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From the Front Page to the Town Hall

Representations of Irish Travellers
and local resistance to sites.

Joanna Moore



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Abstract

This dissertation aims to develop an understanding of the representation of Irish Travellers in the media and in public and political discourse, with a particular focus on local authorities and site provision. Media analysis concentrating on coverage of the Dale Farm eviction of 2011 demonstrates how Travellers are portrayed in a narrow, stereotypical fashion, often with reference to conflict, cost and criminality. Irish Traveller ethnicity itself is questioned in many newspapers, while representations of the group tend to focus on negative characteristics portrayed as inherent to the 'Traveller identity'.

Travellers in the UK suffer not just from negative portrayals in the media, but also from a chronic lack of suitable housing. Local authorities, like the press, represent Travellers in a negative manner, focusing on unauthorised sites and violations of planning law in order to depict the group as law-breaking outsiders. A case study on Dale Farm demonstrates the simplistic, adverse portrayal of Travellers by local politicians, and their attempts to represent a complex housing situation as a simple matter of 'right versus wrong'.

Settled residents' attitudes to new Travellers' sites is the third focus of the dissertation. Resistance by local populations is an established barrier to adequate housing for Travellers, as local officials are susceptible to electoral pressure and often avoid making unpopular decisions. A case study focusing on a recently built site in Essex reveals that the same negative, generalised ideas about Travellers seen in the press and in political discourse are used by those opposing the development of new sites. This dissertation suggests that negative, stereotypical representations of Travellers promulgated by the media affect the provision of sites at a local level by increasing and legitimising residents' resistance and encouraging councillors to oppose site development.

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Introduction

Irish Travellers are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the United Kingdom, with life expectancy and adult literacy rates alarmingly low compared to the 'settled' population. The group suffers from a crisis of homelessness (with an estimated 14% of travellers having no authorised dwelling¹) which is intrinsically linked to a lack of access to healthcare and education. Racial discrimination against Travellers is rife, studies have repeatedly confirmed their status as most unpopular group in society (Valentine and McDonald 2004, Stonewall 2001), and the stereotypical and racist representations of Travellers in the media and political discourse suggest that this discrimination is "the last socially acceptable form of racism."²

Some important research has been carried out on media representations of Travellers, and analyses of political discourse have been a welcome contribution to the field. Studies into site provision have highlighted the fundamental disadvantages the group faces in housing, but there is a lack of holistic research on popular representations of Irish Travellers, and the effect they have on site provision. This dissertation will explore three major factors established to contribute to the rejection of new sites: negative, stereotyped representations of Travellers; settled residents' opposition to Traveller housing; and the actions of local authorities, in an attempt to make a small step towards understanding the barriers faced by Irish Travellers in housing provision.

With these three factors in mind, this dissertation will address the following research questions:

- ◆ *How are Irish Travellers represented by newspapers in the UK?*
- ◆ *How do local authorities represent Irish Travellers, and Traveller sites, in public discourse?*
- ◆ *How are local residents' objections to proposed sites framed? Do these objections reflect themes dominant in the media's representation of Travellers?*

¹ Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) Press Release (2013) *Travellers Movement reacts to Eric Pickles 'blight' of unauthorised sites statement*

² Interview with Mike Doherty 22 July 2013

Although Irish Travellers have lived in the UK since at least the 19th Century, they have only been considered a separate ethnic group since the case of *O’Leary v Allied Domeq* [2000]. The group’s recognised ethnic minority status prohibits prejudicial or pejorative references in the printed media (PCC 2011), along with conferring on local authorities the duty to promote positive race relations between Travellers and the settled population. However, as discussed below, discrimination in both of these areas continues.

Housing

A key feature of the group’s identity is a mobile lifestyle, so although many now live in housing for at least some of the year, the Traveller identity is strongly linked to communal living on sites with caravans. The Caravan Sites Act 1968 conferred on local authorities a duty to provide sites, but many authorities failed to comply, and the duty was repealed by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Travellers were thereon encouraged to buy land and develop sites privately, a policy which has contributed majorly to homelessness, given that over 90% of Travellers site applications are refused by planning committees (Cemlyn et al 2009: 8). Travellers without authorised housing live in injurious conditions, most commonly next to motorways, runways, rubbish tips or sewage farms, or on other unauthorised sites, risking eviction daily (Spencer 2005). As planning decisions over new sites are made by local councillors, their actions regarding Traveller sites will be analysed in two case studies, below. Residents’ pressure has been identified as a major factor influencing councillors’ decisions, so local opposition to a recent Travellers’ site proposal will be examined. Firstly, however, this dissertation will analyse newspaper representations of an infamous Travellers’ site, Dale Farm in Essex, in an attempt to understand the portrayal of Travellers in popular discourse.³

³ It is important to note that the legality of the eviction of Dale Farm by Basildon Council will not be debated here – the inhabitants had indeed developed the site without planning permission, and various courts have determined (however correctly) that protection of the inhabitants’ human rights did not preclude their eviction. However, it is equally clear that Basildon Council was in no way *obliged* to evict; retrospective planning permission is often granted, and development on Green Belt land is allowed at councils’ discretion, for example when affordable housing is needed.

Dale Farm

The Travellers' site, which previously housed a scrapyard, was developed on land owned by John Sheridan, an Irish Traveller, in 2001. Retrospective planning permission was applied for but refused, and enforcement notices were served by Basildon Council from 2001, marking the beginning of the residents' long battle to stay on the site. Ten years of legal struggles, appeals, and temporary reprieves concluded in October 2011 with the eviction of 82 Irish Traveller families by bailiffs working on behalf of Basildon Council.⁴ The weeks leading up to, and during, the eviction marked a serious intensification of Irish Travellers' visibility in the British media, which will be examined below.

⁴ This summary is necessarily condensed, for more information on the history of the Dale Farm site, a newly-published book by Katherine Quarmby is highly recommended. 'No Place to Call Home: Inside the Real Lives of Gypsies and Travellers' is a well-researched and comprehensive study of Gypsies and Travellers in Britain, and discusses Dale Farm's history and the eviction in detail.

Literature Review

Representations of Irish Travellers

The representation of Irish Travellers⁵ in popular discourse is rarely a positive one. Although the group's media visibility has increased in the last three years, largely due to the Dale Farm affair and the 'Big Fat Gypsy Weddings' television series, few would argue that this has led to a more positive, or even balanced, representation of the group (see Richardson 2012). The printed media, particularly high-circulation newspapers, tend towards a negative and simplified portrayal of Irish Travellers.

A review by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (Council of Europe 2010: 39) noted regular negative depictions of both Gypsies and Irish Travellers "in particular in the tabloid press, where they are frequently portrayed, for example, as being by definition associated with [...] sponging off British society, making bogus claims for protection and being troublemakers". The press is inclined to 'other' Travellers in this way, depicting them as fundamentally different to the readership, frequently through the promotion of a narrow and 'essentialised' understanding of the group. A second aspect which is prevalent in literature focusing on newspaper coverage is the tendency to question Irish Traveller ethnicity itself, predominately via comparisons with what the media sees as 'real' Gypsies, leading to discontent with 'special treatment' the group is thought to receive. There has been some informative work on these and related issues, and the themes discussed below will be examined in more detail with reference to coverage during the Dale Farm eviction, when Irish Travellers were high on the news agenda.

'Othering' Travellers

Dr Joanna Richardson, a prominent scholar of Gypsy and Travellers, studied the representation of these groups in two media case studies: *The Sun* newspaper's 2005

⁵ Although this dissertation primarily focuses on Irish Travellers, many previous relevant studies have looked at Gypsies and Irish Travellers together, or at travelling people generally (regardless of ethnicity). Although separate ethnic groups, Gypsies and Irish Travellers share many characteristics and governments generally approach them as a single group (for example, in population monitoring). Throughout this dissertation, reference will be made to 'Travellers' when the source material makes no specification as to the ethnic group, or when it focused on a mixture of travelling peoples, whereas 'Irish Travellers' will be used when that group is referenced specifically.

campaign 'Stamp on the Camps', and the on-going Channel Four series 'Big Fat Gypsy Weddings'. Her analysis of the newspaper campaign is of particular interest, as it reflects many of the themes identified in media reportage of the Dale Farm affair. Richardson argues that media reports act as a key "framework for 'othering'" Gypsies and Travellers; the social reality created by the media "constructs Gypsies/Travellers and the settled community as conflictual opposites" (Richardson and O'Neill 2012: 170).

Richardson employs Cohen's study on the creation of 'folk devils' and 'moral panic' in her analysis of Traveller media coverage, examining how the group's demonization allows their portrayal in opposition to the reader. Cohen's sociological theory originally examined reactions to the 1960s 'mods and rockers' phenomenon, and some of the themes identified are useful in understanding current representations of Irish Travellers. He identifies the existence of the 'moral crusader' (reader), galvanised by the press into reacting to the perceived 'devil' or 'deviant' in society by "making a stand" (2002: 148). This theory resonates particularly strongly with the oppositional rhetoric of 'Stamp on the Camps', readers were galvanised into joining a 'moral crusade' in order to block site development.

Much of the newspaper rhetoric around Dale Farm and Travellers in general during the period discussed below reflects this opposition between the Traveller and the settled resident, the former portrayed as a threat to decent society and the latter as a protector of its interests. This framework could be particularly useful in understanding the tabloid media's propensity to discourage empathy with Travellers, by representing complex issues, such as the Dale Farm eviction, as simple 'us versus them' or 'right versus wrong' conflicts.

Essentialisation

Like many minority groups, it can be argued that Irish Travellers are 'othered' in popular representations. However, a particular form of 'othering' seems to be appropriate in describing their representation in the press. Not only are Travellers 'not like us' but they are characterised as the 'Other' in a very specific way – perhaps due to the small size of the group, it is easier for outsiders to imagine they are all alike. Morris (2000) has argued that Gypsies and Travellers are 'essentialised' in popular representations, this being the process

whereby minorities are treated as if they share “certain negative characteristics not only typical of but essential to the group” (213).

Richardson (2006: 82) explores, through media discourse analysis, the criteria by which Travellers are negatively characterised, focusing on ‘cost’ and ‘mess’ as dominant themes. These related foci produce resentment, the taxpayer’s burden resulting from Travellers’ anti-social activities is often highlighted, ‘othering’ the Traveller (‘they’ make the mess and ‘we’ pay for it to be cleared up). Richardson describes the cost issue as “a powerful tool to control” (84); readers become vigilantes, monitoring the perceived expense and cleanliness of local sites which, it is emphasised, are personally costing them money.

The essentialisation of Travellers can also be interpreted through the theory of ‘racial myths’, as proposed by Campbell (1995), who argued that modern (cultural) representations of minorities, like traditional myths, “validate a certain social order,” dictating “who participates and who doesn’t” (14-15). This seems relevant in the case of Irish Travellers, the mythology designates them as dirty, costly troublemakers, who certainly are not seen as participating in society in any positive sense. These myths are reflected in a study commissioned by Amnesty International (2012), analysing newspaper coverage of Scottish Gypsy Travellers over a four month period. Nearly half the stories about the group (48%) were classified as negative, with only 28% representing a positive view (4). Consistent with Morris’s contention that Travellers are ‘essentialised’, and Richardson’s identification of the persistent themes in press coverage, 38% of the articles connected Travellers with criminality, while 32% referred to hygiene or dirt (ibid).

Ethnic Legitimacy

Existing literature suggests that Irish Travellers’ ethnic legitimacy is frequently questioned by the media and politicians. This suspicion is often expressed through unfavourable comparisons with ‘real’ (normally English Romany) Gypsies. Richardson (2006: 86-88) gives examples of this distinction in letters written to newspapers. Turner (2002) noted this as a “constant theme” in Parliamentary language too, describing the opposing stereotypes of mystical Roma versus “dirty criminal” Irish Travellers (17), believing that the motivation behind such rhetoric is the legitimisation of “coercive and repressive policy”

(ibid), and the avoidance of accusations of racism. This certainly seemed to be the case when the Gypsy Council complained of former Home Secretary Jack Straw's comments that "many Travellers... go burgling, thieving, breaking into vehicles causing all kinds of trouble", comparing such trouble-makers to "relatively few real Romany Gypsies... [who] mind their own business and don't cause trouble to other people" (Millar 1999). He defended his comments when reported to the police and Commission for Racial Equality by claiming that the subject of his vitriol was not an ethnic group, but Travellers "masquerading as law-abiding Gypsies" (ibid).

Human geographer Sarah Holloway studied this imagined distinction between 'real' and 'fake' Gypsies by interviewing residents of Appleby, Cumbria, the site of an annual Travellers' fair (2005). She notes a racialised conception of 'real' Gypsies, defined physiognomically by dark hair or skin, in opposition to white 'hangers-on', who respondents associated with nefarious or criminal behaviour. Comparable accusations of duplicity are explored by Cohen, with regard to newspaper coverage of asylum seekers. He notes the common tendency to contrast "genuine refugees" with "bogus asylum seekers", seeing this as a deconstruction of the "once morally untouchable" category of refugeehood (2002: xxii). Coverage of Irish Travellers may employ the denunciation of the 'fake Gypsy' in order attack another 'morally untouchable' group, ethnic minorities: by refuting their membership of the ethnic group, the use of negative generalisations, hostile treatment and offensive language is legitimised.

The Effects of Discourse

A key area of interest for this dissertation is the relationship between newspaper portrayals of Travellers and local government attitudes towards the group, with reference in particular to the case of Dale Farm. However, the question is not as simple as the extent to which media representations *directly* affect the decisions of local governors. Richardson (2006) asked "Can Discourse Control?" in her work of the same name, and this dissertation will attempt to adjudge the extent to which popular discourse around Irish Travellers translates into actions affecting decisions in various ways, such as galvanising residents

against sites, pressuring councillors to resist granting planning permission and legitimising the idea that Travellers are necessarily trouble for communities.

Applying Bauman's theory of proximity, Richardson (2006: 111-2) argues that as newspapers persistently 'other' Travellers, particularly due to their perceived cost to the taxpayer, readers become desensitised to their ill-treatment; feeling distanced from them. As such, locals are encouraged to consider the cost of new sites, rather than (for example) to understand the authority's duty to provide accommodation for people in precarious situations. The propensity for negative discourse to increase and influence local residents' opposition to sites is of concern to this dissertation; a correlation between local resistance and lack of site provision has been established by numerous studies. Niner (2003: 206) showed that "resistance from local residents" was a major barrier to site provision in 89% of local authorities surveyed, while Cripps (1977 in Niner 2003), categorised local opposition as the most important obstacle to attaining a 'satisfactory' level of site provision. Morris and Clements identify the (essentialising) theme of cost as a tool for resisting new sites. They believe that "by constantly recording [the cost], we are articulating a racist and rhetorical question – namely whether we can afford them" (2002: 2).

Discourses of 'invasion', and conflict language generally, abound in reporting of Traveller issues. Richardson studied an article quoting a Swindon councillor hoping for an "end to the illegal invasions" of Travellers in the city – the same article cited the South Swindon MP pursuing laws to facilitate Traveller eviction. Richardson believes that politicians' use of inflammatory language affects public discourse regarding Travellers, as the adoption of conflict rhetoric by elected officials "has the appearance of sanctioning the discriminatory discourse" (129).

Morris (2000) argues that the printed press exerts a particularly strong influence on people's (already negative) opinions of Travellers. Her two-year study of Gipsy and Traveller press coverage, found that newspapers "routinely represent Travellers in such a way as to actively increase dislike of them and their way of life" (214). While acknowledging that people selectively read newspapers, looking for articles which fit with a pre-established world-view, she notes that negative or stereotyped reports on Travellers both "confirm

existing prejudices and create new ones” (213) building on Wilson and Gutierrez’s affirmation that “the media have their greatest influence when they reinforce rather than attempt to change the opinions of those in their audience” (1995: 44). As prejudice against Travellers is already extremely high, negative reporting can have the effect of marginalising further a community which enjoys very little positive, or even neutral, publicity. Morris acknowledges that although the direct effects of media consumption upon behaviour are nowhere near as clear, or demonstrable, as once thought,⁶ “there is little question that not only do the news media ‘largely determine our awareness of the world at large ... they also influence the prominence of those elements in the picture’”(McCombs 1994 *in* Morris 2000: 213).

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in a 2010 review of minorities in the UK, expressed concern “not only at the racist and xenophobic messages themselves [...] propagated by the media, but also by the fact that civil society actors have in some cases observed direct links between minority groups targeted by the media and minority groups targeted in violent attacks” (39). Such causal links were also described by Brian Foster, Chairman of the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers, in a report submitted to the Advertising Standards Agency (2012), concerning the effects of the advertising campaign for ‘Big Fat Gypsy Weddings’. Information gathered by Foster from British teachers noted an upsurge of racist, violent or antagonistic behaviour towards Traveller children in the immediate aftermath of broadcasts.

Foster notes the particularly damaging effect of billboard campaigns. Advertisements, such as Channel 4’s ‘Bigger. Fatter. Gypsier.’ campaign, featuring a striking close-up shot of an aggressive-looking Traveller child⁷, due to their ubiquity and high visibility, mean that “stereotypical images and messages impact on an even greater section of the population” (ibid: 4). A parallel can perhaps be drawn with front page headlines (particularly in the form of newspaper billboards); passers-by are unwittingly exposed to stereotypical coverage of Travellers. Bhreatnach (2008: 288) notes the frequency by which newspaper stories

⁶ Morris draws heavily on an informative compilation of essays: *MediaEffects: Advances in Theory and Research* (2009) Bryant, J. and Zillmann, D. (eds.), New York: Routledge, which offers a detailed review of the limitations of proving causality from media representation.

⁷ The ASA upheld the complaint against this billboard and two others, deeming that the images could be interpreted to mean that “aggressive behaviour was typical”. The ASA judged that the advertisement “reaffirmed commonly held prejudices” and was additionally “likely to cause distress and mental harm to children from those [Traveller] communities” (Howe & Co Solicitors 2012).

concerning Travellers adopt decontextualized headlines, often focusing on “crime and violence”, reinforcing stereotypes in a highly visible way. The ITMB, in their submission to the Leveson Enquiry, discuss the harmful effects of such negative and stereotypical press: “On the 16th September, 2011 [following allegations of slavery at a Traveller site in Leighton Buzzard]; 20 million people read headlines and content that linked Gypsies and Travellers with slavery, brutality and inhumanity. The very next day the UK’s 300,000 individuals of Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity had to brave the street, the playground, the classroom, the shops, the factory and the office.” (ITMB 2012: 10).

Travellers and Site Provision

The most comprehensive study of Traveller site provision in recent times was published by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in 2006. The report, “Common Ground: Equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers” is a major contribution to the understanding of Travellers and accommodation. It was based on a wide-ranging year-long study; comprising an open call for evidence from individuals involved with Traveller sites, a survey of all the local authorities in England and Wales, and detailed case studies of nine authorities.

Three pertinent areas on which the report focused are: the duty to promote racial equality and good race relations, planning applications, and unauthorised encampments.

Promoting racial equality

The Race Relations Act (Amendment) 2000 (RRA) confers on public bodies the duty to ‘pay due regard’ to eliminating racial discrimination in all forms and to promote good race relations. However the CRE found that in many cases, councillors failed to adhere to the Act in both public and private capacities, for example by making damaging public statements, or by joining or even establishing anti-Traveller site lobby groups (36). Many local councillors questioned did not see Travellers as “constituents whose interests they had a responsibility to represent”, and failed to establish or address their needs while “repeatedly [drawing]

distinctions between the interests of ‘our community’ or ‘local residents’[...] and ‘Travellers’” (35). Such an attitude reflects the media’s tendency to portray Travellers and settled people “as conflictual opposites” (Richardson and O’Neill 2012: 170).

The report highlighted public pressure as an obstruction to good race relations, stating that “[t]he most important barrier many councillors faced was the strong views about Gypsies and Irish Travellers held by many members of the public” (36), to the extent that one councillor described supporting Travellers’ needs as “career suicide” (39), while many others “emphasised the intense pressure [...] to resist providing sites or to take a strong line on enforcement” (36). Crawley (2004a) has noted a “lack of political will to tackle the marginalisation of Gypsies and Travellers” at the local level, typified by a “discourse ... of enforcement and eviction rather than provision” (55) which contradicts local authorities’ duty to promote positive race relations. The failure to recognise Irish Travellers’ ethnicity is also highlighted by the CRE’s report, which found that in most authorities, “no-one ... understood the particular issues facing Gypsies and Irish Travellers, or even that they constituted ethnic groups” (48).

Planning Applications

A study commissioned by the Essex Planning Officers Association found that one of the major obstacles to site development or planning approval in the county was the public’s “negative perception of Gypsies and Travellers [which] feeds in to the attitudes of elected members representing constituencies” (Ahmed, Brown and Steel 2006: 55). The desires of the electorate are clearly important for planning officers (drawn from local councils) when making decisions, an Essex planning officer described site provision as “a balancing act between catering for the needs of Travellers and the wishes of house dwellers” (ibid: 54).

The CRE analysed the nature of objections raised by communities to applications for sites, noting that only those made on material grounds should be considered by planning officers, as the RRA prohibits pressure to discriminate on racial grounds. However, the report showed “some evidence that planning committee members felt themselves under public pressure not to accept applications for Gypsy sites” (2006: 140), and that this public

pressure was not always based on material objections – “the findings [...] suggest that these [racist] representations may in fact be reaching, and influencing the decisions of, several planning committees” (136).

Unauthorised Encampments

The CRE (2006) noted local residents’ and councillors’ particular hostility to unauthorised encampments. The report found that delays caused by human rights considerations (such as the duty to assess impact) contributed to residents’ belief that there was “one rule for us and another for them” (160), while councillors saw the duty as an illegitimate barrier, an attitude “reflected in interviews given by councillors to the local press” (179). The commission found that this publicly expressed dissatisfaction with planning practice “probably fuelled the general hostility towards Gypsies and Irish Travellers” (184) suggesting the existence of the cyclical process of negative press coverage, local residents’ pressure, and populist rhetoric by councillors which will be examined below.

One of the CRE’s conclusions regarding unauthorised sites suggests the contribution media discourse makes to resident dissatisfaction (a theme which will be expanded upon during the following chapters):

“We found a widespread belief that negative local and national media coverage of unauthorised encampments as an issue, and of Gypsies and Irish Travellers (in particular), rendered any local action [to improve race relations] useless. Most of the stories were filled with words such as ‘invasion’, ‘war’, ‘battle’ and ‘scourge’. Officials and councillors in all the case study authorities said this was the most important source of fear and public prejudice” (186)

Why challenge perceptions?

The literature examined suggests that the largely negative media coverage of Irish Travellers portrays them as ‘problem people,’ who cost money, cause crime and are unlike

the settled population. This perception is reflected by local residents when protesting against a planned or existing site. It has been established that councillors making planning decisions are under intense pressure from such residents to reject applications or to evict existing sites. This situation will be examined in the context of Dale Farm, and a second (authorised) site, also in Essex, in order to establish a more detailed understanding of this cycle of negative media coverage, resident pressure, and ultimately, local authorities' injurious actions towards Traveller populations.

Firstly, however, it is worth noting that although the perception of Traveller sites is commonly negative, the reality may often be less so. This is significant for this dissertation, as perception, not lived experience, could be denying Travellers the ability to set up home, due to an expectation of criminal or antisocial behaviour. There is an unfortunate lack of research on this area, although Duncan (1996), studying the planning and development of three Travellers' sites in Scotland, found that all three "had far less impact on their 'neighbours' than these people anticipated". Having analysed local peoples' initial reaction to the proposals, he concluded "[i]n none of the sites examined were the number and intensity of objections an appropriate response in retrospect" (14). Richardson sees this as evidence that when in proximity with actual Travellers, residents realised that "reality was not as bad as the myth" (2006: 115). The CRE, examining examples of good practice, found that well-managed sites lead to Travellers being seen "as part of the community", but that due to the press's inclination to report only negative stories "only those living near these sites had more positive attitudes, while others continued to get their information from the generally negative media coverage" (2006: 107) demonstrating the strength of negative representations, even in the face of a positive reality.

Methodology

Media content analysis

In attempting to establish the dominant themes by which Irish Travellers are represented in mainstream British newspapers, a qualitative content analysis approach was chosen. Reflecting this dissertation's particular focus on Traveller housing, the timeframe selected was the week in which Dale Farm was evicted (14th October 2011 – 20th October 2011).

The data sample was gathered from the LexisNexis® database, using the keywords 'Dale Farm', 'Irish Travellers', 'Travellers', 'Gypsies' and 'Gipsies' (and singular forms). The sources selected were the ten highest circulation national newspapers of September 2011 (fig. 1). Articles from Sunday newspapers were included with their 'sister' publication, not affecting the composition of the top ten. Data were then sifted for superfluous content, leaving a total of 61 articles suitable for analysis.

Fig 1. Newspaper Sources

(data from *Guardian* 14.10.2011)

1	<i>The Sun</i>
2	<i>Daily Mail</i>
3	<i>Daily Mirror</i>
4	<i>Daily Star</i>
5	<i>Daily Express</i>
6	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>
7	<i>The Times</i>
8	<i>The Guardian</i> ⁸
9	<i>i</i>
10	<i>The Independent</i>

The method of content analysis was adopted as “a way of discovering patterns in data that aid our understanding of the underlying phenomena” (Matthews and Ross 2010: 395), in this case, the construction of Irish Traveller identity. Media content analysis is suited for this task, as it can allow researchers to establish what the “media [...] says about a society and the potential effects mass media representations may have on audiences” (Macnamara 2005: 4). A qualitative method was adopted, as quantitative analysis for this study was unlikely to enable the development of a nuanced understanding of the media's particular portrayals of the group in question, as established by Macnamara who argued that “quantitative values such as size and frequency” do not necessarily translate into “impact” upon the reader (2005: 5), while Shoemaker and Reese (1996) consider that “[r]educing large amounts of text to quantitative data ... does

⁸ The *Financial Times* occupies 8th place in the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) ratings, but did not contain a single article on Travellers in this period, thus it was discounted and the *Independent* became a source for analysis.

not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition” (32).

Having identified the work of Joanna Richardson as a major contribution to the field, the methodological approach adopted for her 2006 work “The Gypsy Debate: Can Discourse Control?” was consulted, with some aspects adopted (and adapted) for research on this topic. Richardson established ‘key themes’ early in her research (fig. 2), which enabled her to explore and explain the discourse surrounding Traveller identity. Although one of Richardson’s themes was identified as directly appropriate for consideration in this research, an initial examination of the data established the need for additional themes, including that of criminality, determined by Richardson as irrelevant to her research (2006: 4) but established as appropriate in research by other scholars, ie Leudar and Nakvapil (2000). NVivo® software was used for the newspaper content analysis, allowing all the selected articles to be annotated, easily filtered, and analysed according to the five discursive themes identified as relevant to coverage on Dale Farm: ethnicity, planning law, cost, criminality and conflict.

Fig 2. Richardson’s Key Themes

- Cost and mess
- Labelling – Gypsies or Travellers?
- Folk Devils
- Influx and Invasion

Richardson 2006: 4

Discourse analysis

The second area of research necessitated gathering various data from local officials concerning both case studies. Most council meetings of interest had been recorded at the time, and were available online. It was important to obtain original minutes, as attitudes to both Dale Farm and Severalls Lane have changed considerably since the time investigated, while data obtained through contemporary documents “are static, and present a ‘snapshot’ of a particular time” (Matthews and Ross 2010: 278) rather than being conditioned by hindsight. A mixture of data types was gathered along with meeting minutes; television interviews and statements made to the press were also analysed (again using NVivo®) in order to establish a broad understanding of local politicians’ public discourse, in this sense

expanding on Richardson's research, which did not analyse local officials' statements, other than those which occurred at meetings she observed (2006: 3).

Local residents' opinion on an additional Travellers' site (Severalls Lane), identified as suitable for a case study due to the relatively large amount of available information, was also gathered. A large part of the analysis used data submitted voluntarily by locals signing a petition against the site (see appendix 2 for a small data sample). This was judged suitable for quantitative analysis, as most statements were short and could be coded and analysed statistically without risking oversimplification, as was the concern with newspaper articles. All entries into the online petition were downloaded into a custom-made database, which allowed them to be filtered easily by theme. In order to establish the reliability of the dataset, a random selection of submitted names and residence details was compared with publicly accessible data⁹ establishing that it was unlikely that the petition had been 'spammed' with false data.

Comments from the petition were coded according to themes identified earlier in the research, with the addition of the category of 'mess', identified by Richardson (2006) as a key theme in Traveller discourse but not pertinent in earlier research for this dissertation. The more general category of 'othering' (or 'us versus them') was added at this point, to facilitate the identification of comments which clearly delineated Travellers from residents, as this had emerged as a potential effect of negative and essentialising media coverage.

Interviews

Interviews were held to complement the documentary research described above, taking a semi-structured format, with a pre-determined question schedule which was loosely adhered to (see fig. 3 for list of interviews). Mike Doherty enhanced understanding of media portrayals of Travellers, as well recounting his own experiences with the press and the PCC. Ann Kobayashi told the story of the eviction, and allowed the contextualisation of disparate accounts in the press. Both these interviews were fully transcribed, and the aforementioned themes were noted (where apparent), but it was considered appropriate to

⁹ Data were cross-referenced with information on 192.com, linkedin.co.uk, and the Essex Phone Book.

use them to contribute to the understanding of the primary data, rather than to suppose that two non-Dale Farm residents could be seen as representing the view of those whose voices could unfortunately not be heard in this dissertation.

Fig 3: Interview Schedule

Interviewee(s)	Organisation	Role	Date
Mike Doherty	Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB)	Communications Officer	22 July 2013
Councillor John Jowers	Essex County Council and Essex Countywide Travellers' Unit (ECTU)	Essex Council Cabinet Member for Libraries, Communities and Planning	1 August 2013
Stephen Andrews		ECTU Manager	
Gwyn Owen		ECTU Senior Policy and Strategy Manager	
Ann Kobayashi	Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel	Justice and Peace Activist, Dale Farm and Travellers; rights campaigner	1 August 2013

A group interview with members of Essex County Council was held, and used as primary data for the chapter on local authorities and Travellers. The interview followed a semi-structured format, prepared questions were used, but participants were encouraged to elucidate on key points, or to provide real-life examples of various Traveller accommodation situations. Interviewees were able to provide detailed accounts of their work and challenges with the ECTU. Their repeated use of the Severalls Lane site as an example of settled residents' resistance highlighted a potential case study, so conversation around this was encouraged.

Irish Travellers in the Media

Qualitative analysis of newspaper articles from the week of the Dale Farm eviction will establish and describe the central characteristics around which a narrative of Irish Traveller identity is constructed by the media. Five discursive themes for consideration were

Fig. 4: Discursive Themes

- ◆ Irish Traveller identity
- ◆ Planning law
- ◆ Cost
- ◆ Criminality
- ◆ Conflict

chosen (fig. 4). These foci were derived partly from the existing literature, and partly from recurring themes noted upon initial examination of the source material.

The latter two themes are semantically similar, however an important distinction exists between criminality, as an inherent feature of Irish Travellers (i.e. ‘the illegal residents’) and conflict, presented as a clash between Travellers and authorities or locals (‘the Battle for Dale Farm’). Although the themes frequently overlap: cost is often associated with the planning process, and conflict may be ascribed to planning violations, the identified foci, whether in conjunction or alone, proved an effective way to examine Irish Travellers’ newspapers representation during this period.

Irish Traveller Ethnicity

Although the latter four themes contribute to newspapers’ representations of Traveller identity, it was useful to first examine how the articles conceptualised Irish Travellers when *specifically* referring to their ethnic group. Naming conventions used in the articles indicate the media’s ambivalence towards the group. The vast majority of the articles analysed referred to the residents of Dale Farm as ‘travellers’ (failing to capitalise the T) rather than ‘Irish Travellers’. The ITMB has noted this failure to capitalise ‘Gypsy’, ‘Irish Traveller’ or ‘Traveller’ (a collective noun for both groups), believing this to be “a racist trope” amounting to a “denial of ethnic identity” (2012: 12). Mike Doherty (the ITMB’s communications officer) found this was also the practice of the Press Complaints Commission, who remove capitalisation from submissions and complaints. Doherty calls the correct styling of the ethnic groups “a campaign for the future”, believing that once

newspapers are compelled to treat 'Irish Traveller' as a legitimate ethnic minority term (in the same way as 'Indians' or 'Jews') there will be fewer generalised headlines like 'Travellers found guilty of slavery'.¹⁰

Explicitly racist language was found in only one article, an opinion piece in *The Sun*, not on the subject of Dale Farm, which joked about the biscuit 'Gipsy Cream', suggesting "alternative names, such as 'Pikey¹¹ Crunch' or 'Static Traveller Eviction Order Cookies'" (2011a). Richardson (2006: 88) has argued that the use of discriminatory language "can be explained by the success of 'othering' Gypsies and Travellers"; they have become so 'unlike' us the norms of editorial practice are disregarded. Not only, though, are they unlike 'us', but they are unlike other recognised ethnic minorities in their media treatment; it is hard to imagine an article joking about 'Paki Crunch' biscuits reaching publication.

Existing literature (eg Richardson 2006 86-9) suggests that Irish Travellers are frequently presented in (unfavourable) contrast with 'real' Gypsies, however, this distinction was not apparent in the articles examined. Conversely, the newspapers presenting the least favourable coverage- particularly *The Sun*- used the terms 'traveller' and 'gypsy' interchangeably (*The Sun* using the term 'gypsies' four times in a 61 word article about Dale Farm (2011b)), with no positive value attached. An interesting theme which emerged, although much less emphasised by existing literature, was the total rejection of the ethnic minority status of Irish Travellers. The group's legitimacy was rejected outright in multiple articles, both explicitly and subtly.

The most explicit example of ethnicity denial comes from the *Daily Express* (2011a), in an article which rejects Irish Travellers' minority status numerous times. The article accuses the local government of deferring to "political correctness" by not evicting the site immediately; the imagined outcome had "ordinary citizens [built] a housing estate on an area of greenbelt land". Although the author contrasts Travellers with 'ordinary citizens', he denied them any right to special treatment, accusing those opposing the eviction of being co-opted by the Dale Farm residents, who "cynically exploited their victim status as a supposedly oppressed ethnic minority in order to continue flouting the law", invoking a

¹⁰ Interview with Mike Doherty, 22 July 2011

¹¹ The term 'pikey' has legal precedent as a term of racial abuse, following the 2007 case of Lee Coleman who was charged with using 'racially aggravated' language due to using this term. According to Cliff Codona, Chair of the National Travellers Action Group "There is no word more offensive to a Traveller" (Geoghegan 2008)

stereotype of the cunning criminal, “living outside the mores and laws of settled society” (Morris 2000: 216). The article goes on to question the Traveller identity further: “if they want to be regarded as travellers, they should travel. If they want to be settled residents they should behave like the rest of us.” Finally, the author asserts that “... travellers are not a separate ethnic minority, but a mixture of British and Irish”. This statement is factually incorrect, while the argument that Travellers who are not physically on the move stop being Travellers also necessarily delegitimises the ethnicity, as it understands being a ‘traveller’ as a lifestyle choice which one can adopt or abandon.

A less explicit approach was taken by the majority of the articles analysed. While avoiding denouncing the ethnic minority status of Irish Travellers outright, their identity was frequently portrayed as spurious by many tabloid/middle quality newspapers, and right wing broadsheets. One method of casting doubt upon the ethnic legitimacy of the group identified is denying that race should affect the decision to evict. For example, *The Times* (2011a) asserts that:

“Travellers are being evicted from Dale Farm not on the basis of any ethnicity, but on the basis of a flagrant defiance of planning law on greenbelt land. Across Britain, there are families that have had requests for extensions denied, or garden structures removed, for identical reasons.”

Along with the use of ‘any’ rather than ‘their’ ethnicity, suggesting an agnostic approach to the group’s legitimacy, the examples used exemplify the author’s dismissal of Irish Travellers’ status as a special group. Likening the Dale Farm residents’ struggle for land to a family’s desire for an extension or shed denies the group’s inherent and unmet need for sites. The article fails to recognise that while complying with planning law may be inconvenient for non-Travellers, it is often impossible for Travellers due to the disproportionate rejection of applications. The *Daily Mail* also argues that the Irish Travellers’ ethnic minority status should not affect planning decisions, ridiculing Travellers “cries of ethnic cleansing” and suggesting that any “claim that they’re being wronged because of their ethnicity... is the opposite of the truth” (2011a), again failing to acknowledge the well-documented failure of local authorities to provide suitable accommodation for this legitimate group (see CRE 2006, Ahmed, Brown and Steele 2006).

Planning Law

Newspapers presenting a generally negative view of Irish Travellers make less effort to examine the reasons for the illegal settlement at Dale Farm, placing the eviction in context. The simplification of the struggle to remain on Dale Farm is particularly notable in *The Times*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Star* and *Daily Mail*: “there was an easy solution available: the travellers could have obeyed the law of the land” (*Daily Express* 2011a), “The first and most important [fact] is that the settlement ... is illegal” (*Daily Mail* 2011b) and “We must not forget that at the heart of this is lawbreaking” (*Daily Star* 2011a).

Contrast an opinion article in *The Times* (2011a) with a comment piece from *The Independent* on the same day (2011a). *The Times* article variously refers to the eviction as “just and inevitable”, to the Travellers’ settlement as a “calculated attempt to defy the rule of law” and encourages readers to blame no-one but the Travellers for the eviction: “is it possible to have sympathy for their predicament while also acknowledging that it is entirely self-imposed”. The article’s focus promotes a simplistic understanding of the conflict: emphasising that the site was in “flagrant defiance of planning law on greenbelt land”, with no mention of the fact that the site had formerly been a scrap yard. Conversely, the *Independent* article examines in some detail the complex situation caused by local governments’ encouraging Travellers to buy their own land, noted the “acute shortage of legal sites” and clarifies that the land in question was owned by Travellers. The issue of blame is addressed in markedly contrasting ways in these two articles, while *The Times* sees the eviction as “entirely self-imposed”, discouraging empathy with the Travellers and simplistically portraying them as law-breakers, the *Independent* explicitly states that “errors do not lie exclusively with Travellers”, given that delays and a two-year reprieve “gave the Travellers additional hope” that planning permission would be retrospectively granted.

The *Guardian* is also notable for contextualising the breach of planning law, a particularly detailed article (2011a), notes the lack of authorised pitches, and rate of planning permission refusal for Traveller sites and reflects upon “the stereotype of Travellers as bad neighbours”. The article addresses some of this dissertation’s themes, arguing that stereotyping reinforces the fear of sites: “The more hostile the climate, the more controversial the proposal for a new site and the less willing councillors become to

support it, calling this process “a self-defeating cycle of distrust”. A further article in the *Independent* (2011b) demonstrates a particularly informative approach to the planning dispute, utilising a timeline to narrate explain the length of the procedure, providing context which is missing from other publications.

Cost : Traveller versus ‘Taxpayer’

Expense is a major characteristic by which Irish Travellers are essentialised in the articles selected. Richardson explored the use of cost as a narrative device in reporting on Gypsies and Travellers, arguing that this focus is “a way to tell the reader: ‘you are paying for all this through your council tax’” (2006: 84). In Richardson’s analysis, the cost of Travellers is inextricably linked with another essentialising characteristic: mess, arguing that describing Travellers as dirty “serves to ‘other’ them” (83), while increasing local resentment. However, while the articles selected for this dissertation also frequently refer to Travellers’ cost to society, this is expressed not through the price of cleaning up, but through the expense of the eviction operation. Although the expenditure reported is different, the effects of, and reasons for, concentrating on it are the same.

Richardson found that focusing on cost “makes the issue personal to all those who read the newspaper article”, (84) which is demonstrated by a number of the articles analysed below. Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995) believe that the negative reporting of minorities, particularly groups who (like Travellers) are not frequently shown in a positive or neutral light, portrays such groups, simplistically, as “problem people”, explaining that “they are projected as people who either have or *cause* problems for society. The legacy of news exclusion thus leads to the majority audience seeing minorities as a social burden” (139); this analysis seems pertinent for Travellers, who are infrequently represented in the media, but for articles largely bemoaning their cost. The *Guardian* reflects upon this focus on cost in an article sympathetic to the Travellers (2011a). It asserts that Travellers’ “resistance to assimilation, conformity, the settled life, is considered uncooperative and vexing” leading to “much emphasis [being] placed on the cost of the Dale Farm evictions”, the article seeing this as a hostile simplification of their role in society. The *Guardian* does

not resist this narrative in all its articles, however, particularly one entitled “Dale Farm evictions: the cost”, published on the same day as the aforementioned piece.

Articles from higher circulation newspapers repeatedly adopt cost as a device to place Travellers in opposition to the settled community, who are portrayed positively, as victims of the Other’s ‘social burden’. Erjavec (2001) noted a similar value judgement being placed on the opposing groups in his analysis of Roma Gypsy media representations in Slovakia – finding that the “strategy of homogenisation of both groups makes positive identification of the majority population easier” (717); the reader is firmly placed on the righteous side of the conflict, and is thus prevented from identifying with the Traveller. This strategy is demonstrated by several articles, for example, the *Daily Express* (2011b) identifies the ‘victims’ from the outset: the first line stating that “long-suffering neighbours” had finally been guaranteed an eviction. A *Daily Star* piece entitled “High price we all pay” (2011a) focuses on the eviction’s cost to non-Travellers; the article culminating in the phrase “...once again it’s the British taxpayer suffering most”. The *Daily Express* (2011a) draws an even clearer distinction between the Traveller and majority population, framed in terms of expense: as well as emphasising Travellers’ cost “to the taxpayer”, the article suggests that Irish Travellers “should behave like the rest of us, rent or buy a property, pay their taxes and abide by the law”. The article makes the taxpayer feel yet more exploited with its (unsubstantiated) allegations that Dale Farm residents own expensive “well-appointed” properties in Ireland.

An article in the *Daily Mail* (2011a) clearly employs the ‘social burden’ narrative, accusing Dale Farm residents of “consuming the time and attention” of “the best that our [...] legal and political systems can offer”, representing the Travellers’ fight for accommodation as an illegitimate waste of time and effort, carried out “at massive public expense”. The article is also hostile towards the “handwringing” BBC, whose coverage was seen as too sympathetic to the Dale Farm residents, the criticism is framed in familiar polarising terms: “They deserve not one iota of public sympathy [...] least of all from the BBC, which depends on law-abiding citizens paying their licence fees.”

Criminality

Along with cost, Travellers are essentialised in the media by their association with criminal behaviour. This was recognised in the ITMB's submission to the Leveson Inquiry, which noted associating Irish Travellers with crime as "a perennial feature" of much reporting on the group, believing that criminality "is either explicitly ascribed as an ethnic trait, or is implicitly linked to it" (2012: 6).

Almost all of the sources analysed described Dale Farm as an 'illegal travellers' site', and many focused on Travellers' violation of planning law as a central narrative (see above). However, those newspapers which portrayed Dale Farm residents in a particularly negative light tended to not only accuse them of illegal behaviour regarding the site, but reported more generally on law-breaking by disparate groups of Travellers, suggesting that criminality is indeed portrayed as an 'ethnic trait'. For example, a *Daily Express* article (2011a) calls 'travellers' (generally) the "true oppressors" for "making the lives of their neighbours hell through their criminality, squalor and aggression". The article recounts unrelated stories about Irish Travellers' involvement in drug dealing in Kent, and an alleged slavery ring in Bedfordshire, using these examples to denigrate Dale Farm's residents: "so much for the "gentle" community which the hard-Left actress Vanessa Redgrave spoke of during her visit." By criminalising Travellers, The *Daily Express* blames them for their ill-treatment and legitimises its own injurious coverage: "hostility toward travellers is based not on racial prejudice but on experience of their behaviour" (ibid) – put simply, they 'bring it on themselves'.

An article from *The Times* (2011a) similarly justifies its prejudicial coverage of Travellers by criminalising the ethnicity: juxtaposing planning law violations by Dale Farm residents with allegations of slavery by other travellers in Europe. Although the author states that the "moral solipsism" attributable to the accused slavers is "immeasurably more depraved and troubling" than the flouting of planning laws seen at Dale Farm, a negative association is clearly drawn, both acts are, apparently, "made possible by the same alienation from, and disregard for, the norms of everybody else". In other words, Travellers are unlike 'everybody else' (ie settled people, who of course never commit planning

violations or other crimes), criminal behaviour in some form is inevitable, and essential to the Traveller character.

The *Daily Telegraph* (2011) published a piece by Germaine Greer containing essentialising references to 'Irish Traveller criminality'. Greer reports on a seemingly un-newsworthy skirmish in Cottenham between Traveller families "where the *casus belli* was almost certainly a question of honour". The presumed reason for the fight, its unverifiable nature, and its inclusion in an article ostensibly focused on Dale Farm serves only to strengthen readers' association of Travellers with crime.

The essentialisation of Irish Travellers, and the projection of negative acts by individuals onto the group as a whole, was raised by the ITMB in its submission to the Leveson Inquiry.¹² Bridget McCarthy, Irish Traveller and ITMB advisory group member, wrote of the effects of this essentialisation on Traveller communities:

"They (the press) say "Gypsies" and "Travellers" when they are speaking about a single Gypsy or Traveller. If a single Traveller breaks the law they write about it and say "Travellers" – meaning all Travellers. I mix with people from the settled community at all levels. When a big story about a Traveller doing wrong is in the papers and they say "Travellers are doing this"; I wonder about what the people I meet that day will be thinking." (2012: 1)

The representation of Irish Travellers in some of the articles analysed demonstrates what McConahay and Sears called "old-fashioned racism" (in Campbell 1995: 37). Campbell, discussing black Americans, describes this 'traditional' racism as an attitude which "regards white Americans as superior [and...] considers people of color to exist outside of mainstream society" (ibid). Campbell found no evidence of such obvious bigotry in his analysis of US media, arguing that, for this group, a more covert now racism exists. However, various examples of discriminatory language and reductionist ideas found in the articles analysed, which were allowed to reach publication, suggests that while much progress has also been made with race relations in the UK, Travellers are still victims of 'old-fashioned'

¹² The Leveson Inquiry was a judicial public investigation held in 2011-2, on the matter of press ethics and journalistic practice in the United Kingdom, following revelations over phone hacking at the News of the World.

prejudice, and that discrimination against them is the “last socially acceptable racism.”¹³ It is hard to imagine a respected broadsheet summarising any other ethnic group’s disadvantaged position by blaming the “simple fact that theirs is an absurd and ugly way to live” (*Times* 2011a). This interpretation is supported by Trevor Phillips, former chair of the CRE, who stated in 2004 that for Travellers and Gypsies “Great Britain is still like the American deep south for black people in the 1950s” (Crawley 2004b).

Language of conflict

The representation of Irish Travellers and residents as conflictual opposites is a key tool in the ‘othering’ of Travellers prevalent in many of the articles studied. Existing literature on Travellers and the media has noted the tendency to portray Traveller/settled population relations as conflictual: “Residents ‘battle’ to stop a new Gypsy site. If they succeed, it is a ‘victory’. If more than a few Gypsies arrive anywhere, they ‘invade’. It is the language of war.” (Turner 2000: 73). Every newspaper studied used such ‘conflict language’ in at least one article, in describing the site: “the illegal compound” (*Daily Express* 2011c) and Travellers’ actions: “Gypsies to Fight” (*Daily Star* 2011c). The eviction itself was described as a “pitch battle” (*Guardian* 2011b) or, repeatedly, the “Battle of Basildon” (*Daily Mail* 2011b, 2011c) and “Battle of Dale Farm” (*Mirror* 2011a). Opposing sides were dramatically described “Raging gypsies [...] fought axewielding police” (*Daily Star* 2011c). Perhaps this is unsurprising, as the eviction, with its last-minute hopes for a legal reprieve, opposing groups, threats of violence and heavy police presence can be seen as a classically newsworthy event, leading to it being covered from a sensationalist angle, focusing on the conflict aspect.

Some articles, however, portray the situation as *always* having been one of conflict, an ‘us versus them’ struggle. The *Daily Mail* for example, records the delight of Basildon residents upon the eviction of “the camp, which for ten years has blighted their lives and destroyed the value of their properties” (2011c), *The Sun* describes the council as victorious in “a ten year battle to evict the gypsies” (2011b) and the *Daily Express*, similarly, talks of “the 10-year legal battle that has cost taxpayers millions of pounds” (2011b.)

¹³ Interview with Mike Doherty, 22 July 2011

This discordant representation of Dale Farm is also evident in a *Times* article (2011b) contrasting Traveller and resident opinions on a school “at the centre of the conflict”: Cray’s Hill Primary. The author acknowledges that the school “provided a rare level of acceptance” to Travellers “who were used to being on the outside”, this positive sentiment, though, is immediately contrasted by the assumed resident viewpoint, which sees the school as “a symbol of the hijacking of their corner of Middle England by travellers and their way of life”. This rhetoric supports Richardson’s (2006) interpretation of ‘influx and invasion’ as a discursive theme in Traveller reporting (89-90), locals are apparently “angry that money is spent on a school” which “as they see it, their children have been forced” to leave (20.10.11). This article summarises much of the representation of Travellers during this period, emphasising their cost, their ‘otherness’ and the inherent conflict they cause.

Writing in the *Telegraph* (2011), Germaine Greer uses conflict language and imagery to describe, not Dale Farm, but another unrelated site she claims to have previously visited. Along with essentialising Travellers by using stories about disparate groups, presumed to share negative characteristics, she portrays the site as markedly ‘other’, describing feeling that she “could have been in a Rajasthani village”, apparently due to “the size and shape of the compound” and the fact that “invisible mothers” remained inside their caravans, while “guardian children” were outside. The description ‘others’ Travellers, by comparing their site to a distant and little-known region, coupled with her sinister description of children who “neither moved nor spoke”. Morris describes how newspapers employ this “‘difference’ element” in stories intended to “stand out from the ordinary, that always sell and stir up emotions” (2000: 216). Travellers are an ideal target, as the author is able to draw from an existing “plethora of stereotypes around Travellers [...] with rich imagery and ‘hooks’ upon which they can hang a story” (ibid).

Turner’s discourse analysis of parliamentary language is pertinent here, he notes how ‘normal’ behaviours are presented, by politicians and the media, in such a way to “create a particular image” when ascribed to Travellers; for example, while owning a car is not newsworthy in a motorised world, Traveller ownership of cars is seen as suspicious, “[t]he implication, of course, is that the money for these expensive cars cannot have been earned legitimately” (2002: 10). In the same way, while many children on ordinary housing estates

play or socialise outside, while parents stay indoors, Greer depicts this behaviour amongst Irish Travellers as unusual and hostile.

Conclusion

During the eviction of Dale Farm, the majority of UK newspapers positioned Irish Travellers 'outside' of society, characterising the group narrowly by depicting criminality, expense to the taxpayer and conflict as essential to their characters. Very few efforts were made, particularly by higher circulation newspapers, to contextualise the eviction, other than by relentlessly emphasising the sites' violation of planning laws, a theme which accentuated Travellers' criminality along with their 'otherness'. Allegations of criminality by unrelated groups of Travellers were juxtaposed with coverage of Dale Farm, demonstrating that criminal behaviour is represented by much newspaper coverage as an 'ethnic trait'.

Articles repeatedly mis-named Irish Travellers, portrayed them in a reductionist and stereotypical way, and questioned the ethnic group's legitimacy either directly or tacitly. Articles which contextualised the eviction and largely avoided an essentialised representation of Travellers were found in newspapers with the lowest readership: the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *i*. Given the small size of the ethnic group,¹⁴ negative media representations like those detailed above are likely to contribute majorly to popular perceptions about Irish Travellers, as most people have "no personal contact" with them in daily life (Valentine and McDonald 2004: 18).

¹⁴ The 2012 Census, the first to include a category for 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' counted 54,895 belonging to these groups in England and 2,785 in Wales. Disaggregated data for the two ethnicities are not available. The ITMB believes the census findings significantly undercount the true figures, due to a lack of literacy amongst Travellers, mistrust of data collectors, and a failure to count those living on unauthorised sites. They have previously estimated the Gypsy and Irish Traveller population at 150,000-300,00 (ITMB 2013: 2). A broad estimation suggests that the two groups combined are likely to comprise 0.1%-0.3% of the British population.

Local Authorities and Site Provision

This section will examine how local authorities conceptualise and publicise their treatment of Irish Travellers, and Traveller sites. Local and national government policy on Travellers appears to reflect some of the negative perceptions noted in the section on media portrayals of Travellers, and a key area to examine is whether planning policy is addressing Travellers' (and local communities') needs, or whether local and national politicians "legislate for [...] perception" (Richardson and O'Neill 2012: 210). A second concern is the way in which, largely due to public pressure, local authorities absolve themselves of unpopular decision-making when it comes to Travellers, for example by rejecting Traveller site applications by default, or by campaigning against Travellers themselves.

Local authorities' treatment of Traveller issues is hugely important; planning decisions are made by planning committees (drawn from local councils) so these politicians can affect arguably the most important aspect of Traveller life – having an authorised dwelling. Their position as locally elected officials, however, means that unpopular decisions can risk subsequent election, or even create pressure to resign. Richardson believes that localism, in this sense, suffers from "a fundamental weakness and moral flaw" (2012: 212), as it necessarily represents local majorities, disadvantaging "unpopular or politically weak minorities" (ibid). Ahmed, Brown and Steele noted a correlation between public perceptions and local government decisions, finding that "[o]ne of the biggest obstacles [to authorised sites] was the public's negative perception of gypsies and travellers and a 'NIMBY'¹⁵ mentality [which] feeds into the attitudes of elected members representing constituencies." (2006: 55)

The nature of local and central government representations of Travellers and planning issues is briefly discussed below. In order to present a focused view of the nature and potential effects of such depictions, two case studies will then be examined. Firstly, local government representations of the Dale Farm eviction will be discussed, with a

¹⁵ 'Not in my back yard'

primary focus on councillors' statements. The second case study concerns a new Travellers' site in Essex, and provides an interesting contrast to Dale Farm. Although fully authorised and managed, proposals were met with considerable resistance from local residents and councillors.

Legislating for a perception

A surprising theme which emerged from both existing literature and primary research was the act of 'legislating for a perception'. Richardson (2012) demonstrated how statements by politicians (erroneously) suggested that policies on sites have given Travellers unfair advantage in accommodation, or allowed them to exploit the planning system. Despite the indisputable homelessness crisis affecting Travelling communities, and their disadvantages in obtaining planning permission, they are portrayed by politicians as recipients of special treatment, reflecting the media's representation of Travellers 'playing the system', in contrast with the 'law-abiding' settled population.

Similar rhetoric has been noted as recently as August 2013, when Eric Pickles (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) announced that £60 million of funding would be available for the creation of new Traveller sites. Along with this positive news, however, was a strong emphasis on evicting unauthorised sites; even though the funding allocation demonstrates the current lack of alternatives to these sites. His public statements were clearly written to appeal to settled residents, he asks for "Decisive action early on [which] saves money and unnecessary upset for local residents", insinuating that local councils prioritise Travellers over settled people: "The public want to see fair play, with planning rules enforced consistently, rather than special treatment being given to certain groups", (*Daily Telegraph* 2013) although the lack of existing sites again belies the 'special treatment' argument.

Richardson describes how perception can affect legislation, for example Planning Circular 01/06, which was altered by the Coalition Government "to redress a perception [...] that Gypsies and Travellers had unfair advantage in the planning system", despite acknowledgement that the changes "were to deal with a perception rather than reality"

(2012: 22). Such action is important for this debate, as politicians (whether local or national) whose legislation or voting decisions are based on false perceptions cannot be prioritising genuine systemic problems disadvantaging Travellers. Such actions demonstrate the strength of Traveller 'mythology', the myths created and reinforced by the media and repeated by local people campaigning against sites are legitimised by politicians who treat them as fact.

NITMOs and the Pontius Pilate option.

Councillor John Jowers, Essex County Council cabinet member for Libraries, Communities and Planning, and member of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU), describes many councillors' actions regarding Traveller planning applications as "the Pontius Pilate option"; councillors turn down applications by default, 'washing their hands' of any responsibility, and allow appeals committees to make the decision. Jowers claims this "happens all the time", and is a tool in retaining popularity amongst the electorate, as councillors can claim they opposed unpopular developments.¹⁶ It is highly likely that such action partly explains why 80% of planning applications by Travellers are refused at the first stage. Stephen Andrews, ECTU manager, spoke of the 'NIMTO' ('not in my term of office') attitude of many elected officials in Essex regarding Traveller sites, even councillors who have no personal objection to Traveller sites (of whom many certainly exist) do not take the political risk of supporting site development.¹⁷

Councillors' reluctance to support sites, or active resistance of them, reflects local prejudices, but also reinforces them, as residents' concerns are legitimised rather than challenged by councillors. Councillor Phil Rackley noted the rejection of proposed Travellers housing as common across Essex, stating that Basildon's planning committee advised the refusal of "every traveller application" due to the strength of public opposition to sites (Czernik 2011). This practice was highlighted by the Commission for Racial Equality as a "particular concern" (2006: 151) as it severely reduces the possibility of developing sites,

¹⁶ Interview with Essex Countywide Travellers Unit, 1 August 2013

¹⁷ *ibid*

and even Travellers whose applications are approved on appeal suffer a drawn-out process during which they are technically homeless.

Case 1 : Local authorities and the Dale Farm eviction

This section will analyse Basildon County Council's representation of the Dale Farm eviction, to establish whether themes identified in the media analysis chapter (ie 'Othering' of Irish Travellers, essentialising them through association with criminality) were employed by elected officials. An examination of public statements by councillors, minutes from planning and other meetings, and correspondence, will summarise how elected councillors framed the eviction debate. Focus on the site's violation of planning law and 'destruction' of the Green Belt represented the Dale Farm residents as lawbreakers who were illegally developing on countryside, while councillors emphasised their rejected offers to rehome (some) Travellers in 'appropriate' accommodation, belittling the Travellers' fears of becoming homeless.

Local authorities' actions are of paramount importance to Travellers, but without a duty to provide sites, many are failing to meet the needs of their travelling residents.¹⁸ Research undertaken for the Institute for Race Relations noted that councillors advocating Traveller site development are "placed under enormous strain by residents' campaigns", while councillors who oppose new sites can "make quick political capital from anti-Gypsy and Traveller sentiment" (Erfani-Ghettani 2012). Richardson (2006), in an analysis of statements made by councillors to the press on the subject of Travellers, found that local councillors were frequently guilty of "expounding negative images about Gypsies and Travellers" (128). She noted that in making such statements, councillors "could be seen to be speaking on behalf of local constituents"(128), but argued that as well as reflecting negative local attitudes, councillors create or worsen them; their statements can be seen as "sanctioning the discriminatory discourse" (129).

¹⁸ Since 2006 (Planning Circular 1/06), local authorities have had a duty to assess the need of Travelling communities, although there is no direct related obligation to provide sites and many local authorities have not yet assessed need (CRE 2006). Changes to the planning circular by the current government, which alter the requirements for providing sites, have led to fears that "many local authorities will, true to historical form, bow to pressure for local people and nimbyism and do little or nothing to address the existing need" (Willers 2010)

Public pressure

The Dale Farm case shows that intense pressure is put on councillors to clear existing sites, as well as to resist new ones. An analysis of local residents' opposition to Dale Farm over the duration of its existence, and the extent to which this pressure contributed to the council's push for eviction, is out of the reach of this dissertation, but would be a welcome addition to the field. However, pressure on councillors should be noted, as it may help to explain local politicians' public opposition to the site. It can be shown, for example, that residents saw the repeated delays in evicting Dale Farm residents as a fundamental failure by the council. Tony Ball, Leader of Basildon Council, was asked at a public meeting held in December 2010 if he would step down should the council fail to evict the Travellers from Dale Farm in the following fiscal year, which he confirmed.¹⁹ While Ball was willing to stake his political career on his hard-line stance over the eviction, those who supported the Dale Farm residents faced a hostile reception. Councillor Linda Gordon reported that she and ten Labour colleagues received sustained abuse from residents for opposing the evictions (Hennesey 2011), while John Jowers of Essex County Council has received death threats for his involvement with improving site provision in the county.²⁰

Planning law

A recurrent theme in councillors' statements on Dale Farm is a strong emphasis on the Travellers' violation of planning laws, which was also demonstrated in media coverage of the eviction. This focus seems to serve a dual purpose: the violation of planning law factually justified the eviction, simplifying the debate somewhat by removing attention from the inherent discrimination Travellers face in housing. Simultaneously, the emphasis on planning law was useful, for local councillors, as a tool to delineate 'law-abiding residents' from 'criminal Travellers'. Local people were frequently reminded that Dale Farm residents had broken laws with which they were forced to comply, highlighting their 'Otherness'. Councillors keen to emphasise the 'fair' way in which planning laws are 'the same for everyone' do not expand upon the systemic inequality experienced by Travellers.

¹⁹ Basildon Borough Council (2010) *Council Meeting: Public Question time*, 9 December: 7

²⁰ Interview with Essex Countywide Travellers Unit, 1 August 2013

Examples of the simplification of the debate abound in councillors' discourse, the most prominent being found on Basildon Council's Dale Farm FAQ page:

Question : "Was the site clearance about discriminating against travellers and their lifestyle?"

Answer: "No by taking this action the council is simply upholding the law and in so doing treating the travellers the same as anyone else. Basildon Council has a policy to protect its greenbelt from inappropriate development. Its actions at Dale Farm are a clear example of the law being applied equally and fairly to all people. This is an issue about the planning law as it affects all citizens; it is nothing to do with ethnicity or lifestyle choice."

(Basildon Council 2013)

The 'simplicity' and rectitude of the council's decision is reinforced in other locations, a Basildon councillor propounded this 'common sense' approach on his blog: "Clearing Dale Farm was simply the right thing to do".²¹ Tony Ball, Basildon Council leader, stated during the eviction that although a forced eviction was an unfortunate outcome, "I'm absolutely clear [...] that actually what we're doing is the right thing" (BBC 2011a). Interviewed en route to a high court decision on the evictions, he repeatedly emphasised the importance of the eviction, as "planning law is important to people" (BBC 2011b), multiple short interviews of Tony Ball from around this time, broadcast on national television, similarly focus solely on the planning law violation with no discussion of the lack of alternative housing, impact on evicted residents, or reasons for the delays in eviction. Like in the majority of the newspaper articles analysed above, the complex issue is simplified into a matter of 'right versus wrong'.

Criminal Travellers

Politicians' statements on the site frequently reflect the secondary purpose of focusing on the planning law issue. The goal of polarising statements seems to be the reinforcement of settled residents' perceived victim status. John Baron, MP for Basildon and

²¹ Horgan, S. (2011) *Dale Farm Clearance* [blog] 20 October 2011

Billericay, talking about Dale Farm, insists that “[w]e all accept that minorities have human rights”, but suggests that Travellers’ rights unfairly usurp those of settled people: “we tend to forget that the majority have human rights too, and these include an expectation that the law will be applied fairly and equitably across all of society.”²² Tony Ball, appearing on television the following day, called the eviction “a question of equality for everybody” (BBC 2011c), while John Baron, speaking on the BBC (2011d): reflected Eric Pickles’s ‘special treatment’ argument: “we cannot have in this country a law for one group of people and then a law for another group”. Claiming that Travellers have ‘more rights’ than the settled population is clearly a divisive tool, which makes ‘law abiding residents’ feel unfairly treated.

Research for the Institute of Race Relations had documented a tendency, in political discourse and the media, to portray Travellers “not as the most deprived of all minority groups but actually being privileged, getting an advantage over middle-income Britain, the taxpayers”, as noted above. This representation is certainly evident in political rhetoric surrounding the Dale Farm evictions; the ‘law-abiding taxpayer’ is contrasted with the Traveller, thus presenting the ‘Other’ as neither law-abiding, nor tax-paying. John Baron emerged as a particular proponent of this divisive rhetoric, consistently defending the ‘ordinary citizen’ by taking a hard line on Travellers: arguing that “the law abiding majority [...] are being discriminated against” and persistently focusing on the illegal nature of the site: “don’t forget these are families who have broken the law” (BBC 2011d). The righteous force in the conflict is clearly delineated, ‘illegal Travellers’ are to be evicted by the council for the benefit of law-abiding residents, Tony Ball even asked protestors to stand by “so that the bailiffs can carry on with their lawful work” (BBC 2011a).

Politicians’ tendency to portray Travellers as criminal non-citizens is displayed with surprising clarity in correspondence between senior local politicians in Essex which expressed “support, encouragement and solidarity” with Basildon council over the council’s involvement in the “continuing illegal occupation of Dale Farm by travellers (including Irish Criminals)”.²³

²² Horgan, S. (2011) *Dale Farm and Racism* [blog] 21 September 2011

²³ Letter from Councillor Rodney L Bass (Chairman of Essex County Council) to Councillor Mo Larkin (Mayor, Basildon Borough Council). ITMB 2011:4

The Green Belt²⁴

The Commission for Racial Equality, describing the “perceived unfairness” felt by residents toward Travellers regarding planning law, highlights the Green Belt as a particularly contentious notion. It identifies a common perception, that “applications for Gypsy sites were passed in green belt or green barrier areas while others were not allowed to build there” (2006: 136), noting that local politicians often endorsed this view- a theme observed in councillor’s discourse concerning Dale Farm. In reality, although development on Green Belt land is restricted, exceptional circumstances, including the duty to provide housing, can override these restraints (ibid 137).

Richardson understands the phrase ‘Green Belt’ as “hugely evocative” (2006: 31) despite reality often not reflecting the romanticised notion; for examples, much of the Dale Farm site was a scrapyard before being purchased by Irish Travellers. The ‘evocative notion’ was nonetheless exploited by councillors discussing the eviction, Tony Ball refers to it repeatedly, claiming that the “clearance has always been about the protection of the Green Belt” (Brentwood Gazette 2011). Reporting to the Council, Ball recommended proceeding with the clearance before exhausting possibilities for a peaceful solution as “the site clearance at Dale Farm cannot wait for these discussions to reach their conclusion particularly [... due to] the degree of harm being caused to the Green Belt.”²⁵ The narrative is again one of ‘criminal Travellers’ causing harm and destruction to ‘our’ land, reinforced by MP John Baron (in comments recalling Cohen’s ‘moral crusade’) who vocally supports the council’s attempt “to reclaim this greenbelt land on behalf of the law-abiding majority” (BBC 2011e).

Politicians’ stated concerns for the Green Belt are somewhat belied by their failure to ‘restore’ the site as promised; at the moment of writing (nearly two years after the eviction) the site is plagued by waste and asbestos. Neighbour and hitherto vocal supporter of eviction, Len Gridley, last year described the site as “much, much worse now than it was before” (Lazzeri 2012). Additionally, the vehement defence of the countryside’s sanctity is questionable in light of Basildon Council’s recent decision to dig up a popular designated

²⁴ ‘Green Belt’ is a policy in the United Kingdom, concerned with stymying urban sprawl by designating that certain areas of land (known as ‘the Green Belt’) should be left open and undeveloped (Communities and Local Government 2012: 19)

²⁵ Basildon Borough Council (2011) *Traveller Site Clearance: Dale Farm Crays Hill* [report by Tony Ball to Council] 14 March

wildlife site at Dry Street, in order to build “hundreds of “aspirational” homes” (Austin 2013) and previous use of a Green Belt golf course for landfill (*Sunday Express* 2007), along with other similar Green Belt development across Essex (Czernik 2011).

Denial of ethnicity

Although Basildon council adhered to guidelines regarding impact assessment, anti-discrimination, etc. during the eviction process, ostensibly recognising the ethnic minority status of the Dale Farm residents, comments by elected officials fail to appreciate the specific needs of the evicted group, demonstrated most clearly by their persistent claim to have offered ‘suitable’ accommodation to the Travellers. Tony Ball complained about a television broadcast which failed to mention that he had “made several offers of housing to traveller families” (Brentwood Gazette 2011), and stated that the council “have offered appropriate accommodation, yes, bricks and mortar” (Channel 4 2011). ‘Bricks and mortar’, a Traveller term for non-mobile housing, has however been demonstrated as inappropriate for Gypsies and Irish Travellers, a judgement in the case of *Clarke v Tunbridge Wells Borough Council* (2002) ascertained that for Travellers, “‘bricks and mortar’ was as unsuitable as an offer of a rat-infested barn” (§34), thus the offer of such housing should not avail councils of their homelessness duties towards evicted persons.

Despite Travellers’ well-documented aversion to such housing, and the claim that due to their ethnicity, it is manifestly inappropriate as a solution to enforced homelessness, representatives from Basildon Council continued to portray Travellers as being unnecessarily difficult, one councillor claiming that due to refusing housing, Travellers’ “nowhere to go’ argument carries no weight”.²⁶ Hawes and Perez see councils acting this way as encouraging Travellers “to the point of coercion, to stop being different – or at least to make it as difficult as possible”(1996: 156), while Richardson calls it “a method of controlling and containing ‘otherness’” (2006: 123), although the examples from Basildon Council seem to suggest a process of delegitimising Travellers’ group needs in order to avail itself of any particular responsibility towards them, and to avoid addressing the chronic lack of authorised Travellers sites.

²⁶ Horgan, S. (2011) *Dale Farm: Where now?* [blog] 3 December

Case Study Two: Severalls Lane

A site in Colchester, only 35 miles from Dale Farm, offers an interesting case study in the provision of Traveller accommodation. Perhaps the inherently conflictual situation of Dale Farm; an unauthorised site subject to a long and expensive legal battle, can partly explain the overwhelmingly negative and divisive representations made in the press and by elected official at the time of the eviction. However, it is interesting to examine popular representations of Travellers in the context of a fully legal, authorised site and establish whether resistance is based on the familiar essentialising themes, of cost, ‘otherness’ and criminality.

Essex County Council was provided with a Communities and Local Government grant of £1.97m in 2007 to develop a Gypsy and Traveller site²⁷ on Severalls Lane in Colchester, to replace a nearby site closed in 2002. The application was provisionally agreed by Colchester Borough Council in 2004 but due to manifold difficulties in planning application, funding and resident pressure, the permission was not finalised until 2010, and the site was completed in 2012. Councillor John Jowers, Cabinet Member for Communities and Planning, described how the Council “examined 62 potential locations for a Traveller site in Colchester, and 62 were opposed by local residents.”²⁸

During consultation over this proposed site, numerous actions were taken by local residents to express opposition, including attendance at residents’ meetings, letter writing campaigns and online petitions. These will be analysed in an attempt to establish whether resident opposition, described by the Commission for Racial Equality as “the most important barrier” to good race relations (2006: 36), is conditioned by the same negative representations of Travellers established in the previous chapter. The extent to which local resistance affects site provision should not be underestimated – it has been identified in numerous studies (see Cripps 1997 in Niner 2003; Richardson 2006) as having a huge impact on councillors’ decisions to approve planning applications. Accordingly, if site provision is to be improved for Travellers, it is important to understand the nature of resistance.

²⁷ As the Severalls Lane site is managed by the Council, it is subject to non-discrimination legislation and thus was established to house a mixture of travelling people, rather than being exclusively for Irish Travellers, Romany Gipsies, etc.

²⁸ Interview with Essex Countywide Travellers’ Unit, 1 August 2013

Planning Meeting

The public meeting at which the site was approved by the Colchester Council Planning Committee²⁹ exhibited some of the local residents' reasons for opposing the site. A number of legitimate planning-focused submissions focused on the ability of infrastructure to cope with new residents (lack of school places was repeatedly raised) although councillors noted that the arrival of twelve families was unlikely to place a major strain on resources. It is worth noting that while the site was under consideration, 1000 new residents had arrived in the area thanks to development of settled housing.³⁰

Other public submissions at the meeting were based on more circumstantial evidence; a number of attendees expressed concern that crime in the area would increase with the site's arrival. Many of these concerns cited a Travellers' site which had previously existed nearby at Hythe Quay (Colchester), as an example of Traveller criminality. The planning officer challenged these concerns, acknowledging a total lack of evidence to suggest that crime would increase, distinguishing between Hythe, a private site, with the proposals for a managed authorised dwelling.

Although the motion was eventually passed democratically, with all admissible concerns addressed, residents attending the meeting were frustrated with the council's response, with the public gallery nearly empty by the time of the vote which followed two and a half hours' debate, around half leaving amidst cries of "whitewash" as soon as it became clear the application was likely to succeed (Daily Gazette 2010a).

Petitions

Opposition to the site was also expressed through a number of written objections and petitions, one of which is particularly interesting, as it invited supporting comments.

During the consultation in 2010, over 1100 local people contacted the planning office with complaints,³¹ the majority using a syndicated petition letter, suggesting a co-

²⁹ Colchester Borough Council (2010) *Planning Committee Meeting*, 4 November

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ *ibid*

ordinated attack on the plans, organised by spokesman for the ‘Severalls Lane Action Group’, Stuart St Clair Pearce. Mr Pearce emphasised that all objections should be made on material grounds: “It is important people realise the reasons for opposing this project must be planning reasons[...] It is no good just saying we don’t want these people here” (Daily Gazette 2010b). However, residents’ unsatisfied reactions to councillors’ detailed responses to such concerns (ie promising to widen footpaths, noting the lack of evidence for increased crime) suggest that these issues were, for some, an acceptable front for general resentment towards the proposals.

An online petition, active between August and October 2010 and also organised by Severalls Lane Action Group, allows an examination of other reasons for opposing the site (GoPetition 2010). 121 residents from the Colchester area signed this petition, with 30 leaving comments, 27 of which were visible to the public.³² The majority of signatories (73%) and commenters (70%) used their real name. Despite Mr Pearce’s emphasis on framing opposition on material grounds, only a quarter of the comments solely addressed legitimate planning issues, for example regarding traffic speed on the access road to the site.³³

A more notable theme was cost, expressed through contrasting ‘taxpayers’ with Travellers. 40% of signatories frame their opposition in this way: “I cannot see why local taxpayers have to subsidise travellers lifestyles”³⁴; “i dont want them living for free”³⁵; “...would your money be better spent on health & education?”³⁶; “i cant understand it typical of this country these days though spent tax payers money on those who dont pay it”³⁷, despite the fact that the consultation documents repeatedly stated that Travellers living on the site would pay rent and council tax, and that the site was funded by central (not local) government.³⁸

Recalling a theme noted in media analysis, nearly 30% of the comments anticipated criminal, anti-social or destructive behaviour from Severalls Lane tenants, frequently framed

³² All excerpts from comments visible on the online petition have been reproduced verbatim. Surnames are represented by initial only, although full names were submitted online

³³ Peter C. 20 August 2010

³⁴ Mary M. 5 September 2010

³⁵ Aaron P. 20 August 2010

³⁶ Phil B. 1 September 2010

³⁷ Nicholas G. 27 August 2010

³⁸ Colchester Borough Council (2010) *Planning Committee Meeting*, 4 November

in oppositional terms: “Why should we pay for the free site, mess, and increase in thefts?”³⁹ Many commenters also referred to the aforementioned Hythe site, or unnamed sites, in anticipating anti-social or destructive behaviour: “They were given the opportunity to live at the Hythe and completely ruined the place”,⁴⁰ “We put in sites - and they are burnt to the ground”,⁴¹ “I feel that travellers have been given the chance in Colchester at the Hythe and ruined the facilities.”⁴²

Many comments (around 40%) demonstrated an oppositional understanding of Travellers, an ‘us versus them’ mentality, reminiscent of the Travellers’ positioning as outsiders by newspaper reports and local councillors: “once again the rights of the lawbreaking traveller is given precedence over the law-abiding resident”⁴³; “Once again the views of the many mean nothing ... stop pushing for a site which is clearly against the wishes of the majority of decent people in the area”⁴⁴; “As far as I know they do not pay tax or national insurance as myself and my husband do. We have to work hard for whatever we want. We do not con people out of their money or leave a mess wherever we go.”⁴⁵

Other signatories question Travellers’ minority status, again in a manner similar to that seen in much reporting on Dale Farm: “If they are travellers, let them travel!”⁴⁶; “Why is a permanent site needed for travellers, surely by their very nature they want to travel? If they don’t I suggest they get a house and a mortgage like everyone else has to,”⁴⁷ while some commentators give no material reason for their rejection of the site: “We do not want this site. Travellers are not welcome in this area.”⁴⁸; “I don’t want them living near me”⁴⁹.

Themes prevalent in these comments, along with those apparent at public meetings, suggest that some prejudices against Travellers are so well-ingrained in a significant number of people that even when presented with contradictory evidence, opposition remains. Local residents had access to the planning bid, which stated that Travellers on the site would pay

³⁹ Chris T. 20 August 2010

⁴⁰ Hannah C. 27 August 2010

⁴¹ Peter B. 20 August 2010

⁴² Anonymous 19 August 2010

⁴³ Richard F. 20 August 2010

⁴⁴ Carole W. 23 August 2010

⁴⁵ Anonymous 5 September 2010

⁴⁶ Anonymous, 19 October 2010

⁴⁷ Paul W. 25 August 2010

⁴⁸ Adele H. 15 August 2010

⁴⁹ Leon H. 20 August 2010

rent and council tax, but many still believed this would not be the case. Although this may be due to ignorance of the terms of the site (rather than disbelief), it demonstrates that the presumption made reflects the mass media portrayal of ‘scrounger’ Travellers, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, and in research by Richardson (2006) and the Council of Europe (2010).

Richardson and Smith-Bendell have demonstrated that local opposition to Traveller sites is “often founded on fear and media representation, rather than on fact” (2012: 37). Comments attached to this petition suggest the presence of this ‘fear’ element, in addition to generally stereotyped, media-endorsed views (regarding Travellers’ cost to society, criminality and ‘othernes’). Statements made online and at the planning meeting demonstrate that some residents’ opinions were based on lived experiences, particularly regarding the Hythe Quay site. The act of associating new, unidentified residents with previous tenants of an unrelated site, operating in different circumstances, on the basis of their ethnicity alone, demonstrates the success of essentialising the Traveller ethnicity, resulting in “certain negative characteristics” being seen as “not only typical of but essential to the group” (Morris 2000: 213). The Hythe Quay focus is reminiscent of a situation examined by Richardson in her own research, which found that settled residents’ views about a previous nearby site not only became more extreme after it closed (ie remembering or exaggerating negative events which were not reported at the time), but that this experience “helped to contextualise the objections raised by the public in [a later] consultation exercise...[and] seemed to categorise Gypsies and Travellers as folk devils” (2006: 114).

Local Authority Involvement

A number of councillors also publicly opposed the Severalls Lane site throughout the consultation process. Councillors Gerard and Beverley Oxford ran a “longstanding campaign” against the site, becoming involved with the residents’ opposition movement to the extent were excluded from decision-making meetings due to a conflict of interest (Colchester Borough Council 2010b). Councillor G. Oxford criticised the plans in the local media numerous times, calling the site “obviously very expensive”, adding, “[f]or that sort of

money you could have houses without any problem.” (Essex County Standard 2007). Statements of this nature serve to ‘other’ Travellers by depicting them as a drain on resources: money spent on ‘them’ could be better spent on ‘us’. This practice was noted by Helleiner in her study of Travellers in Ireland, where she found opponents to sites portraying Travellers as “‘outsiders’ taking houses from local people” whose “more legitimate claims on the state” were not being met (2003: 91). The expression of these views by elected councillors endorses the divisive discourse of local residents’ groups and sanctions the portrayal of Travellers as costly outsiders.

At a Finance and Audit meeting,⁵⁰ Councillor Blundell called on Councillor Smith to resign from his role as Portfolio Holder due to the unpopular decision to permit the site’s development, reminiscent of residents’ pressure on Tony Ball step down over the delays in evicting Dale Farm. Councillor Andrew Ellis, although a supporter of the site, acknowledged the attraction of the ‘Pontius Pilate’ method: “...the most comfortable thing to do would be to refuse the application and let it go to appeal” (Eastern Daily Press 2010).

Councillors’ criticisms of the Severalls Lane proposals mirror many of the themes identified in residents’ objections. Councillor Goss, commenting on the Severalls Lane site while it was under development, uses the cost of Travellers to make local residents feel they are being ripped off: “[t]his is not something we should be spending millions of pounds worth of taxpayers’ money on” (Eastern Daily Press 2011). Councillor G Oxford, referring to an unauthorised site in the same article, supports this polarising discourse “I’m sorry, but I don’t have a great deal of sympathy of the travellers’ plight [...] In Colchester we have legitimate people who are homeless who we should be looking after first” (ibid). Oxford’s distinction between locals, who are deserving of public funds, and Travellers who are not even considered ‘legitimate people’, and who are thus wholly undeserving of sympathy, supports the application of Wilson and Gutiérrez’s (1995) theory of ethnic minorities as burdensome “problem people” to the case of Travellers in the UK (demonstrated in media coverage of Travellers, above), and the implication that Travellers with no sites on which to live are not homeless reflects Basildon council’s refusal to accept mobile living as part of Irish Travellers’ ethnic identity.

⁵⁰ Colchester Borough Council (2010) *Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel Meeting*, 31 August

A submission from Myland Parish Council at a Colchester Council planning committee meeting⁵¹ reflects the ‘legislating for a perception’ argument made by Richardson, discussed above. The Council “strongly opposed” the Severalls Lane site, noting that it would “increase the perceived fear of crime,” while at the same meeting Councillor G. Oxford lodged his opposition, stating that “human rights worked both ways,” implying that Travellers’ rights had been considered before (and to the detriment of) those of the settled residents. Councillor B. Oxford also adopted this divisive rhetoric, questioning “why travellers were given priority over residents’ families in respect of school places,” although no such policy was suggested. Councillors Goss and G. Oxford both related crime statistics from previous Traveller sites, clearly portraying criminality as typical of Travellers – Goss even presented data pertaining to Traveller sites from a ten year period, arguing that crime rates, fly tipping and anti-social behaviour would increase if the site was built.

Severalls Lane today

Despite intense resistance, the Severalls Lane site was completed in 2012 and is now home to twelve families. The site is regarded as being well-run,⁵² it is administered by a Traveller and experienced site manager, Patience Buckley, who collects rent and utility payments, along with engaging in community integration projects (Essex County Standard 2012). Only one instance of criminal activity at the site has been recorded since its establishment, although Traveller residents were the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of the minor burglary of a caravan (Daily Gazette 2013).

Opposition to the site has abated almost totally since its construction. Although Mr. Pearce’s campaign is on-going, there is no further evidence of tensions in the area, no negative stories in the local or national media, and Traveller residents are considered to be well integrated to the community.⁵³ Additionally, at least one councillor who vocally opposed the site is now “actively helping to improve services”.⁵⁴ The diminution of opposition to the site adds credence to research by Duncan (1996) which suggests that, in

⁵¹ Colchester Borough Council (2010) *Planning Committee Meeting*, 4 November

⁵² Interview with Essex Countywide Travellers’ Unit, 1 August 2013

⁵³ Interview with Essex Countywide Travellers’ Unit, 1 August 2013

⁵⁴ *ibid*

hindsight, objections prior to site development are often overstated and disproportionate, with impact on local residents being much lower than presumed. This is an important finding, as local pressure, potentially based on misconceptions about Travellers, leads to the delay or refusal of much site development with serious impacts on the well-being of Travellers nationwide.

Conclusion

The case studies examined above demonstrate the tendency of local politicians to adopt a divisive rhetoric, similar to that noted in the media, when discussing Irish Travellers. Additionally, these essentialising themes are evident in residents' discourse when opposing a new site, possibly suggesting a cyclical, mutually re-enforcing, process of negative media depictions of Travellers, local opposition, and councillors' unwillingness to champion an unpopular cause.

Themes of criminality and 'otherness' were particularly pervasive in both case studies. Councillors supporting the eviction of Dale Farm delineated 'criminal' Travellers from law-abiding residents, mainly through an emphasis on planning law, while local politicians and residents alike expressed a fear of crime when a new site was proposed. Travellers were repeatedly characterised as undeserving recipients of 'special treatment', illegitimately expending taxpayers' money, destroying 'our' Green Belt and obstinately refusing councillors' offers of suitable homes. The influence of perception upon policy was noted at a national and local level. Local politicians are, at least to some extent, legislating to deal with residents' (and their own) perceptions of Travellers, rather than examining the needs of Travellers as part of their community.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine representations of Irish Travellers in the media and in public and political discourse. Travellers in the United Kingdom suffer from profound discrimination and many live in precarious situations on unauthorised sites. Although there is an established need for more legal sites, local councils are often unwilling to grant planning permission to Travellers, or to support the development of local authority sites.

An examination of existing literature found that Travellers are frequently represented in popular discourse as inherently different to the settled population. They are 'essentialised' by the media: seen to share certain negative characteristics, such as costliness, and are portrayed as a burden on society. Local authorities were shown to often depict Travellers in the same way, seeing them as an unwanted expense and distinguishing them from other members of the community. The negative views of settled residents were shown to influence the provision of sites, as councillors felt pressure to turn down planning applications, and local opposition to Travellers was established to be a major barrier to integration.

This dissertation sought to examine three key areas: media portrayals of Travellers; resident opposition and local authority discourse. This holistic approach was adopted as previous studies had tended to focus on a single area (for example media, housing or parliamentary discourse) without comprehensively examining whether negative representations of Travellers might influence residents and decision-makers, conditioning the provision of suitable housing.

Adopting a media content analysis approach, this dissertation analysed newspaper coverage of the Dale Farm evictions, a key moment in Irish Traveller visibility in the press. Themes of costliness and conflict were evident in much of the content analysed, and Travellers were repeatedly depicted as criminal 'outsiders', partly due to a persistent focus on planning law. Disparate groups were associated in articles by virtue of their Traveller ethnicity alone, suggesting the racial stereotyping of the entire group, although the ethnic minority status of the group was portrayed by some articles analysed as an illegitimate tool used to get 'special treatment'.

Essentialising themes recognised in the media analysis were noted in local councillors' discourse regarding Traveller sites. Local politicians' general aversion to the unpopular act of site provision was noted, which goes some way to explaining the chronic lack of sites. Analysis of council documents, speeches and interviews regarding the Dale Farm eviction established a tendency to simplify the question of unauthorised Traveller sites by concentrating on an idealistic notion of the Green Bet and the Travellers' contravention of planning law. These foci reduced the eviction debate to a matter of 'right and wrong', while demonising Traveller residents by simplistically portraying them as destructive law-breakers.

Acknowledging that councillors' opposition to sites is largely conditioned by a desire to please the electorate, a case study was carried out to analyse local resistance to a proposed Travellers' site. Residents' opinion was, much like that of local politicians, framed around an expectation of crime, resistance based on memories of a previous nearby site, and the perception of Travellers as costly outsiders who exploit the 'taxpayer'.

The precise process by which media discourse conditions the views of local residents, and the consequent pressure put on councillors making planning decisions is uncertain, but commonalities in the representation of Travellers in all three areas suggest a mutually reinforcing cycle of stereotype, fear and resistance to sites. Tentative research has suggested that resident opposition to sites, although often a decisive factor in the rejection of planning applications, may be conditioned by the negative representations of Travellers propounded by the media. Given the importance of authorised sites to Travellers' health and well-being, and the proven detrimental effects of resistance to such developments, it is hoped that research in this area will continue. A particularly valuable study would longitudinally assess local residents' attitudes to a site, before, during and after development, to compliment research by Duncan (1996) and my own tentative suggestions. If local authorities' actions are indeed conditioned by residents' false perceptions, promulgated by the media, it is time to start examining reality.

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- Stephen Andrews: Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Manager,

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Appendix One: Excerpt from interview with Mike Doherty, Communications Officer, Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

JM : **What themes have you noticed in media coverage of Irish Travellers, stereotypes or themes which keep recurring?**

MD: One of the ones that's concerning me at the moment is comparing Irish Travellers to an idea of true Romany Gypsies, although when you drill down, the actual true Romany Gypsy doesn't actually exist, and Romany Gypsies actually get treated just as badly in the press they just don't suffer from that particular stereotype of course, so there is no real true Romany Gypsy and these papers look to and compare Irish Travellers to, they're just another stick to beat Irish Travellers with

JM: **So they're not 'proper' gypsies**

MD: Yeah, not 'proper'. Another one is, they don't pay their taxes. Erm, I mean, we've had a few successful complaints now to the PCC about that one.

JM: **So would that be like them saying that none of them pay their taxes? Or in an article about a particular group saying that that group didn't pay taxes.**

MD: Erm, it's generally saying that 'Travellers don't pay taxes', and the implication is that it's all Travellers. I mean a lot of these papers are quite clever, they don't actually state these stereotypes, well, some of them do, but y'know when they know that people are watching them and they might get a complaint, their ways to state these things, imply them, use juxtaposition, stuff like that. You've still got the same stereotypes, it's just a bit more subtle. Erm, what's another one? Erm, parasites,

large families, living off the taxpayer, again that kind of implies that Travellers don't pay tax, they're somehow apart from the rest of society, err, I mean that's that's quite... putting Travellers... I don't know if this counts as a stereotype or not, but they're often positioned as the outsider, in a story, and yeah I know, I don't like countering stereotypes by using my own anecdotes y'know but that is just ridiculous, the idea that just because you're a Traveller, you don't pay tax or you don't engage with local communities is just like, it's prejudice.

JM: Yeah that's something I've noticed a lot in the articles I've looked at as well, about the cost to the tax payer as if Travellers aren't taxpayers as well

MD: Yeah. I mean there's an article in the Sun today, it's 'Gypsies cost British taxpayer two million pounds', and what they've done is they've got the totals from all the councils round the country and added it all up, the cost of enforcement, moving on temporary encampments, and they've come to two million quid, and that's the headline. Interestingly, in the story, there's a quote from the Taxpayers' Alliance, which says this is a waste of taxpayer's money. What I find interesting is that it then says, it carries on and the quote alludes that there needs to be provision for all members, for all part of the community, as in a solution to this what they call waste of taxpayers' money, and that's actually not far from what we're arguing! [laughs]

JM [Laughs]

MD: So it's quite unusual to open the Sun and to see the Taxpayers' Alliance agreeing with you. And that is the problem with most of the stories, they don't look into the context they kind of like it's almost like 'me and my mates have got together and

decided to buy some caravans and gone around and started parking on cricket pitches', that's just there, there's no... the stories attack travellers, they talk to the local heroes who fought them off, they don't look at why they might be there, what's happened in the past, and one of the main reasons they're there is coz there's not enough provision and one of the main reasons is that they don't just like disappear is that their ethnicity is that they're Travellers, and throughout history they've changed, changed in economic circumstances, changed in political circumstances, stuff like that, and it takes time and they may well change and the culture may well change but it takes time and it's much better, and these papers they don't understand that when they're attacking Travellers like that it actually works against what they say they want to happen, coz when ok, you might get a group of Travellers, a Traveller family, or something like that. A couple of them, you know, have progressive ideas or something like that, and say I dunno one of the old boys is not so progressive, and you get this, I mean there isn't this 'a group of Travellers are progressive and a group of Travellers aren't' is they're all different I mean in a single person they'll be progressive and not so progressive ideas, ways of dealing with change. And the progressive ideas are driven out every time you open the paper and it says like you know there's an article about erm Appleby, and again it's the Sun and it's not about what a great fair it is and what historically, the historical tradition of it, it's about the mess left behind! And that is just ridiculous. I mean, a festival, the mess left behind at a festival, but that is the actual crux of the story, but that, those kinds of pictures, those stories, they actually they reinforce, what's the word, they reinforce tendencies towards keeping you know, keeping that the rest of society is not for us, not for them.

JM **So they might draw back into it?**

MD: Yes, yes, so, BUT we think if I dunno, I think maybe I'm an optimist, I think there has been a change in the way Travellers have been reported, in the last year, erm and I think it's a positive change, but it's very fragile, erm, people have campaigned in the media for Gypsies and Travellers, and it's not like a linear line going up, it's like you might get three positive stories in the Mail then a really awful one, that kind of thing, but I think there is change, and it's not just the press as well it's the TV, and erm the BBC's output. I separate the BBC from everybody else coz I tend to think that the press, by the different regulators, that's how, and the BBC have their own, they're self-regulated. And I'm way digressing!

Appendix 2 : Sample of Severalls Lane petition

Sample consists of first 50 signatures from the petition, filtered for entries with visible comments only.

No.	Title	Name	Town/City	Date (2000)	Comment
5	Miss	Adele H.	Colchester	Aug 15	We do not want this site. Travellers are not welcome in this area
10	Mr	John C.	Colchester	Aug 16	WILL COLCHESTER SPEND AGAIN AS THEY DID AT THE HYTHE JUST TO HAVE IT SMASHED DOWN BY THE TRAVELLERS? PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY MOVED BECAUSE OF THE INTENDED SITE,WE COULD NEVER SELL IF WE WANTED TO
25	Mrs	Susie D.	Colchester	Aug 19	No to new travellers site, already too congested around there
26	Mr	Anonymous	Colchester	Aug 19	I feel that travellers have been given the chance in Colchester at the Hythe and ruined the facilities. You can only see the problems at the Crays Hill site. This is a green field site which would never be developed for housing so why do the travellers get an opportunity. The cost of this site is excessive for which the local tax payers are funding for something which they do not want. Had I have been aware of this I would not have moved to this area of Colchester.
33	Mr	Peter C.	Colchester	Aug 20	Wrong site because of further development in this area of residential and commercial properties. Also access to the site is very dangerous, just look at the traffic speed and the short distance to a blind bend.
34	Mrs	Anonymous	Colchester	Aug 20	No green field land for travellers sites. Brown land ok.
38	Mr	Chris T.	Colchester	Aug 20	Why should we pay for the free site, mess, and increase in thefts?
40	Mr	Richard F.	Colchester	Aug 20	once again the rights of the lawbreaking traveller is given president over the lawabiding resident. these people dont deserve it !!
44	Mr	Peter B.	Colchester	Aug 20	We put in sites - and they are burnt to the ground - we pay for help and its thrown in our faces - when are we going to say - "enough?"
45	Mr	Leon H.	Colchester	Aug 20	i dont want them living near me
46	Mr	Aaron P.	Colchester	Aug 20	i dont want them living for free

Appendix 3 : Example of email to interviewee

From: Jo Moore <jmoore@brookes.ac.uk>
To: John Jowers <cllr.john.jowers@essex.gov.uk>
13 July 2013

Re: Researching Dale Farm

Dear Councillor Jowers,

I am a master's student in the Geography department of UCL (London), and I am currently doing a project for which I would really like to get some input on from you. I am studying the Irish Traveller site at Dale Farm (the existing one and the evicted portion).

It would be wonderful if I could conduct a short interview with you about this site, to talk about things like concerns raised by non-Traveller residents, comparisons with authorised sites, what happened after the eviction, and other issues of interest, like the creation of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit and what role this might have in the future.

It would be great if you could let me know of a possible date we could meet, I am planning on being in Essex at the end of this month, but I'm very flexible with dates.

Many thanks for your time, yours sincerely,

Jo Moore