

# ‘Out of Site, Out of Mind’: An Historical Overview of Accommodating Irish Travellers’ Nomadic Culture in Northern Ireland

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*‘They were very good-hearted people, the Northern Ireland people. If you had a baby in your arms or any children running after you, they had all the pity in the world. And if you brought the children out on a wet day, they’d take them into the house and dress them – they’d give you clothes for the children. And when they’d give you food, they’d give you plenty of tea, sugar and jam. It was an awful country for jam – the North. It was all orchards, plum, trees, apples. And they’d give you pots of jam and lovely marmalade. Traveller Nan Donahue (Gmelch 1986: 95)*

Irish Travellers are an indigenous people of the island of Ireland. The second largest ethnic group in the North they number approximately 1,710 in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>, 27,000 in the Republic of Ireland and a further 15,000, on mainland England, Scotland and a further 7,000 Irish Travellers are resident the United States. Travellers have been documented travelling throughout the countryside of Ireland from farm to village as artisans (whitesmiths) and tinsmiths making and repairing tin ware, cleaning chimneys, dealing in donkeys and horses, picking crops in exchange for food, clothing and cash, making clothespins, brushes, brooms, baskets, repairing umbrellas, collecting horse hair, feathers, bottles, used clothing and rags, and singing at festival and fairs. Travellers constitute a distinct ethnic group with cultural characteristics including endogamy, shared distinctive cultural values and rituals, their own language Cant and Gammon and importantly their nomadic expression (Ní Shúinéar 1994, Helleiner 2000, McVeigh 1992, Norris and Winston 2005).

The Travelling community is not hegemonic; Sinéad Ní Shúinéar who has done current research on Traveller genealogy has critically shown that the community perceive important internal differences based on origins myths, economic and occupation traditions, marriage patterns, language and behaviour. She suggests that we view this society as a series of micro-

ethnicities, comprising intermarrying clusters that see themselves as distinct from other Travellers (Bhreatnach 2007: 32).

Travellers historically travelled within a regular circuit of two to three counties as a group comprising two to four families. Women and children, an essential component to the familial economic unit, provided for the subsistence of the family, with women hawking (peddling) small household wares, begging, providing emotional services – the telling of fortunes, some as gifted healers, handywomen and herbalists. The Irish urbanisation of twentieth century society resulting in the depopulation of the countryside, as well as the disposable age of plastic, impacted on their metal-work and salvage traditions. Historically adaptive Travellers met these challenges like many in Irish society by moving to urban areas (Gmelch 1979: 14).

While changes have taken place to the scope of nomadism, it still holds significant spiritual and social dimensions and holds substantive currency as an indicator of economic success. A common misconception that the settled community makes regarding Traveller nomadism, and one referenced within the recent draft Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, is the contextualization of nomadism as a ‘life style’ giving the assumption that this is a life choice. Nomadism is a way of life not a life choice which retains significant integrity for communal identity. This misperception of their culture many Travelling people feel has been a significant factor which has led to their marginalization within society, as fundamentally their right to express this cultural facet has been legislatively curtailed in Northern Ireland.

Many families travel less than they did in the past; however those that travel do so in the summer months to coincide with their children’s summer vacations, essentially they reinforce traditional seasonal travelling patterns. According to the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) at any time a quarter of the community are on the road. Some travel regularly to Europe and others to the United States, working in the antique business, dealing scrap metal, tree surgery, market trading, fairground/circus, tarmac, carpet dealing and the tools trade (Donahue *et al.* n.d.). Not travelling does not mean a renunciation of a nomadic identity or, critically, the possibility of returning to the road. The urban economy for those in the North includes a reliance on social security benefit. In terms of long term unemployment, research suggests that only 11 per cent are in paid employment. Moreover, of those who are economically active, 70 per cent stated that they had no paid work in the last ten years (Noonan 1994: 8, PSI 2001).

Northern Ireland's new ethos of a pluralist and inclusive society has in large part been an agenda due to the diligence and efforts of the Northern minority ethnic communities themselves and 'their representative organisations working together and with civil liberties bodies, the voluntary sector and other concerned organisations and individuals, at regional, nation and international levels' (Hainsworth 1998: 4). The Travelling community is indicative of this. The rise in the late 1980s of more activist Traveller support groups working in partnership with Travellers challenged assimilationism and promoted the importance of Traveller cultural identity.

Six Northern Traveller support organisations are located across Northern Ireland, which have worked in partnership and tirelessly on behalf of the community. An Muintir Tober (formerly Belfast Traveller Education and Development Group and Belfast Travellers Sites Project), Belfast, is the most vocal and main strategic Northern body particularly since the recent demise of the Traveller Movement (NI) in 2005; other groups include Derry's Travellers Support Group, Craigavon Traveller Support Group, Armagh Traveller Support Group, Omagh Traveller Support Group, and An Tearmann Project Ltd. Tyrone. The ITM, an all Ireland organisation, advocate on a cross-border basis. Across Europe, their work is considered a respected model of good practice as it utilises a partnership model with government, voluntary and statutory organizations, in the fields of education, health, accommodation, economic regeneration and training.

ITM's analysis and activism has been to the fore in placing anti-Traveller racism in a dominant position within political discourse on both sides of the border. It has been successful in resourcing and mainstreaming its project, with groundbreaking endeavours such as its now defunct anti-racism media campaign *Citizen Traveller*. Commentators suggest that it was unprecedented that the state was encouraged to address the situation of a minority ethnic community, evident in government initiatives such as The Republic's Task Force and the North's Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers.

*This is not to suggest that it was entirely successful but the idea of a Government being forced or prepared to address the situation of a Traveller community in this way is unprecedented. It is true of course that recent retreats on a range of Traveller justice issues suggest backtracking on this issue' (Lentin and McVeigh 2006).*

Historically the economic and social role Travellers provided to rural residents was an important one; often the two communities co-existed symbiotically. (McVeigh 1997). The notion of their mobility was, however, officially contextualised as deviant with much of the early Northern discourse framed in terms of an eagerness to suppress a way of life it characterised as problematic, in the extreme as ‘parasitic and criminal’. This was exemplified by a pamphlet circulated in 1948 which recommended as a ‘practical solution’ for the ‘tinker classes’ the establishment of a concentration camp for the males in which they would have to work to support their families, who would reside outside the camp (Noonan 1994: 97, 155).

Early legislation included the Vagrancy Act 1824, ‘An Act for the Punishment of idle and disorderly Persons, and Rogues and Vagabonds’, by which ‘Persons committing certain offences shall be deemed rogues and vagabonds and may be imprisoned for three months’. A specific piece of legislation enacted during the Famine, the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847, was ‘An Act to make provision for the Punishment of Vagrants and Persons offending against the Laws’. The colonial imperative to control travel is a defining feature of an essentially sedentary (a specific form of racism that takes the view that being sedentary is the norm, and travelling an aberration) legislative ideology with vestiges to be found within current state policy through out the island of Ireland (McVeigh 1997: 10, Donahue *et al.* n.d.).

A Stormont Committee on Gypsies and Itinerants convened in 1948 to discuss Traveller nomadism, which it characterised as problematic. The subsequent report raised a number of concerns, such as trespassing, unsupervised horses and unsupervised children and sanitation, and the community were accused of the ‘spreading of vermin and disease’. Recommendations included a system of registration, the provision powers of summary arrest, and imposition of severe fines by the Royal Irish Constabulary (RUC).

Following on from this in 1950 the Gypsies Bill (N.I) was introduced by the Stormont Senate with intent to further control unauthorised camping, with an imposition of further fines and imprisonment. The Bill was withdrawn during its second reading in the House of Commons due to a codicil within the bill which required the provision of halting sites by local councils. Travellers could defend themselves against prosecution by demonstrating a lack of provision; opposition to this by local councils witnessed the Bills retraction. Four years later the then Minister for Home Affairs G.B. Hanna established a further Stormont Committee to look into ‘the problem of gypsies and other

itinerants'. The official discourse of the time was framed in sectarian terms, with Travellers viewed as an export from the Republic, this translated into increased harassment and hardship for families for several decades impacting a reduction in population as many families were forced to flee to England (Noonan 1998, 157).

Significant progress in the early 1980s was made in the recognition of nomadic expression. The report of the Co-ordinating Committee on Social Problems (N.I., 1981) considering a range of accommodation issues stated 'the underlying principle has been that the travelling people have a right to a nomadic existence for so long as they wish and retain their own identity, without being subjected to pressure to settle'. It suggested a variety of accommodation based on specific needs and, progressively, that work be done interagency with input from Traveller organisations such as the Assisi Fellowship which had been working since the early sixties to provide humanitarian aid. The Fellowship's aims were charitable, emphasising social and human dimensions such as the lack of education and welfare resources by Travellers. However, it framed their fundamental needs in what we would now consider as assimilationist terms, which influenced thinking on accommodation for 25 years. It unsuccessfully made legislative representation for site provision and lobbied to have the 1968 Caravan Sites Act (following on from 1960 Act) extended to Northern Ireland. The Fellowship evolved to become the Belfast Itinerant Settlement Committee, with similar regional committees established across the North which continued to petition, unsuccessfully, to have a Northern legislative unit similar to England. Interagency work resulted in 1984, in The Report of the Northern Ireland Working Party on Site Provision for Travelling People, with recommendations that included the empowerment but not obligation of local councils to provide serviced sites with the subsequent legislation, Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1985 (echoing 1968 Caravan Sites Act).

The Order also provided the right to powers of eviction when councils obtained designation status, which translated to a quota system. Four council areas succeeded in achieving designation, Derry, Dungannon, Strabane, and Newry. Conversely, the 1985 Order also introduced a 100 per cent grant-aid as an incentive to cover the capital costs of site provision. This legislation proposed a series of sites to be built across the North, which historically became a statement of intent, not of fact or reality; a further point of criticism was that it failed to address similar English and Welsh legislation. Other areas despite having Traveller residents, such as County Fermanagh, continue to

provide minimal support to the community; 85 Travelling families in the county have no dedicated accommodation provision (Bermingham 2007). Marie Crawley has stated that this has impacted the community most severely: 'Travellers tend to keep a low profile, and there is no sense of a Traveller identity.' Travellers she spoke to, who in the main live in housing estates were divided with some feeling acceptance, yet others had suffered 'proactive attempts to have them removed from housing estates by local residents' (Bermingham 2007).

Commentators suggest that anti-Traveller prejudice and discrimination in Britain was legislatively encapsulated in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. (Donahue *et al.* n.d.: 42). Save the Children criticism was indicative of a groundswell of opposition. They noted that this 'potentially draconian' legislation failed to consider Travellers' opinions, ignored the inaction of local councils in provision for Traveller families, failed to consider the levels of racism endured by Travellers at the hands of the settled community, and called the legislation 'an attack on Traveller culture'. The Act was subsequently not introduced in Northern Ireland.

As recently as 2002 Westminster was promoting a *new* approach to tackling unauthorized Traveller camps, enabling the Minister of the Department of the Environment (DOE) to empower certain local councils to evict or, importantly, control the growth of long-term residence by Travellers (emphasis mine). This approach was in fact not new but echoed the system of designation, and previous legislation in 1968 and 1985. Donahue *et al* go so far as to suggest that designation works on a similar basis to that of apartheid. (Donahue *et al.* n.d.: 45)

The Race Relations Order (N.I.) 1997 identified Travellers as a distinct ethnic group: 'the community of people commonly so called who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland (and) 'racial group' includes the Irish Traveller community' (1997: 9). While some commentators suggested that this ended the official equivocation about Traveller ethnicity, it has not enshrined the provision nor right to nomadic expression, as the right to camp at lay-bys, margins or the sides of roads, often areas historically utilised for generations, are curtailed by other legislation, such as the series of civic statues Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878, the Housing Act 1963, the Pollution and Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 and the Roads ( NI) Order 1980.

In August 1999, the D.O.E. (NI) published its New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers, recognising the need for one strategic agency to deal with Traveller accommodation, suggesting the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and district councils retaining the power for the provision of transient sites. This legislatively translated into the 2003 Housing Order (NI). This latter decision was contested with many commentators feeling that as councils did not have a statutory duty but *discretionary power* to provide sites the NIHE would be best placed for this provision (Donahue et al.n.d.,58, Maginn *et al.*,1999, 528) (emphasis mine).

Some commentators (e.g. Maginn et al. 1999) argue that in comparison to Britain, there has been slow but relative success in site provision in Northern Ireland, as witness, they argue, capital expenditure on sites twice as high as that spent elsewhere. However, as has recently been discussed regarding Northern spending estimates on health as compared to England, spending is higher as the need is greater, and is not a sole indicator of government largesse. While there is a burgeoning appreciation of the validity of nomadism as a way of life, and the recognition of the need to provide for nomadism, as encapsulated by the Promoting Social Inclusion Traveller Working Group, in 2000, outcomes as far as actual provision of sites have been consistently disappointing. In 1999, 44 Traveller homes were proposed to be built in Belfast. At the time of writing 6 have been completed. Moreover, many Travellers endure poorer living conditions with the community eight times more likely to live in over crowded conditions in comparison with the general population. Many still have extremely limited access to basic amenities such as running water, electricity and sanitation, including some of those living on serviced sites (PSI 2001).

The ITM (2001) report: *A Lost Opportunity?* (2001) provides an overview of local authority accommodation programmes documenting their failure to appreciate and meet the community's needs. This was further exemplified in 2003 by a consultative process by DSD Minister John Speller on unauthorised encampments, which proposed a revamp of legislation which it considered ineffective. Recommendations included increased powers of criminal rather than civic enforcement by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Although recommendations failed the Section 75 Equality Impact Assessment and failed to consider the provision of legal sites it translated into the 2005 Unauthorised Encampments (NI) Order (NIHRC 2007: 2). A year previous to Speller's consultation the English Traveller Research Unit published a revealing study, *At What Cost? The Economics of Gypsy and Traveller Encampments*, which documented that non-site provision, evictions and prosecution, incurred financial implications far outweighing site provision.

English Councillor RM Bennett, Chair of Local Government Associations for Gypsy and Traveller sub-group, in a recent speech at 2007 Traveller Focus Week, stated that £18 million per year was being spent on this enforcement, and related the harrowing situation of one family moved on 52 times in 52 weeks.

Mary McMahon's (2005: 65) study done in conjunction with the Royal Group of Hospitals identified 37 per cent of Traveller respondents in the greater Belfast area living by the roadside. Evocative in her research was the impact the criminalisation of this cultural facet had on their daily lives and well-being. Travellers felt that it had a profound affect on their health. Site provision because of its inadequacy was driving 'younger Travellers into houses'. Many young women were torn; they did not want to go back to the sites because of their inadequacy. However, settled housing provision was isolating, leaving them feeling 'housebound'.

Profound implications, such as those on male economical viability, and female social and communal support structures, left them with severe implications to their mental and physical health and well-being (McMahon 2005: 44). Forced changes to nomadic travelling patterns have been proven in clinical research to be detrimental. Research has observed that 'the meaning of living in a house is linked to a range of emotions from isolation, loneliness, loss of identity to feeling 'closed in' (Van Cleemput and Parry, 2001: 133). Traveller *homespace* traditionally translated to a number of families living and travelling together; often mothers and sisters were feet away. Within a settled housing estate a Traveller woman feels isolated and alone without the supporting environment of relatives and friends, a cultural scattering of families.

The consequence is often escalating levels of depression, violence, and substance misuse. 'The policy of forcing Travellers to stay put in large mixed groups, has eaten into our social structure, economic base and cultural identity' (McDonagh 2000: 40). Like all disadvantaged communities poor health behaviours reflect a lack of self-esteem, depression, and communal confidence; their vulnerability is evident in a key concern over growth in drug abuse (McMahon 2005: 16, 36). McMahon stated it is impossible to overstate the anger, resentment, and sense of injustice that dominated Travellers conversations about accommodation.

The NIHE has done substantial work in relation to Traveller accommodation in a few years and this has been reflected in their groundbreaking study on Traveller Accommodation in 2002, which is being



replicated for 2008. This research has provided an excellent overview of community needs and importantly is being currently done in partnership with the community. Targets for unique Traveller group housing schemes with purpose built homes are under construction in the Glen Road, Belfast and Ballyarnett, Derry following the success of similar schemes in Hillhead, Magherafelt, Tattykeel, Omagh, Bessbrook and Newry by the NIHE in partnership with Travellers, support organisations and local Housing Associations. Travellers' varying needs are being met by provision, for example in Ballyarnett, to match semi and nomadic concerns with purpose built homes, adjacent to a serviced site and further an emergency halting site.

Major difficulties and obstacles have impacted progress, such as in the planning arena, with at present 50 sites identified across the North. In Monbrief Road, Craigavon, there was major planning opposition initially to Traveller accommodation. However, as the scheme has been completed there have been no complaints and the project is a model of social housing. Further impediment to NIHE's progress has been identified as possible DSD budgetary constraints and the recent Review Public Administration (RPA). Concern abounds as it is proposed that planning permission for new sites and responsibility for accommodation move from the NIHE and return to local councils, soon to be Super Councils. Such is the outcry, that it has been suggested this may not be the case. A further obstacle cited was a lack of an inclusive mechanism for consultation on accommodation, as areas such as the west of the province lacked an engaged Traveller voice and lobby.<sup>2</sup>

The Report of the 4th North/South Roundtable on Traveller Accommodation Policy meeting in November 2006 highlighted a number of further concerns crucially that it felt concern at the NIHE Traveller Consultative Forum's lack of Traveller inclusion in decision making, as only one Traveller organization was represented, with no other groups invited to participate (2006: 4). Commentators suggest that this is evocative of a bureaucratic trend away from partnership and inclusiveness; Lentin and Mc Veigh (2006) have commented on a trend towards retreats on a range of Traveller justice issues and backtracking on promises.

As Northern Ireland drafts a Bill of Rights the Traveller Movement has raised concerns regarding the inclusion of Travellers' cultural rights and in particular that their nomadic way of life is acknowledged and enshrined. 'This has not been the case historically. Government policy and practice has been to deny Irish Travellers the right to lead a nomadic way of life and to force them to assimilate with settled society. Although international law protects the right to culture, TM (NI) advocates that the right to a nomadic way of life should be

incorporated into the bill in order to clarify the position and to inform settled society about the validity and existence of nomadism.’(TM(NI),4).

The report (2004) from Directorate General of the European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union* commented that:

*In countries where Roma are nomadic, there have...been failures to provide adequate services, particularly in the fields of housing, education and healthcare. Some countries have compounded this policy failure by adopting other policies that have a detrimental effect. For example, in Ireland and Greece, trespassing is a criminal offence and nomadic Roma or Travellers may be disproportionately affected by trespass laws because of parallel failures to provide legal halting sites. Commenting on similar practices in the United Kingdom, European Court of Human Rights Judge Bonello noted: Here we are confronted with a situation in which an individual was ‘entrapped’ into breaking the law because a public authority was protected in its own breach.*

In an era of a pluralist Northern society, Travellers continue to fare badly on all indicators used to measure disadvantage: unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, education, training levels, and access to decision making, gender equality, political representation, and accommodation and living conditions. This is encapsulated in stark statistics concerning the lives of Traveller women as mothers in Irish society: they live on average twelve years less than settled women; 55 years is their approximate life expectancy, the age it was for ‘settled’ women in 1940. Their health and that of their children belies their communal marginalisation (Redmond 2006: 16). ‘Sedentary colonisation ends up with nomads criminalised not for their acts but for their existence’(Acton 1997: 23).

The Travelling community, as has been discussed, has been denied the use of its traditional halting sites and subsequent provision of alternative legal sites has been problematical, thereby rendering in many instances their nomadic existence illegal. The *problem* of Traveller accommodation has once again been shifted and portrayed particularly in the media from the failure of government and statutory bodies, to a problem caused by the Travellers themselves (emphasis mine). Anti-nomadic legislation has cemented a negative stereotype and perception within society, and perpetuated the social and economic exclusion of Travellers. This rhetoric continues to be openly expressed in the media and government. On January 2002 in the House of Commons Tory MP Andrew Mackay made a sustained attack on Travellers whom he accused of invading his Bracknell constituency.

*Ordinary, innocent people- hard-working, normal, straightforward people who live around Bracknell- want to get on with their lives in peace, but they want protection under the law when they are invaded by this scum. They are scum, and I use the word advisedly. People who do what these people have done do not deserve the same human rights as my decent constituents going about their everyday lives (Hansard 15, January 2002: Column 62WH).*

Rachel Morris suggests in her research that the broadcast and press media has shown marked improvement in its representations of ethnicity but only in regard to certain minorities, 'asylum seekers and Travellers still come in for rough and racist treatment with very little outcry.' (Morris 2000: 217). 'The Travelling community suffer from a negative stereotype that is unfortunately fuelled by the media...the painful truth is that the majority of Travellers are living below the poverty line, under the noses of a compliant local community' (Birmingham 2007).

Northern media has shown marked improvement with some news agencies presenting a balanced picture, some particularly like Belfast's *Andersontown News* offering good news stories on the community; however it is often negative representation of nomadism, framed as a problem caused by the Travellers themselves and not the failure of government and statutory bodies, that retain media attention.

A Northern pluralist ethos has not translated into a fostering of respect for the oldest minority ethnic group. Recent data collected from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey indicates that this anti-Traveller discrimination generates the largest volume of work for the North's Equality Commission.<sup>3</sup> (Donahue *et al.* n.d.: 26) Statistics such as these merit an immediate coordinated programme such as that of the Republic's anti-racism Citizen Traveller programme. Travellers and support organisations cite this as indicative of discrimination operating on both the individual and institutional level; they feel excluded from most of the institutions and structures of society, a process commentators suggest is delegitimation and silencing of a minority ethnic culture in terms of internalized colonialism.

At present, social contact between Travellers and the settled community is minimal. Derek Hanaway, Director of An Munia Tober, 'believes the wider issue of discrimination is a problem deep-rooted in the psyche of the general public suggesting settled people see the Traveller community as inferior to the rest of society' (Birmingham 2007). Women Travellers are invisible; Jane Helleiner has written of their 'complex lives forged within gendered racism' (2000 194). Like women of colour, they have experienced marginalisation,

and tellingly from the very agencies whose remit it is to alleviate their plight, the anti-racist and feminist movements which have done little to dispel myths of their passivity and subservience. Ignoring the ways in which they interrelate within and without their communities, and crucially their role in the social and economic cohesion, 'it is Traveller women who, to date, in the Belfast area, have been the most pro-active in community organisation and activity. They have reinforced a sense of community and identity, and belonging' (Mc Mahon, 2005: 44, Oprea 2004: 29, Fay, 1998).

These women have historically occupied liminal cultural positions, both existing on the margins and at the centres, marginal in living in a racist/patriarchal society and central in that they are on the familial frontline, in dealing with settled society and integral to the Travelling lifestyle. Traditionally they crossed societal spatial boundaries more freely than men, historically going door to door to hawk and, in modern terms, responsible for accessing welfare resources and dealing with the gatekeepers of these resources; therefore, they are more likely to have experienced prejudice than men. They have also been utilised as a rationale for anti-nomadism, critically denying Traveller women's cultural integrity, as settled housing estates are not the solution to end their oppression (Redmond 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, characteristically the Travelling people have been adaptive. However, the oppressive impact of sedentarism has contributed much to destructive communal and cultural pressure. Nomadism is an integral part of their cultural heritage and way of life, yet equivocation and ignorance abound. The only way to provide for Traveller accommodation is to create a political climate in which respect for diversity overrides anti-Travellerism, that legality and legitimacy translates legislatively into respect for Ireland's oldest minority ethnic indigenous community. There is a critical need for an integrated island of Ireland approach to provision, as this is the context in which nomadism takes place. It is crucial that the North-South Ministerial Councils and other cross-border mechanisms place Traveller provision high on their agenda. Travellers should be seen as a benchmark for the success of a Northern pluralistic society, as it is well documented what non-implementation and the negation of their cultural expression has done to Travelling families, physically, spiritually and culturally.

Eamonn Bermingham in a recent article on the Travelling community in Fermanagh, a county with officially over eight-five families and no dedicated support or provision for accommodation, states that the county has ensured that Travellers there are kept hidden behind a kind of *Iron Curtain* (sic), ' a cloak of invisibility'. Travellers are dispersed amongst the settled community, placed in accommodation which ultimately destroys their social cohesion, negates their indigenous cultural integrity and scatters families (Bermingham 2007). Travellers there as elsewhere in Northern Ireland continue to be placed *Out of site, out of mind*.

## Endnotes

- 1 From N.I. Census 2001; many have expressed concern at census statistics as they may underestimate the size of the community. Factors such as suspicion, mistrust of official forms and illiteracy make these figures suspect. This view is supported by Traveller agencies. An Munia Tober estimates the numbers in Northern Ireland to be closer to 2000 and estimates for the ROI the actual figure may be closer to 30,000. (Jarman 2003: 15, Power 2003: 255). A Northern Traveller Census (1993) enumerated 1115 persons, however did not include Travellers in permanent housing. Newer minority ethnic groups may now numerically be stronger in Ulster.
2. This may be the result of the verities of funding. Support groups are in some cases not core funded and lose valued staff lessening the capacity for development, critically undermining the provision of services and future Traveller voices. The Republic have provided FAS funding since the seventies to organisations, which has translated to a significant number of Traveller activist voices and representation.
3. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey – Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People ARK.

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|--|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| I would willingly accept them as a close friend of mine      | Yes - 18%,<br>No - 82% | I would willingly accept them as a relative by way of marrying close member of my family?  | Yes - 13%<br>No - 87% |
| I would willingly accept them as residents in my local area? | Yes - 24%,<br>No - 76% | Do any of your friends – that is, people you mix with socially – come from one or more of the following minority ethnic communities? | Yes - 3%<br>No - 97%  |

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