get married, I did not want because I not want a life on my own...I not know nothing then one day my mum says your getting married I say no way, she says yes you do”. “The family came to ask me, I say what my mum and dad decided”. It is apparent that the selection of the wife is a decision primarily made by the fathers of the potential bride and groom. However, that is not to suggest that Roma cannot choose their prospective spouse, the male informant outlined how some men can “...just go meet a girl... have some drinks with her and if he like her...arrangements can be made”. The male informant described a potential arranged marriage is as follows; “sometimes go with parents to other parents house...and I think you got to pay something I’m not sure”. This somewhat confirms data gathered in Matras (2008:6), that ‘bride prices’ do exist and are still somewhat being practised. However, the male informant wasn’t quite sure what this is for, and our female respondent explained that this is no longer really practised, she says “before yes, ages and ages yes, but now no more... now it is making a big wedding”.

Our male informant outlines that marrying a non gypsy is acceptable for both men and women explaining that; “...from 1989 the world changed”. He proceeds to state “... my uncle married a Romanian girl and my cousin she married a Romanian man and had two kids with him”. This contradicts Matras (2008:7), who suggested that women and men are treated differently and unequally for marrying non gypsies. According to Matras ‘...if it is the bride who is non Rom then she is accepted into the extended family of her husband, as is the case with any children who result from the marriage..’. However, the same is not true of a groom who is not of Romani decent, whereby the bride and her new husband are both ‘cast out of the extended family unit’ (Matras 2008:07).

Our female informant outlines that the wedding ceremony usually takes place in the family home, and the powers of elders extend to proclaiming marriage. She stated “older one says now wife and man”. However, the female informant explained that her wedding was in a church with a priest, “...it was in a church, a dress, everything was perfect normally not going to church but my dad wanted this”. Both informants stated that there is no legal procedure involved. The male informant stated “there is no document it isn’t written on paper” proceeding to describe marriage as “...just like girlfriend and boyfriend”. Our female informant confirmed this declaring “there is no ring, paper”. The wedding takes place purely by saying ‘you are now married’. The female participant told us that they “make weddings big to make a celebration”, and even compared them to “like celebrities”, saying that the

bride is a “princess for the day”. This shows us that it is a large celebration in Romani culture, and although there is no legal aspect, it is still highly regarded.

Our female informant gasped at when asked a question on pre-marital sex. She outlined that “...she (the woman who) makes sex before marriage, is a shame for all the family...she is going to be like persecuted all her life not beated...” Thus, this pre-marital sex is not a common occurrence within the community. Our female elaborates on the notion of persecution outlining that if a woman had an ex-boyfriend, he would not be invited to family events because it would humiliate her husband. Even if her ex-boyfriend was part of her extended family, he still would not be allowed to attend family events because there would be awkwardness between her husband and ex-boyfriend.

Our female informant also revealed that it is somewhat acceptable for men to commit adultery she describes that “my husband he called me up says I was getting drunk with my friends... and I brought in this bed a lady in the street and she sleeping the pillow you sleeping in”. The female informant outlined how she “put phone down...because two three hours he’s back home”. When asked if a female could do this, like the man she exclaimed “... no way...that is like out- it is not done... one time in a million”.

Divorce

We found that divorce is generally not accepted especially if the couple have children. The female informant stated “...must try to fix problems, again...again... if kids divorce is no”. The families of the married couple try to resolve issues to ensure the couple stay together for as long as possible. Our female informant contradicts Okely’s suggestion that ‘...separation was more frequent than suggested by the ministry’s claim’ (1983:159). Thus, our research confirms that ‘desertion, separation and divorce are very rare; the traveller marries for life’ (as quoted in Okley 1983:169).

Our female informant cites her own personal experience of divorce and reveals that if a man starts another family it is possible to get divorced. Divorce is not allowed simply because the couple are unhappy. If divorce occurs, the bride price is also returned to the bride’s father, which confirms our research by Sutherland (1975:236).

Our female informant cited her own personal experience explaining that her husband committed adultery and started a new life in Spain and despite this she had to “...wait a month, six seven, a year, three years waiting for him to come back”. She outlined that she was forbidden to make contact with him; he had to make contact with her first. She proceeded to explain that the bride’s family must “...ask the reasons why he leaving, is it her fault for not washing my clothes, looking after children...” The female informant’s response suggests that males frequently blame females for being bad wives. Our informants experience seems to give credence to Okely’s suggestion that ‘...Gypsy marriages end because precisely one if not both spouses goes on to live with someone else’ (1983:159).

If problems continued after the period of time, the family would call an elder from outside the community, who would attempt to reach a compromise between the parties. The male informant confirms that elders involvement within the process stating, "...coz they know more about traditions... they pay a fine or something if they want take the girl back...they just sort the things out there...if they want the girl to stay with the boy or divorce". When the female has waited a long enough period of time, only then will the community accept that she has made every attempt to salvage the marriage. Our female informant described how she was "persecuted, people show you the finger", "I waiting for him six months, then I find somebody and my family say shame on you". We thus believe that Thompson's description of divorce among gypsy's is incorrect, he states 'among English gypsies the dissolution of marriage was a purely informal affair' (as quoted in Okley 1983:169). Our interviews confirm that there are many procedures which must be followed and many stages of conflict resolution involved. However, Thompson seems correct in stating that post-divorce "...the parties (are) free to wed again if they chose" (as quoted in Okley 1983:169). Our female informant has since remarried.

Funerals

Our male informant outlined that "...I have never been to a funeral...but like they just bring some popular singers..." He proceeds to outline that "...the body is inside (the house) and everybody can come and see if they want". Our female informant gave a more detailed response explaining that "...we keep person that is dead three days in the house on fourth day bring them to church...for blessing then we going to cemetery". She proceeded to outline that sometimes people are buried within a family tomb. Both informants confirmed that there is no cremation and bodies are laid to rest.

The female informant outlined how it is the "usually strange old women, or the wife if she (does) not want people to see her husband" who washes the body. She outlines that it is always women that wash the body and never men. This confirms and somewhat differs from Stewarts' research which suggests 'the body of the deceased is washed by female relatives of the deceased' (Stewart 1997:218). The female informant confirms Stewarts' findings that Roma often place coins over the eyes of the deceased. However her explanation does not replicate Stewarts findings that the coin is a '...ritualised way of sealing the body and stopping the deceased soul from returning' (Stewart 1997:218). She outlines how "some dead die with eyes like this (half open), put coin on eyes to put eye back for hour or two a day to make eyes go back if they come to see dead and see the open eyes they don't like that". We enquired why specifically coins and she stated "...they are heavy, cold ...not going to happen (smell)".

She described that members of the deceased's family "cannot wash for nine days" and "men cannot shave their beard for six months". She states "...not allowed to wash hair or body nine days , for six months /year not allowed to shave beard or cut hair, but women no cutting hair, and wearing black". Our female informant confirmed Stewarts' analysis that after the

burial and for one year until the final mass is read, the family are to behave as though their bodily state was linked to that of the deceased (Stewart 1997:218).

Our informant also confirmed research by Matras that suggests ‘...a female will only attend a funeral if her husband accompanies her, and that they would never attend alone (2008:4). Our informant stated “...If a wife wanted to go to a funeral and the husband didn’t want to go she’s not going to go”. Interestingly she cites this as a reason to separate (divorce).

5.1.2. The Court and Conflict Resolution

Whilst researching the culture and practices of the Romani people we came across a method of dispute resolution which is known as the *Kris* which is the equivalent to a tribunal within a court. The female informant cited a different name for *Kris*, ‘judicarra’ or meeting. Our research revealed that within court proceedings it is the males that pass judgement on any issues that are brought forward for discussion. Our female informant confirms Matras (2008:7) suggestions that women are ‘forbidden’ from taking part in the decision making process but they may act as witnesses. However she outlines that an elder woman will often resolve disputes that occur between two women she proceeded to give us examples such as, arguments that occur between women over clothing or jewellery not being returned after being borrowed, which would be dealt with by an elder female. She described such disputes as: “woman’s issues”. This confirms Wayrauch’s et al findings that female elders or *Mami* act as ‘...is the guardian of the moral code and helps decide matters involving women and children (Wayrauch et al 2009:41). Our female informant outlines that more “serious issues” such as; ‘divorce’, ‘borrowing money’ and issues involving ‘cars’ are matters which would be dealt with by men.

Our male informant outlined that within family conflicts it is the father who usually resolves conflicts. He states “...my father he has most responsibility within the family... my mother she agrees with him”. Conflict resolution between families involves contacting ‘elders’. Our male informant outlines how “...call the elders...and he tell them to pay a fine or something”. He proceeds to cite an example “...I need you because I had a fight with somebody and the elder say I need him to come to me, the person who start the fighting”. The involvement of ‘elders’ to resolve disputes confirms research that ‘...elders are considered particularly relevant for this role (conflict resolution) because they have a greater knowledge of Romania’ (Wayrauch et al 2009:40). The involvement of ‘elders’ is clearly a deeply entrenched tradition within the Romani society. This is evident because a complete stranger would be willing to travel a reasonable distance to help resolve an argument, which other cultures would regard as a matter for the authorities in their local area. Furthermore, it illustrates how insular Romani society in England is.

Both informants confirm that *Kris* or tribunals still exist today and are frequently used to resolve conflict. Furthermore, our informants confirm that initially a male older family member “father, brother or an older uncle” who is personally involved in the disagreement would preside over court. If reconciliation is not reached a stranger, who is more likely to be

impartial is contacted. Our female informant proceeded to cite a hypothetical example involving her father, who might phone a stranger from Birmingham, and as recompense for his assistance he would: “pay for your travel... going to pay for your expenses and I’m going to buy you something to drink... please come and sort this out”. Our female informant thus confirmed a similarity with the Giambis *Kris* because the Giambis *Kris* allows ‘...each party to choose its own judges crisinarea’ (Cahan 2008;89). However, Cahan also outlines that ‘...the standard number of judges in a case is generally two’, our female informant suggests that can be resolved with one judge. Our female informant implied that the reason why internal proceedings are more successful than resolution with the authorities is interlinked with avoiding shame and scorn from fellow Roma.

Both informants acknowledge and respect the value and power awarded to the *Kris* and ‘elders’. This differs to research on the Giambaş community where the *Kris* doesn’t have any legal authority. Stewart outlined that ‘...the judgments given in *Kris* were no more than the advice of one Romani...or more men whom no one was compelled to heed... if they had authority, it was entirely personal and found no support in a system of power relations or means of coercion, since they had no means, moral or otherwise, to enforce their decisions’ (Stewart 1997: 57). This demonstrates that Romani culture differs due to geographical location, the traditional nature of the family and many other factors.

5.1.3. Taboo Issues

The Separation of the Upper and Lower Body

The female informant confirmed that there is indeed a separation between the upper and lower body. She stressed that the separation process is not as extreme as research might suggest. It is widely established that Roma have a system of washing taboos. The female informant outlined that within her family male and female clothes are washed separately, for fear of contamination between female lower body clothing and male clothing. This confirms Matras’ analysis that for many Rom communities clothes are not washed together (2008:9). It is perceived ‘impure’ to wash the clothes together. She proceeded to outline that different types of towels are washed separately, for example facial towels and bodily towels are washed separately. She states “never going to put that skirt with a towel that she wash her face (with) ...because she is having relationship”. However, she does state the degree of separation varies within different families, for some families washing the clothes together, is not really a problem. She states “some older men do not (want) their things (washed) with skirt... my husband don’t have a problem with that but some older men do”. Women’s underwear must not be washed with male clothing for fear of contamination. The male informant’s family did not separate the clothes for washing and commented that his mother only separated clothes due to the ‘colours’. He stated “my mother sort them by the colours...if white then in it goes with whites...my mother usually put all clothes in washer no separation”.

Taboos Associated with Child Birth

The research on taboos associated with child birth was confirmed in both interviews. Sutherland's findings; 'that a woman must not prepare food for six weeks because of her *impure* state', was confirmed (Sutherland 1975:262). The male informant stated post-birth the woman "...is not allowed to do cooking for three months/one month I am not sure...she has to stay in a quiet place for three weeks or something". It is interesting that both informants do not know the specific time for which a pregnant woman must be isolated after birth. The female informant described her own personal experience stating, "I give my example... when I was giving birth to my daughter I was not wanted to go to cook, to touch the bible because I am like dirty... for six weeks... then you go to priest give you some water in the church, then you wash your hands put water on the baby's face, then you are clean". This is a similar ceremony to a christening. She proceeds to outline that the restrictions on cooking is dependent on the family stating "... most traditional families do this thing... my dad had no problem with me cooking ... but my friend, her dad thinking she was dirty". The female informant also outlined that women must not touch the bible or a picture of Jesus during this time. However, post-birth, women are allowed to prepare food for themselves. The female informant outlined that within her family the task of preparing food would be allocated to her mother or sister. Conversely, in the male informant's family, the husband would prepare the food for the rest of the family for these six weeks.

Research suggesting new born babies cannot look into a mirror for six weeks was confirmed by our female informant as they could be frightened by their own reflection. Furthermore, friends are not allowed to visit the baby for fear the baby could be frightened by new faces (Stewart 1997:217). The female informant commented that "yes yes that's true. They're not allowed for like six nine weeks...not allowed because (the baby will) be afraid" and "if I make sex last night I'm not allowed to see her baby...because skin is going to get all red". She further stated that when menstruating "... whether I am virgin or not virgin I am not allowed to hold bible or picture..." Furthermore sexually active females cannot touch the bible, "I can say this because were all girls, I read bible every week, but I make sex ... so I'm not going to touch it for three days". She also states that research surrounding menstruation and taboos is exaggerated.

'Marime'

Initially both respondents did not understand when we attempted to discuss *marime*. The female informant outlined that "marime is the size" citing another term; 'Mauritata'. The semantic meaning of *marime* is interesting because it may well be interlinked with the change in 'size' associated with pregnancy. *Marime* seems to be a concept closely related to the body. It is apparent that *marime* causes states of shame with the male informant admitting "...marime is the worst thing you know, if people know you have Marime it's a bad thing". He proceeded to outline that *marime* can be caused by birth, stating "marime is like... I'm not sure how to say it, its like a lady give birth to her son that's something like that... you

have to wait for some time”. This explains that this is why pregnant women go away for a period of time. When we probed for more information on how people can become *marime* our male informant was reluctant to talk. “I don’t want to say this now, because it’s a bit like...” He claims lots of things can cause *marime* but chooses not outline them. He stresses that ladies wearing trousers would not cause *marime*, eating certain things, and even killing a person cannot cause *marime*. However, intercourse before marriage can cause and ‘the h word,’ to which he was referring to a woman being a prostitute, cause *marime*. Our female informant initially gasps at the question related to premarital sex, which seems to replicate the male informant’s response. She states that if a female has premarital sex it brings “...shame on all family, she will be persecuted her whole life...not beaten”. Our male informant stated that pregnancy before marriage “...sometimes happens but I’m not sure about what is going to happen...probably force them to marry their daughter”. If the family is unsure who the father is the “...women would probably go to the doctor to sort it”. It seems that pregnancy before marriage causes great shame for many Rom families.

The female informant cites lots of examples which can ‘shame’ a man and a woman, but does describe them as *Marime*. The female informant cites many examples of taboos which must be avoided for fear of causing ‘shame’ for a woman. She outlines how if a man is sat at a table, a woman must never lean across him to pick up an object that is on the other side of the table, she must ask for the object instead. If a female was to lean across the man, it would be considered very shameful. She also states that if a woman was not a virgin, she would not be able to sit on the side of a table whilst talking to her father as again it is seen as ‘impure’. She confirms Wayrauch’s et al findings that ‘females must never walk by a seated man because her genitals would be the same height as his face’ (Wayrauch et al 2009: 33).

Furthermore, if an object dropped onto the floor next to a female and a stranger Rom picked the object up for her, this would be interpreted as though the stranger wants the female for marriage, love or sex. A virgin female is allowed to step over any dropped items over the floor, for example a spoon, but a female who is not a virgin must step around this object before it is picked up. Our female respondent stated “if I am a virgin, I can step over it, but because I am not a virgin, I can’t”. This confirms Matras’ analysis that within more traditional communities women are forbidden to step over utensils, water bottles or wells as this is viewed as unclean (Matras 2008:9). She also confirmed Matras’ (2008:9) analysis that it only in families with more ‘extreme’ beliefs that forbid women to walk above a male in the house. She simply stated ‘no’ in response to the accuracy of research.

Clothing

The male informant stated “in my culture, not allowed only the youngest allowed” to wear trousers. He states “I have never seen a Romanian girl wear jeans” because “...they feel ashamed to wear jeans”. The male informant proceeds to outline that revealing tops are not appropriate clothing because people are “not allowed to see their chest...nothing low cut”. On the other hand, men can wear what they like, including mid length shorts. However, the

female informant discussed with us that pre-marriage females can wear jeans. However after marriage, when a female is no longer a virgin, she has to wear a long skirt. Our informant outlined that women generally feel more comfortable wearing skirts than jeans as she said if a man were to start talking to her while she were wearing jeans, she would be constantly checking to make sure her body signals were not giving out the wrong message as she is still a virgin. The male informant also told us that if a woman were to wear trousers or jeans, she would be attracting the “wrong sort of attention” to themselves.

‘Gaje/Gajo’

Both informants stated there are many terms to refer to a non-Gypsy. ‘Gaje’ for a female and ‘gajo’ for a male being among these. Our male informant frequently eats food prepared by non gypsies at his local youth centre. He states “I have lots of friends Bangladeshi House and at the Youth centre....if want to eat ... I eat all the time”. Our female informant outlines how she has “...a few gaje friends” and goes out for meals at local restaurants but would never go to a restaurant with male non-gypsies. Thus, both informants contradict Sutherland’s analysis that ‘...food prepared by Gaje is avoided...’ (Sutherland 1927:259). This suggests that Sutherland’s research was on extremely traditional Rom, and many gypsies do not feel in ‘constant danger of pollution’.

We asked the female informant about things she feels that non-gypsies do that are considered shameful. She outlined that it shameful to see a girl who is intoxicated on the street and is not in control of herself, or is too drunk to realise body parts are in full view of people. The female informant commented that Roma women like ‘gajo’s’ but are “...not allowed to have gajo friends” because of a “big attraction...” that exists between the two. Roma females know it is shameful if they were to be together but like the appeal of the dangerous side of it. She described it has “water and fire...because they love what is not allowed”.

School

Weyrauch et al outlines how ‘...Romani objections to schooling may be related to this danger (marime) because of their exposure to children on sex education and uninhibited communication with non gypsy children...’ (Weyrauch et al 2001: 256). When the female respondent was asked what her opinion was on sex education for children, she replied “I don’t know”. When questioned further, she told us that Romani children are “starting sex from 11 years old” so having sex education lessons would not contaminate them because they are already sexually active. The female respondent however informed us that the contraceptive pill is used but not a condom because “males don’t know how to use them”.

5.1.4. Daily Life

Our female informant instantaneously confirmed that ‘men’ are firmly established as the main authority figures within the family. Our male informant confirmed his ‘father’ as the head of

the house because he has "...the most responsibility in the house". However, our female informant also proceeded to explain that this can be dependent upon the individual family. She cites the example of her daughter and mother, and states how her mother would 'reign' in her daughter's place if necessary. She states that her daughter would listen to the informant's mother because she is the older person, with more 'experience'. This is confirmed by our male informant who states "...you should respect them because they're older people if you speak to them you can get lots of ideas from them". This confirms that older age brings increased status and respect (Sutherland 1975:263). Contrary to myths surrounding the 'age of adulthood' there is no definitive age at which a child is considered an adult. It is dependent upon the family, and also upon the child and how they wish to be treated.

Our female informant outlines how extended families are the norm. People normally marry at the age of "fifteen/sixteen", and boys when "building a home for the first time usually live with their mum", thus brides go to live within the groom's parents' house. This confirms Matras' claims that '...typical Rom family unit will consist of: the head of the family his wife, their married sons and daughters-in-law (borja) with their own children' (2008:4). The male informant also confirms this stating that if he marries; the girl will come to live with his parents.

We acquired data which confirms that the female informant's main family business involves the sale of; horses, wagons, and products. Interestingly, it is the only males who are actively involved in the family business. The male informant states "...my family never really worked for a company". But "twenty years ago", his family "sold shoes door to door", not on markets. It seems for the male informant the family business, is a thing of the past, unlike the female informant.

The female informant describes women as preferring to "...stay home, look after the family and house". The female informant states "women in Romania do not work", and from "eight years old" girls learn to cook and how to take care of domestic duties. This confirms Matras' (2008:8) findings on the stratification of gender roles, as women are primarily in charge of domestic duties. The female informant outlines that it is mainly females who look after the children; she cites an example of women coming together in times of need to look after each other's children. This clearly confirms Acton et al findings that non parental figures are often involved in child care (1997:90) but disconfirms Acton's suggestions that '...child care is joint'. Our interviewee seems to replicate Stewarts' findings that 'almost all domestic duties are a woman's responsibility...' (1997:38). She describes how she often cooks for "sixteen, twenty people"; showing that family meals are clearly an integral part of daily life. This gender stratification seems replicated by our male informant who states that his mother also completes all cooking within the house.

Whilst our female informant has a job, she stresses that very few women work. She describes how young females are led by example stating "nobody wants to be the first to get this experience so there is no example to follow". She outlines how it is the men who must work, demonstrating clear gender stratification. Interestingly, the male informant outlines that his

mother too has a job at a local magazine company but states his father is the main breadwinner and if the older members of the family can help with household income they will do so. He stresses that younger children do not work stating “not the kid he goes to school” (referring to his younger brother). He states that occasionally his father will complete domestic duties if his mother is busy; he cites that this father once cooked ‘cabbage’. This clearly, demonstrates how gender stratification differs within each household, as our female informant insists that domestic duties are primarily completed by females. She even commented that if she was away in hospital for example then “duties are my mother’s responsibility”. The female informant explains how she always makes more food than needed “...if I have three people in house I always cook for five or six”. This confirms Acton’s analysis that Roma families always cook more food than they need (Acton et al 1997:90).

Our female informant describes how travelling still forms quite an integral role within her families lives, it is not simply an out-dated tradition. She cites an example of her five uncles, despite having cars; her uncles still travel with horses and wagons when travelling. Our male informant contradicts this stating that he has never been travelling, and he does not want to, he explains how he was raised here, and states “I’m going to stay here probably for the rest of my life... England is my home”.

The female informant’s opinion on Roma education is not too favourable, stating there is lack of “encouragement” and “proper attention”. Her viewpoint on English education is much more favourable; having witnessed development in her daughter’s progress. She cites how the local school, Cedar Mount, is a highly multilingual and multicultural school which celebrates diversity, and firmly believes that her children are not disadvantaged anyway by their culture. Our male informant’s younger brother confirms this stating “don’t feel different”, proceeding to state how he plays football with his English friends. School uniform does not impact or restrict the female informant’s child’s life as might be anticipated, because unmarried females can wear jeans and trousers. It is only after marriage you must wear long skirts, which is explained more in the taboo clothing section.

She outlines that opinions on education have become more favourable, and how education is becoming more popular. She cites an example which shows a generational shift in favour of schooling. Her parents cannot read or write, and she taught herself to read by watching her little brother, yet her children go to school and she is very happy with the ‘progress’ they are making. Our male informant replicated this and stated “I haven’t been to school’ but “...my little brother goes to school since he was 11” The male informant learnt English at the community centre, and is now volunteering there. However his younger brother attends school “...since he comes from Romania”. When we enquired as to why he didn’t attend school yet his little brother did, he replied “...me and brother were raised here, but my little brother and his twin were raised by my grandparents in Romania”. This suggests that younger generations are more likely to attend or have attended school. However, he commented that he “...wanted to go to school but it was never an option” because of the way he was brought up; but if he had children, he would like to send them to school. Our female informant outlines whilst it is important to read and write, most Roma “...don’t need to make all

progress” because “...I’m not going to be a teacher or go to university ...nobody going to hire me”. She stresses the importance of learning how to support the family through “business skills”, declaring “I think there is discrimination”.

6. Conclusions

We confirm that Rom culture is still rich and very much diverse. Our findings demonstrate that culture differences arise not just due to geographical reasons but due to the individual family’s beliefs and traditions. The interviews confirmed some of our research was correct, yet highlighted that much of the research is outdated and based on extremely traditional families. Furthermore, both interviewees confirmed that culture, as expected, cannot be pigeon holed into a single category and is varies according to the individual and family beliefs and traditions. Thus many of our findings contradicted research completed on Rom families in other countries. However, it is apparent, that some traditions are very much central to the Rom, and we thus confirmed some traditions and similarities between our research and that of Stewart (1997), Matras (2008) and Weyrauch et al (2001). Weyrauch et al outlines how ‘the determination not to assimilate into a dominant society has been crucial to their survival as a separate population’ (2001:29), seems somewhat proven by our research as demonstrated the Rom community clearly retain their own beliefs and traditions.

We believe that we gained deeper understanding and a greater knowledge of the Roma community through the female informant as opposed to the male informant. This is possibly because we were all female interviewers and our informant clearly felt more at ease discussing taboo issues literally stating “...I can talk about this because we are all girls”. In contrast, the male interviewee seemed somewhat uncomfortable when we broached the taboo section, stating “...I don’t really want to say this” and frequently monitored his language to avoid offending us, the ‘h word’ as a substitute for ‘prostitute’ illustrates this. If a further study was conducted, we would suggest that same sex interviews are far more revealing, and much less restricted.

Elwood Trigg analysis that ‘marime’ rules fall into four overlapping categories is also confirmed by our taboo section:

- 1) taboos directly or indirectly related to the fear of being contaminated by women.
- 2) sexual taboos
- 3) things considered to be dirty or unhygienic and
- 4) disdain of socially disruptive behaviour is confirmed in our research (Wayrauch et al 2001:32) .

Total word count 13,257 (excluding contents, appendix and references)

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8. Appendix

Proposed Questions

The proposed set of questions we intend to ask our interviewees is below. The questions have been separated into subject specific categories to ease the interview transmission.

Family Life

- Do you have a main authority figure within the family?
- Do you live within an extended family? Is this normal practice?
- Do you/have you been /considered travelling?
- At what stage in a young person's life are they considered a man or woman?
- Do you have a family business?
- What are the male/female roles in your community?

Dispute settlement

- How are minor and major disputes within the family settled?
- Does this differ to how disputes within the community are settled?
- Do you have a 'big man' /head person within your community if so how is he/she chosen?
- Does your community have a 'kris'?
- What are the female roles within the court?

Gender roles

- Do specific family members deal with domestic duties, which ones?
- Is there a family business?
- What are the typical roles women and men have within the family and what defines these roles?
- Which people are responsible for earning money within the family? Is there a 'breadwinner'?

Weddings

- How are engagements confirmed and celebrated? Are dowries a common practice?
- How are weddings confirmed and celebrated? Is there a specific ceremony? Is there a legal procedure or a special place in which this event takes place?
- Do you practice arranged marriages? If so how is a husband or wife chosen?
- At which age range do people ordinarily get married?
- Are there any cases of pre-martial sex?
- Can a Rom marry a non-rom?
- Do you know how other Rom_families celebrate weddings, similarly or differently?

Funerals

- How do you mark the death of family members? Is there a ceremony, what does it entail? A priest?
- When someone dies within the community, what are the normal rituals for dealing with the deceased? In some Rom communities coins are placed on the deceased eyes and in the palm.

Religion

- Do you have a religion?
- Do you celebrate any religious festivals, if so how are they celebrated?

School

- How do you feel (about your) child going to school?
- Do any customs or traditions affect your school life?
- Would you like to go to school?
- How do you feel about sex education?
- Do you wear school uniform?

Pregnancy

- Do the roles of pregnant females change within the family unit? If so, in what ways?
- How is child birth celebrated? How are children named?
- Can a pregnant woman prepare food?

Divorce

- Do you believe divorce is acceptable or unacceptable within your community?
- On what grounds can a person apply for divorce?
- What is the procedure for a couple getting divorced?

Marime and Taboos interview separately

- What is considered appropriate clothing for men and women? Is there any particular reason why females prefer to wear skirts?
- Do you believe in the separation of the upper and lower body?
- We have come across some information and do not understand it, it is a concept called 'marime' can you outline what 'marime' is? Is 'marime' practised today if so how can it be caused? How are states of 'marime' be resolved?
- What are your opinions on premarital sex, how is viewed within the community?
- Do you have a special name for non gypsies? Do you /have you ever socialised with non gypsies? Would you ever eat food prepared by non gypsies in restaurant etc?