

## Chapter One

# *Introduction*

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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)

Andrew MacKay, MP for Bracknell, stated his opinion (above) as part of a House of Commons debate on an unauthorised encampment of Gypsies and Travellers. Whilst this is an extreme view, it is not an isolated one. This type of sentiment is echoed in other political and public discourse around Gypsies and Travellers. Such discourse reflects antipathy towards Gypsies and Travellers; but it also has a power to control and shape the treatment of this minority group, by the rest of society.

The debate surrounding Gypsies and Travellers is current in Whitehall, town halls and in the media. In the media, issues of site provision and discrimination are examined in newspapers 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 and Long, 2004). Largely, this negative coverage is centred upon the issue of the cost of dealing with planning appeals and unauthorised sites. 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 hypothesis of the book is that discourse can be used as a tool to control those who refuse to conform to societal norms (for instance living in a permanent dwelling), and it looks specifically at Gypsies and Travellers as a controlled group. Discourse can be controlling (Foucault, 1977, 1999 and 2003) but it is perhaps more the actions that

discriminatory discourse can lead to that are the real mechanisms of control.

People don't like travellers ... The operation wasn't just about arresting people, but also part of a 'decommissioning exercise', hitting people so hard and ruining their homes so they'll think twice about leading this lifestyle. (Lodge, 2004: 73)

This is an extreme example of the suggestion or coercion of Gypsies and Travellers to lead a settled life. Lodge and his fellow Travellers were arrested and allegedly hit by the police, when they were evicted from an unauthorised encampment. It was perceived by the Travellers that they were being punished for their lifestyle choice. The example demonstrates the physical manifestation of discriminatory discourse surrounding Gypsies and Travellers, and it outlines the experience of one Traveller's treatment by the police. It is not the only example. A report in the *Observer* (McLaughlin, 2005) discussed the issues around a programme of forced sterilisation for Gypsy women in the Czech Republic. This is not a historical account of previous problems, it is a report on what is happening now, to a minority group, in Europe. If discriminatory discourse is seen as acceptable (for instance in the House of Commons, MacKay, 2002) and this then manifests itself in controlling action—either by the police, or by members of the public, or even by members of the Czech health service—there is a place for examination of the notion of discourse as control.

Through a variety of methodological approaches (see Fig. 1), a number of themes were found which support the notion that discourse can be used to heighten the 'otherness' of Gypsies and Travellers. This has the effect of placing them under the surveillant gaze of society, and it is a form of control. It is the interpretation of discourse which can result in discriminatory policies and legislation. For instance, my research found that 'mess' and 'cost' was a core theme in public discourse and this is reflected in the wording of legislation and local policy. The responsibilities of Gypsies, to keep sites tidy, outweigh their rights to accommodation. There appeared to be a discursive link between anti-social behaviour and Gypsies and Travellers and, again, this is demonstrated in the law (*Anti-Social Behaviour Act, 2003, Part Seven*).

Approach	Methodology
Media Analysis	Search of English and Welsh national and local newspapers for the month of October 2003, using Lexis Nexis database. 54 articles were found, eight were discounted (e.g they referred to a football team called the Gypsies), 13 articles were viewed as being largely positive, with the remaining 33 articles having a negative focus. Coding and analysis of the articles was conducted using NVIVO software.
Planning Consultation in a Local Authority	This was the only local authority debating new site provision at the time (December 2003). The public meeting allowed for the researcher to be observer, without any direct involvement in the discussion. Ongoing communication with the Planning Officer also facilitated access to previous consultation information where 598 responses from the public had been received by the council.
Gypsy/Traveller Focus Groups	A series of four focus groups was held, with a mixture of Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers, from November to early December 2003.

*Figure 1: Summary of Methodological Approach*

By highlighting some of the reasons behind the current discriminatory discourse around Gypsies and Travellers, it is hoped that the debate can move on from looking at the practical problems faced (the symptoms) to examine the causes of these issues. If the motive behind the discourse is discussed, a solution could be considered. This book focuses on uncovering the theories behind the Gypsy/Traveller discourse.

### *Emerging Themes*

From the analysis of the primary research, I noted some emerging key themes in the discourse around Gypsies and Travellers.

### Emerging Key Themes

- Cost and mess
- Labelling—Gypsies or Travellers?
- Folk devils
- Influx and invasion

In addition to these discursive themes was an analytical theme, namely:

- Who is talking about Gypsies and Travellers?

*Figure 2: Emerging Key Themes*

Some of these themes are reflected in the relevant literature, particularly issues surrounding ‘cost and mess’ and labelling. One theme which was apparent in my review of the literature was crime (for instance Leudar and Nekvapil, 2000); however this was not reflected in my own research. The issue of cost and mess seemed to be far higher up the agenda.

These themes are discussed throughout the book. They are used as examples and explanations of controlling discourse, within a theoretical framework (outlined in chapter three) and are discussed in detail in chapters six and seven.

### *Definitions*

It is important to examine some of the terms that are used in the book. ‘Gypsies and Travellers’ is used throughout, as a term to discuss Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers and New Travellers, as a whole group. If a specific group of Gypsies and Travellers is referred to then they will be identified separately; otherwise Gypsies and Travellers are discussed together. The terms are also used with capital letters to denote their recognition as a Black and Minority Ethnic Group. This recognition, is highlighted by Gypsies and Travellers themselves, and by the Commission for Racial Equality; it has legal definition under the Race Relations Act 1976, for Gypsies following the case of *CRE V Dutton* (1989) 1 All ER 306; and for Irish Travellers in the case of *O’Leary and others v Punch Retail and others* (2000). A definition of a ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Traveller’ is not simple; however a commonly used legal definition is from the Caravan Sites and Control of Devel-

opment Act 1960 s24 (as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 s80) which states that Gypsies and Travellers are 'persons of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin'.

The legal definition refers to nomadism as the defining characteristic of a Gypsy or Traveller. However, this is difficult because not all Gypsies and Travellers are nomadic, some have moved into permanent housing because there has been no alternative. There is also the issue of ethnicity; the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) makes clear that Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are ethnic groups, thereby clarifying their protection under race legislation. However, New Travellers are not classed as an ethnic group; but under the legal definition they could be categorised as 'Gypsy' because they lead a nomadic lifestyle. Although a broad generalisation, it is possible to suggest that in legal cases referring to planning applications or appeals, the definition leans more heavily on the issue of nomadism; however, in cases examining harassment there is more of a tendency to use definitions relating to ethnicity. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has recognised the difficulties around the concept of 'settled' Travellers; and as part of its consultation on updating Circular 1/94 it mooted the following definition:

For the purposes of this Circular 'Gypsies and Travellers' means

*A person or persons who have a traditional cultural preference for living in caravans and who either pursue a nomadic habit of life or have pursued such a habit but have ceased travelling, whether permanently or temporarily, because of the education needs of their dependent children, or ill-health, old age, or caring responsibilities (whether of themselves, their dependants living with them, or the widows and widowers of such dependents), but does not include members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people, travelling together as such.*

(Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Sites,  
Consultation Paper, 2004: 11)

The problem of defining Gypsies and Travellers tends to tax academics and lawyers, more than the travelling community themselves. Gypsies and Travellers might suggest that they know perfectly well who they are and that they would benefit more from moving the debate forward and examining wider issues.

Another term used in the book is 'settled community'. Whilst it is recognised that 'settled community' is rather generalised, it does denote non-Gypsies. It is realised that the 'settled community' is not one cohesive whole, indeed many different communities reside in settled accommodation. However, for the purposes of allowing a distinction between Gypsies and Travellers, and non-Gypsies and Travellers, a term is necessary and 'settled community' is often used in the relevant literature. Members of the 'settled community' may also be called 'Gaujo' by Gypsies and Travellers (alternative spellings, such as 'Gorgio', are also used). Although this term does not occur much in the book, it should be explained that 'Gaujo' is the Gypsy term for non-Gypsies.

### *Understanding and Researching Gypsies and Travellers*

Acton (1994) raises valid points about the study and understanding of Gypsies:

The 'visitors' to Romani studies have used a bewildering array of sociological theories to incorporate Gypsies. The racist anthropology of the nineteenth century saw them as genetic primitives in our midst. More modern anthropology continues to see their culture as a cause of their situation rather than their history and situation as the root of their culture; even the 'culture of poverty' had a brief vogue. Functionalists have seen them as a 'middle-man minority' with a particular specialised trading function (Lauwagie 1979). Marxists have seen them variously as sub- or lumpen-proletariat, while interactionists have seen them as hereditary deviants. These theories, whether macro or micro, or somewhere in the muddled Mertonian middle, are usually supported by an ethnography of some particular Gypsy group, and may offer some partial insight into that group; but they say nothing about Gypsies as a whole. (Acton, 1994: 25)

Acton summarises the research context around Gypsies and Travellers and he analyses the epistemology of researchers from Marxists to Functionalists. He also discusses a problem which is true of many areas of research—that of generalising about a diverse group. He discusses the fact that ethnography of some description is invariably used in case study groups and then the findings are widened out from that group to represent all Gypsies and Travellers. Acton states that this type of research is not representative and should not be seen as such. He raises the issue of differentiating between 'true' and 'untrue' Gypsies and Travellers in research:

Quite often when I tell people I have worked with Gypsies for 25 years, they bend their heads closer to mine and ask confidentially if I realise that only a few of them are 'real' Gypsies, as though they were in possession of some arcane secret which I might well not have come across. The residue of this particular inverted form of racism works particularly against New Age Travellers, as though they should be deprived of the right to travel because of some racial inauthenticity. (Acton, 1994: 27)

As stated earlier, this book discusses Gypsies and Travellers as a whole group and does not make a distinction between different groups. The notion of 'real' Gypsies is also discussed later on as one of the key themes in media discourse.

The problem of non-Gypsies and Travellers conducting research with false assumptions is highlighted by various academics, including Acton (1994). For example Weckmann (1998) provides a list of 'do's and don'ts' for researching Gypsies and Travellers in Finland. Heuss (2000) also sounds a warning about the research into Gypsies and Travellers and he moots a methodology for anti-Gypsyism research. He states that:

Anti-Gypsyism research must not posit the existing structures of prejudice as the primary cause for the persecution of Roma, or else they will retrospectively rationalise the irrationality of the historical forms of these antipathies. (Heuss, 2000: 63)

There are many ethical considerations for research into Gypsies and Travellers and I have endeavoured to approach the research for this book in an appropriate, thoughtful way.

### *Next Steps*

There is a considerable amount of policy and practice research, in the subject area of Gypsies and Travellers. However, current research does not engage with theories of control or discourse. The intention of existing research, such as Niner (2003) is to provide policy advice to the government on how to improve accommodation on a practical level; its intention is not to engage with theories of control and discourse. Nevertheless, there is a place for research that does engage with this theory, as control is often implicitly taken as a given, with no attempt to focus on its nature. This book aims to take the next step and to discuss theories of control and discourse in order to expand the debate on Gypsies and Travellers.