

REVIEW

SITES OF RESISTANCE: GYPSIES, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS IN SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND THE ACADEMY, BY ANDREW RYDER (LONDON, UCL IOE PRESS, 2017)

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This book, based on Ryder's direct experience, research, and political convictions, provides a significant contribution to the rather sparse literature on Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma (GTR) communities and campaigning. It complements and augments his previous publications on the inequalities experienced by many GTR people, and relates a history of campaigns to combat these injustices. While the book is firmly based on sound theoretical concepts, the author does not let these get in the way of a good narrative, making excellent use of examples and anecdotes to illustrate his meaning and broaden the reader's awareness of the diverse conditions and aspirations of GTR people.

Ryder has spent many years working as an activist supporter, assisting with the development of various groups and campaigns. Based in part on material gathered for his Ph.D. dissertation, the book traces recent GTR campaigns, identifying both challenges and achievements from the GTR perspective, while intertwining Ryder's particular story of growing engagement and enlightenment. The author skillfully weaves together theory, politics, and practice to develop a deep understanding of the GTR experience as one of the UK's most disadvantaged communities and, just as importantly, charts the strategies of resistance and advocacy used to champion their rights and tackle issues of stereotyping and exclusion.

For example, in one chapter he details the distressing experiences of children attending a secondary school near to their site, using the different reactions of the students and their families to illustrate his model of the varying forms of struggle that communities engage in to deal with the prejudices they encounter.

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The chapter, based on observations and interviews with parents, teachers, and pupils themselves is highly critical of the school's practices, notably the tokenistic nod towards diversity in representing "Gypsy and Traveller culture" and their outreach strategy, which "failed to grasp the importance of developing relationships with the Gypsy community" (p.52).

In another example (Chapter 7), Ryder describes how he assisted individuals in practical ways in their dealings with local authority planning procedures, while at the same time helping to organize the collective campaigns of GTR families facing hostile attitudes from local residents and threatened with eviction from unauthorized sites. In both respects, Ryder's accounts highlight the perceived unfairness of Council officers and explore the vulnerability of GTR communities to discrimination and consequent mental health difficulties. In an interesting examination of the activist role played by Gratton Puxon and his use of oppositional tactics, Ryder is disparaging of the radical "liberator" position, and uses this case to promote his own model of inclusive community development, based on GTR community strengths, assets, and traditions.

Ryder's argument consistently emphasizes the importance of respect and meaningful relationships between GTR individuals and the professionals responsible for providing decent services. I found his treatment of different forms of individual and collective capital (especially social, cultural, and symbolic) interesting. He contends that a two-way process of integration would enable GTR communities to develop, acquire, and share these different forms of capital without losing essential aspects of the Gypsy Traveller identity. The book offers a useful analysis of the ways in which different strategies evolve as a response to marginalization. Using a case study of the households on one site, Ryder demonstrates how kinship ties and social networks comprise strong bonds forged and maintained through attendance at significant "rites of passage" gatherings and annual fairs. He observes an "elaborate series of rewards and sanctions" (p.31) that hold the community together without completely suppressing emerging freedoms, especially for women and young people. Cultural capital (vital knowledge, skills, and informal qualifications) is transmitted through family socialization and traditional patterns of exchange that allow livelihoods to be pursued outside of the formal economic and labor markets. Ryder uses the term symbolic capital to consider power dynamics within the community. Honor and prestige seem to be enduringly valuable in sustaining the "Gypsy and Traveller way" and asserting status, but this can lead to intra-community strain and tends to create divisions between groups that have settled and prefer to conform to local norms, compared to those that continue to abide by GTR moral codes and customs.

For GTR communities to survive, or indeed thrive, they need to develop strategic connections that will help them gain social inclusion and access opportunities as well as tackle entrenched prejudice and discrimination. Ryder sets out how the GTR movement has adopted a range of stratagems that seek to uphold human rights and defend cultural ethnicity while simultaneously finding and working with allies in the wider political world. In the chapter on critical pedagogy, he talks of the role played by people, such as himself, who function as “outsider catalysts” (a Freirean term) or “organic intellectuals” enabling conscientization and community mobilization. Building on previous work and his experience as a paid policy officer for the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition, he cautions against the “Gypsy industry,” the network of NGOs that are dependent on state funding and therefore constrained in the extent that they can be overtly political in working on the issues raised and solutions prioritized by GTR community representatives. The Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition favored a “capabilities” and empowerment approach to securing equal rights, especially in relation to the provision of sites and changes in the law. The group enabled GTR individuals to articulate their demands directly through lobbying and by speaking to journalists about their aspirations.

Ryder explores how their avowed commitment to human rights and all forms of equality (notably around gender and sexual orientation) generated tensions with older generations of the GTR community. My own experience as a community development practitioner suggests that this is not unique to this population, and I would have welcomed a more in-depth discussion of the complex inter-play between tradition, honor, status, and livelihoods. It would have been interesting to compare how these are affected by social media and changes in public attitudes.

Ryder avoids a simplistic essentialism. This enable him to sensitively reflect different responses to oppression, and to draw out how these shape individual and collective choices made by GTR people regarding their families’ welfare and for the future, especially regarding the ambitions of young people. The sections exploring different identities and living strategies are particularly illuminating, informed by Ryder’s direct knowledge of the “Gypsy way” through his links with individuals and their campaign/support groups. This allows him to offer meaningful, perhaps surprising insights and to draw useful conclusions for policy and practice. His consideration of intersectionality is thought provoking, demonstrating an awareness of how identities are often situational, shifting over time in response to a series of negotiated compromises that reflect a tension between traditions and modern circumstances. In dealing with education, community, and culture, Ryder examines how the various dimensions of class, gender, and cross-generational relations produce frictions within some GTR

communities, as well as acknowledging the more familiar aspects of ethnicity and racism that lead to wider conflicts and exclusion.

I found the chapter on competing academic discourses and rivalries to be less stimulating, but no doubt it covers some important ground for those involved in this area of study. Ryder's stance comes from a position of respect and solidarity. He offers a timely reminder of the legitimacy of activist scholarship and the use of engaged research methodologies that adopt critical pedagogy and co-production as underpinning principles. The call for participative and action-oriented research is a pressing plea that deserves to be heard by all concerned with funding and policy-making, as well as the more esoteric branches of Romany studies.

Finally, it would be good to have heard more about the impact of austerity-driven public spending cuts, alongside the growing xenophobia unleashed by Brexit, and how these have affected GTR prospects and livelihoods. Perhaps this is a topic for further co-enquiry among "engaged scholars" drawn from academia and GTR communities themselves. Overall, this book offers a disarmingly self-critical account of Ryder's journey from activist-liberator mode to a more nuanced and complex understanding of the challenges facing GTR communities and the potential for community development to offer credible routes to collective empowerment and the building of alliances with those wanting to work in solidarity and hope that social justice for Gypsies and Travellers is possible.

The book is beautifully written and easy to read, tracing Ryder's personal trajectory with candor and honesty, notwithstanding occasional repetition. "Sites of resistance" is polemical, but grounded in experience and well supported by theory. It will be of interest to people working with GTR communities, policymakers, students, and researchers looking at marginalized communities. Hopefully, Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma people themselves will also find it simultaneously sympathetic and thought-provoking.