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1. Introduction

Traveller Studies are a relatively new scientific subject, a smaller category within the broader field of Irish Studies. Like Roma Studies, Diaspora and Migration Studies, they only started to gain closer attention within the last few decades.¹

This thesis will examine how the ethnic group of Irish Travellers is depicted in cinema since the year 2000. It will start off by giving an overview of some aspects of Irish Travellers' cultural background, of what there is to be said about their history and about the present political situation. A quantitative and qualitative film analysis will help discussing the following theories and questions.

I started researching this thesis with the theory that despite many historical, social and political developments, certain stereotypes about Irish Travellers have remained in different kinds of cultural expression, may it be film, media or literature. I supposed that although a few new facets might have been added to the long established images, many of the traditional stereotypes have remained fairly static and unchanged.

Another suggestion that I came up with at an early stage of my research and that I since discovered to be a widely discussed and accepted theory, is that many of the stereotypical ways in which Travellers are being depicted in different media at present, are fairly close to stereotypes about the Irish in general. I will examine the selected films in regard to this theory. To do so, the thesis will start with clarifying how the term 'stereotype' is actually defined. This will include outlining what stereotype means in relation to film, as film history very early worked with as well as against stereotypes. Later on it will give an overview of the history of stereotypes about the Irish majority population and about Irish Travellers, and have a look at what they have in common.

As there is a fairly long history of 'other' cultures being looking down upon in Europe's past, and because the depiction of Irish Travellers must be seen in the context of Ireland's older and newer history, this thesis will also give an introduction to the meaning of the term 'Othering' and it's relevance in Ireland's history and present. I will research if the Othering of Irish Travellers is depicted, repeated and/or challenged in present film. At the end of this thesis, I will be able to say if and how the old, 'traditional' stereotypes are being repeated and what has changed.

¹ See: Hayes, Michael (2006). *Irish travellers: representations and realities*. Dublin: Liffey Press. Preface.

For this matter, the thesis also offers a brief overview of the history of films about Travellers, mainly focussing on the most popular fiction films involving Traveller characters, but also including some relevant other examples, like documentary, TV series and also print media, among others.

I will analyse five films in detail before concluding with a summing up of what can be said about the depiction of Irish Travellers in cinema since the year 2000.

The thesis also involves a definition of what the terms ‘Irish cinema’ or ‘Irish national cinema’ can include. Do they refer to films made entirely by Irish directors and actors, featuring Irish characters, with an Irish narrative taking place in Ireland? Very unlikely. Starting this thesis, I was considering writing only about the representation of Travellers in Irish cinema. The chapter on Irish cinema will explain if and how such a thing as Irish cinema can be defined at all.

The main part of this thesis consists of a detailed analysis of some of the most popular films featuring Irish Travellers, made after the year 2000. I picked this date, not just because it is a nice round number and marks the beginning of the new millennium, it is also the year when *Snatch* (UK/USA, 2000) was released, the first film with a main part for Travellers ending up a massive international success and a cult film today. I suspect that since *Snatch* there has been a shift in the depiction of Travellers. If and how this shift took place will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

The analysis will not be a film analysis in the classical sense, but will focus on the depiction of Travellers regarding narrative and structure of the films, and compare them. I will examine the films regarding the characters they feature to see which stereotypes appear, if they relate to the traditional stereotypes and if there have been changes. As mentioned above, I will also research if some films challenge these stereotypes. Another question that this thesis will look into is, if any of the films acknowledge political and/or social issues concerning Irish Travellers.

Furthermore, the thesis will occasionally bring forward the production background (for example in how far Travellers were involved as actors or writers) and will feature comments by critics.

All in all I hope to draw a comprehensive conclusion about how Irish Travellers are depicted in 21st century cinema up to now.

2. Terminology

I would like to clarify at this point, that when I refer to Irish Travellers in this thesis, I refer to an ethnic group, and it is self-evident that this group in itself is just as diverse and heterogenous as any other culture. At no point do I want to make any generalisations, assuming that what is said about Irish Travellers would apply to every individual member of this group and neither so for every company or organisation. I hope I don't give the impression that I am taking a generalised view on anything or anyone, and should I do, I apologise. As I am not an Irish Traveller myself, I can only write from the perspective of a non-Traveller, looking at how Traveller culture is currently being represented in different media. I can only look at the culture from outside and point out the information that I came across during my research, which of course is contradictive too, sometimes.

As for the terminology used, there are different perspectives on what vocabulary is appropriate and what some might find offensive. Travellers or Pavee is what the ethnic group usually refers to themselves. An older term is 'tinker', which stems from a traditional occupation of some of Travellers' ancestors, who were tinsmiths. However, the word is nowadays sometimes used in a derogatory or abusive way, which is why many people refrain from using it. Not so Pecker Dunne, who said "*I am proud to be a Traveller and I don't have any fear of the word 'tinker'. The tinkers were a very respected group of craftsmen in Irish society in times gone by and to deny that is to deny history.*"²

The situation is kind of similar for the word 'gypsy'. Some might find it discriminating and offensive, others will use it in a favourable way. It also varies if Travellers are understood as 'gypsies' at all.

As for another term used by the Irish authorities in the 1960s and 1970s, a Traveller woman is quoted as having said "*I'd drink my blood before I'd answer to the word 'itinerant'.*"³

To avoid any offence, I will not use either of the questionable terms, except if I quote others using them or when I refer to a particular stereotype and not a person or culture. In that case I will put the term in single quotation marks.

² Dunne, Pecker & Ó hAodha, Mícheál (Ed.) (2004). *Parley-poet and chanter: Pecker Dunne: an autobiography*. Dublin: A. & A. Farmar, p. 55.

³ Kirk, John M. & Ó Baoill, Dónall P. (Eds.) (2002). *Travellers and their Language*. Belfast: Queen's University Press, p. 170.

To describe non-Travellers, I will not, as sometimes done, refer to the ‘settled’ people, which it is not really appropriate, as many Travellers lead a sedentary life too. Instead, relating to Claudia Wührer’s approach, I will differentiate between Travellers and the ‘majority population’, as “*the term reflects the unequal power relations that are at play in a nation state, in which an indigenous minority group has been, and often still is, pushed to the margins of the same.*”⁴

According to José Lanthers, “*The term ‘community’ is used here and throughout as a way of indicating that Travellers share a common culture and ethnicity. It does not suggest that all Travellers know each other and relate to each other in the same way and on the same level. Economic circumstances and living conditions vary, and families are related to each other in complex ways.*”⁵

⁴ Wührer, Claudia (2012). *For the Sake of Entertainment: The Representation of Irish Travellers in ‘Big Fat Gypsy Weddings’*. Retrieved 2013, September from <http://othes.univie.ac.at/22340/>, p. 1.

⁵ Lanthers, José (2008). *The ‘Tinkers’ in Irish Literature. Unsettled Subjects and the Construction of Difference*. Dublin/Portland OR: Irish Academic Press, p. 4.

3. History: Who are the Irish Travellers?

*“Travellers are a nomadic group of people with their own beliefs and culture that dates back to the fifth century. According to the latest census, there are almost 30.000 Travellers in Ireland. For many decades, Travellers were craftsmen, entertainers, message carriers, horse traders and tinsmiths. And although their ways of life have changed in recent years, they continue to proudly maintain their uniqueness, despite many pressures in modern day Ireland to adapt to a new lifestyle.”*⁶

(Maggie Maughan)

This chapter will introduce some basic information on Irish Traveller history and culture.

Irish Travellers are an ethnic group with a distinct cultural heritage, which can be traced back in Ireland's history for centuries. Although heterogeneous in itself, the Traveller community shares common traditions including a history of nomadic lifestyle and a high emphasis on family values, which involve a much bigger group than just the immediate relations:

*“Settled people organise within parishes and districts. Travellers organise within families. It is not a geographical organisation it is a family organisation. If you look at different names you can immediately identify them with a family group. With ours we have McDonaghs which is the most popular name among Irish Travellers. Then Wards, Collins, Joyces, and Nevin. If you go South you have the O'Driscolls, O'Briens, Sullivans. Galway's names are Sweeney and Ward and Clare has Sherlocks.”*⁷ *Ward is a very popular name. The Irish version means son of the bard and the Travellers were the bards.”*⁸

Not least in the context of the ongoing debate on the official recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group (which the government of the Republic of Ireland omitted up to date), the question of their origins is raised over and over again. It seems as if proving ones past is regarded as being essential evidence for legitimizing ones present. Ironically this seems to be the case, even if paying a whole lot of attention to one's history is not exactly part of one's own culture. I refer to Máirín Kenny's statement that origin myths are not seen as

⁶ Maughan, Maggie & Maughan, Keith (Hosts) (2012, Sept. 01). *Understanding Travellers* [Radio Broadcast]. Ballyhaunis: Midwest Radio.

⁷ Note: These are just examples of some of the most popular family names.

⁸ McDonagh, Michael (1993). Who are the Travelling People? In: Hyland, J. (Ed.), *Do You Know Us At All?* Dublin: Parish of the Travelling People, p. 15.

tremendously important to Travellers, *“that they regard such as ‘baggage’: that questions of ancientness/roots do not fit into the meaning systems of many commercial nomads such as Travellers, who find their sense of validity in a vital network of relationships rather than in a sense of an ancient historicity.”*⁹

Sinéad ní Shúinéar comes to a similar conclusion when she states that the question of how Travellers themselves explain their origins *“is doubly ethnocentric: it assumes both a focus, and a consensus, that simply does not exist. The truth is that most Travellers do not think about their origins nearly as much as non-Travellers do.”*¹⁰ Ní Shúinéar sees their whole relationship to the past as being different from the popular ethnocentric approach, where a single correct vision of history is attempted.

*“At the other end of the continuum, occupied by Gypsies and Travellers, lies a qualitatively different approach, without specialists or orthodoxy, in which the whole of a society owns a seamless continuum of past and present continually reinterpreted and reshaped in the telling. Not only is there no definitive version of now, there is also no former definitive version with which to compare it, for good or ill.”*¹¹

There are other reasons why there is not a whole lot of solid factual proof of Travellers' roots and origins. Firstly their culture is based on an oral tradition, which means that traditionally a lot of Travellers did not learn to read or write (at least in regard to the majority population's semiotic terms). Therefore the first written documents mentioning Travellers were written by non-Travellers.

This oral tradition is not as unusual as it may seem at first glance, and from a 'modern' point of view. So Travellers 'only' have an oral tradition of handing down their own history. So what? Particularly from an Irish perspective it should be remembered that the Irish tradition was an oral one too, for good parts of history. What was written down about the Gaels was usually written down mainly by first the Romans and then the Brits. Christian monks wrote down the pagan myths of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the conquerors writing down the conquereds' story. Indigenous people mainly passed on their history,

⁹ Kenny, Máirín (1994). Final Thoughts: A Case for Celebration? In: McCann, M. & Ó Siocháin, S. & Ruane, J. (Eds.), *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies/Queen's University Belfast, p. 181.

¹⁰ Ní Shúinéar, Sinéad (2006). History as Dialogue: An Anthropological Perspective. In: Breathnach B. & Breathnach, C. (Eds.), *Portraying Irish Travellers*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, p. 67.

¹¹ Ní Shúinéar, S. (2006), p. 66.

their heritage in an oral way: the bards or the seanchaí, the singers and storytellers were the ones who passed on stories from generation to generation. Poetry, music and storytelling is something the Irish are renowned for. Because it is an essential element of their history and of the way it would be told. There is no such thing as ‘only’ an oral tradition. This is a cultural treasure, as the people knew who started recording traditional Irish music basically as soon as the technology would allow to do so. The musical archives are filled with most valuable recordings of stories and songs, many of which by now might otherwise be lost for ever. An oral tradition is neither a worse nor a better way of passing on knowledge and wisdom. It might be a more fragile, an often more joyful way of getting in touch with the past.

All this of course is not intending to say that literacy was not a desirable goal, and education actually is a very important topic among Traveller organisations, who encourage Travellers of all ages to aspire further education, as a majority of Travellers still leave school at a comparatively early stage.

Another reason for a lack of documentation of the bare existence of Travellers is that for centuries Ireland was a British colony and the colonisers did not differentiate between the colonised very much, so there are not many documents giving even a hint on Travellers.

There is evidence of a long distinct Traveller culture though. Firstly, there is the language, ‘Shelta’ or ‘Gammon’, Travellers themselves would call it ‘Cant’ or ‘Minceirtoiree’. This language is closely related to old Irish, which was spoken in Ireland pre 1200’s.¹² Michael McDonagh pointed out: *“Our own words for a priest or for God have shown up in old documents to be words used in pre-Christian Ireland and yet we still use them today.”*¹³ Furthermore, Irish mythology, for example the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, repeatedly features *“landless people who [...] have a diverse identity and culture from mainstream society.”*¹⁴

At this point I would like to mention that the whole debate about the origins of indigenous Irish nomads might be somehow obsolete insofar as the further one goes back in history, the less unusual a nomadic lifestyle was in all kinds of cultures all over the world. It is obvious that living a nomadic life was common before the settled lifestyle was ‘invented’, and not the other way round.

¹² McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 12.

¹³ McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 12.

¹⁴ McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 12.

One of the most common and at the same time most objected to theories about the origins of Irish Travellers is that they are the descendants of people who lost their homes at the time of the Great Famine which peaked around 1845 in Ireland. McDonagh objects to this theory by saying that there are around 10,000 Irish Travellers living in the United States today, that a lot of them went there during the Famine, but since then maintained typical Traveller lifestyle. He concludes that this means that *“these patterns were well established among the families even before they left Ireland, so Travellers then predate the famine.”*¹⁵ McDonagh concludes by saying *“I am not trying to ‘prove’ the origins of Travellers in Irish society but to disprove that we only came about because of a disaster in Irish history”*.^{16 17}

Unfortunately the idea that Travellers did not choose a life on the road but were forced to take the road because they were society’s ‘drop-outs’ has become today’s conventional wisdom. This

*“determines how non-Travellers define, and therefore also how they treat, Travellers – not just in day-to-day encounters but institutionally, in schools, employment, accommodation, social welfare, health care and all the rest of it. Worse again, Travellers themselves, constantly exposed to these convincing explanations of who they ‘really’ are, end up internalising them. Theory, conjecture and scholarship may start off in the ivory tower but do not remain here.”*¹⁸

Some further facts on Travellers’ tradition and history may be summarized as done on the website of the University of Limerick, one of Ireland’s leading faculties for research on Irish Traveller culture:

“Travellers are synonymous with self-employment, occupational flexibility and nomadism. In the nineteenth century tinsmithing was a trade that was particularly associated with Travellers. This gave rise to the sobriquet ‘tinker’ which is now often used

¹⁵ McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 10.

¹⁶ McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 10.

¹⁷ For a more detailed bust of the drop-out theory see Ní Shuinéar, Sinéad (2004). Apocrypha to canon: inventing Irish Traveller history. *History Ireland*, 12(4). Retrieved 2013, May from <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/apocrypha-to-canon-inventing-irish-traveller-history-2/>.

¹⁸ Ní Shuinéar, S. (2004).

only in a derogatory sense. Tinsmithing was only one trade that was synonymous with Travellers however. They are also horse-dealers and recyclers and are synonymous today with activities such as market trading, scrap collection, tarmacking, the resale of secondhand goods, tree-topping and landscaping. Historically, Travellers have been largely invisible among the Irish poor but their language, known as Cant or Gammon, shows evidence of bardic influences, indicating that some of their ancestors may have belonged to bardic families that played a central role in Gaelic culture prior to the imposition of colonisation. The fact that Travellers is how the group refers to themselves is indicative of the importance of travelling or nomadism in Traveller culture.”¹⁹

¹⁹(2006, October 19). *Irish Travellers*. Retrieved 2013, May from University of Limerick website: <http://www3.ul.ie/~library/travellers/irishtravellers.htm>.

4. Traveller politics

*“Don’t, as Ireland has for so long, look on us as dropouts after the famine, or as Ireland’s really poor people who only need a house and a bit of luck or again don’t look on us with romantic eyes as some type of exotic people. No, see us as people that are different because of our culture. See that difference not as a difficulty but as something positive and enriching for all in society.”*²⁰

(Michael McDonagh)

In this chapter I will give an overview of some relevant political landmarks that shaped the situation Irish Travellers find themselves in at present, mainly referring to concerning Irish legislation. I will give a brief introduction to the question of Travellers’ recognition as an ethnic group and mention some major areas where Travellers face discrimination.

4.1. A short history of Irish Traveller politics

In the late 1890s the Gypsy Lore Society was established in Great Britain and since then brings together people with an interest in researching ethnic groups with a background of a nomadic lifestyle. Although having an entirely different history, Travellers and other nomadic groups are sometimes confronted with equal difficulties (the discrimination that Travellers and, among others, Roma face, but also the stereotypes about their cultures are stunningly similar for each group).

Catherine Joyce from Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group finds that *“the experience is quite, quite similar, in terms of discrimination, in terms of not being provided for, in terms of not being educated to the same standard as settled people in whatever country that we live in, in terms of the health statistics and so forth.”*²¹

Being confronted with having to cope with similar issues, Traveller and Roma support groups in Ireland are joining forces and just recently the Pavee Point Travellers Centre has been renamed to Pavee Point Travellers and Roma Centre.

“In 1922 the newly independent Irish state inherited a legacy of anti-nomadic legislation which it did not repeal. [...] Moreover, the new Irish state soon began to construct an anti-

²⁰ McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 18.

²¹ Joyce, Catherine (1999). *Catherine. Slí na mBan – the road of women. Journeys with Irish women activists*. Retrieved 2012, October from <http://www.tallgirlshorts.net/marymary/catherine.html>.

*nomadic project of its own. [...] [T]he state continued to insist that the existence of Travellers – rather than anti-Traveller racism – was ‘the problem’. The state has also been gradually implementing a ‘satisfactory solution of the problem’ – settlement. This assimilation policy amounted – first explicitly and later implicitly – to cultural genocide.”*²²

The first official research on Travellers happening in the Republic of Ireland was when the Irish Folklore Commission initiated a survey on Irish Travellers in 1952, the so-called ‘Tinker Questionnaire’. It was more a survey on the majority population’s view of Travellers though, as not a single Traveller was interviewed. Sinéad ní Shúinéar stated that *“The notion that information should be gathered, not from members of the group, but from admittedly hostile non-members with little or no direct contact save of the most superficial, functional type, is remarkable, but no one found it so. That in itself reveals a great deal about the relations between our peoples.”*²³

In 1963 the Commission on Itinerancy *“set out to promote [itinerants’] absorption into the general community”*²⁴. This was the Irish government’s *“first Traveller specific policy, which began a concerted effort to end the nomadism of the community, by introducing halting sites in set locations and through a policy of housing and settlement to end itinerancy in the community.”*²⁵ The commission *“recommended a policy of assimilation and absorption, in other words ridding society of Travellers.”*²⁶ The people on the commission may have been *“well intentioned and set out to do the right thing to alleviate the hardship being experienced by Travellers as they saw it. However, their analysis was misguided, offensive and damaging.”*²⁷

As by then the drop-out theory was widely accepted and, concluding that Travellers were merely settled people that had lost their houses for some adverse conditions, it seemed appropriate to officials to try and force them back into a settled life and lifestyle.

²² Lentin, Ronit & McVeigh, Robbie (2006). *After Optimism? Ireland, Racism and Globalisation*. Dublin: Metro Eireann Publications, pp. 132-133.

²³ Ní Shuinéar, S. (2006), pp. 65 – 66.

²⁴ Ní Shuinéar, S. (2004).

²⁵ Ní Shuinéar, S. (2004).

²⁶ Ó hAodha, Michael & Heneghan, John & Warde Moriarty, Mary (Eds.) (2012). *Travellers and the settled community, a shared future*. Dublin: The Liffey Press, p. 4.

²⁷ Ó hAodha, Michael & Heneghan, John & Warde Moriarty, Mary (Eds.) (2012), p. 4.

This included a constant “*threat to ‘institutionalise’ or take away their children because they were allegedly ‘at risk’ from Traveller lifestyle.*”^{28 29}

In an interview for Trinity News, Brigid Quilligan said “*When I was growing up assimilation was the approach taken to what was called ‘the Traveller problem’. There was nothing positive about my community in the school curriculum.*”³⁰ She has a similar perception of the effects of that policy on members of the Traveller community as Michael McDonagh, who wrote that

“*When you take away their identity as has happened to many Travellers it causes unbelievable problems. This happened in the 60’s and caused very low self-esteem with Travellers. Many have a fierce inferiority complex which has only been tackled in the last few years. It’s great to see the difference in young people now. They are proud to be Travellers and they want to keep their language whereas a couple of years ago they were hiding the fact that they were Travellers. Trying to fit in. [...] So Travellers sometimes became ashamed of their identity. That shame came about because for years we were told to give up our traditions and ways. A lot of them are gone forever. An identity is so important, to take it away does untold damage.*”³¹

Catherine Joyce finds similarities to other marginalized groups around the globe:

“*If you look at the situation of native American Indians in America, the Aborigines in Australia, the Maori people in New Zealand – across the ball if you look at marginalized groups within society – they have two things or three things in common. One is they have alcohol abuse and high rates of dependency on drugs and misuse of drugs. They have high rates of violence and internal conflict and inequality within their community. And the second thing that they probably have is a lack of opportunities and a negative outlook on life. The reason why they have that is not because of the stuff that’s going on within their community. It’s because of their focus or their function within*

²⁸ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 150.

²⁹ To avoid confusion, please note that the author Micheal Ó hAodha also published as Michael Hayes. I refer to literature published under both names, but in my text I will always refer to ‘Ó hAodha’, even if the book was published under ‘Hayes’.

³⁰ Burtenshaw, Rónán (2013). Who are the Travellers? *Trinity News*. Retrieved 2013, March from <http://trinitynews.ie/who-are-the-travellers/>.

³¹ McDonagh, M. (1993), p. 14.

mainstream society. And that's the very same situation for Irish Travellers here. We have not got a value in this society, we have not got a worth in it."³²

In 1995 the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (an inter-party group) recommended that by the year 2000, over 3,000 accommodation units needed to be provided for Travellers.³³

The situation was not made easier for Travellers with the Housing Act of 1992, which enables authorities to evict unauthorised encampments, and by the introduction of the Trespass Bill (Housing Act No. 2, 2002), which for the first time made trespass on land a criminal offence. This meant that it became illegal to enter private or public land with an object (such as a caravan) without permission. As assessed in the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community seven years earlier, there were by far not enough appropriate accommodation units available. By the time of the introduction of the Trespass Bill, over 1,000 Traveller families were camped on public land, awaiting accommodation. So from a legal point of view, they were all committing the offence of trespass, which means they could be evicted any time, without a legal alternative to go to, and if they refused to leave, they risked imprisonment, confiscation of their caravans and fines.³⁴

*"Many organisations, including the Irish Traveller Movement and Pavee Point, have argued that this bill is assimilationist in strategy and discriminates against Travellers by criminalising the practice of nomadism. The basis of their argument rests on the woefully inadequate number of appropriate and serviced halting sites that are available for Traveller families. If there are so few sites available, it is asked, then where can Travellers go without breaking the laws of trespass? Are Travellers required to accept some form of housing?"*³⁵

"In the year 2000, approximately 500 families nationwide were served with eviction notices without being offered alternative accommodation. In these circumstances families

³² O'Callaghan, Miriam (Host) (2013, June 16). *Miriam Meets... Michael Collins and his wife Catherine Joyce* [Audio Podcast]. Retrieved 2013, June from <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/miriam-meets/podcasts/>.

³³ See: Delaney, Paul (2003, July). A Sense of Place: Travellers, Representation, and Irish Culture. *The Ireland Institute*. Retrieved 2013, May from <http://theirelandinstitute.com/republic/03/pdf/delaney003.pdf>, p. 85.

³⁴ See: (2010). Definition of Evictions. *Irish Traveller Movement*. Retrieved 2013, May from <http://itmtrav.ie/keyissues/myview/23>.

³⁵ Delaney, Paul (2003, July). A Sense of Place: Travellers, Representation, and Irish Culture. *The Ireland Institute*. Retrieved 2013, May from <http://theirelandinstitute.com/republic/03/pdf/delaney003.pdf>, p. 86.

*are given only 24 hours to move and must try to get legal representation and establish their case within this period.”*³⁶

Some local authorities work with ‘bolder policies’, placing large rocks along the roadside to prevent Travellers from camping illegally. So many Travellers find themselves in a situation where they cannot find a place for their caravan in an official halting site, simply because there are not enough spaces available. At the same time they can always be evicted with short notice from any unofficial halting site.

In November 2013, 1.200 Traveller families were officially homeless. On November 16th 2013, hundreds of people protested in Dublin against this precarious situation.³⁷

4.2. Ethnicity debate

In April 2013, a report on Ireland’s implementation of the European treaty on the protection of national minorities concluded that there still remains a huge difference between Travellers and the majority population concerning access to education, the labour market and health services.³⁸ The report welcomed the fact that “*Irish authorities had introduced measures to recognise the community’s special position in society and to better protect their rights*“ and „*urged them to finalise the consideration of the proposed recognition of travellers as an ethnic minority*“.³⁹

In Great Britain, Travellers were officially recognised as an ethnic group in the year 2000. In Northern Ireland, they are recognised as a minority group since 1997. In Ireland, however, the government refused them this status, and for a long time the outlook on getting it was not encouraging optimism. It was just in April 2014 that the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice published a report, recommending the recognition of Traveller ethnicity, which raises hopes for a positive decision soon to come. This should mean „*that Travellers would automatically be included in all State anti racism and intercultural*

³⁶ Hayes, M. (2006), pp. 264, 265.

³⁷ Tevelionis, Andrius (2014). Traveller Protest Over ‘Total Failure’ Of Housing Strategy. *BTDG Newsletter. Spring Edition 2014*. In: Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group. Retrieved 2014, July from <http://www.btdg.org/index.php/news>.

³⁸ Lynch, Suzanne (2013, April 20). Travellers ‘excluded’ from labour force. Council of Europe finds widespread discrimination. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved 2013, April from <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/travellers-excluded-from-labour-force-1.1366345>.

³⁹ Lynch, S. (2013, April 20).

*initiatives without delay. The discrimination Travellers experience would be recognised as racism.*⁴⁰ After nearly three decades of Traveller organisations like Pavee Point working with the government, this is a groundbreaking step.

4.3. Areas of discrimination

In 1998, Fine Gael Country Councillor John Flannery suggested that all Travellers should be “*tagged with microchips like cattle*”⁴¹ in order to be able to monitor their movement. In September and December 2012, Judge Seamus Hughes compared Travellers to “*Neanderthal men abiding by the laws of the jungle*”⁴² and compared the action of a woman guilty of assault to those of a ‘tinker’. In January 2013 Judge Geoffrey Browne used the abusive term ‘knacker’ when on duty.⁴³

During a radio interview, Donegal County Cllr Sean McEniff (Fianna Fáil) opposed the Donegal County Council’s decision to purchase a five-bedroom house for allocation of a Traveller family who had been living in a three-bedroom house with ten children before. Cllr McEniff stated that in his opinion Travellers were “*all bad eggs*” who “*wreck houses*” and “*should be in an isolated community by themselves*”.⁴⁴ Following this, the *Donegal Democrat* published an article, interviewing neighbours of the said family, who said they never had any problems with them. Despite this, in the night of Monday February 11th 2013, a fire broke out at the aforementioned house and it was burned to the ground. Gardaí immediately suspected arson. That was the third time an arson incident involving housing intended for travellers had taken place in the recent years.

Other discriminatory situations that some Travellers have to deal with is that they

“are sometimes refused entry or access to public places or services such as shops, pubs, restaurants, laundries and leisure facilities. [...] Traveller children in schools have also experienced segregation through ‘special classes’, although the current policy of the Department of Education is based on the promotion of integration. Nevertheless, some

⁴⁰ (2014, April 14). Our Ethnicity – Our Pride, Your Prejudice: Time for the State to end this cycle of ethnicity denial. *Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre*. Retrieved 2014, April from <http://www.paveepoint.ie/press-statement-our-ethnicity-our-pride-your-prejudice/>.

⁴¹ Murray, Niall and Varley, Declan (1998, May 13). Councillor wants all Travellers tagged like cattle to monitor them. *The Examiner*.

⁴² See: Costello, Julie (2013, May-June). Donegal Arson Seen as Latest Sign of Anti-Traveller Racism. *Voice of the Traveller*, 89, p. 9.

⁴³ See: Costello, J. (2013, May-June), p. 9.

⁴⁴ Costello, J. (2013, May-June), p. 9.

schools still refuse to accept Travellers using the pretext of being full or unsuitable. [...] Travellers with a disability have usually been cared for in institutions, where assimilation was the norm and where little or no consideration was given to cultural identity.”⁴⁵

Catherine Joyce compares the situation of Travellers' exclusion to the situation of the Irish that went to work in England in the 50s and 60s:

“[T]hey faced a myriad, a bombardment of racism against Irish people: They had pubs that wouldn't serve them, they had hotels that wouldn't let them sleep in them, they had a situation where they couldn't get employment. They had doors with posts inside them saying 'no dogs, no Irish' and jobs was the same, they couldn't apply for them and we as Irish people get that every day here in Ireland. Now, we as organisations are trying to challenge that, and we are trying to challenge mainstream society's perceptions, but equally we are trying to change the community inside as well. And we are trying to say to them look, along with the right to go into a pub, there is responsibilities attached to that, and we try to examine what these responsibilities might be. But it's a very, very dodgy bridge that we are standing on, because you can't expect Travellers to conform to everything that society has put on them and at the same time constantly feel the rejection from that society that they live in.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ O'Connell, John (2002). Travellers in Ireland: An examination of discrimination and racism. In: McVeigh, R. & Lentin, R. (Eds.), *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*. Belfast: BTP Publications, pp. 57, 58.

⁴⁶ O'Callaghan, M. (2013, June 16).

5. Othering

“The scientific discipline of ethnology itself is highly problematic and should be abolished.”

(Anonymous, tongue-in-cheek)

In the following chapters I will outline how the process of Othering and the employment of stereotypes generally relate to the representation of cultural groups and what the relation to film and the depiction of cultural ‘Others’ involves.

In this chapter I will introduce the concept of ‘Othering’, what role it plays in Ireland’s history and present, and why it matters for the depiction of Irish Travellers.

5.1. Othering – an introduction

The concept of ‘Othering’ is being discussed in social science and philosophy as defining the ‘self’ through opposing it to an ‘other’. Particularly since the late-twentieth century the discourses on ‘difference’ and ‘Otherness’ have been gaining closer attention.⁴⁷ In *Representation* (2013) Stuart Hall summarises four different ways of how the issue of difference has been discussed in cultural studies in recent decades.⁴⁸ After describing linguistic, social, cultural and psychological approaches⁴⁹, Hall points out the ambivalence of relations in which the concept of difference is situated: *“It can be both positive and negative. It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject – and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the ‘Other’.”*⁵⁰

Hall remarks that in order to define one culture and distinguish it from another, *“symbolic boundaries are central to all culture.”*⁵¹ What on the one hand is necessary to, basically said, enable culture and cultural difference, also *“leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure,*

⁴⁷ See: Ó hAodha, Micheál (Ed.) (2009). An Introduction to Paul Harrison’s Art. In: Ó hAodha, M. (Ed.) & Harrison, P. (photographs), *Traveller Friends*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

⁴⁸ Hall, Stuart & Evans, Jessica & Nixon, Sean (Eds.) (2013). *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Second Edition. Los Angeles, CA [etc.]: SAGE; Milton Keynes: The Open University, p. 224.

⁴⁹ See also: Hayes, M. (2006).

⁵⁰ Hall, Stuart & Evans, Jessica & Nixon, Sean (Eds.) (2013), p. 228.

⁵¹ Hall, Stuart & Evans, Jessica & Nixon, Sean (Eds.) (2013), p. 226.

*abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes 'difference' powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order.”*⁵²

In this context, it is also important to keep in mind that Europe's history of colonisation, starting from the 16th century towards Africa (and not least with Ireland as a British colony) should be taken into account when considering concepts of Otherness. Ó hAodha points out how Edward Said describes in detail how significant the construction of a “*fictive homogeneity that is the 'us' as opposed to an 'other'*”⁵³ was for justifying colonialism. Said's analysis includes “*an examination of the role which ideology [...] played in the internalisation of values that accompanied colonialism and for the legitimisation of ideas about the 'Other' so that these ideas appeared 'natural'.*”⁵⁴ See the chapter on stereotype for a more detailed introduction to the relation of colonialism and the functions of Othering and stereotyping of the colonised.

5.2. The Othering of Irish Travellers in Ireland's past and present

The history of Othering within European colonialism also involved a history of Traveller and 'Gypsy' Othering. Mícheál Ó hAodha points to a

*“constant re-articulation of reductionist stereotypes as applied to a wide range of nomadic peoples and the creation of a mythic Traveller/Gypsy prototype that is based on a series of endlessly repeated generalisations which gradually assume the status of an objective 'truth.' This discourse of representation has culminated in powerful institutional attitudes, many of which have influenced official and policy responses to these minorities. [...] The 'Othering' tradition in an Irish context is more complex than most. It relates to a definition of Irishness that accompanied independence, a construction that was monologic.”*⁵⁵

Articulating an answer to the question of self-definition, the idea of Irishness, as often promoted in the young post-colonial Republic of Ireland, in many ways repeated narrow frames of what it meant to be Irish, ironically sometimes close to the images applied by the former colonisers (see Éamon de Valera's ideals of the rural, catholic, Irish-speaking, Irish). In order to strengthen a new national identity, supporting nationalism/republicanism,

⁵² Hall, Stuart & Evans, Jessica & Nixon, Sean (Eds.) (2013), p. 226.

⁵³ See also: Hayes, M. (2006), p. 80.

⁵⁴ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 76.

⁵⁵ Ó hAodha, M. (2009), p. 1.

the strive for homogeneity excluded many minorities from the idea of what it meant to be Irish, as Dympna McLoughlin states:

*“Joining them [the Travellers] in their ‘problem’ status were various religious groups of Protestant and Jew, as well as separated individuals, deserted wives, single parents (mostly women), homosexuals and even writers and artists. Ireland from the 1920s to the 1980s had no room for diversity, pluralism and heterogeneity.”*⁵⁶

*“One form of ‘Othering’ replaced another and the ‘hidden histories’ of other cultures and minorities were hidden away, shunted to the margins”*⁵⁷, Ó hAodha states, concluding that

*“[t]hankfully, the discourse is finally changing. We currently live in the era of ‘difference’, the era of the migrant or ‘stranger’ [...]. Travellers are the archetypal migrants. Long considered as ‘outsiders’ or ‘strangers’ in their own country, the Travellers are a group who have lived on Irish society’s margins for hundreds of years. Their marginality, liminality – call it what you will – has both attracted and repelled the non-Traveller artist, be he/she a writer or a visual artist.”*⁵⁸

Indeed, none less than William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge and Lady Isabelle Augusta Gregory, among many others, had Travellers appear in their writing⁵⁹. See for example Synge’s play *The Tinker’s Wedding*⁶⁰ for a typical stereotypical depiction of how Travellers were perceived in the early twentieth century. According to Ó hAodha, all of the artists of those days (starting from the nineteenth century onwards) used Traveller characters and Traveller tropes, the majority of which would have been fit a generic image. This image would often be a very similar to the colonial ‘stage Irishman’.⁶¹ See the chapter on stereotypes for more detail on this image of the ‘stage Irishman’. For a closer reading on the history of the depiction of Irish Travellers in literature see José Lanter’s *The ‘Tinkers’ in Irish Literature* (2008).

⁵⁶ McLoughlin, Dympna (1994). Ethnicity and Irish Travellers: Reflections on Ní Shúinéar. In: Ó Síocháin, S. et al. (Eds.), *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Ó hAodha, M. (2009), p. 1.

⁵⁸ Ó hAodha, M. (2009), pp. 1, 2.

⁵⁹ See: Lanter, J. (2008).

⁶⁰ Synge, John M. (1904). *The tinker’s wedding, Riders to the sea and The shadow of the glen*. Dublin/London: Maunsell.

⁶¹ See: Ó hAodha, M. (2009), p. 2.

Michael Hayes' *Irish Travellers: Representations and Realities* (2006) offers a carefully researched overview of the history of Traveller Studies and includes a detailed introduction to the role that the construction of difference, or Otherness, played in the relationship between the Irish majority population and the Irish Travellers.

*“As a marginalised and stigmatised group within Irish society Travellers became a useful projective outlet for those stereotypes and types which the ‘newly nationalist’ Irish population wished to jettison and to categorise as ‘not us’.”*⁶²

In this context it might come to mind how Homi Bhabha suggests that the way in which others are represented by a society might tell much more about the representing than about the represented.⁶³

According to Ó hAodha, the background of othering Travellers has not changed notably in a long time. He finds that fictional representations of the Travellers – be it in literature, film and television shows – have remained remarkably static. He concludes that

*“the core intent and spirit of the ‘Othering’ process has remained virtually the same into the present day. It is a process which has constructed an identity for Travelling people, one that situates Travellers within the non-Traveller community’s own terms of reference. [...] [T]his institutionalised image of Travellers has ‘taken on a life of its own’ and become the conventional wisdom regarding Travellers. [...] This mental image – partly negative, occasionally romantic but often inaccurate – stems from a Traveller identity that has become so institutionalised in the Irish psyche as to be part of the Irish cultural heritage itself.”*⁶⁴

⁶² Hayes, M. (2006), pp. 92, 93.

⁶³ See: Bhabha, Homi (1990). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

⁶⁴ Hayes, M. (2006), pp. 112, 113.

6. Stereotypes

“Stereotypes, in order to be let go, first have to be acknowledged.”⁶⁵

(Michael D. Higgins)

I am going to start this chapter with a brief definition of the term *stereotype* and how it is generally understood. The way stereotype relates to film will be discussed in the chapter ‘Film and Stereotype’. In the present chapter I will outline some stereotypes about the Irish, including some historical context, and will later show how close they are to the ones regarding Irish Travellers. I will also describe some stereotypes about Irish Travellers. Many, but not all of them, will relate to the extract that Mícheál Ó hAodha outlined in *Irish Travellers. Representations and Realities* (2006). He drew on the Irish Folklore Commission’s 1952 *Tinker Questionnaire*, which, tellingly enough, only interviewed none-Travellers about their view on ‘tinkers’. Among others, I will also relate to José Lanter’s *The ‘Tinkers’ in Irish Literature* (2008) to add some key aspects she outlined. Taken together, this will be a summary of some of the most common and persistent stereotypes about Irish Travellers.

I am aware of the fact that repeating stereotypes, even if just for the purpose of analysing them, always comes with the danger of manifesting them once more. I consider it relevant for my thesis to do so, though, as later, in my film analysis, I will refer to them and see if they still persist or if and how the films relate to them.

Deconstructing stereotypes is a two-bladed knife. I will not attempt to do so. Not just because I am not qualified to even judge which stereotypes are actual ones and which ones might actually be (self-)images that are valuable to defining a cultural identity for some or many Travellers. It should be considered that denying cultural differences might be just as counterproductive as over-emphasising them.

All I intend doing is to point out reoccurring images of how Travellers are portrayed, what context the stereotypes might be related to and occasionally point out reactions to these depictions.

⁶⁵ Higgins, Michael D. (2012, October 30). The British Council Annual Lecture with Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland. Recorded live at the 50th Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen’s University. *Britishcouncil.org*. Retrieved 2012, October from <http://livestream.britishcouncil.org/>.

6.1. Stereotype: defining terminology

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a Stereotype is “*a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.*”⁶⁶

The term ‘stereotype’ is used differently in various academic discourses such as psychology, linguistics, the study of literature or art history. There are parallels, overlapping aspects and differences. Jörg Schweinitz describes those in great detail, emphasising that his summary is very theoretical and that the approaches can be different and also mixed: “*According to the understanding of the term in sociology, social psychology, and ethnology [...] the ‘stereotype’ primarily describes conceptions concerning social or ethnic groups and their members, usually ‘images of the Other’ or, less often, ‘images of the self’.*”⁶⁷

6.2. Functions of Stereotypes

Stereotypes fulfil a broad spectrum of functions, although often not consciously perceived so by the people who use them (neither perceived as stereotypes, nor as actually fulfilling a function, that is). The dangerous thing about this is that stereotypes “*may be the only source of information about a group that people who may not have direct contact with the group ever receive.*”⁶⁸ Following this, “*there can be little doubt that negative images reinforce negative responses and that there is some connection between racial stereotyping and discriminatory treatment.*”⁶⁹

Just a brief summary of the functions that stereotypes and prejudices can fulfil – from a sociological point of view. Elisabeth Reif⁷⁰ has summed them up as follows:

- Raising self-esteem through lowering others.
- Deviation of own frowned upon or forbidden wishes, fears or fantasies.
- Orientation in a complex postmodern world through creation of clarity.
- Distraction from social and societal problems through creation of scapegoats.

⁶⁶ Oxford Dictionaries. Retrieved 2014, April from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/stereotype?q=stereotype>.

⁶⁷ Schweinitz, Jörg (2011). *Film and stereotype: a challenge for cinema and theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Hayes, M. (2006).

⁶⁹ Mayall, David (2004). *Gypsy identities, 1500-2000 : from Egipcians and Moon-men to the ethnic Romany*. London: Routledge, p. 17.

⁷⁰ See: Reif, Elisabeth (1997). Vorurteile und Umgang mit dem Fremden. In: Reif, E. & Rainer, B. *Du schwarz?! Ich weiß! Modulsystem zur Prävention von Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Gewaltbereitschaft bei 11 - 14-jährigen*. Vienna: Gesellschaft für Bedrohte Völker – Österreich, p. 115.

6.3. Irish Stereotypes

I will point out some Irish stereotypes in order to relate them to the Irish Traveller stereotypes. It is a stunning fact how similar many stereotypes about Irish Travellers are to stereotypes about Irish in general, of which many stem from times of British colonisation of Ireland. For further reading on how colonisation made it necessary to see the colony's native inhabitants as second-class humans, see Sinéad ní Shuinéar, *Othering the Irish (Travellers)*.⁷¹ She describes how

*“you cannot invade, massacre, subjugate, exploit and oppress people who have just as much right to live their lives as you do. There has to be a reason for it, you have to be justified, and ‘wanting to steal their resources’ isn’t nearly good enough. Defining them as an active threat, by contrast, makes your actions self-defence, and defining them as benighted savages who are a threat to themselves makes your willingness to pull them up to your own lofty standards downright noble: The White Man’s Burden. [...] It is no coincidence that London’s first gorilla was christened Paddy.”*⁷²

Ni Shuinéar demonstrates *“how popular images of Irish Travellers are merely the most extreme manifestation of an ancient Anglo-Saxon tradition of othering the Irish in general.”*⁷³

*“The othering of the Irish, forged by the English, should have been confronted and refuted by its victims. Instead we took the lazy way out – transferred the entire package onto Irish Travellers. ‘Yes, the stereotypes are all true – but not about us! About them!!’ There is nothing accidental about ‘othering’. It is a sociopolitical manoeuvre forged in historic circumstances. It defines ‘us’ in terms of who we are not, and creates a sense of fundamental unity overriding internal difference. But we have a choice as to who and what we define ourselves against, and whether we interpret difference as threat, challenge, simple alternative or enrichment. And it’s high time we stopped colluding in the perpetuation of these eight-hundred-year-old myths.”*⁷⁴

Some early stereotypes of Irishness, as applied by English colonisers: *“From the earliest times, nomadism, beggary, backwardness, superstition (later popery), anarchy,*

⁷¹ Ni Shuinéar, S. (2002).

⁷² Ni Shuinéar, S. (2002), pp. 178, 180.

⁷³ Ni Shuinéar, S. (2002), p. 177.

⁷⁴ Ni Shuinéar, S. (2002), p. 190.

sexual profligacy and violence have been portrayed as general characteristics of the Irish by those who 'othered' them.”⁷⁵

Giraldus Cambresis, whose treatises *Topographica Hibernica* and *Expugnatio Hibernica*, written in the late 1180s, acted as “*a religious justification for the invasion of Ireland, created a prototype of the negative Irish 'other' that was to last for centuries.*”⁷⁶
Cambrensis

“considered the nomadic pastoral (herding) economy of the Irish to be inferior to that of their English counterparts and castigated their social customs, including their sense of dress and their preference for beards and long hair. The marriage customs and religious practices of the Irish came in for particular condemnation, indicating that he found it necessary to undermine the widespread European view of Ireland as a centre for civilisation and learning.”⁷⁷

Other Irish stereotypes of that time include slyness, treachery and a repugnancy for rules, immorality, being generally barbarous, dirty, morally suspect and uncontrollable. Ní Shuinéar ads the images of „*the idle, drunken Irish man, the Irish woman as a virago, the simple peasant with the gift of the gab, the fighting Mick for whom unprovoked, indiscriminate brawling is a gleeful contact sport.*”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 82.

⁷⁶ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 83.

⁷⁷ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 84.

⁷⁸ Ní Shuinéar, S. (2002), p. 178.

Cartoons from the satirical *Punch* magazine illustrate these images quite vivid.

Figure 1 -- from *Punch*, Oct. 29, 1881



Figure 1, cartoon from *Punch* magazine. (1867, Dec.). The Fenian Guy Fawkes. *Punch Magazine*. London: Mark Lemon.
Figure 2, cartoon from *Punch* magazine. Britannica defending her sister Hibernica from the ape-like fenian. (1881, Oct. 29). Two Forces. *Punch Magazine*. London: Sir Francis Burnand.

A figure known as the *Stage Irishman* in theatrical circles was standard in portraying Irish people by British as well as Anglo-Irish playwrights for about two centuries before Ireland's independence. The stock character of the Stage Irishman usually depicted the Irish as ingratiating rogues who were lazy, cunning, drunk, criminal, outcasts, dishonest, happy-go lucky vagrants and/or always up for a fight.⁷⁹

As Liz Curtis points out, the anti-Irish Othering discourse was most successful, as “*The very word Irish is enough to provoke roars of laughter from television studio audiences, and is used in everyday conversation to describe behaviour that is confusing or illogical.*”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ See: Hayes, M. (2006), p. 88.

⁸⁰ Curtis, Liz (1984). *Nothing but the Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism*. London: Information on Ireland, p. 45.

In the present Irish antiracist discourse, there exists an awareness of the parallels between these representations of the Irish in the nineteenth century, and the contemporary Othering of Irish Travellers.⁸¹

6.4. Traveller stereotypes

A fascination with the ‘other’ culture of Travellers has inspired writers, musicians and other artists for centuries but had a clear peak in Irish English-language writing in the early 20th century.

In *Irish Travellers. Representations and Realities* (2006) Micheál Ó hAodha outlines a “discourse of difference”⁸² in Irish tradition that “defines Travellers in terms of a reductive essentialism [which] [...] represents Travellers as culturally ‘Other’, an ‘Other’ who are defined in terms of secrecy, dishonesty, licentiousness, violence and ‘a society within a society’.”⁸³

I will now describe some of the most frequent (and most persistent) stereotypes about Travellers.

LINK TO THE IDYLLIC PAST

In the beginning of the twentieth century, at the times of Yeats and Gregory, Travellers were depicted as “*survivals of an ancient past, that was largely unaffected by either colonialism or industrialism. [...] The wandering life of a Traveller was presented as a romantic symbol of escape from the perceived repression and hypocrisy of post-Famine Irish society.*”⁸⁴

“*Between the creation of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, with its nationalist aim of depicting Ireland as the home of an ancient and heroic idealism, and the formation of the Free State in 1922, when that idealism was put severely to the test, the ‘tinker’ trope underwent a remarkable transformation, from being the abstraction on which Anglo-Irish nationalists projected all their desires and anxieties about the independent nation that was yet to be created, to becoming the embodiment of everything that was objectionable about the Irish past and worrisome about its future.*”⁸⁵

⁸¹ See: Connolly, Maeve (2006) A Bit of a Traveller in Everybody. In: Negra, Diane (Ed.), “*The Irish in Us*” – *Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture*. Durham & London, Duke University Press, p. 284.

⁸² Hayes, M. (2006), p. 230.

⁸³ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 230.

⁸⁴ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 94.

⁸⁵ Lanter, J. (2008), p. 4.

So the two sides to the coin of the ‘tinker’ image as perceived around the time of the Celtic Revival and later the formation of the new Irish Free State was on the one hand a nostalgic view of a purer, more traditional way of life, and on the other hand a throwback to a less civilized time and “*as intrinsic opponents of the virtues of capitalism, law and order, and the democratic rights and obligations inherent in the nation-state.*”⁸⁶

Maeve Connolly points out that in many films (for example *The Field* (1990), *This Is My Father* (1998) and *Country* (2000) “*Travellers tend to form a key element of the historical mis-en-scène, often providing a figurative or literal link to the past.*”⁸⁷

OTHERWORLDLINESS

Particularly in science fiction, fantasy and children’s literature, Travellers or, more generally speaking, figures with a nomadic lifestyle, are often mythical figures, travelling ‘between the worlds’, the real and a mythical otherworld, and are frequently able to provide shelter from authorities and the law.

As with the ‘Gypsy’ stereotype, Travellers are also often related to magic and fortune-telling.

“*Often depicted as an utopian alternative to the excesses of contemporary society, the transient lifestyle of Travellers in fantasy fiction features as a possible escape from a fallen world and a way back to a simpler and more peaceful past. Mythic plots, often borrowed from Celtic sources, not only relegate Traveller characters to an ‘older’ way of life, but also confine them within a preconceived scenario not of their own making.*”⁸⁸

However, there appears to be some truth to the myth, as apparently „*Travellers traditionally engaged in fortune-telling as they went from door to door in exchange for food, old clothes, etc. Some of the old Travellers still tell fortunes at fairs or on Traveller sites.*”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Lanthers, J. (2008), p. 117.

⁸⁷ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 285.

⁸⁸ Lanthers, J. (2008), p. 5.

⁸⁹ Clondalkin Travellers Development Group (1993). *Travellers: a way of life*. Dublin: Clondalkin Travellers Development Group, p. 59.

OUTLAWS

*“Of course there is a criminal element in the Traveller community. There is a criminal element in all communities. The criminal element in the Traveller community is small-fry compared to the criminal element in corporations and in banks. Certain members of the Travelling community have engaged in anti-social behaviour but it is nothing on the scale of the anti-social behaviour of politicians, lawyers, bankers and other high flyers.”*⁹⁰

As with Irish stereotypes, Travellers would be linked to fraud and trickery, and in mass media, Traveller crime is often *“portrayed as being more ruthless, cunning and vicious than the crimes committed by ‘country people.’”*⁹¹

At the time of the *Tinker Questionnaire*, the stereotype about stealing involved the idea of Travellers as child-stealers. Some parents used to threaten their children, telling them that if they did not behave, the ‘tinkers’ would come and take them away.⁹² Some Irish and Scottish sources, on the other hand, point out the fact that it was actually a common practice to give unwanted children to Travellers, who would adopt them and welcome them into their families, when otherwise these children might have died or would have been put into institutions.⁹³

Another area that has been a source of controversy between Travellers and settled people was the damage caused by Travellers’ horses on land being trespassed. Especially in the early twentieth century, when Ireland was very poor, particularly in less fertile parts of the country, Travellers and farmers both grazed their horses and donkeys even on the roadside, so there was a direct competition there. Sometimes Travellers would also graze their horses on farmer’s private land and that was not always welcome either. Also the practice of snaring rabbits was one that farmers and Travellers both shared, and which then became a source of direct competition.

The present media image still involves the Traveller as an outlaw:

“The figure of the Traveller as it appears in the mainstream media is that of a rogue, a con-man whose activities take place in a moral and legal grey area. These media

⁹⁰ Joyce, Tracie (2012, Winter). A Day with Vincent. *Voice of The Traveller*, (87), p. 17.

⁹¹ Huether, Andreas & Waldron, Dara & Ó hAodha, Mícheál (Eds.) (2009). *Screening “Difference”. Visual Culture and the Nomadic “Other”*. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, p. 15.

⁹² See: Hayes, M. (2006), p. 147.

⁹³ See: Hayes, M. (2006), p. 149.

*texts tell us that Travellers seem like clever, likeable ‘chancers,’ but when they are crossed, they reveal themselves to be fundamentally dangerous and borderline psychopathic.”*⁹⁴

Frequently Traveller figures in fiction film or literature appear as somehow outside the state law, untouchable not least because of their ability to ‘disappear’ without a trace, as their nomadic lifestyle allows them to leave the scene whenever they want. They are “*all but invisible to the authorities, are easily victimized, but their marginal status also allows them to kill without consequences.*”⁹⁵

José Laners compares this image with the one of Loki in the Norse myths, a figure that “*is an annoyance, an irritant, sometimes dangerous and at other times a source of entertainment, but not usually or intentionally the creator of the evil he helps to expose and, at times, in unorthodox fashion, eradicate. This is not to say that the tinker figure is perceived as innocent: being a tinker is itself an infringement of what passes for acceptable behaviour in respectable society, but it also situates the character in a parallel universe largely beyond the reach of the official justice system.*”⁹⁶

FEUDING AND VIOLENCE

The view of Travellers as particularly violent and involved in feuding is an old one too and nowadays one of the most widespread and persistent ones. Feuding at present actually is an issue for some Travellers. Mass media relatively frequently report of feuds between Travellers.

The reasons for feuds can be complex, as Michael McDonagh of the Navan Travellers’ Workshop points out: “*We have large complex extended family systems, located across the island. [...] These families become so large, that a lot of the feuding actually takes place within families. There are the issues of power, control and standing for your family.*”⁹⁷ Money sometimes plays a role as well⁹⁸, but a lot of the time it’s about the Family’s honour, an article in *The Voice of the Traveller* explained.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Huether, A. & Waldron, D. & Ó hAodha, M. (Eds.) (2009), p. 14.

⁹⁵ Laners, J. (2008), p. 186.

⁹⁶ Laners, J. (2008), p. 5.

⁹⁷ (2008, October). Red Hot Summer. *Voice of the Traveller*, (64), p. 23.

⁹⁸ See: (2008, November). Some Mother’s Son... *Voice of the Traveller*, (65), p. 17.

⁹⁹ See: (2008, October). Red Hot Summer. *Voice of the Traveller*, (64), p. 23.

For some Travellers one way of solving disputes with other Travellers are bare-knuckle fights, sometimes referred to as 'fair fights'. *"The 'fair fight' was and continues to be a bare fisted boxing fight, with no rounds. The fight is considered over when one man says 'he's beat.'"*¹⁰⁰

There are also some excellent professional boxers coming from the Travelling community: *"The Traveller community makes up less than one percent of the country's population but it supplied twenty percent of the Irish Olympic boxing team"*¹⁰¹ at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, where John Joe Joyce and John Joe Nevin both boxed for Ireland. That year neither of them won a medal, but in the 2012 Summer Olympics, Nevin brought home a silver medal.

Going back through history, even in the IFC's questionnaire there were reports of Traveller fights, where sometimes Traveller groups were referred to as 'factions'. This again reminds of the Irish faction fighters of the 19th century:

"The faction fighting peculiar to 19th century Ireland was a strange social phenomenon which had its origin in County Tipperary, probably in 1805. It spread like wildfire throughout Munster and Leinster, and soon factions were fighting each other in almost every county, the north-east excepted.

*Factions were armies of country people, hundreds even thousands, armed usually with sticks and stones although guns and swords were brought into the action occasionally. Their fights were between families, clans, namesakes, baronies or parishes, the remote cause of the fighting being, perhaps, some insult, real or imaginary. Mainly, they fought for the sheer love of fighting, and their battle fields were fair greens, market places, race courses and frequently the streets of towns and villages. Many people were killed and scores wounded in the more notorious fights."*¹⁰²

If there's one classic stereotype about the Irish, it's the one of the 'fighting Irish'. Give an Irishman some drink and you get the most fabulous canon fodder. Many Irish men went to

¹⁰⁰ (2008, October). Red Hot Summer. *Voice of the Traveller*, (64), p. 23.

¹⁰¹ (2008, October). Boxing Clever. *Voice of the Traveller*, (64), p. 17.

¹⁰² O'Donnell, Patrick (1975). *The Irish Faction Fighters of the 19th Century*. Dublin: Anvol Books, back cover.

war, and by far not always their ‘own’ wars. Among them were plenty of Irish Travellers.¹⁰³

So the image of the quarrelsome Irish is an old one, and there is evidence that tradition of the fistfight does exist in Ireland’s history, including Travellers’ history.

Michael Collins, who was involved in the making of *King of the Travellers* (2012) said:

“that is part to who we are, you know – weddings are a big part of Travellers’ lives, christenings are a big part of Travellers’ lives, and in a very small percentage of Travellers feuding is a part of their life, you know? And years ago, when people went out to have a fight and it settled an argument it worked very well, but it doesn’t work as well today. Plus the media blow it all up out of proportion. [...] But when you have people glorifying it on Youtube and, you know, and I mean even you could say in King of the Travellers and also the Tabloids, it’s just – you get these young people saying – ah sure, maybe I’ll make it on the newspapers if I go out and have a fight with someone. [...] There is a fear. There is a fear of Travellers, you know, but the only problem I have with it is – I am not to be feared of.”¹⁰⁴

Catherine Joyce adds that

“traditionally Travellers would have had a mechanism for sorting out disputes. One of the mechanisms was actually moving off, and they had the opportunity to move off and they could travel to another county or even to another country. Unfortunately there is a restriction on travelling now and we have a situation now where the first time in the history of the state, of Travellers living in this country, we have a situation where Travellers are criminalised for travelling. So the opportunity to move away and avoid the trouble isn’t actually there anymore.”¹⁰⁵

In a radio interview with Sean O’Rourke, Martin Collins from Pavee Point said about how the Traveller organisation tries to address bare knuckle boxing:

“We are trying to promote mediation and conflict resolution for where there are disputes that people come to the table and find a very civilized way of dealing with them. Without resorting to some barbaric activity where you have two grown adults, if you like,

¹⁰³ Hayes, M. (2006), p. 224.

¹⁰⁴ O’Callaghan, M. (2013).

¹⁰⁵ O’Callaghan, M. (2013).

boxing the head off each other [...]. People need to cooperate with the Gardaí and give whatever information they have to the Gardaí to make sure these events don't take place."¹⁰⁶

BARBARITY

Travellers being dirty in moral and physical ways is an old stereotype, as they were often seen as the embodiment of chaos, barbarity, and as the opposite to modernity.

*"For the modern Irish character in mid-twentieth-century literature, the 'tinker' represents both the lure and the danger of a potential regression into primitivism. The literature of this period displays a particular fascination with the tinker's perceived association with moral and physical dirt, a manifestation of the modern preoccupation with issues of contamination and hygiene that reflects a repressed awareness of modernity as the producer of the very waste its sanitation mechanism so obsessively keep at bay."*¹⁰⁷

Ironically, it is actually the government's politics of criminalising travelling without providing enough appropriately equipped halting sites, (as described in the chapter *A short history of Irish Traveller politics*) that forces some Traveller families to live on illegal sites without proper sanitation or waste removal.

TRAVELLER WOMEN

The image that existed of Irish women has been criticised as for centuries being reduced to either maiden, mother or whore.¹⁰⁸ It is only in the last few decades that this mould started to be broken up. The same stereotypes still appear frequently when it comes to depicting Traveller women.

In fiction film, Travellers in general and Traveller women in particular, frequently represent *"a recurrent romantic investment in the spiritual, familial and communal values that these white 'others' are thought to possess—values no longer securely located in post-*

¹⁰⁶ O' Rourke, Sean (Host) (2013, October 09). *Today with Sean O'Rourke*. [Radio Broadcast]. Retrieved 2013, October from <http://www.rte.ie/radio/utills/radioplayer/rteradioweb.html#!rii=9%3A20451914%3A15036%3A09%2D10%2D2013%3A>.

¹⁰⁷ Lanters, J. (2008), pp. 4, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Keller, Kathrin (2009). "Outsiders" in Irish Film: Marginalised Women in *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*. In: Huether, A. & Waldron, D. & Ó hAodha, M. (Eds.), *Screening "Difference". Visual Culture and the Nomadic "Other"*. Essen: Verl. Die Blaue Eule, p. 84.

*Celtic Tiger Ireland*¹⁰⁹ According to Jane Helleiner, “[T]here are three ‘types’ of Traveller women in popular representation: romanticized and sexualized, masculinized and aggressive, and victimized by husbands and fathers.”¹¹⁰

Maeve Connolly points out that

“[f]rom Synge’s Revival perspective, Travellers represent freedom and the courage to challenge an increasingly narrow version of Irish identity.

Unfortunately, this vision allows Travellers, especially Traveller women, to exist solely as symbols who often become sexual or ethnic ‘others’ against which the settled community can define itself. Even when the representation of Travellers is relatively positive, it is frequently because they offer a romantic means to achieve the ‘therapeutic’ [...] recovery of the past”¹¹¹

There used to be the image of a supposed casual attitude of Travellers regarding marriage and courtship, be it rituals or general behaviour. “The greatest irony regarding stereotypes of alleged Traveller immorality in the sexual sphere was the fact that rules concerning gender relations and the interaction of the sexes were extremely strict.”¹¹² “In fact there are simply no words to convey how repugnant the notion of sex outside of marriage is to Irish Travellers, and these fantasies go beyond distortion to calculated insult.”¹¹³

‘Thanks’ to the TV series *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, the stereotype about Traveller women’s licentiousness might have partly switched to the opposite now, as many Travellers taking part in the show present themselves as very strict about courtship and marriage customs in this series.

6.5. Irish Stereotypes, Traveller Stereotypes

To sum up which stereotypes Irish and Irish Travellers have in common: All of them. As suggested in the statement by ní Shuinéar earlier, it looks as if the Irish stereotype was just brushed off and put onto another ‘other’ straight away. No matter if it is the romanticised image of the idyllic, traditional ‘back to the roots’ lifestyle, or the one of the violent, primitive, unpredictable outlaw and rogue. Eight hundred years after Cambrensis, it looks

¹⁰⁹Hynes, Colleen Anne (2007). “*Strangers in the House*”: *Twentieth Century Revisions of Irish Literary and Cultural Identity*. Austin: University of Texas, p. 16.

¹¹⁰Hynes, C. A. (2007), p. 150.

¹¹¹Hynes, C. A. (2007), p. 183.

¹¹²Hayes, M. (2006), p. 217.

¹¹³Ní Shuinéar, S. (2002), p. 185.

like we still haven't got over taking offence in other's cultural habits, social customs, religious practices and even sense of fashion. We still put others down in order to raise our own self-image. This must, by consequence, mean that our own self-image was pretty low in the first place. We still have not learned to just be and let be.

7. Film & Stereotype

“Completely subjective and spontaneous experience free from each and every conventional and stereotypical element is just a borderline concept, an abstract idea which bears no relation to reality.”¹¹⁴

(Arnold Hauser)

7.1. A short history of stereotype and film

In this chapter I give an overview of the history of stereotype in film and of how the issue is perceived in present filmmaking.

In the early years of cinema, there were big expectations about the medium of film. Hopes were that through working on a visual level (as opposed to literature or even language, which by some were criticised for being too abstract and conventional to be able to show reality¹¹⁵), film might have the potential to overcome these deficiencies through creating a ‘new visual culture’.¹¹⁶

It soon turned out that the opposite was the case and that film was an even more conventional medium than literature. Industrialisation influenced cinema in its production and distribution. Because it was created as a mass medium, with a constantly growing number of the ‘products’ of films, made for a quickly growing number of ‘consumers’, the audience, the narrative and visual content was soon getting standardized.

“[C]onventionalization of cinema did not fail to affect the sphere of gestural and visual expression. Through the constant repetition of patterns reduced in complexity it standardized the imaginary of large masses of people, even on an international scope. Cinema tended to create globally widespread visual imaginations and forms of expression. [...] A major cause for these serial tendencies was soon found: film’s industrial mode of production, which was associated with the reigning capitalistic conditions of commodification and distribution.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Hauser, Arnold (1982). *The Sociology of Art*. London: Routledge, p. 30.

¹¹⁵ Theory of language scepticism (*Sprachskepsis*), with Ludwig Wittgenstein and Fritz Mauthner as prominent founders.

¹¹⁶ See: Schweinitz, Jörg (2011). *Film and stereotype: a challenge for cinema and theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. x.

¹¹⁷ Schweinitz, J. (2011), pp. x, xi.

Around 1930, film theorists for the first time discussed the issue of stereotype and film, and the view was generally a very negative one, as ‘standard’, as it was mainly referred to, was considered uncreative, and could not be artistic or original.¹¹⁸

This view has changed over the years. Not only film, but many areas of everyday life have become standardised (or: even more standardised than they were before).

*“[A]udiovisual-stereotypization and conventionalized patterns of (visually or narratively) reduced complexity have assumed such quality, quantity, momentum, and ubiquity, with corresponding schemata having taken over our imaginary worlds to such an extent, that the idea of creating films untouched by such factors seems truly anachronistic. [...] [I]n our contemporary world of media there is no form, no image, no narrative idea, and no structure that, once it has ‘caught on’, remains without an extended series of successors.”*¹¹⁹

Cinema today is built on having standardised patterns of narration and audiovisual expression. Everybody knows which kind of music announces approaching danger in a thriller. Even if filmmakers want to oppose these patterns, they will have to refer to them. They have become a tool that is used in a variety of ways, in what Jörg Schweinitz calls ‘*reflexive use of stereotypes*’¹²⁰, for example in playing with the spectator’s expectations of what is going to happen next in the storyline and overthrowing those expectations, as for example often used in comedy.

*“Originally comic or carnevalesque, this approach was later adopted by the avant-garde and is now widely established in mainstream cinema and fictional forms of television such as soaps. This particularly characterizes productions identified as postmodern. This treatment of stereotypes is part and parcel of the post-1980s TV style that John Caldwell terms ‘televisuality.’”*¹²¹

7.2. Stereotype in fiction film

Referring to the classification of the term ‘stereotype’ as widely accepted, oversimplified images of persons or things, it is obvious that these patterns from everyday life would very successfully be used in an art form that strongly involves creating fictional characters,

¹¹⁸ See: Schweinitz, J. (2011), p. xii.

¹¹⁹ Schweinitz, J. (2011), p. xiv.

¹²⁰ Schweinitz, J. (2011), p. xv.

¹²¹ Schweinitz, J. (2011), p. xiv, xv.

which are supposed to have a broad variety of audience with different cultural background be able to relate to them.

Schweinitz differentiates between different kinds of terminology for narrative figures. With reference to Umberto Eco¹²², he distinguishes ‘individual characters’ from ‘types’.^{123 124} The former develop an ‘intellectual physiognomy’ during the course of the film, while ‘types’ don’t – they feature a less diverse character that does not change from beginning to end. E. M. Foster calls these ‘round characters’ and ‘flat characters’¹²⁵. Although theoretical studies mostly understand ‘type’ as ‘stereotype’, Schweinitz suggests that a flat ‘type’ can only become a ‘stereotype’ if the type’s pattern is used repeatedly (as opposed to a flat character that appears just once), as repetitiveness is considered one of the stereotype’s characteristics.

Referring to film theory and its relation to stereotype, it is also important to mention that the term ‘stereotype’ appears in a variety of aspects of filmmaking. It can be related to genre, narration and plot as well as image and sound.¹²⁶ All these different levels can feature repetitive patterns and bare the potential to influence how certain conceptions about people are shaped.

So without a doubt an interrelation between recipient and producer of fiction films exists: The stereotypes shown in films are based on attitudes and ideas of a broad population, on the other hand stereotypes in film influence the consciousness of the masses.

¹²² Eco, Umberto (1986). *Apokalyptiker und Integrierte. Zur kritischen Kritik der Massenkultur*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, p. 169.

¹²³ Eco later changed the terminology from ‘type’ to ‘topos’.

¹²⁴ See: Schweinitz, J. (2011), p. 45.

¹²⁵ Foster, Edward M. (1927). *Aspects of the Novel*. San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace, p. 67.

¹²⁶ See: Schweinitz, J. (2011), pp. 42, 43.

8. Irish cinema?

*“At a time when Ireland faces its most severe economic challenge since independence, the contribution that art and culture can make has never been more crucial. Such works, whether in literature or film, may not provide answers, but they may just help to identify or provide a means of engaging with the most significant challenges.”*¹²⁷

(Werner Huber)

This chapter will introduce some aspects of if and what Irish cinema is. There will be an introduction to the question of what might define Irish cinema, its past and its present.

I would like to start this chapter with some thoughts concerning the term of ‘Irish National Cinema’, its definition and contradictions. Although the whole concept of a National Cinema may be questionable (Gillespie (2008)¹²⁸, Barton (2004)¹²⁹, Bhabha (1990)¹³⁰), there are some facts which ought to be considered when approaching Irish film, even if the conclusion is going to be, in the words of Lenny Abrahamson, one of Ireland’s most celebrated filmmakers, that *“If Irish cinema is going to be really great it has to stop worrying too much about being ‘Irish cinema’.”*¹³¹

Considering Ireland’s struggle for independence from Great Britain over hundreds of years, national and cultural identity were always particularly important issues. Cultural identity was attacked, destroyed, defended but also developed and invented in this process. One consequence for the Irish film industry was that one of the first legislative acts passed by the parliament of the newly established Irish Free State in 1923 was to introduce the so called *Censorship of Films Act*. *“We cannot be the sons of the Gael and citizens of Hollywood at the same time”*, wrote Gabriel Fallon in 1938¹³² This approach matched Éamon de Valera’s ideals of an Irish-speaking, traditional, rural, catholic Ireland which was not only a self-definition but also a self-definition as being the complete opposite to what the former occupying forces represented – urban, protestant modernity. Again, we are confronted with the phenomenon of Othering.

¹²⁷ Huber, W. (2011), p. 9.

¹²⁸ Gillespie, Michael P. (2008). *The Myth of an Irish Cinema: approaching Irish-themed films*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.

¹²⁹ Barton, Ruth (2005). *Irish National Cinema*. London: Routledge.

¹³⁰ Bhabha, H. (1990).

¹³¹ Huber, W. (2011).

¹³² Cited in Huber, W. (2011), p. 9.

Not least because of the massive emigration of Irish citizens to America ever since the Great Famine, there are strong cultural and emotional bonds between Ireland and the USA (and Great Britain too, for that matter, as it has been many an economic migrant's destination for a long time too). So the depiction of 'old Ireland', particularly in the first few decades since the invention of film, more often than not was a sentimental, and romanticized one, frequently incorporating and supporting de Valera's vision, mentioned above. Some of the most famous examples would include Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (GB, 1934) or John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (USA, 1952). Both examples express that nostalgic view on the visual as well as on the narrative level. Just as an example, the depiction of women in those films is either one of a humble, hard-working mother and wife, wrapped in her shawl, braving the elements (*Man of Aran*) or alternatively of the innocent but wild, red-haired colleen (*The Quiet Man*).

*"Cinema has seized on this tradition, alternatively affirming it and negating it, replicating these visuals and subverting them with counter-images – of the corrupt city, the menacing countryside. Alongside this repository of images is a range of themes that recur within these films – of rebellion and sacrifice, of departure and return, of spiritual voyages, and these in turn are animated by a panoply of characters, many of them borrowed from the repertoire of early stage and vaudeville representations – the fighting Irishman, the buffoon, the long suffering mother, the feisty colleen, the rebel son. Taken together, these images, themes and characters form the foundation of an Irish cinema and have become, for each generation of filmmakers, a way of defining their own work, whether they chose to reject them, incorporate them or rework them."*¹³³

During the first hundred years of cinema, *"less than one hundred feature films have been made by Irish filmmakers in Ireland [...], [while] more than two thousand fiction films have been produced about the Irish outside the country."*¹³⁴ So not least because of the huge difference in these numbers, 'Hibernian green on the silver screen' *"has become a critical commonplace, a topos even, to explain the history of Irish cinema as a struggle for an independent (indigenous) cinema, i.e. a small nation's/third cinema, within the much larger international arena."*¹³⁵

¹³³ Barton, R. (2005), p. 7.

¹³⁴ Rockett, Kevin (2006). *National cinemas and world cinema*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Huber, W. (2011), p. 1.

It is self-evident that, considering all these circumstances, an Irish national cinema cannot be defined by a geographical space. It may rather be defined as “*a body of films made inside and outside of Ireland that addresses both the local and diasporic cultures. This is not to suggest that local and immigrant visions of Ireland are one: on the contrary.*”¹³⁶

The reason I am making a point here with regard to the definition of Irish cinema, is that the films I intend to discuss later in this paper were not all made in Ireland, not all made by Irish directors or with Irish actors, but bearing in mind what I outlined above, I still consider them to be, if not Irish cinema in particular, to at least share a related focus.

Moving from a past of nostalgic and romanticized representations of ‘old Ireland’ to the present, I would like to refer to Werner Huber and his approach to defining a contemporary Irish cinema, if ever such a thing exists in our globalized world. His conclusion followed an Interview with Lenny Abrahamson and Mark O’Halloran, the creators of the widely celebrated films *Adam and Paul* (IE, 2004) and *Garage* (IE, 2007):

“*Their work is generally regarded as representative of a new Irish cinema that critically engages with the profound social changes brought about by the economic boom, globalisation, and the concomitant socio-political transformations that led to the designation of ‘Celtic Tiger Ireland’. ‘Adam and Paul’ points to the Tiger’s underbelly (the themes and motifs of drug abuse, crime, impoverishment, xenophobia) in an exemplary manner. The transformation of Ireland from a country of emigration to a country of immigration has also become a conspicuous theme in contemporary Irish film [...]. It is open to speculation, but this preponderance towards social/socio-political identity issues is a new defining factor at least in one strand of Irish cinema that continues to eschew the easy option of the theme-parking and exoticisation of Ireland as Ireland Inc., Eiredisney , or “cappuccino” Dublin.*”¹³⁷

For a closer reading on how new Irish cinema engages with topics such as racism and globalisation, see Seán Crosson’s *Irish Intolerance: Exploring Its Roots in Irish Cinema*.¹³⁸ He explores “*how Irish filmmakers sought to identify the roots of contemporary racism*

¹³⁶ Barton, R. (2005), p. 5.

¹³⁷ Huber, W. (2011), p. 2.

¹³⁸ Crosson, Seán (2011). *Irish Intolerance: Exploring Its Roots in Irish Cinema*. In: Crosson, S. & Huber, W. (Eds.), *Contemporary Irish Film: New Perspectives on a National Cinema*. Vienna: Braumüller.

through an exploration of intolerance in Ireland's past.”¹³⁹

According to Debbie Ging, there has been a huge change in Irish self-image, expressed in Irish film:

*“As Ireland has transformed from an agrarian, post-colonial nation to a (post)modern, first-world state, its changing self-image has been reflected in a cinematic output that is increasingly diverse, generically, thematically and stylistically. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that such developments should result in a more pluralistic, multi-vocal film culture, and indeed there has been a marked increase in the visibility of gay, lesbian, immigrant, minority-ethnic and socially-excluded characters on the Irish screen in recent years.”*¹⁴⁰

I hope that the above summary gives an image of how Irish (cinema's) history influenced the present situation.

¹³⁹ Crosson, S. (2011), p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Ging, Debbie (2008). Goldfish Memories? On Seeing and Hearing Marginalised Identities in Contemporary Irish Cinema. In: Borbála F. and Moynagh S. (Eds.), *Facing the Other: Interdisciplinary Studies on Race, Gender and Social Justice in Ireland*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.182-203.

9. A history of films about Travellers

*“If you bother Eric Kyle ‘tis yourself will be the sorry man!”*¹⁴¹

(Eric Kyle)

In this chapter I will give a brief overview of some major films featuring Irish Travellers as actors and/or characters, so as to be able to relate the more present depictions to earlier ones. I will outline the most relevant examples since the beginning of film history until the year 2000, the year from which my more detailed analysis will start off. I will mainly refer to fiction films, a few non-fiction examples and TV series will be mentioned as well, as they are particularly relevant to the history of the depiction of Irish Travellers on screen.

9.1. Feature Films, featuring Irish Travellers

No Resting Place (GB, 1951) was documentary filmmaker Paul Rotha’s feature film debut. In the social drama, Travellers working on farms as seasonal workers accidentally kill a gamekeeper as they defend themselves against his attack. As they assume that their side of the story will not be believed by officials, the rest of the film follows their attempt to avoid arrest. *No Resting Place* was the first fiction film with Irish Travellers as main characters.

Joe Comerford directed *Traveller* (IE, GB, 1981), a film based on a script by Neil Jordan. Set in Ireland, it is the first example of members of the Irish Traveller community playing leading roles in a fiction film. Judy Donovan and Davy Spillane, a prominent musician and producer, play Angela Devine and Michael Connors who, after an arranged marriage, struggle with each other and to earn money by smuggling goods.

Maeve Connolly argues that “Comerford’s approach to the project was influenced by avant-garde documentary”¹⁴², while Ruth Barton criticises that *Traveller*, “whilst featuring members of the travelling community, imposed on them a narrative that did not originate from within their native culture.”¹⁴³ Connolly again, claims that the film “is, arguably, one of the few Irish film dramas to reject the reduction of Travellers to the status of symbol. Instead, [...] it refuses to essentialize Traveller culture and foregrounds a

¹⁴¹ Rotha, P. (Director), & Lesslie, C. (Producer) (1951). *No Resting Place*. [VHS]. IE: Collin Lesslie Productions Ltd.

¹⁴² Connolly, M. (2006), p. 285.

¹⁴³ Barton, R. (2004), p. 185.

mobile identity that is structured by many of the same historical and social forces that shape settled society.”¹⁴⁴

The Field (IE, GB, 1990), directed by Jim Sheridan, is based on a 1965 play of the same name, written by John B. Keane. It features a rather stereotypical depiction of Travellers, as Katie, the red-haired ‘tinker’s daughter’, personifies freedom and untameable wildness, challenging the narrow-minded, land-obsessed settled community. She later flees from the other Travellers, who are “*represented as drunken, quarrelsome and abusive to their children.*”¹⁴⁵ She tries to escape with a young farmer’s son who himself wants to leave the restrictions of his community. Like the Travelling people, the majority population is not shown in a very favourable light either, being depicted as greedy, selfish and ruthless. This film deals with themes typical for what Ruth Barton calls ‘heritage cinema’, such as emigration, repressive social norms and traumatic memory.¹⁴⁶ Heritage cinema, emerging around the 1990s, is defined by a celebration of history as a spectacle, evoking memories of the past, re-creating and occasionally reworking national histories.¹⁴⁷

Also by Jim Sheridan, *Into the West* (IE, 1992) is probably the most famous Irish film about Irish Travellers. The only film about Travellers, that random people I personally talked to came up with more often than with *Into the West*, was *Snatch* (USA, 2000), which I will discuss in more detail later on. “*Critics have situated ‘Into the West’ within the context of a postmodern turn towards nostalgia in Irish cinema, making a shift away from the more formally innovative works of the late 1970s and early 1980s.*”¹⁴⁸ It can also be counted towards heritage cinema, as it evokes and idealises images of the past. In *Into the West*, a magical white horse takes two young Traveller boys from their urban home in Dublin for an adventurous journey towards the rural west of Ireland. It has been suggested that this journey, which forces the boys’ widowed father to leave his apathetic, alcoholic life and basically return to horseback, to find his sons, stands symbolically for his, or their return to their Traveller roots. José Laners argues that “[t]he script implies that the move into the city has victimized Travellers, and has severed their connection with the ‘pure’ Traveller traditions of the past. [...] However, rather than to acknowledge that Travellers

¹⁴⁴ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 306.

¹⁴⁵ Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler (2001). *Ireland’s Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*. Cork: Cork University Press, p. 182.

¹⁴⁶ See: Connolly, M. (2006) 285.

¹⁴⁷ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 282.

¹⁴⁸ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 282.

move with the times, like everybody else, 'Into the West' fixes the 'true' Traveller in an immovable romantic past."¹⁴⁹ On their journey, the boys playfully imagine to be Cowboys on their way to the 'Wild West'. Joe Cleary suggests that

"'Into the West' implicitly acknowledges the impossibility of a real escape from the world of advanced capitalism. Cleary emphasizes that 'Into the West' cannot be read as a film that is in any sense 'about' the Travelling community in Ireland. Instead, [...] he suggests that the Travellers function as 'the figure of a rather nostalgic desire for a kind of communal collectivity,' a collectivity that has been destroyed by advanced capitalism." (as cited in Connolly, 2006).¹⁵⁰

Maeve Connolly criticises that *Into the West* "fails to offer an alternative to dependency, other than the mythic land of *Tir na nÓg*."¹⁵¹ I would suggest that it does not fail, because it does not attempt. After all, it is a modern fairytale.

This Is My Father (IE, CA, 1997) by Paul Quinn, reminds of legendary *The Quiet Man* (US, 1952), as it deals with the issue of an American descendant of an Irish emigrant, returning to Ireland to discover his roots. Unlike with *The Quiet Man*, the past that is discovered is not rosy but holds some painful secrets. Some elements draw the story towards a fairytale, not least a Traveller woman with the obligatory barrel top wagon, wild, curly hair and ragged clothes. She is the fortune-telling deus ex machina, a likeable character that moves the story forward. That is, concerning her past self, at least. In the present she lives as an elderly lady in a house that she and her son run as a Bed and Breakfast, so they depict an alternative kind of life other than the typical image of travelling idyll/hardship or settled misery.

All in all, it can be said that "*Travellers occupy a central role in the negotiation of history and memory in Irish cinema, yet their place within international cinema invites further analysis.*"¹⁵² Not all fiction films involving Travellers raise questions of national or cultural identity, but "*it is possible to note a number of pronounced points of intersection*

¹⁴⁹ Lanthers, J. (2008), pp. 147, 148.

¹⁵⁰ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 300.

¹⁵¹ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 302.

¹⁵² Connolly, M. (2006), p. 287.

*between these diverse international films, particularly in terms of the representation of family, ethnicity, and criminality.”*¹⁵³

The most dominant pattern of representation in fiction film until the year 2000 is the alignment of Travellers with the past, frequently they symbolise a return to or recovery of an idealised past.¹⁵⁴

9.2. Other depictions of Travellers on screen

Southpaw – The Francis Barrett Story (IE, 1998), directed by Liam McGrath is a documentary that followed Francis Barrett for two years of his life. Barrett, a professional boxer, was the first Irish Traveller to represent Ireland in the Olympic Games: In 1996 he competed in the light welterweight competition and carried the Irish flag in the opening ceremony.

Popular TV series that have featured Travellers include *The Riordans*, a TV soap opera (RTE, 1965-1979); *Glenroe*, a drama series (RTE, 1983-2001) and the TV comedy *Killinaskully* by Pat Shortt, (RTE 2003-2008). *The Riches* is an US-American TV series starring Eddie Izzard and Minnie Driver, broadcast in the US between 2007 and 2008. Most recent, most popular and also causing most criticism for the way Travellers are represented is *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (UK, Channel 4, running since 2010). In a nutshell, how Rosaleen McDonagh puts it:

*„Now seems to be the time when we, the Traveller community, get the 15-minute fame phenomenon that other communities have had, where their cultural norms and practice were ridiculed and criticised in the context of western, mainstream, middle-class media. It was always the women who were targeted for being old-fashioned, subservient, submissive to the family, unliberated and the phrase, ‘Sure aren’t they all the same and they’re worse for putting up with it.’”*¹⁵⁵

The sensationalism driven programme portrays Travellers in a voyeuristic, mocking manner and “*creates the image that Travellers are lavish in their weddings, have an abundance of unaccountable wealth, marry young, fight and dress provocatively.*” For a

¹⁵³ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 287.

¹⁵⁴ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 311.

¹⁵⁵ McDonagh, Rosaleen (2012, February 27). An Irishwoman’s Diary. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved 2013, June from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2012/0227/1224312439429.html>.

more detailed criticism see Rosaleen McDonagh's article *An Irishwoman's Diary*¹⁵⁶, or Claudia Wührer's diploma thesis *For the Sake of Entertainment*¹⁵⁷.

Blood of the Travellers (2011, RTE), on the other hand, was highly praised for how Liam McGrath and Francis Barrett (see: *Southpaw*) traced Travellers' ancestry throughout Ireland's history. "The reaction throughout both communities was 'overwhelmingly positive', according to Liam."¹⁵⁸

9.3. 'Pro Traveller Programmes' and 'Travellerism'

Further more positive programmes have been made, and some of them are available on social media such as YouTube or they feature on TV. Although they are appreciated by many as an attempt to support a greater understanding of Traveller culture, there are also critical perspectives. Catherine Joyce expressed concern about a phenomenon that may be called 'pro Traveller programmes'.¹⁵⁹ She wonders where this new interest in Travellers comes from: "Is it from a human rights perspective, is it from a public awareness perspective or are these programmes exploiting and misrepresenting what is already a community under constant public scrutiny and misrepresentation?"¹⁶⁰ What these programmes more often than not have in common is that they

"are developed and edited by non-Travellers, Travellers themselves have little input and they are not targeted as the readers or viewers. To encapsulate: There are programmes that are doing some good and there are programmes that are doing more harm than good. What they have in common is the highlighting of difference, mediated by outside voices which most often speak on behalf of Travellers. [...] Outsider voices are not a proxy for their own and although intentions may be good, there are difficulties in the deconstruction of a received way of thinking or an established discursive system. The support and engagement of the majority population, however, is needed when it comes to the struggle to ensure that a space for Travellers' voices and, ultimately, a space in Irish society is provided."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Warde, Martin (2012, March). Marginalisation of The Travelling Community. *Voice of the Traveller*, 84(10).

¹⁵⁶ McDonagh, R. (2012, February 27).

¹⁵⁷ Wührer, C. (2012).

¹⁵⁸ (2011, October). Travellers on the silver screen. *Voice of the Traveller*, (81), pp. 14-15.

¹⁵⁹ Wührer, C. (2012), p. 27.

¹⁶⁰ As cited in: Wührer, C. (2012), p. 28.

¹⁶¹ Wührer, C. (2012), p. 28.

*“Too often, the voices of Travellers are still occluded, but the sedentary writers and film makers who speak for them have exchanged the more blatant language of romanticization and vilification that used to prevail in the past for what at times almost resembles an attempt at ventriloquism.”*¹⁶²

Some sources speak of this present boom of an apparent interest in Travellers in the media as *Travellerism*. As *Voice of the Traveller* columnist Martin ‘Beanz’ Warde put it,

“[i]t seems that being a Traveller or Gypsy these days has its upside with the media. No more is it just the head kickings and drunken antics that get aired. Nope! Something odd has crept from under the secretive rock on the campsite. Traveller-ism. So you have the little wannabe Barbie’s running around plastered, worse than a painters radio in fake tan and you have them singing and crooning away to their hearts content. We all know about the less than positive documentary covering weddings, and we all know about more positive ones like ‘Blood of the Travellers’ and ‘Gypsy Life for Me’. But what do we really know about what is going on television?

*At the end of the day the production companies are not there to ensure travellers are shown in a positive light, mainly because positive images rarely sell as well as negative and sensational images.”*¹⁶³

Martin Collins from Pavee Point said in an Interview with Sean O’Rourke:

*“[I]t’s getting a little bit tiring and a little bit boring at this stage and I am just wondering – when are we going to reach a saturation point in relation to all of these programmes, documentaries and books? But having said that, there was an ongoing obsessive fixation, and indeed I would say a very intrusive interest in our community. And we have seen that in the last three to four years there was a range of damaging stereotypical programmes on both Travellers and Gypsies.”*¹⁶⁴

Summing up all these diverse ways that Travellers have been and are being portrayed, it becomes obvious that there exists a broad variety of depictions, from stereotypical over symbolic to advocating. It was fairly early that the first real Travellers were playing

¹⁶² Lanthers, J. (2008), p. 210.

¹⁶³ Warde, Martin (2012, Summer). Who Wants to be Famous? *Voice of the Traveller*, (85), p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ O’ Rourke, S. (2013, October 09).

Travellers as well, and my later analysis will show how this approach has developed further up to present.

10. The representation of Irish Travellers in mass media

"Media. I think I have heard of her. Isn't she the one who killed her children?"

*"Different woman," said Mr. Nancy. "Same Deal."*¹⁶⁵

(Neil Gaiman)

This chapter describes the contradicting ways of how Travellers appear in mass media. I will give a summary of a study published in 2003, which researched the issue by analysing headlines involving Travellers from *The Irish Times* newspaper. Some statements by Journalists and members of Traveller support groups will further clarify what the situation of media representation looks like at present.

In the *Ireland report: 1997 European Year Against Racism*, the National Co-ordinating Committee acknowledged that in Ireland “[t]he role of the media and racism has been both complex and contradictory. In recent years the media have helped to develop a focus on racism and to celebrate our cultural diversity. At the same time they have also contributed to reinforce stereotypes and labelling of already marginalised groups in our society.”¹⁶⁶

In *Setting up Margins*,¹⁶⁷ Micheal Breen and Eoin Devereux published a study about how poverty and social exclusion were represented in Irish print media, before and during the Celtic Tiger period. They analysed media coverage of marginalised groups and how it influenced attitudes towards the latter. Examining headlines from *The Irish Times* newspaper, they found that

“Based on a simple reading of these headlines, a reader might readily infer that Travellers are a source of difficulty in schools [...], problematic about trespass [...], litigious [...], and a source of negative comment made by politicians but rejected by political parties [...]. It is important to note that these headlines focus on Travellers per se, rather than, for example, on the issues of equality, or the reasons Travellers might be

¹⁶⁵ Gaiman, Neil (2001). *American Gods*. London: Headline, p. 338.

¹⁶⁶ Irish National Co-ordinating Committee (1998). *1997 European Year Against Racism: Ireland report*. Dublin: Stationery Office, p.14.

¹⁶⁷ Breen, Micheal & Devereux, Eoin (2003). *Setting up Margins: Public Attitudes and Media Construction of Poverty and Exclusion in Ireland*. *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2, pp. 75-93.

engaged in trespass through failure of local authorities to meet statutory requirements [...].”¹⁶⁸

Breen and Devereux analysed a random 30 out of 679 stories involving Travellers, published between 1996 and 2003. They found that, based on a word count, most space was given to the area of education, driven by a Galway school’s issue. Next highest was an attempt by some publicans to ban Travellers from using their premises. Least space was found to have been given to stories dealing with Traveller’s rights. The conclusion of this analysis was that

*“The media representation of Travellers initially, and now refugees and asylum seekers, is such as to present persons in these categories as a source of problem in and of themselves rather than offering any analysis of the sociological realities that underpin the experiences of these groups. [...] In the context of Travellers, it must be noted that efforts made within the legal system to ensure equality of Travellers amongst others in society are often presented as Travellers abusing the law to make money at the expense of ‘legitimate’ business.”*¹⁶⁹

In an interview with Tracie Joyce for *Voice of the Traveller*, the *TV3* and *The Irish Times* journalist Vincent Browne said about how Travellers generally are being depicted in Irish mass media: *“I think most of the time they are treated appallingly by the media and if other groups were treated like that there would be uproar.”*¹⁷⁰

Micheál ÓhAodha adds that in mass media *“Traveller crime is portrayed as being more ruthless, cunning and vicious than the crimes committed by ‘country people’”*¹⁷¹ although he also acknowledges that, worst tabloids aside, *“media discourse has undeniably shifted to a considerable extent away from past perceptions of Travellers as a socio-economic problem to a perception where their ethnic difference is acknowledged in more positive terms.”*¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Breen, Micheal & Devereux, Eoin (2003), p. 84.

¹⁶⁹ Breen, Micheal & Devereux, Eoin (2003), pp. 90-91.

¹⁷⁰ Joyce, Tracie (2012, Winter), p. 17.

¹⁷¹ Huether, A. & Waldron, D. & Ó hAodha, M. (Eds.) (2009), p. 15.

¹⁷² Hayes, M. (2006), p. 242.

According to Jack Fennell, bare knuckle boxing is the most widely-reported Traveller-related issue in Irish mainstream media.¹⁷³ See the chapter on stereotypes and my analysis of the film *Knuckle* (2011) for further reading on bare knuckle boxing.

Fennell assumes that mainstream media's preference for sensationalism is a possible sociological cause for the mistrust exhibited towards Travellers.¹⁷⁴ He understands this preference for sensationalism as

*“dictated by the advertisers from whom publishers receive most of their income, and geared towards capitalising on the paranoia of Ireland's ‘nouveau riche’. [...] With no attention paid to Traveller culture or Traveller-related social issues, Traveller crime is seen to exist in a vacuum. They are criminals simply because that is what they are, and the settled community are their innocent victims. Despite their protest to the contrary, the media are to a large extent responsible for anti-Traveller prejudice.”*¹⁷⁵

In 1996, journalist Mary Ellen Synon wrote in the *Sunday Independent*: “Traveller life is without the ennobling intellect of man or the steadying instincts of animals. This tinker ‘culture’ is without achievement, discipline, reason or intellectual ambition.”¹⁷⁶ It would be the easy way out to blame the media for printing racist content like that in the first place, but the responsibility lies with the readers as well, as Elisa Joy White points out:

“There is substantial evidence that various media validate racist sentiments, but it is the larger society that willingly accepts them. There is much more agency involved and it would be misdirected to blame cultural products for the culture itself. For example, when former ‘Sunday Independent’ columnist Mary Ellen Synon stated that the spectacle of physically challenged athletes participating in the 2000 Sydney Olympics was ‘perverse’ and ‘grotesque’, the nation responded en masse with boycotts of the ‘Sunday Independent’, letters to the editor of numerous newspapers, and days of discussion on radio call-in programmes [...]. Hence, even though Synon emerged out of the media, Irish society also

¹⁷³ Fennell, Jack (2009). “Construktung a “Folk-Devil”: Irish Travellers and the “True Crime” Genre. In: Huether, A. & Waldron, D. & Ó hAodha, M. (Eds.), *Screening “Difference”. Visual Culture and the Nomadic “Other”*. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, p. 20.

¹⁷⁴ Fennell, J. (2009), p. 24.

¹⁷⁵ Fennell, J. (2009), p. 24.

¹⁷⁶ Synon, Mary Ellen (1996, January 26). Time to get tough on tinker terror “culture“. *The Sunday Independent*.

used the media to vehemently express that her comments were offensive, unacceptable and not reflective of popular opinion.”¹⁷⁷

The reasons why there was such an uproar in the latter case, and less so in the former may vary. Still, this example shows how media can not solely be blamed for spreading racism, it is always the readers or audiences who read or listen and the ways that they react, that influence what they read, hear or see.

The 2013 *Report on Ireland's Implementation of the European Treaty on the Protection of National Minorities*, initiated by the Council of Europe, „highlighted the persistence of negative stereotypes regarding the Traveller community in some written press and electronic media, in particular with regard to criminality, abuse of social benefits and nomadism.“¹⁷⁸

10.1. Social Media

I could not hope to cover the whole topic of how Travellers represent themselves and are represented in social media, the area is much too complex to give a summary here. I have touched on the subject in the chapter on ‘Pro Traveller Programmes’ and ‘travellerism’, and will now only mention one popular phenomenon, because it appears in some films I am going to discuss. Relating to the bare knuckle fights, there are videos of fights and also challenges for fights published, mainly on YouTube. Even before YouTube existed, there was already a market (and a black market) for videos of fights, bare knuckle fights among them. YouTube just made it easier to publish them, so now many amateur videos are available online, of the fights themselves as well as of the challenges for them.

10.2. Inside out: Travellers about Travellers

As mentioned above, media have potential for damaging as well as possible positive effects. Some media published by Travellers, and also some Travellers themselves warn about the danger of being exploited, but also encourage Travellers to use media to change the stereotypical image about them. Publications by Travellers, sometimes initiated by Traveller support groups, are an important tool for Travellers to be able to actively challenge these negative images/stereotypes.

¹⁷⁷ White, Elisa Joy (2002). The new Irish storytelling: Media, representations and racialised identities. In: McVeigh, R. & Lentin, R. (Eds.), *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*. Belfast: BTP, p. 103.

¹⁷⁸ Lynch, S. (2013, April 20).

So here the circle comes to a close. The depiction of Travellers in mass media, as with other ethnic groups, or rather, any groups of society, often tends to be reductive and stereotypical. “*Popular culture is of course not uniform in its role in popularising racial imagery. Instead it is both ‘the locus for the expression of racism’ and a ‘site where the efficacy of racist images can be challenged.’*”¹⁷⁹

I will now briefly mention a few outstanding people associated with the Traveller community, who contribute to a more realistic, more varied picture of their culture, whom I came across during my research, and I will also give some sources for further reading. I am not saying that all of the following wish to challenge popular images of Travellers. Some individuals might prefer to be seen just as writers, not as Traveller writers who speak for their whole community and whose work is constantly put in relation to their ethnicity. Others though particularly wish to give an alternative picture of their culture to the one perceived in mainstream media.

First of all I would like to mention some popular Traveller support groups. There are many more though, and just because I don’t have the space to mention all of them here, certainly does not mean I consider their work less relevant.

There is ‘Pavee Point’, founded in 1985 as a non-governmental organisation. It works on a broad field of Traveller- and Roma related Issues, from supporting human rights, social solidarity to community development, for example, to support, promotion and validation of Traveller and Roma culture.

The ‘Irish Traveller Movement’ (ITM) was established 1990 and is a network of over eighty organisations and also individuals working for the Traveller community.¹⁸⁰

As for Traveller related media, the *Travellers’ Times* is a Rural Media project, aiming “*to be a source of quality information, where not many others exist.*”¹⁸¹ Not least, they offer free workshops for young Travellers on journalism.

¹⁷⁹ Lentin, Ronit & McVeigh, Robbie (Eds.) (2002). *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, p.16.

¹⁸⁰ For a more detailed introduction regarding the development of Traveller advocacy see: Hayes, M. (2006), p. 231.

¹⁸¹ About Us. *Travellers’ Times*. Retrieved 2013, June from <http://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/default.aspx?c=c6d4e3d6-da7e-4a71-b88e-7ce90908194b>.

'Voice of the Traveller' is "*the only national magazine for Travellers*"¹⁸². It is published five times a year and covers many Traveller related topics, for example culture, politics and sports.

As for literature by Travellers, a particularly high number of autobiographies and memoirs have been published over the past few decades, for example Nan Joyce's *Traveller: An Autobiography* (1985)¹⁸³, William Cauley's *The candlelight painter : the life and work of William Cauley, traveller, painter and poet* (2004)¹⁸⁴ or Pecker Dunne's *Parley-Poet and Chanter: Pecker Dunne: an Autobiography* (2004)¹⁸⁵. According to Ó hAodha, these autobiographies

"feature an essential impulse of [...] countering of the 'older' and more stereotypical ways that Travellers were represented in the Irish cultural imaginary until relatively recently. This 'new' literature has a strong autobiographical or semi-autobiographical aspect to it and frequently attempts to bring Travellers in from the margins of public discourse and deconstruct the near-monolith that were nineteenth and twentieth century literary representations of Travellers."¹⁸⁶

So autobiographies are one important genre in the fairly recent new articulation of identity from the side of Travellers. They were the first works ever making Travellers' voices heard in the public sphere, and so tremendously important in the fight for a new, more authentic picture of Traveller culture.

Another genre that is successfully being used for this purpose are plays for theatre. Two outstanding people that are involved in arts as well as in politics are Travellers Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins. Rosaleen McDonagh is a journalist, playwright and performer as well as a social activist and involved in politics. In all areas of her work she tackles issues concerning groups with disadvantages in society, such as Travellers, people with disabilities or women, among others.

"Just as many Irish people felt that Synge was letting them down in front of strangers by showing drink, sex and violence, the pressures on a writer from the Travelling community must be towards uplift rather than realism. McDonagh shows extraordinary

¹⁸² Voice of the Traveller. *Involve*. Retrieved 2013, June from: <http://www.involve.ie/voice-of-the-traveller/>.

¹⁸³ Joyce, N. & Farman, A. (Ed.) (1985).

¹⁸⁴ Cauley, William & Ó hAodha, Mícheál (Ed.) (2004). *The candlelight painter: the life and work of William Cauley, traveller, painter and poet*. Dublin: A. & A. Farman.

¹⁸⁵ Dunne, P. & Ó hAodha, M. (Ed.) (2004).

¹⁸⁶ Ó hAodha, M. & Heneghan, J. & Warde Moriarty, M. (Eds.) (2012), p. 75.

*courage therefore in exploring the internal tensions of Traveller lives hemmed in by violence, drug-dealing and confused attitudes to both sexuality and education. She turns on its head the entire tradition of relating Travellers on stage to freedom and mobility, and gives us instead a world that is both literally and figuratively closed-in. The action of her play [‘Stuck’, 2007] is largely set either within the small spaces of a trailer or in the surrounding halting site that is being walled-in by the authorities. Hers is no bland celebration but, for the way it gives us Travellers as real people with complex dilemmas, it is worth celebrating.”*¹⁸⁷

Michael Collins has been an actor since the 1980s, acting on stage and on screen. In the films I will analyse later in this thesis, he appears in *King of the Travellers* and *Pavee Lackeen*. He has acted in Dublin’s Abbey and Olympia Theatres and has written plays concerning social issues such as domestic abuse or suicide. He has also been an advocate for Traveller human rights for more than twenty years.

These are just two examples of people who made full use of available media and their personal gifts of writing and performing, to advocate for issues they considered needing broader public attention.

¹⁸⁷ O’Toole, Fintan (2007, Dec. 1). Travellers as real people. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved 2013, May from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2007/1201/1196375081438.html>.

11. Film analysis

This chapter will be an analysis of the depiction of Irish Travellers in 21st century film. It starts off with Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (UK/USA, 2000), followed by *Country* (IE, 2000, Kevin Liddy), *Pavee Lackeen* (IE, 2005, Perry Ogden), *Knuckle* (IE/UK, 2011, Ian Palmer) and *King of the Travellers* (IE/UK, 2012, Mark O'Connor).

I have decided to focus the analysis on feature-length films that were shown in cinemas, so as to narrow down the broad range of depictions which, for example, are to be found in media such as TV or on the Internet, as I have mentioned earlier. I think that films shown in the cinema are a good source of reflecting the popular image(s) about Travellers while at the same time having the potential to go deeper than the average sensationalism-driven TV-show.

Most of the films discussed here are fiction films, although some are a mix of fictive and real incidents, so called docu-fiction. Involving a quantitative as well as a qualitative film analysis, the last part of the thesis will relate to the framework that has been set with this thesis up to now. The separate film analysis and the following conclusion will discuss if and how cultural, ethnic, national, ideological and gender (male and female) identity are implemented in these films, if and how the issue of Othering is brought up or happening, and if there has been a change in the way Travellers have been depicted, since the *Tinker Questionnaire* and also since the beginnings of film.

From this part of my thesis on I will include excerpts of a personal interview with journalist, writer, actor and comedian Martin 'Beanz' Warde in the text. I am most grateful to Martin for taking the time and meeting me to share his opinion. Again, what is featured here is his personal opinion and not to be understood as speaking in the name of all Irish Travellers.

11.1. *Snatch*

Snatch (UK/USA, 2000) was Guy Ritchie's second feature film after *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (UK, 1998), and his most successful one up to date. The cult classic is an action comedy, a heist movie about different gangsters trying to get their hands on the same diamond. The interlocking stories of the plot follow Frankie Four Fingers (Benicio Del Toro) robbing the gem, while Boris the Blade (Rade Sherbedgia) sends his henchmen to steal it from him. Tommy and Gorgeous George (Stephen Graham and Adam Fogerty)

buy a caravan from Traveller Mickey O'Neill (Brad Pitt). A dispute over the caravan ends up in a fistfight, where Mickey knocks out Gorgeous George who was supposed to fight in an illegal boxing match for the ruthless crime lord Brick Top (Alan Ford). To avoid Brick Top's revenge for having his boxer end up in hospital, which means he can't enter the boxing match for which the bets are already set, Turkish and Tommy convince Mickey to replace George in the fight. The crime lord demands that Mickey 'go down' at a particular point of the fight, which he doesn't – he wins it instead. To force Mickey to obey his order in a following fight, Brick Top kills Mickey's mother by burning her caravan at night. Mickey's will seems broken, but it turns out he has arranged for the score to be settled, as he has laid bets on himself in the upcoming fight. He wins a lot of money and with the help of other Travellers kills Brick Top before disappearing.

11.1.1. Introduction to the depiction of Travellers in *Snatch*

Travellers are depicted very stereotypically in *Snatch*. In fact, exaggeration and strongly emphasised stereotypes are one of the film's most characteristic features. Yes, the Travellers are depicted stereotypically, but so is everybody else. There are stereotypical money-ridden Jews trading diamonds, a cold-blooded Russian mobster (Boris) with a scar above his eye, there are clumsy African-British wannabe gangsters, and all of them with a corresponding, strongly emphasised accent. What Ritchie did here was what Jörg Schweinitz calls 'reflexive use of stereotype', as pointed out in the chapter on stereotype. In the words of Xan Brooks, while "*labouring to avoid political correctness, 'Snatch' falls back on stereotypes. These characters are too affectionately rendered to cause much offence, but in dramatic terms they're phoney creations.*"¹⁸⁸

11.1.2. The invincible bare knuckle boxer

Snatch is frequently related to David Fincher's *Fight Club* (USA, 1999), as both have a narrative focus on illegal boxing and feature Brad Pitt as the main (boxing) character. Sometimes *Snatch*'s Mickey is interpreted as Pitt's satiric persiflage on his *Fight Club* character Tyler Duren, as Connolly puts it, a "*hypermasculine character, ultimately revealed as the fantasy product of an office worker's nervous breakdown. Ritchie's film, however, seems to recover an image of heroic masculinity from an earlier cinematic*

¹⁸⁸ Brooks, Xan (2000, October). *Snatch. Sight and Sound*. Retrieved 2013, July from <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/506>.

*moment, through reference to contemporary stereotypes surrounding Traveller society.”*¹⁸⁹

I assume that with ‘contemporary stereotypes’ Connolly here refers to the Travellers in *Snatch* being depicted as outlaws who avenge Mickey’s mother’s death and kill her murderer instead of reporting the crime to the police, they solve conflicts themselves instead of referring to legislation, at one point calling for a bare-knuckle fight to settle a dispute. A satirical depiction of *Fight Club*’s hypermasculinity as well as of the general typical boxer film character is the way in which Mickey can take an unusually high amount of blows in a fight, always standing up again after nearly being knocked out, always returning to finish his opponent with a final strike.

11.1.3. Messy tricksters

Other stereotypes about Travellers that appear in *Snatch* are that they live on a messy campsite, inviting Tommy into their home with false hospitality before tricking him into buying a broken caravan (even the children try to rip off Tommy, asking him for money in return for telling him where Mickey is). They wear leather jackets and tatty clothes, and have shady, suspicious looks on their faces half of the time.

11.1.4. A strong community

A further aspect of the boxing theme in *Snatch*, according to Connolly, is that the character Mickey also “*is in fact a highly exaggerated version of a very familiar cinematic figure – the tough working-class boxer with a soft heart – motivated by commitment to family and community*”¹⁹⁰

Martin Warde pointed out this positive aspect too:

“What was striking about ‘Snatch’ was that that character of Mickey came out to be the hero. He came out to be the one who got the last laugh against the bad guy. And it also showed the Travellers as a very tight community that stood by each other, and, you know, they will always stand by their own people. And I think that that was a very, very good depiction of what the mentality is within the community. You do have to stand by each other because you will be walked over, you will be used, you will be abused. So we have come to learn that we have to stick by each other. Which is rather unfortunate, because I love everybody, not just my own community. I would like to be able to help everyone. But

¹⁸⁹ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 308.

¹⁹⁰ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 308.

that movie, that film, it did pretty well in that regard. The violent side not so much, again, that was a generalisation, but as you said, he's done that with all the communities in that film."¹⁹¹

11.1.5. The old Irish stereotypes

Some sources find a mirror of the old Irish stereotypes in *Snatch*. Diane Negra thinks that

*"Both 'Traveller' [1997] and Snatch present an array of ethnic 'types' and produce images of male Traveller identity that are highly celebratory, while at the same time deeply problematic. This recasting of the generic hero as an Irish Traveller or gypsy in the cinema of the 1990s and 2000s seems to underscore the international appeal of Irishness as means of being 'white, yet ethnically differentiated.'"*¹⁹²

Referring to Garth Pearce, Sinéad ní Shuineár emphasises that she understands Brad Pitt's make-up as going straight back to the roots of Traveller and Irish stereotypes:

*"According to Pearce, it took three hours to get the prosthetics onto his nose and forehead to give him an appropriate simian look – that's longer than it takes to transform Michael Dorn into Worf, everybody's favourite Klingon. When we compare the simianized Brad Pitt to earlier cartoon characterizations of Irishness, we note continuity."*¹⁹³

11.1.6 Hard to understand

Probably the most discussed aspect of *Snatch* with reference to Travellers is the accent Brad Pitt used. In an interview Michael Collins told Annmarie Hourihane that he thought Pitt's accent was woeful and that even though he is a Traveller himself, he did not understand him at all.¹⁹⁴ Pitt himself admitted that he struggled with the accent a lot: In a *Sunday Independent* Interview, Pitt revealed

"that he did not meet any Irish Travellers when preparing for the role. 'No, but I met some English gypsies,' said Pitt. [...] 'But the day before we started shooting, I still didn't have the accent. It sounded too technical. And it was about 10pm that night, and I was in a bit of a panic. I'm supposed to be on set at seven in the morning. I was staying in this flat in North London, and I just started walking the streets.' Pitt says that he decided

¹⁹¹ Warde, M., personal communication, 2014, July 03.

¹⁹² Negra, Diane (2006). Introduction. *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*. Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, p. 13.

¹⁹³ Ní Shuineár, S. (2002), p. 189.

¹⁹⁴ Hourihane, Annmarie (2000, November 19). Travellers' tales. *Sunday Times, (people)*, p. 3.

to purposely make the dialogue difficult to understand and the director went along with that.”¹⁹⁵

So Pitt and Ritchie apparently decided to solve the problem by making it into a running gag. The gibberish Pitt speaks is not even understood by the other characters of the film sometimes, and they say so. The other Traveller characters hardly say anything, they mainly whisper secretly among each other to agree on what they are going to do next.

So, even though there is a good amount of fairly severe criticism of the results Pitt and Ritchie came up with, at least they found their own solution for the tricky challenge of having a non-Traveller actor playing a Traveller.

Martin Warde also told me that this is an aspect of Travellers on film that he thinks should be considered carefully. Asked if he thinks that it is difficult for non-Travellers to play Travellers, particularly considering the language (you would think as it's an actor's job to play all different kinds of characters, it should not be such a big deal?), Warde said *“Well, we have our language, which is Shelta. Which, you know, we don't see it enough in film. It's been whitewashed out of the history books and schools, we don't get taught it anywhere, it's a dying language. It's actually dead. It's only a few people that can even speak a few words of it now. And that came through assimilation, forced assimilation. And that was to stop us having something that differentiates us from the rest of society. [...] Because language of course is one of the prerequisites for minorities ethnic status. Language, shared cultural believes and things like that. So we already had all that and they whitewashed the language out. And that's why it's very important to get the language right.*

In regards to the accent that's used and the dialect that's used in film – it's so important to get that right because if you don't get it right it sounds like you are being over-stereotypical and it sounds insulting. It's like when you hear an American actor doing an Irish accent and it sounds like a Leprechaun. It's humorous, but when you are a minority group, humour becomes abuse. You know, it becomes abusive and insulting. So yes, it's very important.

With 'Pavee Lackeen', you know, fair play, they used the Traveller language Shelta in the title, so pavee meaning Traveller, lackeen meaning young girl.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ (2009, February). Brad Pitt's favourite film role: Mickey O'Neill. *Voice of the Traveller*, (67), p. 6.

¹⁹⁶ Warde, M., personal communication, 2014, July 03.

11.1.7. Othering

Snatch strongly emphasises the prejudice against Travellers. One could actually say it shows a stereotypical, or at least satirical depiction of the stereotypes against Travellers. In *Snatch*, even the small-scale gangster Tommy, who himself obviously is not exactly a prime example of being law-abiding and honourable, looks down on Travellers. His statement 'I fuckin' hate Pikeys' turns into some kind of 'running gag'. The one time he states that he can't see what all the fuss is about and that he thinks they are great 'fellas' is just seconds before the newly bought caravan breaks apart and so proves him wrong.

Incidentally, it is quite possible that the abusive term 'Pikey' may have become more popular through its frequent use in *Snatch*. It would need a more detailed investigation to show if this really is the case, but I have come across the term more often in the films made after *Snatch* than in the ones released prior to it. In an Interview with Annmarie Hourihane¹⁹⁷ in September 2000, Michael and his father Johnny Collins both said that they had never heard the term, despite the fact that Johnny spent some years of his life in England, where the term generally seems to be more common than in Ireland.

11.1.8. Conclusion to *Snatch*

The concept of the film *Snatch* is built on the stereotypical depiction of a variety of different cultures, and they are all portrayed in a mocking way. The depiction of Travellers is one of invincible bare-knuckle boxers who are sly tricksters that will not be fooled easily. They appear as a strong community that live by their own rules and take vengeance themselves as a community if one of their group is harmed. They are also shown as secretive, isolated and, in the truest sense of the word, hard to understand.

Even though the other cultural groups in *Snatch* relate to one another more or less frequently, the Traveller community appears isolated and the non-Travellers attitude to them is a hostile and distrustful one. This hostility again is over-emphasised so much that it could be read as mocking the prejudice against Travellers by over-emphasising it.

11.2. Country

Kevin Liddy's drama *Country* (IE, 2000) starts off in a family home in the Irish countryside in the 1960s. From the beginning, the atmosphere is one of suppressed

¹⁹⁷ Hourihane, A. (2000, November 19), p. 3.

feelings, aggression and lingering dark secrets from the past. The house of the film's central family, the Murphys, appears more like a trap than a home. The farmer Frank's (Des Cave) young son Jack (Dean Pritchard) suffers under the situation of growing up without his mother, who has died under circumstances that only get revealed throughout the film. It is a very harsh and loveless environment for him to live in, although nobody else is comfortable in their situation either. The idea of moving away to a big city to escape the apathetic country life seems to be less successful in reality than in some entrapped character's fantasy though. Jack's aunt Miriam (Lisa Harrow) was the one person who managed to escape the country life and go to live in the city. She returns for a while to the household, temporarily balancing the absence of a woman (and mother).

Life changes even more for Jack when he makes friends with a Traveller boy, Michael (Laurence Kinlan), who seems to possess freedom, vitality and confidence, all features that are missing in Jack's life. Michael lets Jack ride his horse, takes him jumping from rocks into a lake and teaches him how to box, so he can defend himself against another boy that is bullying him. The boys' friendship is welcomed by both of their families, but other members of the village do not want the Travellers around. They threaten them to make them go away, and as they refuse to leave, they get blamed for a crime that someone else committed and a lynch mob burns down the Travellers' campsite, forcing them to leave.

In the end, Michael and Miriam, both initially personifications of individual freedom and escape turn out to be just as much at the mercy of life's pitfalls as anyone else. They both leave and Jack stays behind in a similar situation as the one he was in the beginning of the film. But because he has met encouraging, positive people, he has the strength to face his life, as incomplete and shattered as it may be, and deal with it as best he can.

11.2.1. Introduction to the depiction of Travellers in *Country*

Referring to Steven Croft, Maeve Connolly positions *Country* among national cinema, where Croft observes a thematic continuity in the 1990s, noting that “*many of the most prominent exports from this period explore culturally universal themes, such as family*

madness or artistic ambition, but combine these familiar themes with specific 'local inflections'."¹⁹⁸

Country was celebrated by reviewers as carefully crafted film drama with well developed characters:

*"'Country' is suffused with a sense of empathy...The key to Liddy's film is that none of this is symbolic. Frank is not a metaphor. He does not stand for the patriarchal male or the tight lipped, tight pursed farmer. This is a complex portrait of a complex man. There is no false romanticism in 'Country'. The modern and the traditional are intertwined with no simplistic reductionism. Even minor characters are fleshed out. The subtlety and nuance, the sense in which characters are individuals struggling with their particular circumstances, gives the film a rare sense of authenticity. At a time when most Irish films are striving to be urban and contemporary, this one is deliberately unfashionable. It is also assured and confident. With 'Country', Liddy has made a powerful story about people at a particular time and place."*¹⁹⁹

What is said here about the central characters also applies to the Traveller characters in *Country*. I do think there are some metaphors though. The figure of Michael can certainly be read as a symbol of freedom and confidence, even if that idea is deconstructed during the story, as it turns out his freedom is very limited too.

11.2.2. Depicting the majority population's prejudice and racist patterns of behaviour

*"Liddy's film 'Country' is a powerful portrayal of the consequences of intolerance. Liddy has indicated that his film goes back to his childhood in Ireland, where expressing yourself or having an interest in the finer things of life like music or art would have been viewed with suspicion"*²⁰⁰

Most of the films I researched involved a narrative showing little or no contact between the Travellers and the majority population, save a hostile or otherwise negative one. *Country* is one exception, it shows a deep friendship between two boys from each of both communities. Their friendship cannot be maintained though, because of some prejudiced

¹⁹⁸ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 286.

¹⁹⁹ McCarthy, Gerry (2000). *Country*. Retrieved 2013, July from <http://www.kevinliddy.com/22205/country/>.

²⁰⁰ Crosson, S. (2011), p. 27.

people who use the Travellers as scapegoats and as outlets for their anger and antagonism that the Travellers initially are not responsible for. These patterns of behaviour where individuals just unload their negative emotions on innocents instead of directing them to the real source of their feelings, are clearly exposed in *Country*'s narrative (see 'Functions of stereotypes' in the chapter on stereotypes).

In reality, this effect is applicable to individual life stories as well as to all manners of minority groups in general, as often the finger of blame get pointed at others, when it's actually more about distracting from internal deficiencies. Not least, it is a welcome, because easy strategy in politics to gather cheap votes.

This pattern is also similar to what appears in the chapter about Irish and Traveller stereotypes, and how all the negative stereotypes about the Irish were subsequently redirected onto Travellers.

So *Country* depicts the phenomenon of how easy it can be to conceal one's own shortcomings by directing attention and negative emotions on a shared imaginary enemy.

In nearly all of the films I discuss in this chapter, at some point a caravan goes up in flames. It is usually a member of the majority population setting the fire, less often it is a Traveller burning another Traveller's caravan. But always the fire is an expression of an interpersonal conflict, frequently involving the above-mentioned difficult relationship between communities. Of course, it also offers a huge dramatic moment for a film to see someone's home with all his or her belongings and possibly even themselves inside end up in a ball of fire. So presumably it's tempting for filmmakers to include such a 'highlight' in their storyline.

I told Martin Warde that in the end of most films I researched, the Travellers are chased away or leave by their own choice, at least the conflicts with the majority population are not solved in a constructive way. I told him I was wondering if that repeating pattern showed the filmmaker's lack of fantasy for imagining 'happy ends', constructive solutions for difficulties in the relationships between the Travellers and the majority population. Warde told me no, he does not think the unhappy ends are due to a lack of the filmmakers' fantasy, he thinks it's a proof of fantasy, because that's not what reality is like. The filmmakers make up the unhappy ends, so their fantasy is nothing to be worrying about.

This does not mean though that arson is not a reality still happening in present day Ireland, as mentioned in the chapter about politics.

11.2.3. Othering

All in all, *Country* tells individual life stories and avoids generalisations. It does relate to the old Traveller stereotype of freedom and affinity with nature, but only to repeal them later on. It does, however, lay a focus on the process of Othering in society, and on the damage that prejudice and racism cause.

11.2.4. Conclusion to *Country*

Country is one of the only films depicting a close friendship between a Traveller and a non-Traveller. It strikingly shows the destructive power of senseless prejudice anger. It also shows that with redirecting hatred at innocent scapegoats, no one wins. In the film, Jack's brother, who, in a mindless spell of hatred lets himself be talked into taking part in the arson, ends up curled up on the ground in the woods, left with nothing but despair, shame and regrets.

11.3. *Pavee Lackeen. The Traveller Girl*

Pavee Lackeen. The Traveller Girl (IE, 2005) was photographer and filmmaker Perry Ogden's first and up to date only feature length film and won, among other prizes, the IFTA award for Best Film, Ogden got the IFTA award for Breakthrough Talent too. The film accompanies ten year old Winnie Maughan in her everyday life over the course of several months.

Shot on hand held mini-DV, the film features a docu-fiction style, a blending of drama and documentary. The borders between fiction and non-fiction are blurred in this film, a lot of the plot are based on Winnie's life as she experiences it, but other parts originate from the director's script and are fictional, or were improvised. The caravan parked on the side of a busy road really is the home of Winnie and her family, whose members – none of them professional actors – all 'play' themselves. There are some professional actors featured in the film too though.

Although problems of individuals are shown here, a lot of them are topics that other Irish Travellers and also other members of Irish society are struggling with too, for example

difficulties with access to education, insufficient social security, evictions, drug abuse, poverty and society's indifference towards these problems.

In the storyline, because of a fight in the schoolyard, Winnie gets suspended from school for a week. She spends her days going into shops, talking to the shop assistants, visiting her brother in prison and climbing into a clothes bin with her sister Rosie to get 'new' clothes for them. Meanwhile their mother Rose tries to find a better home for the family whom she is looking after as a single parent. Social workers and activists for Travellers' rights try to help her, but remain unsuccessful. Gardaí and government employees approach Rose with threats and empty promises and talk her into moving the caravans further up the road. The situation there is even worse for the family, but now the caravans are not parked on the council's land anymore, which means the family has lost their entitlement to replacement to at least an equivalent alternative living area.

11.3.1. Introduction to the depiction of Travellers in *Pavee Lackeen*

Pavee Lackeen takes the perspective of Winnie and her family. As it features a pseudo-documentary style, it somehow claims authenticity. The rest of this chapter will explain some aspects of why that is a tricky and challenging attempt under the prevailing circumstances. It will start with describing aspects of the depiction of Travellers in the film.

11.3.2. Fortune-telling

Already the first scene reveals that we have arrived at an 'other' place. An elderly woman reads Winnie's palm. This way the topic of superstition and fortune-telling gets brought up, an image also frequently related to Roma and Sinti stereotypes. It is one of the more 'positive', romantic images. The woman's advice is less typical though: 'Follow your head' she concludes. 'Not your heart, follow your head.'

11.3.3. The Housing Problem

A very revealing visualisation of the difference between the Maughans' life and an average Irish middle class life are the first and the last scene of the film. Both times Winnie's mother asks the girl to make her a cup of tea. In Ireland, tea is a kind of a national drink (not least because of the country's past of being occupied by colonial Britain). So a mother asking her daughter for a cup of tea would be a very familiar situation for an Irish

audience. So the girl takes the teapot, leaves the caravan and crosses a busy road to get some water at a water tap on the other side of the road. It turns out this tap is the family's only source of water. This kind of situation now is less familiar to the majority of the Irish audience.

In the last scene, Rose again asks Winnie for a cup of tea. The situation has clearly worsened for the family, whom authorities have evicted from their former halting spot. Instead of 'only' having to cross the street to get water, the girl now takes a bucket and puts it into a pram to push it, as the distance she has to walk has only got longer at the end of the film, despite all efforts that were made to find a better home. So in this way the issue of the 'housing problem' is depicted quite vividly on the visual level, although the topic is also addressed in the film's storyline and dialogues in a more straightforward manner.

11.3.4. Social exclusion

The Maughan's difficult financial situation causes Winnie's segregation from middle-class society's consumerism, which *Pavee Lackeen* depicts on a visual and narrative level, as the camera follows her spending a day in the city. Winnie goes into shops, looks at the goods for sale and talks to the shop assistants. She is always shown outside the shops first, before entering. A strong visual effect is how the glass fronts of the shop windows are like an invisible barrier in front of the goods that the girl can't afford.

Winnie goes into an African hairdresser's shop, a Russian video shop, an esoteric shop with products from India and Bali and an arcade where only people of Asian heritage are encountered. She touches the goods in the shops, talks to the shop assistants, but leaves the shops empty handed (apart from a small present she is given). This shows her curiosity but also her poverty. The people she meets along her way represent some of Ireland's major immigrant groups.

*"While the almost total non-appearance of any other Irish people (apart from council officials and social workers) in the film appears sometimes overly contrived, the message is clear: if Irish society cannot treat her own indigenous minorities with respect how can it hope to embrace the diverse immigrant groups that increasingly make up the country."*²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Crosson, Sean (2006). *Pavee Lackeen*. *Journal of Irish Studies – Estudios Irlandeses*, (1), p. 185. Retrieved 2013, June from: <http://estudiosirlandeses.org/reviews/pavee-lackeen/>.

Winnie hopes to find a place in a 'school for settled children', as she feels she is bullied in the one where she is. Unfortunately those schools resist the admission of Traveller children.

The location of where the family has halted their caravans speaks volumes about their place in society. They physically ended up at the margins. *Pavee Lackeen* also vividly expresses the restlessness the family faces. On the one hand, being 'on the move' is part of some traditional Travellers' lifestyle. In *Pavee Lackeen*, Winnie is moving a lot, if she is not at home, she is walking, riding her bike, or inside a car with her mother. The caravan's doors are often open and then there are no clear borders between inside and outside, public and private. That would not be such a problem if the family had a proper private place to park their caravans. But this way it appears as if they did not live at the side of, but on the road, as if the lorries were driving right through their living room. So in the background of many scenes, there is a constant movement of vehicles, which, together with a permanent engine noise gives an impression of restlessness and tension. This family lives where other people only travel through.

Another strong visual element used are boulders. These are the large rocks that are placed at roadsides in Ireland to stop Travellers from pulling in and halting there. In the film, such a stone is positioned by a forklift truck (background sound: a beeping alarm tone), before the camera pans to mother Rose, standing in the door of her caravan, cornered by (exclusively male) Guards and officials, forcing her to leave the site under threat of legal proceedings and by making empty promises, although she says she has nowhere else to go. When in the last scene, Winnie goes off to get water again, on the whole length of the way there are boulders in the background. Her family has been pushed even further to the margins of society, symbolically and very physically and real.

While *Pavee Lackeen* does not attempt to make generalisations about Travellers, this case is not a sole exception. It is a fact that despite official recognition of a necessity to challenge the problem of a lack of appropriate halting sites since at least the mid-nineties, as mentioned in the chapter on politics.

11.3.5. Othering

As *Pavee Lackeen* aims to show the point of view of a Traveller girl, the ‘other’s’ point of view is taken by the non-Traveller Ogden. The film shows aspects of a unique personal life story, so it does not attempt to make generalisations about Traveller culture. Still, it features some issues that could be interpreted as repeating stereotypes about Travellers, as for example the fortune telling.

11.3.6. Conclusion to *Pavee Lackeen*

Pavee Lackeen strikingly points out a bigger social context by telling individual people’s stories. By explaining political and social issues on the basis of their concrete effects on particular people, the ‘others’, the ‘victims’ are given a face and the audience relates to them and can get a more in-depth understanding of the actual situations and relating problems. The fact that *Pavee Lackeen* is a mainly none-fictional film intensifies the poignancy of the process. This accords to Siegfried Krakauer’s idea of the potential of film:

*“[I]f we want to assimilate values that delimit our horizon we must first rid ourselves of that abstractness as best we can. In trying to meet this challenge, we may still not be able to cast anchor in ideological certainties, yet at least we stand a chance of finding something we did not look for, something tremendously important in its own right—the world that is ours.”*²⁰²

Pavee Lackeen indeed might have the potential of supporting the public’s understanding of problems that some Travellers (and other marginalised groups in Ireland) are confronted with. The Maughan family also decided to take part in this film, because they were hoping that the public attention to their desperate situation might help them find a better place to live. Unfortunately I found no evidence about this having materialised.

It should raise some questions to read how

“The production notes asked: ‘Do you like the way the film presented you?’ (Not, ‘... your character’.) This is what she [note: Winnie] said: ‘The film made it look like my head was all over the place and I was doing things that I wasn’t supposed to do. Some

²⁰² Krakauer, Siegfried (1960). *Theory of film: the redemption of physical reality*. London/New York: Oxford University Press, p. 296.

*people will think it is real and I don't want that. I want them to know that I wasn't really sniffing petrol, it was just apple juice.'*²⁰³

*"This part particularly has caused the young star of the movie some discomfort, although, to be fair, she and the rest of her family say they 'died with the shame' watching much of the film."*²⁰⁴ This might imply that Winnie did not fully realize what she was letting herself in for when she agreed to take part in the film project, or at least as that she was uncomfortable with some parts of it. Ogden though said that he did confer with the Maughans on what would be shown: *"Once or twice we would ask them to do something and they would say no. But we developed a real level of trust with them."*²⁰⁵ In an interview, Róisín Ingle got the impression that Winnie was not upset with Ogden about the way he made the film, though: *"'he has a good heart', she says."*²⁰⁶

This film lives on Winnie's natural, open ways (film trailer's caption: 'Honest. Beautiful. And. Above all. Alive.'). The above sounds like director Perry Ogden is moving on very thin ice between supporting and exploiting the Maughan family.

I asked Martin Warde what he thinks about the above aspects of *Pavee Lackeen*, if he thinks the Maughans have been exploited. This is what he said:

"Well, I think they tried to sell this as a documentary. As a true depiction. However, you can see throughout that all the instances were staged, they had professional actors in there as well, Michael Collins actually was in that movie, you know, so it wasn't an actual depiction of what is happening with that family. The petrol sniffing, the jumping into clothes bins and things like that you know – there is no doubt there was hardship, massive hardship and there still is hardship, but I do think they were given creative licence to stretch, again, the boundaries so they can make it look as though this is what it's like, it's so bad. And again: That's why they won awards, you know? Because they went that far."

²⁰³ Fottrell, Quentin (2008). Artistic colonialism under guise of activism. The poor are not our intellectual property. It is time to look at our own culture and practice of exploitation. *The Irish Times*, Retrieved 2012, November from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/0318/1205706619573.html>.

²⁰⁴ Ingle, Róisín (2005, October 19). Starring Role in a Trailer. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved 2012, November from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2005/1019/1127148507045.html>.

²⁰⁵ (2005, October 28). The Road Less Travelled. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved 2012, November from: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/theticket/2005/1028/1130314565291.html>.

²⁰⁶ Ingle, R. (2005, October 19).

Now, I also think that they did use it to the disadvantage of the characters, or of the actors. Because there was nothing afterwards. You know, you invite these people, who come from very humble beginnings, and then you bring them into the limelight, you depict them as doing drugs, as sniffing petrol and things like that. And then there is nothing afterwards. There is no support, there is nothing there to say, well, we think that this could be a good career for you, let's help you develop as an actor now. There was none of that. That young Maughan girl – I don't even know where she is now. And this film won awards. Why not follow up and say – thank you for helping us win awards and making a profit on this film, thank you so much for that. We'd like to offer you, maybe, one year tutorship at acting to help you get out of this horrible situation that you're in. But the way it looks to me is, they went in, they recorded all this, they saw how bad the life was and they didn't do anything to try and change it. You know? Standing by, watching them jump into clothes bins. Again, this was exploiting this family purely for the director and the writer and the producer. It was those guys that gained. It was nothing for the community. In fact, all that it did was to instil that depiction within society that this family is a generalisation of the whole community: this is what they're all like. And again, that is wrong. That is a minority within a minority, you know? It is not the overall majority. This is a standalone case. There may be fifty, sixty, a hundred cases even of this happening, but the rest isn't like this. Just like other documentaries, like 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' and things like that – the depiction, it was sold as sensationalism. It wasn't a realism thing.”²⁰⁷

Quentin Fottrell put down some very serious comments too. First of all, he criticised that

“Though her life story was mined for this artistic/social manifesto, she did not get a writing or producer credit.”²⁰⁸ Fottrell also suggested there should be more guidelines to protect people who take part in projects like *Pavee Lackeen*: *“We have a practice of poets and film-makers, artists and journalists, rambling the world of poor neighbourhoods seeking fodder for charitable, artistic or intellectual canons without enforced guidelines and legal requirements on the process and end result, under the guise of middle-class respectability and political activism. [...] The poor are not our intellectual property.”²⁰⁹*

Authenticity and ethics of documentary making are a tricky area.

²⁰⁷ Warde, M. personal communication, 2014, July 03.

²⁰⁸ Fottrell, Q. (2008, March 18).

²⁰⁹ Fottrell, Q. (2008, March 18).

*“[W]hile documentary is expected to be based in fact or actuality, it differs from current affairs in that it is given more licence to place those facts into narratives. Documentary has been defined as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ and the definition of what counts as ‘creativity’ has been a key ethical issue in the field. [...] In some cases the ‘creativity’ has been mistaken for ‘fakery’, in, for example, the use of reconstructions – as if live action footage was in some way less mediated. This has been at the expense of focusing on what perhaps should be the key ethical concern for documentary makers – their relationship with those that they are documenting. If this was the case, then the integrity of documentaries would depend more on the careful consideration of issues around informed consent and participation.”*²¹⁰

Referring to new media, Alan Gilsenan makes a point, saying that

*“Never before have we been so observed. So recorded. So documented. On every street, in every parking lot, in every shopping centre. Online and elsewhere. [...] And never before have we documented ourselves so much. [...] Yet in most of these exchanges, our consent is never clearly nor consciously sought. [...] We are all slowly becoming the unknowing subjects in some strange abstract film, an unformed and shapeless documentary of our social netherworld.”*²¹¹

Emphasising the importance of the relationship between the people who make documentaries, and the people whom the documentaries are about, Gilsenan writes that

*“While consensus is arguably one of the most important pillars of any civilised society, underpinning both our public democracy and our interpersonal relations, it has become an increasingly devalued aspect of documentary production.”*²¹²

Gilsenan also points out a study with forty-five US film-makers about ethics of consent in documentary filmmaking, conducted by the Center for Social Media at the American University in Washington DC, which found that Filmmakers

“find themselves without community norms or standards. Institutional standards and practices remain proprietary to the companies for which the filmmakers may be

²¹⁰ MacKeogh, Carol & O’Connell, Díóg (Eds.) (2012). Introduction. *Documentary in a changing state – Ireland since the 1990s*. Cork: Cork University Press, p. 8.

²¹¹ Gilsenan, Alan (2012). True North. The ethics of consent. In: MacKeogh, Carol & O’Connell, Díóg (Eds.), *Documentary in a changing state – Ireland since the 1990s*. Cork: Cork University Press, p. 57.

²¹² Gilsenan, A. (2012), p. 58.

working and do not always reflect the terms they believe are appropriate for their craft”²¹³

Concluding on how the ethics of consent can be approached in documentary filmmaking, Gilsenan suggests that

*“Life – and its reflected image that is the uncertain world of smoke and mirrors of documentary film-making – is complex and complicated. In this uncertain environment, it is hugely difficult to legislate for right and wrong, and one can only follow one’s own lights, one’s own moral compass, one’s own true north. In the end, ethics is fundamentally about honesty and respect for others, and ethics for documentary making are no different.”*²¹⁴

11.4. Knuckle

Knuckle (IE/UK, 2011) is a non-fictional feature-length documentary film by Ian Palmer and was featured at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. Palmer repeatedly filmed three Traveller families for more than twelve years. The main focus lies on showing the bare knuckle fights that members of the families organize. Palmer also did some interviews with them and their families to document the background behind the fights. As he says in the introduction, he was invited by the fighters to come and film the fights when he originally got to know them while he was filming a wedding.

Knuckle is filmed entirely with hand-held cameras of different quality on a low budget, which adds to the effect of immediacy and authenticity.

11.4.1. Introduction to the depiction of Travellers in *Knuckle*

The fight scenes are very explicit and brutal, presented and commented on in a sensationalist manner.

In an article for *The Irish Times*, Rosaleen McDonagh wrote that *Knuckle* both frightened and disturbed her:

“It confirmed all my fears about voyeurism and creating entertainment from people living on the margins. The power of the outside gaze in the case of ‘Knuckle’ cannot be underestimated.

²¹³ Gilsenan, A. (2012), p. 64.

²¹⁴ Gilsenan, A. (2012), p. 64.

*The atmospheric phrases like ‘the secret world of Travellers’ had that tiresome drone of here-we-go-again: the mad, poor, would-be-dangerous-if-not-stupid, archaic and savage Travellers. [...] ‘Knuckle’ brings with it a set of complex dynamics. Both the director and the Travellers who were involved in this documentary have perpetuated stereotypes of our community.”*²¹⁵

11.4.2. The bare knuckle boxer

There is a long tradition of depicting fist fights in Irish film. Even one of the ultimate Irish film classics, *The Quiet Man* (1952), features an extended fist fight scene. The database irishfilm.net decided to choose boxing as one of their twelve keywords to classify Irish films in.

While *Fight Club* and *Snatch* were Hollywood’s glamorised versions of illegal bare knuckle fights, *Knuckle* takes the approach of attempting a realistic, documentary style depiction. It takes full advantage of the market’s demand for depiction of the brute force of bare knuckle boxing.

*“[I]ts illegal and violent character [...] makes them perfect subject for a social forum that functions on crime-conscious middle-class paranoia. [...] In Celtic Tiger Ireland, Traveller violence is profitable, a fact evidenced by the black market in bare-knuckle boxing DVDs. [...] The continued existence of the fight-video industry demonstrates that the viewers of these DVDs are not interested in the quality of the match, or in the abstract notions such as sportsmanship [...]. The true appeal behind fight-videos is the bloodshed they report. It is self-evident that these videos are purchased because the viewers wish to see Travellers inflicting serious bodily harm on one another. The Traveller bare-knuckle boxers perform the same role in present-day Western society that gladiators did in ancient Rome. [...] [There is] a hardcore niche market for such material anyway.”*²¹⁶

During the film and also in some consecutive interviews, Palmer admitted that he was drawn into the excitement of the bare knuckle fights. By saying so, he left the audience with the question of where their own motivations for watching *Knuckle* come from. He did deliberately get as close as possible, as he described in an interview with Donald Clarke:

²¹⁵ McDonagh, Rosaleen (2011, August 22). Beyond ‘fighting Traveller’ clichés. *The Irish Times*.

²¹⁶ Fennell, J. (2009), pp. 20, 21.

*“I have never been into violent sports. But it does make you feel on the edge of being alive. I’d film the fight from behind the camera and get as close as possible. The effect is: crunch, crunch, blood spraying, spittle. Occasionally I even got a smack myself from a flailing punch.”*²¹⁷

11.4.3. Traveller women telling it straight

The Traveller women in *Knuckle* only appear on the margins of the film – there is little focus on them. They are depicted as being reluctant to talk to Palmer. At one point they do get their say in an interview though. Rosaleen McDonagh emphasised the importance of this scene:

*“The saving grace of the film happens close to the end. All during the film Mr Palmer spoke about how difficult it was for him to get Traveller women to talk. Finally, we hear the voices of older women: they explained how futile the feuding was, and how we’re all kin to each other and, more importantly, these Traveller women spoke about how they didn’t want their grandchildren growing up and being pressurised to fight.”*²¹⁸

So the women who get to talk are family members of the boxers, again giving the image of the Traveller woman as the caring mother and wife, representing the ‘voice of reason’. This, despite fitting into the frame of stereotypes, provides at least a counterbalance to the stereotypical ‘fighting Traveller’ image that *Knuckle* promotes.

11.4.4. Othering

So *Knuckle* repeats stereotypical images of the ‘fighting Traveller’ and lives on the audience’s fascination with the ‘other’s’ violence, raising questions about the audience’s own motivation for watching it though.

Martin Warde said that, as for the representation of Travellers, *Knuckle* had its point, if you consider one thing. He said that it is a documentary, a fairly realistic depiction of some individual Travellers. In this context, it is necessary to understand the difference between tradition and culture. ‘Tradition’ might apply to just one single family or to a small part of a community, while ‘culture’ applies to a whole community. In the Traveller culture, some

²¹⁷ Clarke, Donald (2011, August 3). Taking a bare-knuckle ride. *The Irish Times*.

²¹⁸ McDonagh, Rosaleen (2011, August 22).

Travellers have a tradition of fighting, others for example have a tradition of music or storytelling. So Warde said he thinks that *Knuckle* was good in the way it showed what kind of internal problems some Traveller's tradition of bare knuckle fighting can cause.

11.4.5. Conclusion to *Knuckle*

It would be easy to blame Palmer for making a highly voyeuristic and sensationalist documentary, and even worse, giving an impression that fighting and feuding is a general aspect of Traveller culture. But that is only one side of the story:

*“When a community implodes on itself questions need to be asked. Questions about educational opportunity, employment possibilities and social, political, cultural participation. Knuckle presented Travellers in a very prurient way. Yet we collude in our own objectification and that's the saddest element of the documentary. Part of me wants to scold and criticise the director, but the reality is my own people allowed him into their lives. He may be voyeuristic and opportunistic but they also got something from participating. They got the time and attention of a well-resourced settled man, and they played to that gallery. There is still a job for the stage Irishman.”*²¹⁹

11.5. *King of the Travellers*

King of the Travellers (IE, 2012) is a drama directed by Mark O'Connor and co-written by Michael Collins. It evolves around the main character, Traveller John Paul Moorhouse (John Connors), who wants revenge for his father's murder twelve years earlier. He does not know who the murderer is, but he suspects another Traveller family, the Powers. As it happens, Winnie Power (Carla McGlynn) is a childhood friend whom he meets again after many years apart.

Another conflict escalates and gets most violent when John Paul and other young Travellers ignore a landowner's complaints about their trespassing on his land. Finally, there is an internal conflict in John Paul's family, as his adopted brother Mickey Moorhouse (Peter Coonan) repeatedly gets into trouble and challenges the authority of the head of the family Francis Moorhouse (Michael Collins). The film poster says: ‘Two Families. One Bare-Knuckle War. King of the Travellers. Love. Betrayal. Friendship. Revenge.’

²¹⁹ McDonagh, Rosaleen (2011, August 22).

11.5.1. Introduction to the depiction of Travellers in *King of the Traveller*

What is fairly unique about *King of the Travellers* is that nearly all of the Traveller characters were played by actual members of the Traveller community. Some of the actors are professional actors, others are amateurs. Obviously the cast supports the authenticity of the film. So does the fact that *King of the Travellers* was co-written by a Traveller, Michael Collins, who was strongly involved in the development of the film.

Despite the fact that many Travellers were taking part in the making of the film, it does feature some stereotypical images of the culture. What struck me about this film is that it proves again how thin the line is between unwelcome stereotypes and welcome images that are cultural markers. This time you can't just say – here we go again, they've done it again, another bunch of the same old stereotypes because this time Travellers were involved in the making of the film. As mentioned in the chapter on stereotypes, film does rely on stereotypes a lot and it's not so easy to challenge them all at once. Yes, there are bare-knuckle fights and a feud in the film, but there is also a background story of the trouble that this causes for either side. *King of the Travellers* depicts Travellers neither in an overly positive, nor overly negative way. It depicts them as individuals with their own stories that made them who they are, with their strengths and their flaws.

The film also features aspects of Traveller culture that are shown less frequently. The topic of adoption is brought up, for example, as Mickey Moorhouse was found as a baby and raised as one of the family's own. On the other hand, it does depict Mickey's conflict of not feeling accepted as a full member of the family, trying to overcompensate by confronting and provoking non-Travellers and challenging the Powers to bare knuckle-fights.

The reactions to the depiction of Travellers in the film were diverse. In a review for *Voice of the Traveller*, David Joyce wrote that “[t]he film overall falls into the sort of cliché one would expect from the producers of ‘Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’ and not the work of a lauded up and coming independent film writer/director Mark O’Connor”²²⁰

Rosaleen McDonagh's perspective is that “*Fresh and innovative representations don't come easy for Travellers. Ethics and values influence how a narrative and characters are created and shaped. One particular hue of Traveller culture gets*

²²⁰ Joyce, David (2013, May/June). *King of the Travellers*. *Voice Of the Traveller*, (89), p. 37.

communicated. Variations are the key. Within our community, we don't know each other as homogenous. Diversity is all around us."²²¹

11.5.2. Attempting some realistic fiction

In a *Newstalk* interview, Michael Collins was

*"keen to stress the film also aims to give a different, more realistic portrayal of the travelling community, one that's removed from traditional media portrayals. '[The film] is about love, hate and betrayal. It's based in the community where people mightn't know what's going on inside, and this gives an insight into the community... This film is quite different than 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' or 'Into the West' or 'Trojan Eddie'. Travellers are involved both in front of the camera and behind the camera."*²²²

Going more into detail of how he thought *King of the Traveller*, despite being a fictional story, was able to relate to reality and enable the audience to relate to it, Collins said that

*"We touched of stories that people would have heard in the media. Like we have this settled person in the middle owning the land and you have the two Travellers who own the land on each side. That would be very similar to Dale Farm which we are all conscious of. And then there is other elements in it that people would relate to, to other stories that would have happened with Travellers and settled people down through the years. So even though it is a fictional story, you have all those elements in it."*²²³

Reviewing the film, Rosaleen McDonagh recalled that

"All my generation had was 'Glenroe' or 'The Riordans'. These came, inevitably, with settled people playing our parts, caricaturing our identity in a manner that was not representative. Our expectations are greater now. The formula has to fulfil certain demands. It has to have a narrative that is expositional and explores and at times exploits racism as the main theme. [...] Audiences and critics feel short-changed that 'King of the Travellers' doesn't deliver on these expectations. But 'King of the Travellers' is not a Ken Loach piece. It never claimed to be anything other than fiction. Clichés were relied upon.

²²¹ McDonagh, Rosaleen (2013, August 1). Authenticity penetrates the cliché. *Village*. Retrieved 2013, August from <http://www.villagemagazine.ie/index.php/2013/08/authenticity-penetrates-the-cliches/>.

²²² McNeice, Stephen (2013, April 11). Peter Coonan and Michael Collins talk *King of the Travellers*. An Interview with Norah Casey and Chris Donoghue. *Newstalk*. Retrieved 2013, April from http://archive-ie.com/page/2671186/2013-08-21/http://www.newstalk.ie/reader/47.305.358/3993/blog_list/.

²²³ McNeice, S. (2013, April 11).

The mad, bad, crazed Traveller man is at the heart of the film. Inevitably, bare-knuckle boxing is there with all the violence and machismo.

However, the film stands up when compared to other pieces of drama that objectify and humiliate. 'King of the Travellers' didn't exploit our people in the way that Ian Palmer's 'Knuckle' or that facile piece of drivel 'Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' does. Sharing this perspective with a settled friend, her scolding was harsh. She was unable to understand that, for all its clichés, 'King of the Travellers', had authenticity due to the majority Traveller cast."²²⁴

Martin Warde had a similar approach saying

*"That is fiction. It is not a realistic portrayal. When a film is written purely for fiction, then they have creative license to, I suppose, stretch the boundaries of reality. I think the fact that there's Travellers involved in this project means that it was probably coming from the right space. And, unfortunately, again the pressure is on the writers to write something that's going to sell. And again, reality wouldn't have sold as well as what was written in 'King of the Travellers'. [...] It is a bunch of stereotypes, and I think the whole purpose was to use the stereotypes. I don't think it was there to break any ground, sociologically or anthropologically, I don't think it was there to dispel myths or stereotypes, I think it was there to, more or less, plámás them and really kind of get the stereotypes and put them out, because that's what's going to sell."*²²⁵

11.5.3. Non-Traveller actors playing Travellers among Travellers playing Travellers

I also asked Warde what he thinks about how Traveller- and non-Traveller actors were both playing Travellers in the film, and if he thought that the non-Traveller actors, for example Peter Coonan and Carla McGlynn stood out as 'fakes'.

"Do they stand out as fakes? Absolutely. But that was through no fault of their own. They are fantastic actors in their own right. It's just that being a Traveller, you will notice somebody who is pretending to be a Traveller, no matter how good an actor they are. But I don't believe that they portrayed the characters in a negative light. In fact, I think that Carla was actually fantastic, and Peter, with all due respect to Peter, you know, he was given that character who was wild, who was boisterous, he was the one who was causing

²²⁴ McDonagh, R. (2013, August 1).

²²⁵ Warde, M., personal communication, 2014, July 03.

trouble, you know – which suited him perfect as an actor. So he didn't portray us in a negative light, he only portrayed a character that was written for him. So you can never really blame the actors in this, you know? But it's an interesting one."²²⁶

Michael Collins appreciates the way Coonan prepared for the role and how he

*"made the effort to play the Traveller characters brilliantly, you know, and went out and met Travellers, and went out and lived on the sites and tried to get more sort of body language than the accent. Anybody can put on a thick accent and call it a Traveller accent, but if you don't get the body language, for me it doesn't work."*²²⁷

Collins also approvingly mentioned the way Peter Coonan worked out his character's way of talking:

*"One of the things about Travellers is, when Travellers are communicating with each other, they actually talk quite fast. They only slow down when they are talking to settled people and Peter even caught that as well which was good, because when he was doing it with the other characters, there was a bit of a speed in it as well. Because if you are a trained actor, the first thing you need to know, the first thing you learn is that people need to know what you're saying. So you need to have your accent but as a Traveller character you would talk quite fast, but also quite clear."*²²⁸

11.5.4. Othering

Who are the 'others' in *King of the Travellers*? Who is talking? Well, the line between the 'us' and the 'them' is consciously crossed (and partly erased). Travellers were involved in the making of the film more than in any other films discussed in this thesis. No less important, probably more than in any other of the films, Travellers are a target audience too. It's not just the majority population's finger pointing view. It's a conscious attempt at a more realistic portrayal, at the same time not trying to speak for the whole community. This is a story about some individuals who happen to belong to Traveller culture, but they have their good and their bad sides, and both Travellers and non-Travellers have their 'bad guys'.

²²⁶ Warde, M., personal communication, 2014, July 03.

²²⁷ O'Callaghan, M. (2013, June 16).

²²⁸ McNeice, S. (2013, April 11).

Behind the stereotypical bare-knuckle boxer is a young man who struggles with his own family and his fate just as much as with the rest of the world, including the ‘settled people’. Actually, as Francis tells John Paul ‘You need to know something, son, about the settled community: They’re no good. All you’ll ever be in their eyes is a dirty knacker. Never accepted. You stick with your own people, son.’, John Paul answers him ‘That’s a load of shit. Settled people never treated me no different in the boxing club.’

Othering, prejudice and racism are one central strand of the plot. So is the violence and suffering that they bring. More than once in the film, if the characters had tried to sit down with their opponents and talk it out, if they had really tried to understand the other’s point of view, a lot of trouble could have been avoided.

11.5.5. Conclusion to *King of the Travellers*

Asked if the reactions he got about the film were generally supportive, Collins said:

*“The people who worked on it, yeah, the people who have seen it, yeah, but of course, I mean, somebody is going to find a problem. It does not matter what you do, people will find problems with it, the media will. Sometimes, you know, people will get caught up too much on the feuding or the big fat gypsy wedding and forget the story. What I would love people doing is.... Forget that the film is about Travellers and enjoy the story.”*²²⁹

²²⁹ McNeice, S. (2013, April 11).

12. Conclusion: Travellers in 21st century film – still the old stereotypes?

In the introduction, I suggested that despite many historical, social and political developments, certain stereotypes about Irish Travellers have remained, and that although a few new facets might have been added to the long established images, many of the traditional stereotypes have remained fairly static and unchanged. I will now briefly go through the stereotypes mentioned earlier in this thesis and sum up whether they still apply to the representation of Travellers in the films discussed here.

12.1. Still a link to an idyllic past?

In *A Bit of a Traveller in Everybody* (2006), Maeve Connolly concludes that in Irish and international cinema,

“the figure of the Traveller provides a conduit to the recovery of the past, a recovery coded as therapeutic.”²³⁰ Her analysis “highlights a recurrent romantic investment in the spiritual, familial, and communal values that these white others are thought to possess – values that are no longer securely located in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. This recovery of the past sometimes enables the establishment of new relationships, or more progressive forms of social and familial organizations.”²³¹

This statement matches what is said about the stereotypical depiction of Travellers as a link to the idyllic past in this thesis’ chapter on stereotypes. However, I think this aspect has declined in recent films. Often, Travellers are still depicted as a close community with strong family bonds, although the image does get opposed, for example in *King of the Travellers*, where murder happens within the family, or in *Pavee Lackeen*, where the father has left the family. The same applies to *Knuckle*, where the family bonds are strong within the families, but feuding does take part among families that turn out to be distant relatives. So an image of strong family bonds among Travellers does appear frequently, but the image does get opposed in a radical way too.

²³⁰ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 311.

²³¹ Connolly, M. (2006), p. 311.

As discussed in more detail later on, Traveller women, if they appear in the films at all, are mostly depicted in the traditional role of the caring mother. This allows interpretations of Traveller women personifying a link to an idyllic, traditional past.

Travellers are still frequently depicted as spiritual, religious people though, but usually there is no central focus on that feature of any character's personality. The mystical, magical aspect is sometimes brought up too, for example in the opening scene of *Pavee Lackeen*, when Winnie has her fortune told.

Wherever an image of people sitting around a campfire appears (and it does appear in the majority of the mentioned films), this triggers conscious and unconscious relation to humans' ancient connection with that element. So the campfire does provide a conduit to the recovery of the past, although not necessarily an idyllic one.

Generally speaking, in recent films featuring Traveller characters, I don't think Connolly's introducing statement is still fully valid. Travellers do sometimes appear in the suggested manner if the films engage with the past, as in *Country*, but not so much in films that are set in the present, as it used to be with *Into the West*, for example.

12.2. Still criminals?

In the films analysed, Travellers are not generally portrayed as criminals, but often as outlaws, as tricksters and as having committed small-scale crimes such as organising illegal bare-knuckle fights or trespassing on private land, like for example in *King of the Travellers*. This is still a successor to the 'likeable chancer', the unruly trickster with anarchistic tendencies. This is still exactly the same image we know as having taken over from the old Traveller stereotypes. Particularly Mickey in *Snatch* and Mickey in *King of the Travellers* are depicted as being bold, likeable troublemakers. The characters in films that are less fictional, as in *Knuckle* and to a degree also Winnie in *Pavee Lackeen*, are still portrayed as being involved in criminal activity, either with bare-knuckle fighting or petty theft. Out of five films analysed, four depicted Travellers as being (at least) small scale criminals.

12.3. Still feuding and violent?

As mentioned in the introduction, I do think that *Snatch* has introduced a major shift towards a more frequent appearance of bare-knuckle fights in films featuring Traveller characters. I could not judge in how far *Snatch* was the causation or if it just happened to be the first film to take the opportunity that a growing market for a more explicit and more frequent depiction of violence in mainstream fiction film in particular and in other media in general offered for that topic. What I do discern is that it was one of the first films to use some Travellers' tradition of bare-knuckle boxing as a way of serving that demand on the feature film market. Apparently the international success that *Snatch* gained on the one hand, spread a new image of Irish Travellers, or enforced existing ones (the image of the quarrelsome Irishman is not a new one, as we know, and neither is the projection on Travellers).

Anyway, *Snatch*'s success encouraged further film projects to feature bare knuckle fights too, as for example *Knuckle*, *King of the Travellers*, or *Traveller* (2013)²³². Out of five films analysed in this thesis, three depicted bare knuckle fights, one of them, *Knuckle*, has them as the main focus.

Actually, if you include children's schoolyard fights, all five out of five analysed films feature fighting Traveller characters.

12.4. Irish/Traveller male images

In the above context, it is interesting to read that in 2009's *Screening Irish-America*, Diane Negra observed that although the frequency of depiction of Irish-themed material "*slightly diminished in recent years, a wave of new portrayals suggests that Irishness has emphatically regained its representability in US media and on very particular terms in masculinist narratives of anger, resentment and defensiveness.*"²³³ Negra points out a link between "*new fictional representations of television Irishness and the empathically angry Irish-American males of cable news.*"²³⁴ She also noticed a growing interest in "*Irish-American themed print narratives about brutal power brokering such as [...] Dick Lehr's*

²³² Benjamin John's *Traveller* (2013) is such a sequence of all the well known stereotypes, it would not have offered any new aspects for this thesis, so I left it out even though it is the most recently published example of Travellers in fiction film.

²³³ Negra, Diane (2009). Irishness, Anger and Masculinity in Recent Film and Television. In: Barton, Ruth (Ed.), *Screening Irish-America*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, p. 279.

²³⁴ Negra, D. (2009), p. 279.

*'Black Mass: The True Story of an Unholy Alliance Between the FBI and the Irish Mob'*²³⁵

Negra observes a “*broad consensus in the US that Irishness is available to speak a precariously classed, highly unstable whiteness*”²³⁶, and in this context points out Lee Grieveson, Esther Sonnet and Peter Stanfields research on a commonality of gangster genre films as “*sites of instability of wider cultural resonance.*”²³⁷ These writers find a depiction of Irishness that

“*conspicuously searches for geographical stability and deploys psychological territorialism to bolster masculinity. [...] The Irishness displayed here would seem particularly designed to alleviate stress points in the psychology of contemporary white US masculinity, and despite the slightly different registers in which they sometimes operate, this set of films and television programmes is strikingly united by a pervasive sense of gendered melancholy and anxiety.*”²³⁸

All in all, Negra observes a “*'hardening' of Irishness in this new wave of representations*”²³⁹ and “*links between Irishness and disenfranchised whiteness, the emphasis on fraternalism and criminality in the texts and the work that they perform in managing crises of American citizenship through Irishness.*”²⁴⁰

As for Irish cinema's images of Irish males, Debbie Ging wrote that,

“*By and large, Irish cinema has been strikingly deficient in heroic men. Cinematic visions of Gaelic musclemen and swashbucklers do not readily spring to mind. We are more accustomed to images of men who are violent, tyrannical, emotionally damaged, depressed, suicidal, alcoholic, socially marginalised or otherwise excluded from the dividends of male cinematic heroism. Unlike many other mainstream national cinemas, which have – at least until recently – tended to treat heroic, patriarchal and patriotic masculinities as relatively unproblematic, most Irish filmmakers have been savagely critical of these paradigms.*”²⁴¹

²³⁵ Negra, D. (2009), p. 279.

²³⁶ Negra, D. (2009), p. 280.

²³⁷ Grieveson, Lee & Sonnet, Esther & Stanfield, Peter (Eds.) (2005). *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, p. 9.

²³⁸ Negra, D. (2009), p. 280.

²³⁹ Negra, D. (2009), p. 281.

²⁴⁰ Negra, D. (2009), p. 281.

²⁴¹ Ging, Debbie (2013). *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan p. 1.

Ging also pointed out the contradiction that on the one hand there is a resurgence in popularity of gangsters, criminals and hard men in the entertainment media, while at the same time a counter-discourse is happening in the news media, expressing a “*fear of deviant or antisocial male youth and of ‘men running wild’*”²⁴² Finally, Ging observed “*an increasingly ambiguous engagement with male-centred narratives, whose protagonists resist unequivocal ideological categorisation.*”²⁴³

So according to Diane Negra, there is a trend in American mainstream media to frequently depict the Irish male in the context of anger and resentment, actually expressing instability and a need for an outlet for a sense of gendered melancholy and anxiety. In that case it is not surprising that the hyper-Irish image, the male Traveller, is going through a boom of being depicted in the same way. Obviously not every depiction of a bare-knuckle fight is an expression of a deep identity crisis. Depiction of violence can equally well be just what it is: depicting violence.

“*Indeed, most films do not set out to represent the social world accurately: cinema is often as much about presenting a vision – be it utopian or dystopian – of how things could be as it is about commenting on how things are. [...] [N]o film industry, Hollywood included, is ideologically monolithic – indeed, cinema has also been adept at exploding the myths about hard men and in presenting us with alternative images of manhood.*”²⁴⁴

As for the films analysed in this thesis, they feature a variety of male identities. There is a clear focus on male Travellers as being well trained fighters ready to enter a fight at any time of the day (*Snatch*, *King of the Travellers*, *Knuckle*). Sometimes this depiction is heroic, as in *Snatch*, sometimes it is voyeuristic, as in *Knuckle*, sometimes it is an aspect of more complex internal and external conflicts that the characters are struggling with, as in *King of the Travellers*. Most of the time it has more than one reason and does not fit in just one of these boxes. The best example for this is *Country*, where Michael, who, together with Jack is one of the film’s two very gentle and sensitive characters, teaches Jack how to box so he can defend himself against another boy.

²⁴² Ging, D. (2013), p. 6.

²⁴³ Ging, D. (2013), p. 6.

²⁴⁴ Ging, D. (2013), p. 5.

In any case, three out of five films do expound the problems of violence and do end up with the conclusion that solving problems in a violent way did not work to the advantage of the characters.

I asked Martin Warde if he thinks that there is pressure on Traveller artists, or, more generally speaking, Travellers in public positions, to give an overly positive image rather than just a realistic one, because they feel they have to balance out all the overly negative depictions. He said

“Yes. I do. I do believe that when you are so negatively portrayed in the media – constantly, it’s a constant barrage of being portrayed as violent, unruly, unsympathetic to other people’s culture – you see, we have been demonised to a point where we now have to come back as being overly nice, you know? And you see that with most ethnic minorities across the world. What happens is, they become so negatively portrayed in the media, that they begin to believe that this is how they really are. So they try to overcompensate that, by becoming the total opposite. So you have total opposites. And then you lose the actual reality, which is in the middle. You know? But the middle is not good enough, because the media won’t believe in realism. They want to have the whole sensationalism, because sensation, that sells. If I was to tell you I write poetry, I love to read – that does not account for the stereotype of what a Traveller man is. You know, so that’s not going to sell. People will say, oh no, that’s not real, I’m not going to believe that. That can’t be real. I’ve seen five movies and they’re always fighting, so that m u s t be real. That’s what I w a n t it to be. So yes, I do believe that there is definitely pressure for people to become the opposites because of overly negative depictions.”²⁴⁵

12.5. Irish/Traveller female images

As for the Irish stereotypes, “[A]t the transition from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century Irishness frequently functioned as a touchstone for an essential ‘family values’ in American popular culture.”²⁴⁶ It may or may not be a coincidence that out of five films analysed, four had the female Traveller’s part with a focus on the caring mother in a more or less traditional role.

²⁴⁵ Warde, M., personal communication, 2014, July 03.

²⁴⁶ Negra, D. (2009), p. 280.

The chapter concerning stereotypes shows that the traditional stereotypes depict Traveller women either as romanticised and sexualised, masculinised or victimised by husbands and fathers.

What was striking about the depiction of Traveller women in all films except *Pavee Lackeen* was that Traveller women ... were not depicted. In *Snatch* Mickey's mother gets a few lines telling Turkish and Tommy not to get her boy into any trouble, as he is a good boy. On the other hand, not many other women in this film get any lines at all. for the same applies to *Country*, where a few Traveller women briefly appear by the campfire, quietly wrapped in their shawls. This film though, is built around the painful absence of women, where

*“the men occupy a space void of beauty, compassion or love. [...] Country is a complex and sophisticated analysis not only of the damage done by patriarchy to women, children and ethnic Others but also of its ultimately masochistic nature: homosocial collusion may guarantee power to the menfolk [...] but they are bitter, self-loathing and emotional strangers unto themselves.”*²⁴⁷

Pavee Lackeen is the exception that proves the rule by building the story nearly exclusively around female characters. Initially director Perry Ogden had intended to work with Winnie's brother for a film project, though he changed his mind when he met the charismatic girl and decided to invite her to take the leading part in his film. By building this film around Winnie's real life experiences, it draws attention to social problems such as access to education or the housing problems. Through 'using' the Maughans to draw attention to these problems, they are depicted as being victims of the failure of Ireland's social welfare system.

At the same time, there are serious accusations towards the filmmakers about taking advantage of the family's precarious living circumstances for the sake of the film's success, thus victimising them again. What *Pavee Lackeen* also shows though, is what the actors reveal about themselves and their lives, and what made this film the success it is. It shows a curious, intelligent, gentle, brave, shy, confident young girl and her mother, a strong, proud and tough woman fighting for a safe, healthy, secure future for her family.

So although the keywords 'victim' and 'mother' appear in this context, this film challenges stereotypes about Travellers by engaging with individual life stories.

²⁴⁷ Ging, D. (2013), p. 89.

Knuckle too has real women allowing a camera into their lives and sharing their point of view. They represent the ‘voice of reason’, opposing the fighting, regretting the hostility among Travellers.

King of the Travellers again does not break much ground for the depiction of Traveller women outside the regular stereotypes. The caring mother, the victim of the violence of a husband-to be, the love interest.

So yes, we are still stuck with the image of the Traveller woman as mother, wife and/or victim. But that is not a Traveller-specific issue. Out of five films about Travellers discussed here, only one had a female leading part (*Pavee Lackeen*). However, that is still a better statistic than the one for US mainstream film releases this year, where only fifteen percent feature female leading parts.²⁴⁸ It’s not just the case in the depiction of Travellers, it’s a general issue that many production companies think they will make more profit with male leading parts where the women’s role is reduced to playing the ‘love interest’. They seem to think that males are a more economic target audience and that males prefer seeing male leading parts in the films they watch. Which is nonsense, in many ways, but also from an economical point of view, as the huge success of *Lucy* (USA, 2014) or *Maleficent* (USA, 2014) proves.²⁴⁹

12.6. Intolerance and Othering

This thesis’ chapter ‘Irish Cinema?’ introduces Werner Huber’s approach to defining contemporary Irish cinema, referring to characteristics like bringing forward topics such as globalization, the Celtic Tiger (and the Tiger’s underbelly), it’s aftermath and the relating issues of impoverishment, drug abuse, crime and/or xenophobia suggesting that this “preponderance towards social/socio-political identity issues is a new defining factor at least in one strand of Irish cinema.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Mendelson, Scott (2014, July 21). Scarlett Johansson’s ‘Lucy’, Angelina Jolie’s ‘Maleficent’ Lead Girl-Powered Blockbusters. *Forbes*. Retrieved 2014, July from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2014/07/21/scarlett-johannsons-lucy-angelina-jolies-maleficent-lead-girl-powered-blockbusters/>.

²⁴⁹ See: Mendelson, S. (2014, July 21).

²⁵⁰ Huber, W. (2011), p. 2.

Quite a few of the films discussed broach the subject of intolerance. *Snatch*'s whole concept is built around overemphasizing stereotypes, it depicts racism towards Travellers in a satirical way. *Country* has intolerance as a main theme and strikingly depicts the damage done to the victims of intolerance as well as to the victimisers. *Pavee Lackeen* is the film closest to Huber's definition. It was filmed during Ireland's Celtic Tiger period, yet it shows a family that was marginalised and did not get a share of the Tiger cake. What the Maughans experience from some members of society and from the social state that is supposed to look after them, is not so much intolerance as sheer indifference and neglect. *Knuckle* is a prime example of Othering, presenting the people involved in a sensationalist and voyeuristic way, like some exotic, fascinating but incomprehensible species.

More Travellers were involved in the making of *King of the Travellers* than in any film before. Even though it repeats some patterns of stereotypical depiction, more importantly it depicts a conflict between Travellers and members of the majority population that is fuelled by both sides' indifference to each other's cultural and personal habits and needs, and by their unwillingness to work on a solution that suits both sides. The consequence, as shown in *Country*, is that everybody gets into trouble and nobody wins. As in *Country*, *King of the Travellers* also depicts the destructive consequences of intolerance.

All in all, four out of the five films analysed depicted intolerance, the fifth one (*Knuckle*) was a prime example of Othering.

12.7. Why the hype? What does it say about society? And is there a chance for a realistic portrayal?

So what does the travellerism hype say about society in general? One theory could be that as Travellers are such a closely related 'Other' (with regard to a shared history etc.), they are a close reflection of society itself. One of the things Travellers symbolically stand for is the idea of freedom and of being able to move about as they want, not having to pay taxes and not having to abide by the law. So in a time where the enthusiasm about an independent Republic of Ireland has made way to the realization that it's impossible to live up to the high ideals of the past and after the second wave of enthusiasm about the Celtic Tiger has also ebbed, leaving people and the country in debt for lifetimes, this picture of a lawless, self-obtained, even self-ruling life (e.g. solving conflicts by fistfights) not unlikely

is a tempting or at least interesting one. It might give a ‘what-if’ picture. What if we abandoned those homes that left us in debts to roam the streets?

Another possible issue of envy or at least interest is the idea of close family bonds and a reliable community. In a country where two generations ago it was not unusual for a family to have a dozen or more children, and in the rural community everyone was keeping an eye on everyone (in more than one way) it must be particularly unsettling for a growing number of urban single parents to be confronted with having to raise their children more or less on their own. The other side of the coin is of course – what if we actually were to lose our homes to the banks and end up in bitter poverty?

Asked where he thinks the present ‘travellerism’ hype comes from, and what it says about society, Martin Warde said that he used to be very sceptical about this boom, but times have changed and so has his opinion. He suggested that the boom shows people’s interest in less well known cultures. For example, there are other series comparable to *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, like *Breaking Amish* for example. The success of these series shows that there is an interest in other cultures, and that’s a good thing, he said.

12.8. Has the depiction changed?

Asked how he sees the chances for mainstream cinema to show more realistic, even-handed depictions of Irish Traveller culture, Warde said that he is not too optimistic for big changes any time soon. It’s like with the depiction of Ireland in mainstream cinema: It would still be the green fields a lot of the times. “*But again: we’ve got to work on that.*”²⁵¹

Probably the most important change happening recently in terms of the depiction of Irish Travellers is that there is a strong trend towards self-empowerment from the side of Travellers. There are more Travellers involved in acting, writing, filmmaking, media and theatre than ever before. So that is a major step towards challenging the majority population’s point of view and making a change.

Considering that all in all, the old stereotypes which were first applied to the Irish by the British colonisers are still alive and in frequent use, pertaining to the Irish as well as to the Irish Travellers, encouraging a more intercultural understanding still has a lot of unused

²⁵¹ Warde, M. personal communication, 2014, July 03.

development potential. As Rosaleen McDonagh wrote in *Authenticity penetrates the cliché*:

“The burden of representation is ever-present when one writes about Travellers. It is not about engaging in polemic or diatribe. It is about finding that balance of presenting material in both an ethical and authentic way. This does not always fit comfortably with what audiences or funders may want.

The ‘settled people’ view demands the misfit, untethered, dysfunctional, over-sexualised, alcoholic, bare-knuckle fighting, misogynist Traveller-man. Any such representation is a total diminution of Traveller male identity. A Traveller female representation is often sought for the sole gratification of the settled male gaze. We are represented as passive, vulnerable, virginal.

The binary position of villain or hero can leave very little room to make new challenging, complicated, dynamic narratives. Fulfilling a prescribed aesthetic can be a form of colluding and playing the part that they have chosen for you.

Travellers seem to make for easy pickings when collaborating with settled artists. The agenda can be ambiguous, more about money and marketing than representation. Engaging with the film or arts industry could be empowering and liberating for a new generation of Travellers. However, we must move into these new areas with a mature balance of caution and confidence.”²⁵²

²⁵² McDonagh, Rosaleen. (2013, August 01).

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INTERVIEW

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Abstract, English

Traveller Studies are a relatively new scientific subject, a smaller category within the broader field of Irish Studies. Like Roma Studies, Diaspora and Migration Studies, they only started to gain closer attention within the last few decades.²⁵³

This thesis will examine how the ethnic group of Irish Travellers is depicted in cinema since the year 2000. It will start off by giving an overview of some aspects of Irish Travellers' cultural background, of what there is to be said about their history and about the present political situation. A quantitative and qualitative film analysis will help discussing the following theories and questions.

I started researching this thesis with the theory that despite many historical, social and political developments, certain stereotypes about Irish Travellers have remained in different kinds of cultural expression, may it be film, media or literature. I supposed that although a few new facets might have been added to the long established images, many of the traditional stereotypes have remained fairly static and unchanged.

Another suggestion that I came up with at an early stage of my research and that I since discovered to be a widely discussed and accepted theory, is that many of the stereotypical ways in which Travellers are being depicted in different media at present, are fairly close to stereotypes about the Irish in general. I will examine the selected films in regard to this theory. To do so, the thesis will start with clarifying how the term 'stereotype' is actually defined. This will include outlining what stereotype means in relation to film, as film history very early worked with as well as against stereotypes. Later on it will give an overview of the history of stereotypes about the Irish majority population and about Irish Travellers, and have a look at what they have in common.

As there is a fairly long history of 'other' cultures being looking down upon in Europe's past, and because the depiction of Irish Travellers must be seen in the context of Ireland's older and newer history, this thesis will also give an introduction to the meaning of the term 'Othering' and its relevance in Ireland's history and present. I will research if the Othering of Irish Travellers is depicted, repeated and/or challenged in present film. At the end of this thesis, I will be able to say if and how the old, 'traditional' stereotypes are being repeated and what has changed.

²⁵³ See: Hayes, Michael (2006). *Irish travellers: representations and realities*. Dublin: Liffey Press. Preface.

For this matter, the thesis also offers a brief overview of the history of films about Travellers, mainly focussing on the most popular fiction films involving Traveller characters, but also including some relevant other examples, like documentary, TV series and also print media, among others.

I will analyse five films in detail before concluding with a summing up of what can be said about the depiction of Irish Travellers in cinema since the year 2000.

The thesis also involves a definition of what the terms ‘Irish cinema’ or ‘Irish national cinema’ can include. Do they refer to films made entirely by Irish directors and actors, featuring Irish characters, with an Irish narrative taking place in Ireland? Very unlikely. Starting this thesis, I was considering writing only about the representation of Travellers in Irish cinema. The chapter on Irish cinema will explain if and how such a thing as Irish cinema can be defined at all.

The main part of this thesis consists of a detailed analysis of some of the most popular films featuring Irish Travellers, made after the year 2000. I picked this date, not just because it is a nice round number and marks the beginning of the new millennium, it is also the year when *Snatch* (UK/USA, 2000) was released, the first film with a main part for Travellers ending up a massive international success and a cult film today. I suspect that since *Snatch* there has been a shift in the depiction of Travellers. If and how this shift took place will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

The analysis will not be a film analysis in the classical sense, but will focus on the depiction of Travellers regarding narrative and structure of the films, and compare them. I will examine the films regarding the characters they feature to see which stereotypes appear, if they relate to the traditional stereotypes and if there have been changes. As mentioned above, I will also research if some films challenge these stereotypes. Another question that this thesis will look into is, if any of the films acknowledge political and/or social issues concerning Irish Travellers.

Furthermore, the thesis will occasionally bring forward the production background (for example in how far Travellers were involved as actors or writers) and will feature comments by critics.

All in all I hope to draw a comprehensive conclusion about how Irish Travellers are depicted in 21st century cinema up to now.

Abstract, Deutsch

Traveller Studies sind ein relativ neues Forschungsgebiet, eine kleinere Kategorie im größeren Feld der Irish Studies. Wie Roma Studies oder die Migrationsforschung erfahren sie erst in den letzten Jahrzehnten vermehrte Aufmerksamkeit.²⁵⁴

Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht wie die ethnische Gruppe der Irish Travellers seit dem Jahr 2000 im Kino dargestellt wurde. Sie beginnt mit einem Überblick über einige Hintergründe der Kultur der Irish Travellers und einer Einführung in deren Geschichte und die gegenwärtige politische Situation. Im Zuge einer qualitativen und quantitativen Filmanalyse werden folgende Fragen untersucht.

Ich habe meine Arbeit mit der These begonnen, dass trotz vieler historischer, sozialer und politischer Entwicklungen bestimmte althergebrachte Stereotypen zu Irish Travellers unverändert in kulturellen Medien wie Spielfilm oder Literatur angewendet werden. Die Vermutung war dass obwohl einige neue Facetten zu den lang etablierten Darstellungsweisen dazukamen, trotzdem viele traditionelle Stereotypen relativ gleich geblieben sind.

Eine andere Theorie, die ich relativ früh während meiner Recherchearbeit aufgestellt habe, und die sich für mich seither als weitläufig diskutiert und anerkannt herausgestellt hat, ist dass viele der Stereotypen über Irish Travellers den allgemeinen Stereotypen über Iren und Irinnen sehr ähnlich sind. Um dieser Theorie nachzugehen beginnt diese Diplomarbeit damit, den Begriff ›Stereotyp‹ zu definieren. Dies beinhaltet auch eine Erläuterung darüber was Stereotyp im Bezug auf Film bedeutet, schließlich wurde in der Geschichte des Films schon sehr früh sowohl mit als auch gegen Stereotypen gearbeitet.

Als nächstes wird ein Überblick über die Geschichte von einzelnen Stereotypen über die irische Mehrheitsbevölkerung gegeben und dann über jene Stereotypen zu den Irish Travellers, um beide vergleichen zu können.

Europa hat eine lange Tradition darin, dass auf ›andere‹ Kulturen herabgeschaut wird. Weil die Darstellung von Irish Travellers im Kontext von Irlands und Europas älterer und neuerer Geschichte gesehen werden muss, wird diese Diplomarbeit auch eine Einführung zum Begriff ›Othering‹ geben, und wie dieser im Bezug zu Irlands Geschichte

²⁵⁴ Vgl. Hayes, M. (2006).

steht. Es wird untersucht ob das ›Othering‹ der Irish Travellers im Spielfilm des einundzwanzigsten Jahrhunderts dargestellt, wiederholt oder hinterfragt wird. Am Ende dieser Arbeit werde ich sagen können ob und wie traditionelle Stereotypen zu Travellers in den Kinofilm der Gegenwart übernommen wurden und was sich geändert hat.

Zu diesem Zweck gibt diese Arbeit auch einen kurzen Überblick über bisherige Filme über Travellers mit einem Hauptfokus auf die bekanntesten Spielfilme mit Traveller Charakteren, aber auch andere relevante Beispiele werden gebracht, unter Anderem Non Fiction Filme, TV Serien und Printmedien.

Diese Arbeit bietet auch Definition davon was Begriffe wie ›Irish Cinema‹ oder ›Irish National Cinema‹ beinhalten können. Betreffen sie ausschließlich Filme von irischen Regisseuren, mit irischen Schauspielern, irischen Charakteren und Schauplätzen? Wohl kaum. Zu Beginn dieser Arbeit habe ich mit dem Gedanken gespielt ausschließlich über Irischen Film zu schreiben. Das Kapitel ›Irish Cinema?‹ wird erklären ob und wie ein solches überhaupt definiert werden kann.

Der Hauptteil dieser Arbeit besteht in einer detaillierten Analyse der bekanntesten Filme in denen Irish Travellers vorkommen, und die nach dem Jahr 2000 herausgebracht wurden. Ich habe dieses Datum nicht nur gewählt weil es eine schöne runde Zahl ist und den Beginn eines neuen Jahrtausends markiert, es ist auch das Jahr in dem *Snatch* (UK/USA, 2000) released wurde, der erste Film mit Irish Traveller Charakteren der ein internationaler Erfolg wurde und heute ein Kultfilm ist. Ich vermute dass sich seit *Snatch* die Darstellung von Irish Travellers geändert hat. Ob und wie diese Veränderung passierte ist Teil wird im Zuge meiner Filmanalyse besprochen. Es handelt sich allerdings nicht um eine Filmanalyse im klassischen Sinn, der Fokus richtet sich hauptsächlich auf die Narration und Struktur der Filme. Es werden die in den Filmen vorkommenden Charaktere analysiert und untersucht welche Stereotypen vorkommen, ob es einen Bezug zu den traditionellen Stereotypen gibt und ob es Veränderungen gegeben hat. Wie oben erwähnt wird auch untersucht ob es Filme gibt die diese Stereotypen infragestellen.

Eine andere Frage die diese Arbeit untersucht ist jene, ob auch gegenwärtige politische und/oder soziale Themen der Irish Travellers in den Filmen zur Sprache kommen.

Weiters werden gelegentlich Produktionshintergründe aufgezeigt (z.B. ob Travellers als SchauspielerInnen oder AutorInnen involviert waren) und es werden Kommentare von KritikerInnen vorgestellt.

Zusammenfassend hoffe ich eine klare Aussage über die Darstellung von Irish Travellers im Kinofilm seit Beginn des einundzwanzigsten Jahrhunderts bis heute machen zu können.

Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION:

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Theatre-, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna, with a focus on Irish Studies and Translation Studies.

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