Talking about Gypsies: the notion of discourse as control

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Gypsies and Travellers are increasingly part of a debate by politicians and the media in the U.K. This discourse is not a benign reflection of events; instead it is part of a complex mechanism of control. There is a difficult relationship between the settled and travelling communities which inhibits political discussion of a strategy for site provision. In this context, the paper examines the links between discourse and control, by paying attention to Foucaultian notions of the 'gaze', amongst other explanations. Drawing on findings from analysis of the media, focus groups with Travellers and a case study in one local authority planning consultation exercise, the paper proposes a theoretical explanation for the link between the discourse used around Gypsies and Travellers and the control that is exercised over them, particularly in inhibiting their right to a travelling lifestyle.
Key words: Gypsies/Travellers, discourse, control.

Introduction

Gypsies and Travellers have been used by politicians, such as Michael Howard in his 2005 election campaign, as a way of highlighting groups in society which need controlling. It is seen as a vote-winner to crack-down on these and other 'folk-devils' (Cohen, 1980) such as asylum seekers and young, single mothers.   Local authorities are under pressure to ensure that the needs of Gypsies and Travellers are analysed (for instance the duty to conduct a needs study under the Homelessness Act 2002), yet there is no legislative duty to build new sites (this was removed by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994). Research for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Niner, 2003) has highlighted a shortage of suitable local authority sites, yet Gypsies and Travellers are not given planning permission to build their own.   The social housing sector faces a difficult time in balancing the needs of settled and

travelling communities to promote cohesion, and the discourse used by politicians and the media highlight the tensions between the two. It is a problematic base from which to devise a forward strategy for accommodation provision and, as such, there is a need to understand how discourse is used as a tool to control.

The debate surrounding Gypsies and Travellers is current in Whitehall, town halls and in the media. It is also discussed increasingly in the housing press (Snow, 2004 and Gardiner, 2004) and issues of site provision and discrimination are examined in papers such as the Guardian (Bowers and Benjamin, 2004 and Barkham, 2004). These examples of coverage of the issues are largely positive, as is the news (Beunderman, 2004) that the first Roma MEP was elected to the European parliament. Despite positive moves to debate the issues, there is also an increase in negative discursive debate (Greenhill, 2004, Kelly, 2004, Levy, 2004, Lincolnshire Free Press, 2004, Long, 2004 and The Sun, 2005). Largely, this negative coverage is centred upon the issue of the cost of dealing with Gypsies and Travellers, a theme that is central to this paper. There is also recognition that Gypsies and Travellers are subject to negative, discriminatory discourse that would not be acceptable against other Black and Minority Ethnic communities (Asthana, 2004).

The current discursive debate is not just limited to the press, but is manifested in recent legislation such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003). Also there is the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), and Circular (02/2005) was published in March 2005 which gave guidance on Temporary Stop Notices - allowed for in Part four of the Act - on unauthorised developments. Political and legislative debate continues around the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) which took away

the duty from local authorities to provide sites. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee published their report in November 2004, calling for a duty to be reinstated. The response in early 2005 was that the Government did not feel that a duty was needed. This official response was prompted in a statement given at the end of 2004:

> A duty to provide sites is not necessarily an appropriate solution. A duty has been tried before and often did not produce sufficient or appropriate provision. (Johnston, 2004: 4)

However, ODPM have still asked councils to provide extra sites in their good practice guide *Diversity in Equality and Planning* (March 2005). Commentators suggest this will not be possible without enforcing a duty (Hilditich, 2005). Additionally, local authorities should also adhere to the Homelessness Act (2002), which requires a needs survey to be undertaken in their areas (this includes the needs of Gypsies and Travellers). The ODPM has already reprimanded one council in Brentwood (Inside Housing, 2005), for not including the needs of this group in their local development plans.

Housing providers need to make sense of their duties under a mixed raft of legislation. This is not easy within the current discourse, which is positive in some areas of the press (particularly the housing press) but extremely negative in the more popular press (see the Sun campaign in March, 2005). This discourse affects strategies for providing accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. Therefore, there is a need to understand the discourse surrounding the group and to see how it can be controlling. To do this, a theoretical approach is examined, next, and this is followed with analysis of primary research undertaken, within the framework.

Theoretical Framework

There is an existing body of work which examines frameworks of control or discursive frameworks; for instance Akerstrom Anderson (2003) and Clegg (1989). The framework detailed in this paper focuses on Foucault's theory of gaze and links this with explanations of discourse. A further component of the framework is an analysis of society, norms and folk devils. This is in an attempt to explain why control of Gypsies and Travellers, through discourse, is seen as necessary in society. Neither Akerstrom Anderson (2003) nor Clegg (1989) tackle this issue; they concentrate on the how, rather than the why. Clegg states as much in his work:

> The circuit of power framework enables us to analyse how this is so. Why it should be so is another question, suited to more polemical occasions than this text allows.
> (Clegg, 1989: 272)

The framework has three main areas: firstly, power and control (Foucault's gaze, 1969), secondly, theories of discourse (and the links between theories on discourse and control, Foucault, 1976) and, thirdly, theories on society, norms and folk devils (Bauman, 1989 and Cohen, 1980).

Power and Control

For the purposes of this paper, the examination of theories on control and power focuses on Foucault. In particular, his work on the gaze is important. It might best be described as the eye of power and control. Foucault describes gaze, thus:

> …the gaze is not faithful to truth, nor subject to it, without asserting, at the same time, a supreme mastery: the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates.
> (Foucault, 1969: 39)

The crucial element in the gaze is the interpretive element. Foucault (1969) was discussing it in relation to doctors looking at illnesses in their patients. He explained

that doctors no longer passively viewed symptoms, but instead started to actively interpret them. This is important because this research attempts to link theories of the gaze with those of discourse and it raises the notion of discourse as control. The gaze is not passive surveillance, but involves active interpretation and domination. Words and terms used in the discourse around Gypsies and Travellers are not passively describing a situation but instead they are interpreting them. The interpretation involved in discourse is based on a variety of variables including the ontology of the speaker and their social norms and characteristics.

There are a number of examples of explicit surveillant gaze over Gypsies and Travellers. For instance, during a project to assess Supporting People needs in the South West of England, a Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Officer showed the researcher where a closed circuit television camera had been hidden on a neighbouring property to the site, to record images for the police.

Foucault's (1969) research on surveillance was inspired by Bentham's Panopticon principle in his 18th Century prison designs. Cohen (1985) explains panopticism as:

> Surveillance and not just punishment became the object of the exercise. The all seeing world of Bentham's panopticon is the architectural vision of the new knowledge/power spiral: the inmate caught in a power which is visible (you can always see the observation tower) but unverifiable (you must never know when you are being looked upon at any one moment). The prison is the purest form of the panopticon principle and the only concrete way to realize it. (Cohen, 1985: 26)

But there are other ways of realising it. Partly, this is through society's gaze – which is dominating through active interpretation rather than passively watching. Additionally there may be other concrete ways of realising it; such as the architecture of the built environment (Dovey, 1999).

Foucault (1969) did not just believe in the manifestation of the gaze in physical things, such as Bentham's panopticon, or a modern day example – surveillance cameras; he believed that the gaze was internalised. The problem of understanding why the gaze is internalised by some people and not others comes back to the issue of different group and individual norms - why do some individuals believe in different norms to the rest of a group, or to other individuals? If internalisation of the gaze, as a tool of power, is dependent on everyone internalising the same values then there will never be internalisation wholesale of one value of society, because of different individual and group norms. Gypsies and Travellers could be viewed as eschewing the norm of living a settled life in a house. However, this meta-norm of society, of house dwelling, does not accord with the long history of the norm of nomadism of the Gypsies and Travellers. In some current examples Gypsies are forced to accept the settled norm because there is no alternative accommodation provision, but others refuse to do this and will not give up their norm of nomadism. Cowan and Lomax (2003) highlight this pressure to conform:

> We argue that both policing and welfare require and reinforce conformity to particular norms as preconditions to legal entitlements, and socially exclude those who fail to conform.
> (Cowan and Lomax, 2003: 284)

They further discuss this implicit surveillance and the pressure to internalise the gaze:

> Equally important, however, is the dispersal of policing processes and practices into the enquiries and assessments made by welfare professionals…Submission to assessments by health, housing and social services implies a submission to their own individual surveillance and policing techniques.
> (Cowan and Lomax, 2003: 306)

McNay (1994) reinforces the view that control is exercised indirectly through normalisation techniques:

> Control in modern societies is achieved, therefore, not through direct repression but through more invisible strategies of normalization. Individuals regulate themselves through a constant introspective search for their hidden 'truth', held to lie in their innermost identity.
> (McNay, 1994: 97)

Discourse

In housing research, discourse tends to be discussed in two ways, as a theoretical subject (Clapham, 2002) and as a method of analysis (this occurs across a number of social science fields, including housing studies). In this paper, the link is made between discourse and control at a theoretical level; but critical analysis methods, such as through the use of NVIVO help to examine themes in the media and in public debate. Discourse analysis is increasingly being used in housing, and also specifically in the field of Gypsies and Travellers. Of particular importance in this area is: Erjavec (2001), Holloway (2003), Leudar and Nekvapil (2000), Shuinear (1997) and, Turner (2000 & 2002). Turner's work particularly is discussed further on in the paper, as certain themes have resonance with this research; in addition, Shuinear (1997) helps to understand the Gypsy as folk-devil.

The main premise of Foucault's work on discourse and language is that it is not reactive. Discourse does not just describe an action or thought; indeed, for Foucault, discourse is productive. By talking, or writing, about a particular entity it is possible to recreate it.

Clapham (2002) helps to understand the importance of discourse:

> In this way language and knowledge are not copies of reality, but constitute reality, each language constructing specific aspects of reality, on interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the lived world.
> (Clapham, 2002: 61)

However, it is the link between discourse and control that is the focus of this paper.

Foucault specifically links discourse and surveillance:

> The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. The procedures of examination were accompanied at the same time by a system of intense registration and of documentary accumulation. A 'power of writing' was constituted as an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline.
> (Foucault, 1977: 189)

Although a theoretical link can be made between discourse and control, this paper will, shortly, analyse research which sought to test whether this theoretical relationship applied to Gypsies and Travellers. Firstly, however, it is necessary to discuss further the issue of social norms, and those seen to live outside them.

Society, Norms and Folk-Devils

> Objective reality can readily be 'translated' into subjective reality, and vice versa. Language, of course, is the principal vehicle of this ongoing translating process in both directions.
> (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 153)

Berger and Luckmann define society as subjective reality which, through language, links in with 'objective' reality – each defining the other. Not only is this useful in thinking about what society means, but it shows the links between society, the gaze and discourse. It helps to explain how the objective 'reality' of Gypsies and Travellers is internalised into subjective reality, but then enters a dialectical process with objective reality again; a cycle of definition and social construction of reality continues.

The circular route that Berger and Luckmann discuss is key to the theoretical framework in this paper. Plus, there is an emphasis on the importance of society,

what it means and what is seen to be real in society. A useful debate is that of social 'norms', this is necessary in order to understand that there are people who are seen to exist outside of the norm. Elster (1989) provides an appropriate base. He states that a norm is social because it is shared with other people, but also enforced by other people (pg 99). Living in a permanent dwelling may be seen as a social norm, and as such Gypsies and Travellers, and homeless people, fall outside of this; these 'outsiders' can be described as 'folk-devils' (Cohen, 1980). Bauman (1989) examines the importance of 'proximity' in the context of 'othering':

> Being inextricably tied to human proximity, morality seems to conform to the law of optical perspective. It looms large and thick close to the eye. With the growth of distance, responsibility for the other shrivels, moral dimensions of the object blur, till both reach the vanishing point and disappear from view. (Bauman, 1989: 192)

Cohen (1980) and Bauman (1989) have discussed the notion that folk-devils serve a purpose by being different. Shuinear (1997) also supports this functionalist explanation for distancing Gypsies and Travellers as folk-devils (it should be noted that Gaujo is the name that Gypsies and Travellers give to members of the 'settled' community):

> This need is so overpowering that time after time, in place after place, Gaujos create situations forcing Gypsies to fill this role.

> It is important to remember that what we're talking about here are not 'alien' faults and problems but *Gaujo's own*; therefore, the people onto whom these are projected must be clearly distinct from the Gaujo mainstream, but not utterly foreign to it: just as in cinema, the screen must be neither too close nor too distant if the image projected onto it is to remain sharply focused. (Shuinear, 1997: 27)

This begins to provide a reason for the control of the group, through discourse, and begins to answer the question of why there is a perceived need for the control of Gypsies and Travellers.

The framework brings together the above three key areas:

(Figure one here, see separate page)

The diagram shows three stages of a circular route of power and control: what, how and why. It is circular, rather than linear, because there is no set start and end point. Additionally, there are no arrows to denote direction of the route, as it is multi-directional and can flow any way.

The question of 'who' is controlling is not included in the diagram, because it is possible to apply the main theoretical model to any marginalised group, for instance asylum seekers. In applying the framework to the empirical material in this paper, the 'who' particularly sees the government and the media as controllers. Gypsies and Travellers are seen as mostly subject to control. It is important to remember from explanations of resistance by Clegg (1989) and research in housing policy by Marston (2004), and also Foucault's description of power (1980), that a 'target' of power can also apply power. Power is relational. A contextual example of this relational, changing power is the Gypsy Traveller Media Advisory Group (GTMAG). This group monitors media representations of Gypsies and Travellers in an attempt to see a more positive portrayal. The act of those under media surveillance, forming a group to monitor the media, demonstrates a resistance to the flow of power and exemplifies the circular route discussed by Foucault (1969 & 1980).

There are also links with the definition and re-definition of groups through discourse. For example, Berger and Luckmann (1966) discuss the social construction of reality,

as broken into subjective and objective reality. This is especially true when one looks at the question of who is being controlled. Gypsies and Travellers are defined according to societal norms and then kept under surveillance through societal discourse which controls and re-defines the group according to new subjective realities. This subjective reality is then taken as a new objective reality and so the definition and redefinition, through discourse, continues.

The motivation of government and the media to define and redefine 'other' groups is not explicit, however a number of researchers moot different ideas. For instance, Cohen (1980) analyses the need for government to move a general fear into something more tangible, in order to allow for political shifts. It is possible to see examples of this in national security issues, post 9/11. The fear of terrorist attack is heightened by government rhetoric in order that policy and legislative shifts can be made under the guise of protecting the population. A similar explanation can be found for the government in their discourse around Gypsies and Travellers. By othering them, particularly on the issue of cost, the theory of proximity (Bauman, 1989) means the general population is less concerned with adverse treatment of them. It should be noted that there is a differentiation between government 'actors'. In this paper, 'government' largely refers to central political government, which is concerned with retaining party political control. However, local officers, and indeed quasi-governmental officers will have different motives for their discourse around, and treatment of, Gypsies and Travellers. The local gate-keeping role (Lipsky, 1980) would be an interesting area for future research in Gypsy/Traveller discourse.

The reason for the media 'othering' Gypsies and Travellers is perhaps not as clear as that of government. However, one suggestion is that by perpetuating the stereotype of Gypsies and Travellers as 'folk-devil' it enables more newspapers to be sold (and thus the link with cost as motive is further enforced). The 'othering' discourse surrounding Gypsies and Travellers serves to heighten their presence in society which makes it easier to monitor them. This discourse redefines Gypsies and Travellers further, as folk devils, and refuels the motive to 'other' them, and so the cycle continues.

The theoretical framework enables some of the concepts such as power, control, gaze and discourse to be operationalised in the analysis of the empirical material. It outlines what type of power and control is being used (surveillance/gaze), how it is being used (through discourse) and why it is being used (to 'other' those that don't conform to societal norms).

Talking about Gypsies

To begin, a literature review was undertaken; this examined key texts. The primary research focused on the way that people talk about Gypsies and Travellers, and how this forms part of a controlling discourse. Three elements were involved in the primary research strategy: media analysis, public consultation in Colchester, and focus groups with Gypsies and Travellers.

(Figure two here, see separate page)

This approach aimed to triangulate the methodology to enable the talk about Gypsies and Travellers to be analysed from a number of angles. A number of themes emerged

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from the literature review, and these were used as key words in the analysis and explanation of the discourse:

- Mess and cost
- Site provision, including size and location of sites
- Labelling – Gypsies or Travellers?
- Folk Devils
- Who is talking about Gypsies and Travellers? (This final theme was analytical, rather than discursive)

It is important to remember that these themes are not merely describing the views of the media, the public and Gypsies and Travellers. Instead, they construct new social 'truths' about them (see Clapham, 2002). The use of language seems to precipitate further action. It is not the saying of the words that is the ultimate control, but instead is where it may lead to extra vigorous policing, or renewed focus on trespass legislation or planning legislation. Examples of this can be physical action (Lodge, 2004), implementation of legislation (Morris, 1998), or increased visibility and surveillance that dominates the travelling community.

Having included a brief summary of the research methodology, it is now necessary to turn to an analysis of the findings, on a thematic basis.

Themes of Discourse and Control

Throughout the primary research, a number of themes were identified. Each of these themes is discussed, below:

Mess and Cost

One of the most significant themes to come out in the findings of the media coding and analysis, was that of mess and cost. There is an assumption that Travellers settle

on green fields and then leave a mess. It is further suggested that any rubbish left on a Travellers' site was left there by Travellers; however, this is not always the case, as was highlighted by a Traveller in his letter to the Cornishman newspaper:

1. We did not force any padlock or gate to enter the site; we merely lifted off the chain and opened the gate which is left unlocked…
2. We do not drive untaxed vehicles
3. We have not caused any damage to the land (or gate) and intend only to enhance the site

> This is not rural pastureland but a "brownfield site" – and a highways dump and local fly-tipping spot which has been cleaned up, cared for and enhanced by a community of people who have appreciated living here and becoming part of the community and have felt, on the whole, very welcome.
> (*The Cornishman*, 2003b: 35)

In the findings from the media analysis, there were a number of 'negative' articles which discussed mess. This is a common theme across all three elements of the primary research. The public consultation linked mess and cost with Gypsies and Travellers. During the focus groups with Gypsies and Travellers, they too knew that they were linked with mess but they felt unable to defend themselves and change this perception.

The theme of mess was linked closely with cost. The issue of cost and mess was couched in a way to tell the reader – 'you are paying for all this through your council tax'. Examples of this include: "Mess left by travellers over the last two years has cost Redditch taxpayers £50,000 to clean up" (*This is Worcestershire*, 2003: 9). "Birmingham taxpayers have forked out tens of thousands of pounds to evict [Travellers] and clear up their mess and litter" (*Birmingham Evening Mail*, 2003: 5). A headline in one local newspaper said *£60,000 to keep them out* and it went on to describe the years of work and the amount of money spent in clearing a greenfield site, and then making it 'traveller-proof' for the future (*This is Wiltshire*, 2003: 1).

Another newspaper carried a similar article in which it stated that "On Wednesday Camarthenshire County Council completed a two-day clean-up of the site, removing rubbish – including nappies and tyres – in an operation reputedly costing more than £6,000." (*South Wales Evening Post*, 2003: 2).

The discourse of the cost of Gypsies and Travellers is powerful. It quantifies the expense of 'otherness' in a way which could make the settled community feel the travelling lifestyle is too expensive to society. The particular examples from newspapers, discussed above, make the cost of Travellers personal to the reader. This 'costing' of the lives of Gypsies and Travellers was examined by Morris and Clements (2002). They looked at the cost of not providing sites, rather than focusing on the cost of provision. They also made the point that a lifestyle could not really have a numerical value placed upon it and indeed, by trying to cost a lifestyle, this heightened the 'otherness' (costliness) of that lifestyle.

Cost was a key theme in public speech at the planning meeting, and information from a prior consultation exercise (which saw 598 responses received by the council) also reflected the importance placed on cost and mess. Although, in Colchester, the issue of cost did not just relate to the cost of clearing up mess; it also seemed to relate to the perceived cost of reduced value in property prices. Examples of some of the quotes from previous written objections, provided by the Planning Officer, included:

- "What would you think if you bought a £150K house from Barratts to find your neighbours were Gypsies?"
- "The value of my property which I work hard to pay for would drop in value overnight. Perhaps the Council would be prepared to compensate people living close to this site"
- "…put them back in Haven Road with a site warden to keep them and the site clean and hygienically tidy"
- "These Travellers contribute nothing, only filth"

- "MESS, <u>THIEVING</u> AND POLLUTION"
- "The Police admit they have no control as to when or where they turn up, or any control of Travellers what-so-ever"
- "Surely cost should be one of the most important factors? After all, it's someone else's money you are spending"
- "Looking at the last location near the Hythe river, the mess they left, the horses wandering around and the general squalor of the site appals me and we DO NOT want it here"
- "I have first hand experience of Travellers and the carnage they leave behind".

(Colchester Borough Council, Relocation of Gypsy/Travellers Site Report to Council, 30th September 2002, Appendix One).

Cost and mess is the most important theme to come out of this research, it links with findings from other empirical research (Morris and Clements, 2002) and it is also explained by two stages of the theoretical framework (see fig. 1). 'Cost' is a unique theme in that it can be placed in the 'how' or 'why' section of the framework. It is possible that reduction of cost is a motive for the government to 'other' the Gypsy/Traveller lifestyle in its rhetoric. However, the language of 'cost' is also the method of achieving a 'folk-devil' status for the travelling community amongst the public and in the media.

Site Provision and Facilities

Gypsies and Travellers wanted to talk about the benefit of new site provision; a theme not found in the media analysis or public consultation. The current lack of site provision (Niner, 2003 and Crawley, 2004) is a further manifestation of public discourse. Gypsies and Travellers are seen as vote-losers by politicians, and the government of the day does not want to be seen to pay 'taxpayers' money' to an unpopular cause. The issue of new site provision is a double-edged sword. If enough sites were provided it would reduce unpopular, unauthorised encampments. This is not to suggest that new site provision would provide a Utopian ideal where there

would be no more divisions between the travelling and settled communities. It would, nevertheless, reduce illegal development and unauthorised encampments which do give rise to friction. However, to provide more sites the government would have to spend money on a group that is unpopular in public discourse and is seen as 'costly' to society. The Travellers in the focus groups felt they were being controlled by lack of site provision and lack of services. Some of the women in one of the groups said that their privately run site, owned by Travellers, did not have washing facilities and that the nearest public shower facility was eight miles away. One of the women said that each of her four children was charged £2 every time they had a shower and she was charged a little bit more. She felt cheated by the cost of the shower but said she was a clean person and was aware of the public perception of Gypsies and Travellers as dirty and messy. By charging so much, the owner of the facility was almost challenging this woman's family not to wash every day, as was the site owner who did not provide arrangements for washing. They felt that what was needed was more council site provision with toilet and washing facilities. All of the Travellers in the focus group agreed that increased site provision would reduce unauthorised encampments and would perhaps reduce the tensions between the settled and travelling communities.

Despite the need for more sites, and the increased debate, by the housing press and some national newspapers, during the 2005 election campaign, neither the Labour nor the Conservative party would commit to enforcing local authorities to provide more sites. Gypsies and Travellers are a group which politicians fear will lose them votes.

The theme of site provision also extends to the location and size of existing and proposed sites. During the Colchester consultation, the framework examining potential sites used a points system. Proximity to residential and commercial sites carried negative points in the consultation process. Additionally the public were clear that they wanted the number of pitches on the new site to be limited.

Bauman's theory of proximity (1989) is important in explaining the concern over the location and size of Travellers' sites. Sites need to be physically distant from the settled population – this allows Gypsies and Travellers to be seen as 'other' and prevents them from being known as 'real'. This means the 'truth' about them can be socially constructed and reinterpreted through discourse. The issue of distancing and the theory of proximity is an important component in explaining how discursive control is exercised, according to the theoretical framework.

Labelling - Gypsies or Travellers?

> The desire to classify, characterise and label satisfies a fundamental human need… The processes of defining, labelling and representing Gypsies are much the same as those involving any group, especially minority groups. The stereotypical descriptions adopt and adapt the language and concepts of any given period, and so reveal the nature and distribution of power in society…
> (Mayall, 2004: 276)

A theme which runs through the media, public and Gypsy/Traveller discourse is labelling. This is an issue which applies not just to Gypsies and Travellers but particularly also the debate on asylum seekers where the term 'bogus' has been common currency in previous political debate.

Two newspaper articles, in the media analysis, focused on the distinction between Gypsies and Travellers. Both of these were in fact letters from local people in the settled community and they were negative in their portrayal:

> …Some of these people are threatening in their behaviour, aggressive. There may be the odd family group who are genuine but in my experience they don't often 'park up' with larger groups.

> Penwith please be realistic, stop calling this group 'travellers' – they're hardly of the Benedict Allen variety of 'Romany Ryes' – gypsies never camp with 'travellers'. Save Penwith from becoming an easy place to doss.
> (*The Cornishman*, 2003: 35)

As well as marking out a distinction between Travellers and Gypsies – fake and genuine – the author of the article also heightens the Travelling community as 'other'. Terms such as 'these people' followed with negative associated characteristics, again serve to heighten the presence of the Gypsy or Traveller in the local population and to mark them out for surveillance and control. Terms like 'these people' also link in with the theory of proximity (Bauman, 1989) which discusses the 'othering' of people who are perceived to be different, in order to make it easier to treat them badly. 'These people', Gypsies and Travellers, are not like 'us' and therefore don't need to be treated with the respect that 'ordinary people' would expect.

The second letter is also negative, but specifically against Travellers as opposed to 'real' Gypsies.

> …Gypsies are members of the Romany tribe. They are extremely honest, hard-working and clean. Unlike gypsies, travellers are thieves, liars, lazy and dirty – as we have learned to our cost here in Eldene.
> (*Western Daily Press*, 2003b: 12)

It is virtually impossible to imagine a published piece of writing about any other ethnic group, describing them as 'thieves, liars, lazy and dirty', being allowed past the

editorial control of the newspaper. Why then, does it seem to be acceptable to talk

about Gypsies and Travellers in this way? The writer of the letter also assumes to be

blessed with the knowledge that allows them to distinguish between 'real' and 'fake'

Gypsies, just by looking at them (Acton, 1994). In providing a distinction, the writer

of the letter is making the job of the surveillant society even easier. 'Do not worry

about the good traditional Gypsies: concentrate on the dirty, thieving Travellers – they

are the ones who need controlling', is what this distinction is saying. Mayall (2004)

discusses the issue of labelling and Gypsies and Travellers. One of the problems he

identifies is the dual definition of Gypsies and Travellers according, on the one hand,

to race, and on the other, to nomadism. This confusion in political and legal

terminology exacerbates the problem of labelling in other areas of discourse, such as

media debate.

One letter, published in the local press, gave a Gypsy/Traveller view of the labelling

issue:

> There is still an enormous amount of prejudice. In fact, we are treated like the
> Red Indians of America. People want us to keep to reservations. There has
> always been an inbred fear of the Romany. If Romanies move into a village
> and people find out, many will start saying that the gypsies will be stealing
> diesel and so on. When I put in for planning permission in the same village
> where my parents had lived for 30 years, I faced a huge amount of prejudice
> and people collected money to try to buy me out.
> (*Western Daily Press*, 2003a: 6)

The focus groups with Gypsies and Travellers echoed the problem with labelling.

Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers wanted to be known as Gypsies and Travellers,

respectively, in the main. However, some Romany Gypsies felt that the word 'Gypsy'

had been tarnished with negative connotation, and preferred the more generic term of

'Traveller'. This is different to the perception of the letter writer from Eldene, above, who has a very clear idea that Gypsies are acceptable and Travellers are not. The word 'Gypsy' has been shortened, in some colloquial language, to 'Gypo'. This is a derogatory term and it could be this which has tarnished the work Gypsy.

The lack of objection to discriminatory language and labelling in news reports and public speech, demonstrates public acquiescence (Zelizer, 1993). Negative labelling of Gypsies and Travellers does not meet resistance from readers or listeners because they are agreeing to the social construction of the 'truth' about Gypsies and Travellers through the discriminatory discourse.

Folk Devils

This theme follows on from the issue of labelling and it, again, links with Cohen (1980) and Bauman (1989). In a discussion with the Planning Officer at Colchester Borough Council, the image of Gypsies and Travellers as 'other', as folk devils, was examined. From historical information on site provision, it became apparent that there had been an issue with one particular site. Originally this was populated and managed by Romany Gypsies, but the Gypsy manager then left and Irish Travellers started to move in. The Romanies and Irish were not at ease with each other and the Romany Gypsies left. At the same time, the previously unpopulated surrounding area started to build up both commercially and residentially:

> As a result the two communities were thrown together. Interestingly, if you talk to people today there are a lot of urban myths of how bad the Travellers were, from murders to eating people's pets. At the time however, very few complaints were raised. Without a doubt the criticism of Travellers has grown over the intervening years.

> Local populations have difficulty in distinguishing between unauthorised camping and staying on an authorised site. They assume that Travellers are all

dirty and trouble. Quite clearly the majority of residents have a prejudice related to Travellers which is now being fuelled by stories that have either no evidence or no way of determining who could have been responsible. (Planning Officer, Colchester Borough Council, 2004)

The history of people's views of Travellers in Colchester helped to contextualise the objections raised by the public in the consultation exercise; and the views of local people seemed to categorise Gypsies and Travellers as folk devils. It is interesting to see that the views have become more extreme in the years since the site was closed. This echoes Bauman's theory of proximity (1989) in that it seems the longer the period of time from the site being inhabited, the more 'other' the Gypsies and Travellers were. There are also links with Morris' research (2000 and 2002). It seems that the more extreme the characteristic – murdering, eating pets – the less like 'normal' settled members of the community Gypsies and Travellers are. This makes it easier for the settled community to deny them decent homes, access to schools or welcoming neighbours. The myth of local discourse, as with the socially constructed 'truth' of the media, is so strong that they cannot remember the reality. For instance, the local people of Colchester did not make many complaints when Travellers were actually living on the site, but with hindsight and distance in time there is a new truth that they murdered people and ate people's pets.

There has been some research conducted in Scotland which looks at views of Travellers sites, which may back up this theory of proximity. Duncan (1996) examined neighbour's views of three proposed sites for Travellers. He examined public opposition to the planning permission, and then revisited some of the complainants to ask their views after the site had been up and running for a while:

We have to conclude that the three sites which were the subject of this study have had far less impact on their 'neighbours' than these people anticipated

before the sites were set up. The picture we obtained is that the sites have generally fitted into their chosen surroundings better than people living in the neighbourhood anticipated….

It would be fair to say that our study backs up the view that official sites do settle down to a large extent after they are developed. In none of the sites examined were the number and intensity of objections an appropriate response in retrospect.
(Duncan, 1996: 14)

The Gypsies and Travellers that the Scottish neighbours were objecting to were the mythical messy, costly, troublesome Travellers that are the subject of local discourse and media social construction. However, the Gypsies and Travellers who actually populated the three sites were not like the people the neighbours had been imagining. The 'otherness' of the Gypsies and Travellers seemed to be less marked. There is some merit in replicating Duncan's (1996) methodology in Colchester. It would be interesting to find out the views of the neighbours to the new site in a few years; they may show similarities to the Scottish example.

The stereotyping of Gypsies and Travellers as folk devils was discussed, in the theoretical framework, as part of the motive behind the media's negative discourse. Erjavec (2001) also found this in her empirical work, of their representation in the Slovenian media. She found that unless they were stereotyped, they were not newsworthy. The Gypsy, as costly and messy, sells more newspapers than the Gypsy who is represented as 'normal'.

Who is talking about Gypsies and Travellers?

As part of the coding of the newspaper reports on Gypsies and Travellers, the origins of direct quotes were examined. Speech was put into 'ownership' nodes, for example: Travellers, local people, and politicians (councillors and Members of Parliament).

The 'negative' comments in the articles were then analysed according to who had said them. In fourteen instances it was a local person quoted with a negative comment, but in nine instances it was a local councillor or MP. Of the negative comments 26% were from political representatives of local constituencies – people who had been voted in by local members of the public to best represent their needs. Therefore, they could be seen to be speaking on behalf of local constituents.

It seems that the very people who should carefully consider what they say are the ones expounding negative images about Gypsies and Travellers. One such comment, from a Swindon Councillor, said "Hopefully, after all these years, we'll finally see an end to the illegal invasions which have caused so much misery and anger in this area" (*Western Daily Press*, 2003a: 25). A Councillor, in Grimsby, talked about the costs associated with Travellers, and said "…increased costs of educating extra children and the potential tension caused by possibly hundreds of travellers moving into the area" (Turner, 2003: 10). The Chair of Stowe Town Council talked about abusive Gypsy youths and how female shopkeepers had to be protected from their intimidation during the Stowe fair (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 2003: 5). Two Birmingham Councillors showed their impatience in an article about moving Travellers on. They suggested that evictions were delayed because Traveller women claimed they were pregnant and one of the Councillors referred to an example where a Traveller family was not moved on because one of their children was in hospital (Bell, 2003: 5).

Because of their status in the local community, what local Councillors and MPs say bears significance on the public discourse on Gypsies and Travellers. When elected

officials use discriminatory language about Gypsies and Travellers it has the appearance of sanctioning the discriminatory discourse. This may be partly due to the fact that, as a group, Gypsies and Travellers can lose votes and as such politicians are disinterested to support them. Crawley suggests as much: "What was lacking was the political will to ensure that the accommodation needs of Travellers and Gypsies were addressed" (Crawley, 2004: 19). Indeed, the Conservative 2005 election campaign relied partly on a tough approach to Gypsies and Travellers, for instance by suggesting that European Human Rights legislation should not be adhered to in the case of Gypsies and Travellers (Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1988) is one of the main defences used in Traveller cases).

In some instances senior politicians have been as acquiescent as the public in allowing discriminatory discourse to unfairly label Gypsies and Travellers and mark them out for surveillance by society. In one extreme example of discriminatory discourse used in the House of Commons in 2002, the Conservative MP for Bracknell, Mr Andrew MacKay said:

> The cost to council tax payers, where there are natural budgetary restraints, is great. Ordinary, innocent people – hard-working, normal, straightforward people who live around Bracknell – want to get on with their lives in peace, but they want protection under the law *when they are invaded by this scum. They are scum*, and I use the word advisedly. People who do what these people have done do not deserve the same human rights as my decent constituents going about their everyday lives.
> (MacKay, 2002) [*Emphasis added*]

MacKay's use of inflammatory and discriminatory language was not picked up by other members of parliament. Indeed, Angela Eagle (Under-secretary of State for the Home Office at the time) spoke of her gratitude to the Right Honourable Member for

raising this. Eagle did state that Travellers should be seen as part of society, but she did not comment on the use of language by MacKay (Eagle, 2002).

It should not be surprising therefore, that the language of local politicians and officials, as exemplified in the October 2003 news reports, discriminates against Gypsies and Travellers. The example from the House of Commons is that it is acceptable to talk about Gypsies and Travellers in discriminatory language. This public discourse about Gypsies and Travellers contains so many socially constructed 'truths' that it does not seem to be noticed or commented upon.

Therefore, whilst at first the fact that 26% of the negative comments quoted in the October 2003 press were from local councillors and MPs may seem high, an examination of national political and public discourse goes some way to explaining it. This finding is supported by research undertaken by Turner (2002) who found parliamentary language to be overwhelmingly negative. He analysed a number of speeches, including one made by Anne Widdecombe:

> Miss Widdecombe was very explicit about the need for 'control'. It was mentioned by her several times. Indeed, the British way of life itself was threatened. She closed her speech by arguing that there was a need to find a means of 'controlling the menace before it becomes a greater one, when it will no longer be so easy to bring it within the laws that apply to the rest of civilised Britain'.
> (Turner, 2002: 7-8)

Turner's (2002) paper also sorts discourse according to themes. The dominant themes in his paper were:

- Criminal by nature
- Outside the community
- Menace
- Dirty
- Dishonest

- Immoral and amoral
- Nomadic
- 'real' and 'fake'

The similarities can be seen with the themes that have been discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

One of the strongest themes to come out of the research was the association of 'mess' and 'cost' with Gypsies and Travellers. This was not evidenced by those who spoke of mess in the media or the public meeting, in any systematic way (although a cost was attributed to mess), but instead it demonstrated a socially constructed 'truth' both in the media and the local population in Colchester.

It was discussed, earlier, how 'mess' and 'cost' seemed to be emotive language that made the settled community more prejudiced over the travelling community. The media makes the links between 'mess' and 'cost' and Gypsies and Travellers, as does the settled community; this was exemplified in the Colchester debate. The former did so because of proprietorial pressure to use emotive headlines to sell newspapers (Kundnani, 2004). The latter seemed to do it in order to win their objections against neighbouring planning proposals for Travellers' sites.

Whatever the individual motive of the speaker of the negative terms and phrases, there seems to be an overall desire to mark the Gypsy or Traveller out as 'other'; as different to the people in the settled community. Whether they are creators of mess and rubbish (media analysis) or whether they are eating people's pets (Colchester folk devils), the aim of the discourse is to highlight their 'otherness' and to increase their visibility in society.

The theoretical framework is a useful aid to interpret the empirical data. It explains

the circuitous route of discourse as control and it serves as an example of how the

motive to 'other' reinforces the stereotype and that this reinforced image causes a

moral panic and a need for further surveillance. This, then, produces more

discriminatory discourse that reinterprets the Gypsy/Traveller stereotype; and on it

goes.

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