



IRISH TRAVELLER MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

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Submission by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain to the Leveson Inquiry

Gypsies and Travellers in the press

“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.”

Bridget McCarthy, Irish Traveller and member of the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Advisory Group.

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About ITMB: The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) was established in 1999 and is a leading national policy and voice charity, working to raise the capacity and social inclusion of the Traveller communities in Britain. ITMB act as a bridge builder bringing the Traveller communities, service providers and policy makers together, stimulating debate and promoting forward-looking strategies to promote increased race equality, civic engagement, inclusion, service provision and community cohesion. For further information about ITMB visit www.irishtraveller.org.uk

Foreword

The answer to Key Question 10 on whether there are or should be checks and balance in place to regulate the freedom enjoyed by the press in a democratic society is clearly 'Yes'. In this submission the ITMB deal with the checks imposed by the law; by the rules of the Press Complaints Commission, and by the code of conduct laid down by the National Union of Journalists.

These mechanisms have proved effective in eliminating the attribution of criminal or antisocial characteristics to particular ethnic minorities from the columns of the press except in the case of Gypsies and Travellers. The examples given show that certain newspapers label – or should I say libel – Travellers collectively as guilty of deplorable conduct on the basis of acts committed by a few. Blatantly racist comment threads are often attached to online stories about Travellers even where the original articles are sympathetic and even in responsible papers. Editors appear to accept their responsibility for removing illegal online material relating to other minorities, but not Travellers.

Freedom of expression is not absolute. The UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says that it may be subject to restrictions that are necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, and similar wording appears in the European Convention. Our own Human Rights Act allows an individual, but not the representatives of an ethnic group, to apply to the court for relief in a matter which may affect the exercise of this Convention right. The ITMB points out that the Press Complaints Commission follows the same rule in Clause 12 of its Code of Practice. The result is that as long as they are carefully worded, derogatory references to Travellers can be published repeatedly, as they were in the Sun's 'Stamp on the camps' campaign, without committing any offence. Yet it is clear that articles of that sort do cause substantial damage to the rights and reputations of Travellers, fanning hostility against them in settled communities.

The policy of successive Governments since 1968 is that local authorities should enable the provision of sufficient accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers to end unauthorised encampments. Some newspapers bear a heavy responsibility for stirring up such animosity against caravan-dwelling Travellers as to ensure that whenever and wherever a Traveller site is proposed, it is certain to evoke a tidal wave of protest. Councillors, fearful of the electoral consequences, often cave in, and almost half a century after the first national attempts to solve the problem, 2,000 Traveller families still live a precarious existence on land from which they are liable to be evicted. The sooner some journalists and editors stop demonising these homeless people, and treat them as they do every other section of the population, the sooner the Travellers will become settled, and enjoy the health and educational services of which they are now deprived.

Lord Avebury, Secretary to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers,

Introduction

This submission is made by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain at the invitation of the Leveson Inquiry. The primary focus of the submission is on reporting in the press of Irish Travellers and English Romany Gypsies.¹ Both groups are ethnic minorities protected under the Equality Act 2010, they share similar experiences of discrimination and are often conflated in the press as ‘gipsies’.

Negative media coverage of the UK’s Irish Travellers and Gypsies has been acknowledged by the United Nations Human Rights Committee in its Universal Periodic Review of the United Kingdom², in a report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination³ and in a review by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI):

‘Gypsies and Travellers are regularly presented in a negative light in the mainstream media, and in particular in the tabloid press, where they are frequently portrayed, for example, as being by definition associated with....sponging of British society, making bogus claims for protection and being troublemakers. ECRI is concerned not only at the racist and xenophobic messages themselves that are thus 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.’⁴

The main issues this submission will cover are:

- 1) Context of submission and key Inquiry questions
- 2) Disproportionality.
- 3) Linking Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity to crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 4) Accuracy and balance
- 5) Name-calling
- 6) Lack of ‘voice’
- 7) Capitalization of Gypsy and Irish Traveller
- 8) Comment threads

¹ ITMB are aware that European Roma also suffer from prejudiced reporting in the media, however, for the purposes of this submission, framed by the public interest, the focus is on the ITMB’s main client groups: Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies. ITMB’s previous submission to the Inquiry includes examples of bad practice regarding police investigations and media coverage that targeted Roma.

² See UN Human Rights Council Eight Session, 2008, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, page 15, para 15.
http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session1/GB/A_HRC_8_25_United_Kingdom_E.pdf

³ UN CERD, September 2011, *Concluding Observations, Seventy Ninth Session, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, page 6, para 27, page 2, para 11
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/CERD.C.GBR.CO.18-20.pdf>

⁴ ECRI, March 2010, *ECRI Report on the United Kingdom (fourth monitoring cycle)*, p. 39
http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/united_kingdom/GBR-CbC-IV-2010-004-ENG.pdf

- 9) Community impact
- 10) Press responsibility
- 11) The way forward

1. Context of submission and key Inquiry questions

Context of submission

'Studies have reported that Gypsy and Traveller communities are subjected to hostility and discrimination and experience problematic relations with settled communities.'

Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers⁵

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain believes that the press is a major driver of the hostility and discrimination that the UK's Gypsies and Travellers face, and that they have responsibilities towards ensuring that it doesn't publish material that serves to stir up racial hatred and harm social cohesion.

The ITMB would like to remind the Inquiry that; as News International executive, Richard Caseby; said in the opening seminars of this Inquiry:

"There is a wider public interest in the nature of the mass market popular newspapers. Yes, they make money but they are an important way of disseminating information on the issues of the day to a mass market readership."

The ITMB believes that the "dissemination of information", that Richard Caseby mentions, brings certain responsibilities with it. That responsibility, we believe, is not to withhold "information" just because it may damage social cohesion, but in sensitive areas, such as reporting on Traveller issues, to get it right, to be fair, and to accurately reflect the truth whilst avoiding what the ITMB has called in the past; "the lynching of a whole ethnicity".

This stand-point on how the public is influenced by the press is supported by research conducted by Rachel Morris from the Cardiff Law School, who relates it to the prejudicial reporting on Gypsies and Travellers:

⁵ DCLG, April 2012, *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers*, p. 5
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2124046.pdf>

*'The individual's store of information (...) is today easily derived from the mass media. Racist invective by the press infects society in a widespread way; a way in which an unintentionally racist remark by one individual to another cannot. They confirm existing prejudices and create new ones.'*⁶

In short, most non-Travellers do not know any Travellers. They form their impressions of them from the media and other non-Travellers who have also formed their impressions from the media. These impressions are often stereotypical and negative and influence future 'real-life' interaction between non-Travellers and Travellers.

Prejudiced reporting in the media has a big effect on the public – a public that includes: teachers, policemen, council officers, doctors, social workers, shop keepers and assistants, councilors, policy makers and Gypsies and Travellers themselves. It creates the perception that the cultural differences between ethnic Travellers and the rest of society are so wide and glaring that Travellers cannot possibly be accommodated for in mainstream society and will always be outsiders. This is supported by Rachel Morris's research which found that prejudiced reporting amplifies the discrimination experienced by the UK's Gypsies and Travellers⁷

Key Inquiry questions to be addressed

This submission is based on questions 10 and 5 from the first phase of the Leveson Inquiry and relates to the public interest:

Key Question 10: *The Inquiry has heard strong arguments for the importance of a free press in a democratic society. The Inquiry would be interested in submissions on the special role to be played by the press in a democracy, what 'freedom' requirements need to be in place for that role to be played and the whether this role places any obligations or responsibilities of the press?*

Key Question 5: *The issue of stories that attract a high degree of press attention but subsequently turn out to be false was raised at the seminars. The Inquiry would be interested in submissions from editors, reporters and subjects of such stories - why they occur (what are the pressures that drive press interest), and how they occur (what checks and balances are or should be in place to stop this happening and why do they sometimes not operate)?*

⁶ Morris, R, Cardiff Law School, 2000, *Gypsies and Travellers; Press regulation and Racism*, p. 213
<http://media-diversity.org/mdi/additional-files/documents/Z%20Current%20MDI%20Resources/Gypsies.%20Travellers%20and%20the%20media%20-%20press%20regulation%20and%20racism%20in%20the%20UK.pdf>

⁷ Ibid, p. 216

2. Disproportionality

'An article in the Nazi party organ Neues Volk of September 1938 charged that only 850 of around 8,000 Gypsies living in the Burgenland had "a more or less regular job." All the others made a living by begging, fortune telling, thieving and other criminal pursuits. Another writer, alleging that six out of 12 Gypsies had a criminal record, called for something to be done about it. The authorities, it appears, did not need much convincing....'

The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies; Lewy, G (2000) OUP.

Gypsy is an emotive word. For most non-Travellers it brings up a multitude of meanings and feelings. It symbolises otherness, crime, conflict, mystery, romance, freedom, dirt, and now slavery as well. This makes it a very useful word to sell newspapers. Stories about Gypsies and Travellers that would barely cause a ripple in an online hyper-local if they were about non-Travellers are splashed across the national headlines.

For instance:

Consider this headline: **'CARDIFF CARAVAN SITE RESIDENTS FIGHT PROPOSED COASTAL PATH'**.

This story would not be out of place in a local newspaper or website, but there is not much chance of it moving on to the nationals.

Now compare that to this headline in the Sun from a story about Travellers living on a site in Cardiff objecting to a proposed coastal path – (26/03/212 by Wales News Service):

'NIMBY GYPSIES FIGHT WALKERS'

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3894925/NIMBY-gypsies-fight-walkers.html>

The same story but this time in the Express:

'COAST PATH UNDER THREAT TO PROTECT GYPSIES' PRIVACY'

<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/279691/Coast-path-under-threat-to-protect-gypsies-privacy>

And finally in the Daily Mail:

‘GIPSIES TURN INTO NIMBYS: COASTAL PATH ROUND WALES WILL INVADE OUR PRIVACY, SAY TRAVELLERS’

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2053236/Gypsies-block-UKs-longest-coastal-path-claiming-ramblers-invasion-privacy.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>

In short – An article that slates Gypsies and Travellers has news value.

3. Linking Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity to crime and anti-social behaviour

‘Speaking as a Romanichal Gypsy who was born on the road, I feel I have to point something out here. We are not thieves, criminals, scum, animals, or the bogeyman. We’re human beings. We’re just people.’

Online comment by ‘Little Black Fox’ after an article on Dale Farm; published by The Observer.

A perennial feature of much of the reporting of Gypsies and Travellers is the article that links their ethnicity to crime and anti-social behaviour. In these articles criminal and anti-social behaviour is either explicitly ascribed as an ethnic trait, or is implicitly linked to it. Sometimes the offending behaviour may be described as ‘cultural’, sometimes it is tied in with ‘community’ (giving a sense of collective responsibility) and sometimes it’s called ‘traditional’, but the end result is the same: Because of their ethnicity, culture, tradition and the community they come from, members of this ethnic minority are likely to behave in a certain way because this type of behaviour is ingrained.

Rachel Morris (2000) again:

‘Yet the print media commonly suggest to their readers, in their representations of Travellers, that this category of people routinely display certain negative characteristics not only typical of but essential to the group: that is, they represent Travellers in a stereotypical and prejudicial fashion. The relationship of the representation to the real is the same as it would be for any societal group: some Travellers are dishonest or law-breaking, some don’t clean up after themselves. The difference is that while some settled people also have those characteristics, all other settled people are not assumed also to possess them, as is the case for Travellers.’⁸

⁸ Morris, R, Cardiff Law School, 2000, *Gypsies and Travellers; Press regulation and Racism*, p.213
<http://media-diversity.org/mdi/additional-files/documents/Z%20Current%20MDI%20Resources/Gypsies,%20Travellers%20and%20the%20media%20-%20press%20regulation%20and%20racism%20in%20the%20UK.pdf>

An example from the Guardian illustrates this. It's from a comment piece by journalist Sam Wollaston on "Gypsy Blood", a TV documentary on Travellers and violence:

'This is very different side to the Irish Traveller and Romany Gypsy communities from the one we saw in Big Fat Gypsy Weddings. That was about the flouncing and frills; this is about the fighting and the fists.'

'And again there'll be criticism, I'm sure, that these people are being misrepresented. I don't know how representative it is, or even if it needs to be. (...) Gypsies and Travellers have settled disagreements with their bare knuckles for ever and they continue to do so. And to teach their sons how to.'

Despite the caveats, the sense of the piece is that violence is "ingrained" and cultural. There may be exceptions to this – but this is the tradition, the norm, the default setting: "have settled disagreements with their knuckles for ever..." In fact, earlier in the piece, Wollaston; talking about how the featured children are taught to fight, says: "I'm not sure they've got much choice really. It's going to be ingrained." However, Wollaston, a TV critic, seems to have suspended his critical faculties. The documentary uses a fly on the wall style to follow some Traveller families that the film maker admits took two years to locate. Wollaston has failed to spot that the families featured in True Blood are representative of no one but themselves – and that this representation is manufactured by a film-maker whose preconceptions and prejudices are laid bare by his film's title; "Gypsy Blood"..

Another way that Gypsies and Travellers are linked to crime is through the headline, stand-first and pull-quote.

An example is this headline from a Daily Mail news piece:

'PRISONERS, TERRORISTS AND GIPSIES SHOULD BE HANDED MORE HUMAN RIGHTS, DECLARES EQUALITY QUANGO'

It's probably impossible to fit any more folk devils – or bogeymen - in to a headline, and this betrays the positioning of the UK's smallest and most marginalised ethnic minorities within the Daily Mail world-view: As bogey-men who exist to whip up moral outrage, to define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, and to bring the perceived community of readers together in a bond of mutual loathing.

Rachel Morris (2000) explains the reasons why Gypsies and Travellers as 'Bogey-men' sells papers:

'The 'difference' element makes good copy, makes stories that stand out from the ordinary, that always sell and stir up emotions. The plethora of stereotypes around

*Travellers provides writers with rich imagery and 'hooks' upon which they can hang a story, and readership sympathies upon which they can draw.*⁹

In short – prejudicial and negative reporting can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Gypsies and Travellers as Bogey-men are also 'bang at it', as this headline from an article in the Daily Mail (28/01/12), by Helen Carroll, insinuates:

'AN AWFUL LOT OF TARMAC! WE REVEAL THE £140,000 COST OF THOSE BIG FAT GYPSY WEDDINGS (JUST DON'T ASK WHERE THE CASH COMES FROM)'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1351622/My-Big-Fat-Gypsy-Wedding-We-reveal-140-000-cost.html#ixzz1qE9x79cV>

As well as being tax-dodging criminals and thugs, Travellers are - more often than not - portrayed as outsiders, as this headline from hyper-local Get Surrey (02/03/12) illustrates:

'PUBLIC VOTES AGAINST TRAVELLER SITE AT DEEPCUT'

http://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/s/2109451_public_votes_against_traveller_site_at_deepecut

It seems that the UK's Gypsies and Travellers are not to be included within media notions of 'the British public'.

4. Accuracy and balance

'Folk devils are created in order that society can say 'they are not like us, they can be treated differently'. If folk devils are punished severely, or treated in an inhumane way, then their definition as folk devil absolves those involved in their treatment of their own guilt and responsibility.'

Richardson and Ryder; *Stamp on the Camps* (2009)

The ITMB believes that the standards of journalistic craft skills for stories on Gypsies and Travellers are allowed to slip below acceptable levels. Here another example of Gypsy and Traveller 'bogey-man' in action again; this time in the Daily Mirror:

'GYPSIES SOLD ME AS A SLAVE FOR £10,000'

⁹ Ibid, p. 216

'An ex jailbird yesterday revealed he was sold as a £10,000 slave by travellers who traded people "like cars"' (Daily Mirror; 16/10/2011: Steve White)

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/gypsies-sold-me-as-a-slave-for-10000-153954>

The story is about an "ex-con", Andy Williamson, who claims to have been kept as a slave by Travellers about three years ago. He also admits to having been on the run from the police at the time and that he later did time for armed robbery. Hardly a reliable witness – yet the story does not seem to have been backed up by any other evidence. Andy Williamson also appears to have given an interview with The Sun, who fail to tell their readers of Williamson's past: (The Sun; 16/10/2011: Dan Sales)

'GYPSY SLAVE TRADER SOLD ME FOR £10K'

'A MAN has told how he was sold as a slave for £10,000 while in the power of gypsy gangs.'

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3817495/Gypsy-slave-trader-sold-me-for-10k.html>

Andy Williamson also appeared in the Brighton Argus, This is Tamworth (website); The Daily Mail; The Sunday Mercury; The Irish Central and The Daily Star. All linked the story to the recent raid on a Gypsy and Traveller site in Leighton Buzzard at which arrests were made – meaning that the case was now sub-judice and should have been covered by restrictions under the Contempt of Court Act 1981. As far as the ITMB knows – the Attorney General took no action.

A comment posted under the version in The Irish Central – written by reporter Cathy Hayes - pretty much sums up the ITMB's position on this story:

"As for the author of this one-sided story, Cathy Hayes, I suggest learning how to report! Unless you are a tool, you provide both sides of a news story."

pilib04 | Sep 17, 2011, 08:04 AM EDT

To this we would add that all the reports seem to have been written from the same interview, the same press release, or 'blagged' from the same initial source. None of the articles question what 'Andy Williamson' says, and none has any other attributed source. All conflate Gypsy with Irish Traveller.

This is the same level of reporting that produces articles such as:

'I SAW ELVIS IN A SCUNTHORPE LAUNDERETTE DOING SERVICE WASHES FOR A FIVER'

Yet they are not funny. On the 16th September, 2011; 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.

And according to the Daily Mail (24/11/11), this number is set to rise:

'BRITAIN'S POPULATION OF TRAVELLERS HAS RISEN BY 400 IN LAST YEAR... AND MORE THAN DOUBLED OVER LAST CENTURY'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2065876/Traveller-population-Britain-risen-400-year.html>

Again we leave an anonymous online comment poster in the Daily Mail to state the obvious:

"erm.. Population is growing exponentially all over the world, is it a surprise that this one is too?"

5. Name-calling

"The Vienna edition of the June 28th: 1939, Volkischer Beobachter expressed satisfaction with the arrest of the Gypsies. Paraphrasing a well-known song, the newspaper story was headlined "Come Gypsy – Show Me How You Can Work".

The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies; Lewy, G (2000) OUP

"Gypoa shortened abbreviation of Gypsy.....generally meaning thieving toe rag."
(Online comment in the Daily Express (23/0211))

Trevor Kavanagh, former political editor of the Sun, related one of the strengths of the popular press in the opening seminars of the Leveson Inquiry:

"The great sin of the popular press is to be popular. Our lighter, brighter, brasher papers are commercially successful. We have 20 million readers, perhaps 10 times as many as the heavies. So to their irritation they have been obliged to imitate our lively style in order to keep in the game. Our headlines have become part of the vernacular. During last week's heat wave, for instance, even the BBC Today programme was talking about what a scorcher."

This ability to transform everyday language can also have a down-side as well. Pejorative headlines can become part of the vernacular. Big fat Gypsy did not originate

with the press - it came from the Channel 4 reality TV show "My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding" – but the popular press certainly ran with it.

A story from the Daily Mail (17/12/2011) about a group of French Gypsies who set up a temporary unauthorised encampment used this headline:

'MY BIG FAT GYPSY HOLIDAY: 40 FRENCH TRAVELLERS SAY 'ALLO 'ALLO TO HACKNEY AS THEY SET UP CAMP 'TO SEE THE SIGHTS OF LONDON'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2062727/French-gypsies-set-camp-week-holiday-sights-London.html#ixzz1qDqvYa1o>

And in the Sun

'MY BIG FAT GYPSY COUNCIL HOUSE'

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3395748/Family-of-gypsies-get-12m-council-house.html>

The Sun again:

'BIG FAT GYPSY WAR ZONE'

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3787022/Big-fat-gypsy-war-zone-Travellers-ready-for-eviction-siege-with-bailiffs.html>

And the Sun again; this time they are reporting on a religious festival for born-again Christian Gypsies and Travellers in Essex. This is potentially a very interesting story, yet the Sun is only interested in one broken church door in a local village, the litter that was left behind and bending the story to fit in with the headline below:

'THE ONLY WAY IS ESSEX FOR BIG FAT GYPSY KNEES-UP'

6. Lack of 'Voice'

"To most hacks we are not real people – more like animals. We are definitely not seen as actually being part of whatever their perception of the 'British public' is. I have many examples of journalists acting weird around Travellers, but one of the most galling and dehumanising is their use of the telephoto lens to get pictures. They hide behind bushes and take photos of us as if we were sheep."

Damian Le Bas, journalist and Editor of The Traveller's Times.

Gypsies and Travellers are usually not given the chance to defend themselves against this tidal wave of prejudice. A recent analysis by the ITMB of 24 Gypsy and Traveller articles appearing in the local press during March – mainly planning and community-conflict related – found that only seven included direct quotes from Travellers, whilst 20 included direct quotes from ‘local residents’ opposed to the Travellers. This figure went up to 24 or 100% if direct quotes from local ward councillors opposed to the Travellers are counted.

In most local press articles about community conflict, care is usually taken to present both sides fairly – if not always in a balanced manner. This clearly does not happen in the case of local community conflict stories involving Gypsies and Travellers.

7. Capitalisation of Gypsy and Irish Traveller

‘Eskimo’; ‘Cossack’; ‘Inuit’ – so why not ‘gypsy’, ‘Irish traveller’ and ‘traveller’?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Gypsies are an ethnic minority, as are Irish Travellers. Consequently, both should start with a capital letter. We also suggest that Traveller – the collective noun for Gypsies and Irish Travellers, should take a capital T as well.

The courts have also established that Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies and Irish Travellers are ethnic groups for the purposes of the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000)¹⁰

Ethnic minorities are usually capped in the national press.

As the Guardian Style Guide says:

“Gypsies:

uc, recognised as an ethnic group under the Race Relations Act, as are Irish Travellers.”

(uc = upper case)

The Independent has also recently started capping Gypsy and Traveller.

However, most papers don’t do this and use lower case. As an ‘outsider’ denial of ethnic identity is a racist trope this is symbolically very important.

It is also discriminatory as most papers cap other ethnic minorities/groups, as this example from The Daily Mail shows:

¹⁰ Commission for Racial Equality v Dutton, 1989 and O’Leary and others v Punch Retail, 2000

“An Eskimo yesterday added his voice to campaigners protesting against the expansion of Stansted Airport. Aqqaluk Lynge, 59, spoke out as a planning inquiry started into the British Airport Authority's proposal to increase the number of flights by 72,000 to 264,000.”

8. Comment threads

“They are choosing to exclude themselves from the rest of civil society. They choose to exclude themselves from the functions of the state - government, laws, local and national taxes, council tax etc...On every measure, the "travellers" are not contributing to civil society in the way that honest taxpayers do.”

(Online comment published by the Guardian)

The ITMB has analysed one particular thread after a sympathetic Dale Farm opinion piece in The Observer and separated and counted the racist comments.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/02/dale-farm-early-ache-tightening-vice>

If the comment was negative about perceived Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity and 'culture', or about the perceived behaviour of Gypsies and Travellers as a group then it was counted as racist. If it was a negative comment about the Dale farm Travellers as a group – then it may have been offensive - or even libellous – but was not counted as racist. A hypothetical example makes this clear: “The Dale Farm residents don't pay tax and live off benefits,” was counted as offensive and libellous. “Travellers don't pay tax and live of benefits,” was counted as racist.

A lot of comments contained insinuations and rhetorical questions rather than statements. Following media law precedent, it was the sense of the whole comment that was analysed.

There are 500 comments in this particular thread - 150 of which are racist about ethnic Travellers.

Local papers and papers to the political right of the Guardian and The Observer tend to have shorter threads and less objections to the racist posts.

There are common themes to the racist posts.

One is: 'You wouldn't want 'them' living near you' (meaning ALL Travellers - not just the ones at Dale Farm. If it was clearly just about the Dale Farm inhabitants then it's abusive - but not racist).

Another type is that Gypsies and Travellers are not ethnic groups - just drop-outs and free-loaders who cry 'race' if challenged.

Another type compares bad 'Irish tinkers' to good 'true Romany Gypsies'. Then there are the unsubstantiated anecdotes about Travellers spreading human excrement, leaving rubbish and thieving. And these anecdotes are then ascribed as traits that are cultural or even genetic traits of the different Traveller ethnic groupings.

Gypsies 'who own shiny 4 x 4's' having lots of money 'obviously' obtained from criminal activities is another. Not paying tax or contributing to society - yet getting more than a fair share of its benefits is yet another. Also; according to the commentators, Travellers as a group beat their women, abuse their children and use drugs and alcoholism.

All the racist comments are posted anonymously under avatars. These avatars have names like 'Haardvark', 'Doughnut' and 'Fart Like a Creaky Hinge'. The same statements crop up regularly in other articles on Travellers.

A quick scan suggests that other ethnic minorities do not get the same treatment – or, rather, the racist comments are deleted by the papers online moderators. It seems like Travellers are a special case.

And editors are legally and – the ITMB would say - morally responsible for this racism.

Under libel law, editors and publishers are legally responsible for publishing defamatory allegations (see **Godfrey v Demon Internet Service (2001)**) of fact from on-line anonymous and/or named posters (see **Gina Ford v Mumsnet (2007)**).

Criminal law prohibits the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displaying any written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting with the intention of stirring up racial hatred or where racial hatred is likely to be stirred up.

The question is – are editors and comment-thread moderators aware that these comments are likely to stir up racial hatred?

The Guardian's moderator and commenter's guide suggests that they do. It says:

“We will not tolerate racism, sexism, homophobia or other forms of hate-speech, or contributions that could be interpreted as such. We recognise the difference between criticising a particular government, organisation, community or belief and attacking people on the basis of their race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age.”

The last word on the comment threads can go to someone who braved the abuse to post on another comment thread in the Observer. He is addressing the previous commenter's:

"After reading some of your remarks i would honestly say you need to be in court you are racist. if a man woman or child from another culture black african chinese and so on you would be to scared to write any of the comments. as i know as well as you do it would end in a court battle i just hope to meet you one day and take you to court you bigoted horrible people".

Cheshire lad ,State registered male nurse , English Gypsy

9. Community Impact

"Like most Gypsy and Traveller discrimination; it's a vicious circle. Travellers don't trust the media because how it portrays them. But the media has more power to break this circle than we do."

Sophia Vale; ITMB policy assistant, law graduate, and English Gypsy

Brian Foster; Chairman of the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers and an experienced Traveller educationalist outlines the impact that prejudiced reporting has:

"Teachers working closely with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, have reported upsurges of racist bullying at times of negative press publicity. During the Sun's 'Stamp on the Camps' campaign, an Irish Traveller Welfare Assistant commented: "How do you think it feels going into school, with this all over the papers?" A housed Traveller student was excluded for kicking a door that had been slammed in his face by a "friend" with the words: "Get back to Dale Farm, pikey."

"Big fat gypsy" has joined "pikey" as an acceptable form of address in some schools and girls have been subjected to sexual harassment by boys emulating the dubious practice of "grabbing" sensationalised by the programme. The tabloids follow the programme assiduously seeking to capitalise on aspects of the portrayal of these communities.

DFE research (2010) found that more than half of Gypsies and Irish Travellers drop out of Secondary education. There are many reasons for this, but parents frequently cite racist bullying as the reason for their children not attending or in cases where they react to the bullying – for being excluded. The contribution of the press to the perpetuation of crude, negative stereotypes, and its choice of sensation before information, gives ammunition to playground bullies, and undermines the efforts of schools to promote community cohesion."

Thomas McCarthy, a traditional Irish Traveller folk singer and Traveller rights campaigner, describes the effects of prejudicial reporting:

“The most disgusting one – and I don’t know why they were not done for inciting racial hatred – was the Sun’s Stamp on the Camp campaign (2005). In hard times, or when the politicians need votes; then they look for scapegoats and the papers do their work for them. It comes right from the top that it is acceptable to be racist towards Gypsies and Travellers. Even comedians when they want to raise a laugh and get the audience behind them – they make a racist joke about ‘pikeys’ or ‘gippos’ and it’s ok because it’s done with a smile. This is happening today. It wouldn’t happen to any other ethnic groups. It’s an invisible apartheid towards Travelling people. But not invisible to us.

The press is full of stereotypes of who we are – so was my Big Fat Gypsy Wedding. And the stereotypes are mainly negative. For instance, the McDonalds collected money, food and toys and drove to Romania to deliver them to the people in need there, but that wasn’t in the papers. Instead it’s always about dirty Travellers; dishonest Travellers; violent Travellers and thieving Travellers. Once the statement is made it leaves a stain.

It has a devastating effect on the Travelling people. It eats at your self-confidence, self-image and self-esteem and causes bad health in your mind and your body. When I see the headlines it feels like a physical blow. It feels like we have been knocked backwards when we are trying to step forward.”

10. Press responsibility

Press Complaints Commission

The Press Complaints Commission – a regulatory body established and operated by representatives of the press itself – have a Code of Practice, clause 12 of which relates to discrimination:

12 Discrimination

- i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.*

- ii) Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.*

However, the PCC clause 12 only works if racism is targeted at a recognisable individual. This is not an effective defense against casual and intentional racism against Gypsies and Travellers as ethnic groups, as the example below – a complaint by Marc Willers, who is a barrister specializing in Gypsy and Traveller planning law, illustrates:

The article in question is a comment piece in The Observer written by the journalist Elizabeth Day (23/11/2011).

'DALE FARM WAS BETRAYED BY ITS FOOLISH DEFENDERS'

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/23/elizabeth-day-dale-farm-
eviction?INTCMP=SRCH](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/23/elizabeth-day-dale-farm-
eviction?INTCMP=SRCH)

Marc Willers – who complained both to The Observer, and then to the PCC – found these two particular paragraphs to be prejudiced towards Gypsies and Travellers:

“For the past 10 years, Basildon council has sought to negotiate and offer alternative accommodation. It has also alerted the Dale Farm residents to other vacant, authorised sites around the country only to be told that a community which defines itself by its nomadism does not wish to travel.”

And:

“Given that the Travelling culture has at its heart the desire to, well, travel, isn't the very idea of permanent accommodation nonsensical?”

The ‘facts’ in the first paragraph are actually in dispute, but it is the opinion expressed at the end of the second paragraph above that is prejudiced, as Marc Willers explains:

“However, it was Ms Day's comment on the exchange between Mr Paxman and Ms Crickley that we find most objectionable. Ms Day said: 'Given that the Travelling culture has at its heart the desire to, well, travel, isn't the very idea of permanent accommodation nonsensical?'. That comment at best displays the fact that she has little real understanding of the traditional way of life of Irish Travellers or indeed their accommodation needs and at worst displays her prejudice towards them.

Though they have a tradition of residing in caravans and travelling in order to find work and earn their living, the fact is that the shortage of lawful stopping places and sites combined with the legislative powers that the police and local authorities can use to move them from unauthorised encampments make it almost impossible for them to travel on a regular basis. They wish to continue living in accordance with their traditional way of life, residing in caravans, but they need permanent sites to use as a base from which to travel; sites on which they can 'over winter', sites on which the elderly and sick

can live in peace throughout the year and access appropriate healthcare and sites from which their children can attend school on a regular basis and achieve the same levels of educational attainment as children from the settled community.”

In short – Elizabeth Day (echoing Jeremy Paxman) says that as they are called Travellers and value their culture and they must like to ‘travel’; so why don’t they just ‘travel’ off?”

As Irish Traveller Thomas McCarthy says in the section on Impact above, it’s “racism with a smile” – or a smirk in this case. Just to make the nature of this prejudice crystal clear – the ITMB would like the Inquiry to imagine a situation where a white columnist commenting on UK citizens and/or immigrants of Somalian heritage, suggests that if they value and want to protect their Somalian heritage and culture – they should just go back to Somalia. Or ‘travel’ off back home – in other words.

The PCC didn’t think so and Marc Willers received this reply:

The Commission acknowledged the position of the complainant. However, under Clause 12 (i), newspapers must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual’s race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability: the clause does not cover references to groups or categories of people. In this instance, the article did not make a prejudicial or pejorative reference to the race of a particular individual but rather expressed the columnist’s, albeit robust, views on rehousing the Travellers of Dale Farm following their eviction from the site.

The ITMB would like to make the Inquiry aware that the Press Council of Ireland’s code of practice includes groups under its clause on *Prejudice*:

Principle 8 – Prejudice

‘Newspapers and magazines shall not publish material intended or likely to cause grave offence or stir up hatred against an individual or group on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin, membership of the travelling community, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness or age.’

National Union of Journalists

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has over 25,000 members in the UK. NUJ members agree to abide by a Code of Conduct, clause 10 of which states: ‘A journalist shall only mention a person’s race, colour, creed, illegitimacy, marital status (or lack of it), gender or sexual orientation if this information is strictly relevant. A journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination, ridicule, prejudice or hatred on any of the above mentioned grounds’.

The NUJ code also includes guidelines on reporting on Gypsies and Travellers – it is distinct from the section on ‘black’ ethnic groups:

‘Only mention the word gypsy or traveller if strictly relevant and accurate.’

‘Give balanced reports, seeking travellers’ views as well as those of others, consulting the local travellers where possible.’

‘Resist the temptation to sensationalise issues involving travellers, especially in their relations with settled communities over issues such as housing and settlement programmes and schooling.’

‘Try to give wide coverage to travellers’ lives and the problems they face.’

‘Strive to promote the realisation that the travellers’ community is comprised of full citizens of Great Britain and Ireland whose civil rights are seldom adequately vindicated, who often suffer much hurt and damage through misuse by the media and who have a right to have their special contributions to Irish and British life, especially in music and craft work and other cultural activities, properly acknowledged and reported.’

However – a caveat and an invitation to run a cultural awareness workshop for the NUJ - we would like to remind the NUJ that Gypsies and Irish Travellers are legally acknowledged as ethnic groups. Therefore they take a capital letter. And - as Gypsies and Travellers are diverse social groups that include lawyers, nurses, journalists, lorry drivers, students, hairdressers, civil servants, politicians - they make “special contributions to Irish and British life” other than “music and craft work”.

At the ITMB we believe that the NUJ code is not followed in the case of the reporting of Gypsies and Travellers. However, we believe that the code is not always followed with many of the minority social groups included in the NUJ Code of Conduct, clause 10. Indeed, a journalist or editor may argue that: ‘How can it be always adhered to? How – for instance – can you report on Yakuza’s without mentioning that most of the gang members are Japanese, or of Japanese heritage?’

So we believe that the NUJ code is an ideal to be strived for – but that editors and journalists should be aware of those clauses and take great pains to implement them.

Awareness training and workshops

Ethics, journalism’s responsibilities to society, how to interview vulnerable people and how to cover stories about race are now commonly taught as part of most journalism courses. To this list we would like to ask Journalism Course Directors – from City;

Cardiff; Sheffield etc, to consider adding to their syllabus a seminar or workshop on the issues raised in this submission.

Another way of tackling prejudicial reporting was mentioned by Richard Caseby in the opening seminars of this Inquiry. He was talking about cultural and social awareness workshops that took place at the Sun editorial office. He said (about who such workshops should be targeted at):

“The journalists obviously because those are the people at the sharp end who are writing the stories. We had health professionals coming into the Sun, for example, on Broadmoor one must always talk about “patients” and don’t talk about “cons” and things like that and we have a constant educational service, almost, to journalists of education. I don’t think this is either known or it’s not something we shout about but perhaps we should do.”

Workshops such as these – but on Gypsies and Travellers and the effects of prejudiced reporting – could also be targeted at the Society of Editors, the NUJ and the PCC.

11. The way forward

Considering all the issues raised in this submission, ITMB would like to make the following three recommendations, enabling all parties to move forward with positive steps to effectively address these issues:

To include in the existing – or any new press code of conduct – a clause that recognises that prejudicial and racist reporting – whilst it ultimately affects the individual – is not necessarily targeted at an individual and may be targeted at a group (e.g. Irish Press Council code of practice, principle 8 on prejudice) .

The NUJ code (as amended above) should be included in the syllabus’s of journalism courses and used as a guide when formatting any new PCC clauses or code.

Newspaper editorials, The Society of Editors, the PCC and other media watchdogs should seek cultural awareness raising workshops, presentations and seminars from Gypsy and Traveller representatives and campaign groups.

Conclusion

As in other countries, Gypsies in Nazi Germany were regarded with hostility and suspicion by a significant proportion of the population – they were commonly seen as people who were often involved in crime, and behaved in an “asocial” manner. It is estimated that around a quarter of the pre-war Gypsy population were killed by the Nazis; some 220,000. Gypsies have increasingly used the term “porrajmos” (devouring) in order to distinguish their experience from other groups persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime.

The ITMB has included references to the porrajmos because we believe that the reporting of Gypsies within Nazi Germany has distinct parallels with much of the reporting of Gypsies and Travellers occurring today in 21st century Britain.

These parallels are in tone, style and content. The ITMB does not wish to suggest that the political situation in 21st century Britain is similar to that of Nazi Germany. Nor do we suggest that it is likely to become so, or that prejudiced reporting is the base of an inexorable ‘pyramid of hate’ that will inevitably lead to genocide.

However, we do believe that the current state of the reporting of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK disrupts relationships between local ‘settled’ and Traveller populations, contributes to the bullying of Traveller children at school, contributes to what has been described as ‘the last acceptable racism’ and, paradoxically; disrupts the efforts of those Travellers – and the organisations that support them – to promote integration and engagement with wider society amongst Traveller communities.

It is clear from the evidence in this submission that the current regulatory codes and guidelines – voluntary, civil and criminal - are not enforced when Gypsies and Travellers are reported on. Apart from anything else, this is discriminatory and needs to stop.

It is also clear that a constant barrage of prejudiced reporting, about two of the smallest ethnic minorities in the UK, has a devastating effect on individual Gypsies and Travellers, on community cohesion and on the wider public.

“An analysis of the Fuldaer Zeitung, for example, shows a definite increase in articles accusing Gypsies of various crimes from 1936 on. Charges that Gypsies were asocial parasites now combined with racist invective.”

The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies; Lewy, G (2000) OUP

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

Date *14/11/2012*