"A Bit of a Traveller in Everybody":

Traveller Identities in Irish and American Culture

TITO RILEY: Are the Travellers cowboys or Indians Papa?

PAPA RILEY: There's a bit of a Traveller in everybody, Tito,

very few of us know where we're going.

Introduction

As a relatively self-conscious fusion of Anglo-Irish literature and revisionist Hollywood Western, *Into the West* (dir. Mike Newell, 1992) would seem to constitute an exemplary postmodern text. The central theme of this highly intertextual narrative, scripted by Jim Sheridan, is the loss and recovery of cultural identity and familial stability through recourse to a rural, pre-industrial past. But significantly, in *Into the West,* this typically postmodern crisis is displaced onto a community of Irish Travellers, an indigenous ethnic minority whose culture and lifestyle becomes the subject of a highly romantic representation. Although not related to Gypsies or Roma, Travellers share both their nomadic tradition and their history of persecution and social exclusion. Of the 25,000 Travellers in Ireland (less than 1% of the total Irish population) one quarter live in unserviced caravan sites by the side of the road, without regular refuse collection or running water. They suffer higher mortality rates that the settled population, as well as restricted access to education and healthcare.

The opening section of *Into the West*, set in and around the campsites and tower blocks of North Dublin, foregrounds the marginalization of the Irish Traveling Community but any attempt at realism is abandoned at an early stage. The narrative centers on a mythic quest undertaken by two Traveller children, Ossie and Tito. Following an encounter with a magical horse named 'Tir na nÓg', ultimately revealed as the spirit of their dead mother, they leave Dublin for the 'wilderness' of the West of Ireland. By the close the film, they have convinced their father Papa Riley (Gabriel Byrne) to abandon the city in favor of the West and the 'old ways' of the Travellers. Critics have situated *Into the West* within the context of a postmodern turn towards nostalgia in Irish cinema, marking a shift away from the more formally innovative works of the late 1970s and early 80s. Ruth Barton, for example, includes Sheridan's film in an extensive list of works that can be designated as 'heritage cinema' because of their celebration of history as spectacle.[1] Theorists of the European heritage film have tended to focus on the narrative and visual pleasures associated with the recreation, and occasional reworking, of national histories in costume drama[2] and, in keeping with this approach, Barton highlights a series of Irish costume dramas set in the 1950s and 60s. Her analysis also encompasses a broader range of film narratives, however, which (like *Into the West*) unfold within an ostensibly contemporary setting but nonetheless evoke memories of a past era.

Barton's critique is informed by the social, cultural and economic changes taking place within the Irish context of production since the early 1990s, and she links the rise of the heritage aesthetic with a shift in the Irish rural economy - from agriculture to tourism. Her analysis also calls attention to the fact that heritage cinema seeks to address a predominantly *metropolitan* audience, by offering an image of the past that is both "pre-industrial" and "uni-racial".[3] *Into the West* clearly operates

within the conventions of Irish heritage cinema, with prominent allusions to Anglo-Irish literary myth and highly romantic images of the rural landscape. But because it foregrounds the discrimination experienced by the Traveling Community as an indigenous, yet racialized, ethnic minority, the film could also be seen to offer a starting point for a more self-conscious examination of Irish identity.

In her exploration of ethnicity in Irish cinema, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford notes that *Into the West* develops a parallel between the contemporary marginalization of Irish Travellers and the mistreatment of Native American peoples in the US.[4] She analyzes the recurrent debate within the film between the children and Papa Riley, over the true identity of the Travellers.

> [Tito] repeats his brother's earlier question, 'Are the Travellers Cowboys or Indians, papa?'. Papa's response is evasive, but, since the film's depiction of anti-traveller racism suggests that the travellers are Indians in relation to the settled community, the Southern Irish must be the cowboys. [...This] identification is familiar but, in a postcolonial context, not necessarily positive. The travellers are white Others who have been 'blackened' by a previous group of white Others, the Irish.[5]

Here Butler Cullingford calls attention both to the ambiguous racial status of Irishness at an earlier moment in history and to the subsequent displacement of 'blackness' onto Travellers. The apparent continuity between racialized representations of Irishness in the nineteenth century and the contemporary 'othering' of Travellers has since begun to emerge as a key issue in Irish anti-racist discourse, within the context of a wider campaign for Travellers rights.[6]

In this article, I examine the cinematic construction of Travellers as white 'others', focusing primarily on a series of Irish and international film narratives produced during the 1990s and 2000s. While several of these films are exemplars of Irish 'heritage cinema', others are postmodern re-workings of more overtly transnational genres, such as the gangster film or road movie. My analysis starts from the assumption that these representations of Travellers in Irish and international cinema are structured by, among other factors, the emergence of Irishness as a globally marketed identity, an identity which holds a particular appeal as a form of ethnicized whiteness.

Representing Travellers in Irish and International Cinema

Prior to the emergence of the heritage cycle of the 1990s, some of the most significant cinematic representations of Travellers were produced by documentary filmmakers, or those with a strong interest in documentary aesthetics. In *No Resting Place* (1950), the acclaimed documentarist Paul Rotha turned to social drama to represent the experiences of a Traveller family. In 1981 Joe Comerford directed *Traveller*, a film based on a script by Neil Jordan, and exemplifying the kind of formal and political innovation that Ruth Barton sees as lacking in the 1990s. It remains one of the few (Irish or international) films to feature a performance by a member of the Traveling Community and, as I argue in the latter part of this article, Comerford's approach to the project was influenced by avant-garde documentary. More recently, film and television documentary has provided a critical forum for the exploration of media images of Travellers.[7]

My analysis is more explicitly concerned, however, with the particular place of Travellers in the cycle of period dramas that have dominated Irish cinema since the

early 1990s. In addition to *Into the West*, images of Travellers recur in at least three explorations of Irish history; *The Field* (Jim Sheridan, 1990), *This Is My Father* (Paul Quinn, 1998) and *Country* (Kevin Liddy, 2000).[8] These films are notably diverse in terms of temporal and narrative structure yet all engage with familiar themes in heritage cinema, such as emigration, repressive social norms, and traumatic memory. My discussion of these films highlights the fact that Travellers tend to form a key element of the historical mise-en-scene, often providing a figurative or literal link to the past. In her introduction to this volume, Diane Negra notes that global popular culture repeatedly presents Irishness as the "moral antidote" to a range of contemporary ailments, from postmodern alienation to crises over family values. In a set of films produced in Ireland and consumed largely by Irish audiences (*Into the West*, *This is My Father*, *The Field* and *Country*) this dynamic is slightly modified so that the antidote is provided by Travellers, rather than by the 'settled' majority.

In addition to their prominence in Irish heritage cinema, representations of Travellers have also begun to appear in international cinema. Bill Paxton, Mark Wahlberg, Brad Pitt and Johnny Depp have all played Irish Travellers in narratives that are set outside Ireland. Paxton and Wahlberg take the lead roles in an American independent drama *Traveller* (Jack Green, 1997) focusing on a community of Travellers in the US. Pitt plays a champion Traveller boxer in the British comedy *Snatch* (Guy Ritchie, 2000) and Johnny Depp appears as an elusive Irish 'gypsy' in *Chocolat* (Lasse Hallstrom, 2000), a British-American co-production set in rural France during the 1950s. As I outline below, both *Traveller* 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 a means of being "white, yet ethnically differentiated."[9] The circulation of these mobile and flexible Traveller identities in international cinema is, however, at odds with a prevailing tendency in Irish cinema to align Travellers with the past.

In order to understand the place of Travellers within Irish and international cinema it is useful to turn to Steven Crofts' critique of national cinema. Crofts highlights a thematic continuity across the commercially and critically successful products of 'national cinemas' in the 1990s, a continuity underscored in the discourses of film festival organizers and distributors. He notes 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".[10] Within this mode of address, Travellers can be seen to function as emblems of both the culturally universal and the local, not least because of the fact that they share the 'outsider' status of artists and the insane. The universal appeal of the Traveller, as a romantic figure, is summed up by Papa Riley in *Into the West* in the epigraph for this essay.

The Irish film *Country* would seem to incorporate many of the key elements of the formula outlined by Crofts, although it conspicuously lacked the uplifting resolution that marked more commercially successful examples of national cinema. An evocation of rural childhood in the 1960s, viewed through the eyes of a young boy, *Country* displays the authentic period detail and picturesque landscape photography typical of the heritage genre. It is set in a small rural community in the early 1960s, decimated by emigration and divided by memories of a traumatic national past. Travellers do not simply 'authenticate' this representation of the past. Instead, their (highly romanticized) way of life is constructed in entirely nostalgic

terms, as emblematic of childhood itself. The Traveller camp is portrayed as an idealized alternative to the claustrophobia of the nuclear family, and its predicable destruction signifies the (settled) hero's rite of passage into adult responsibility.

An opposition between the extended nomadic clan and the 'settled' nuclear family is also apparent in *The Field*, but the exploration of this dynamic is relatively self-conscious. Noting that the film is characterized by a narrative excess at odds with the heritage aesthetic, Barton describes it a "family melodrama with historical/epic overtones" and a "quasi-Biblical" central character.[11] The action centers on a clash between 'Bull' McCabe, a man who has devoted his life to the nurturing of a rented rocky plot, and his rival for the land, an American who wants to build on it. The Bull's investment in the land is both deeply personal and culturally specific, as it concerns a traumatic memory of famine and familial loss. The conflict over the land is paralleled and complicated by an Oedipal narrative concerning the Bull's son Tadgh and a young "Tinker woman" whose unfettered sexuality symbolizes all that is forbidden in settled society. Against his father's wishes, Tadgh rejects his inheritance in favor of romantic love and life on the road. Ultimately, however, his alliance with the Traveller woman proves fatal. Through the death of Tadgh, and the destruction of the male line of inheritance, *The Field* portrays *settled* society (or at least its overtly patriarchal dimension) as doomed. In this sense it offers a useful contrast with *Country*.

It is clear that Travellers occupy a central symbolic role in the negotiation of history and memory in Irish cinema, yet their place within *international* cinema invites further analysis. *Traveller* (the US version), *Snatch* and *Chocolat* do not share the concern with questions of national or cultural identity that marks *Into the West, The Field, Country* and *This is My Father*. But it is possible to note a number of

pronounced points of intersection between these diverse Irish and international films, particularly in terms of the representation of family, ethnicity and criminality. Joe Cleary's analysis of *Into the West*[12] offers a starting point from which to examine the structural relationship between Irish and American representations of Travellers, not least because it is informed by Fredric Jameson's celebrated discussion of ethnicity and utopia in *The Godfather*.[13] Before proceeding with my exploration of these cinematic images, however, it may be useful to explore some aspects of Traveller identity, within the context of the economic and cultural transformations of the 1990s.

The 'Other' Irish: Travellers and Irish Identity

Jim Mac Laughlin has provided one of the most in-depth accounts of the fraught relations between the Traveller and settled communities, from the colonial period to the present day. He emphasizes that in pre-colonial and early colonial Ireland, Travellers provided seasonal farm labor, various forms of entertainment, and valuable services such as tin-smithing. In fact, he notes that Travellers were "often the only *national* institution, [and they] provided the social cement which bound isolated communities together".[14] Across Europe, however, the appropriation and privatization of property, and the adoption of "petty bourgeois sedentary life-styles" contributed to a gradual dissociation of nomadic peoples from the stationary majority.[15] This process of separation contributed to the romanticization as well as the vilification of gypsies and nomads, obscuring the interdependency of nomadic and settled economies and cultures. The extended, patrilinear, families of Traveller society came to be seen as echoes of an earlier moment in the history of the settled collective.

In Ireland, anti-colonial discourse tended to construct attachment to a nomadic past as an obstacle to modernization. The romantic longing for a primitive past came to be

refigured around a shared *terrain,* rather than tribal or clan structures and, in the process, Travellers came to be located outside the national body politic. But the disavowal of Travellers occurred later in Ireland than elsewhere in Europe, and their dissociation from the settled population was complicated by the fact that colonial conquest had disrupted the Irish class structure. Mac Laughlin states; "from a purely materialist perspective at least, there was often a very thin divide separating [colonial] 'settlers' from the 'dispossessed' and 'Travellers' in colonial Ireland".[16] By the nineteenth century sections of the settled (and Traveller) population had also begun to emigrate and an increasing number of seasonal laborers were moving between Ireland and Britain. In the absence of clear distinctions between settled and Traveller societies, attention shifted to the question of origins, often through reference to linguistic or physical markers.

Mac Laughlin, however, is explicitly concerned to highlight the complex and shifting social and economic relations between the two communities, and to this end he draws upon the cross-cultural perspective offered by anthropologist Aparno Rao. According to Rao's model, Irish Travellers can be defined as 'Peripatetics', or "endogamous nomads who are largely non-primary producers or extractors […] whose principal resources are constituted by other human populations".[17] Even though peripatetic communities may own land, houses or even herds, their primary subsistence is derived from *commercialism* (from the sale of goods or specialized services) and this mode of subsistence obviously requires ongoing interaction with settled communities.

Rao also notes that the marginal social status of Traveling peoples is often paralleled by a "high ritual status", to the extent that nomadic groups are a focus for superstition and myth within settled communities.[18] It has been suggested the distinct

social and cultural identity of the Traveling community may have actually developed in response to overt prejudice and racism. For example, Mac Laughlin points out that Travellers may have responded to the spread of clericalism in late nineteenth century Ireland by adopting Catholicism as a "protective move", while at the same time preserving "a separate 'hidden' ethnicity and belief system underneath their public image".[19]

A quest to uncover this 'hidden' ethnicity can be seen to inform the representation of Irish Travellers since the late 1880s. In his analysis of "pseudo-anthropological" ethnographic representations and Anglo-Irish literary works, Paul Delaney suggests the Travellers were repeatedly rendered "discursively mute" through the trope of the unseen witness. He notes that, in Synge's work, the figure of the Traveller is rarely represented directly, but instead remains a significant offstage presence - the focus for a specifically *Anglo-Irish* anxiety around the question of national identity. He reads this as a response to the emergence of a dominant (and exclusive) model of Irishness:

> The writings of this period, after all, were framed by a series of Land Reform Acts (stretching from 1881 through to 1909) which saw the emergence and consolidation of a rural Catholic peasantry for whom identity was inseparable from a certain kinship with the land. […] One might suggest, therefore, in the final instance, that the problems relating to the representation of Travellers [in Synge's work] prompt the question of whether it is possible to recognise and depict another culture as also Irish.[20]

This would suggest that a tendency to employ images of Travellers to represent *other* 'outsiders', and articulate anxiety around social change, is well established within Irish culture.

Media Representations of Travellers in Ireland and the US

The wave of mass emigration from Ireland to the US during the nineteenth century included small numbers of Travellers and, today, some of their descendants now live in the Southern and Midwestern states.[21]   In contrast with other Irish migrants, Travellers in the US would seem to have gravitated towards rural or small town communities, establishing a relatively permanent presence in settlements such as "Murphy Village", South Carolina. Although a considerable number of American scholars have visited Ireland to document the culture and language of Travellers, sociological and anthropological analysis of Irish Travellers in the US remains limited.[22]   Given the relative absence of scholarly research in this area, my discussion cannot hope to fully engage with the specificity of Traveller's culture within the US. It *is* possible, however, to propose a number of parallels, and differences, between the Irish and American contexts. For example, Rao notes that each peripatetic community "constitutes a minority wherever it may be".[23] So, in as much as they adhere to nomadic customs, Travellers in the US are likely to share the marginal social status of their Irish counterparts and to be subject to similar forms of prejudice and discrimination. It is difficult to determine whether Travellers in the US may form part of a wider Irish-American community but it would appear that as a group Travellers have not developed, or retained, the cultural and political attachments prized by the rest of Irish America.

Recent media coverage of US Travellers, such as the case involving Madelyne Toogood Gorman, would indicate that they are subject to suspicion, curiosity and, on occasion, overt prejudice. In September 2002, Toogood was filmed beating her four year old daughter by parking lot surveillance cameras, outside a store in Mishawaka, Indiana. The footage was played repeatedly on US networks during the build-up to the war against Iraq, prompting one commentator to remark; "First Madelyne. Then Saddam. Then Madelyne. Back to Saddam. Americans are becoming confused: Who's worse?".[24] Predictably, the footage prompted an investigation into Toogood's fitness as a mother, echoing a wider media phenomenon – the construction of working class white women, and women of color, as 'delinquent mothers'. Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels have explored the idealization and the vilification of motherhood in American popular culture since the late 1980s. They argue that media coverage of maternal violence, abuse and drug-taking, has tended to be sensational in tone and to focus primarily on cases involving working class women or women of color. Although occasionally middle class, and white, the typical "unfit mother" of such stories was more likely to be "the one who had failed to be upwardly mobile, the one who couldn't control her emotions […] who probably hadn't played Mozart [to her child] in the womb, the one who insisted that biological ties and gestation were enough".[25]

Douglas and Michaels do not deal directly with the representation of Toogood but their account does place particular emphasis on surveillance, and the "spectacle" of maternity. They note that media images of maternal delinquency contributed to a process of self-surveillance and authorized a "public inspection" of maternal behavior. [26] In the case of Toogood, however, attention was not exclusively focused on motherhood, as media commentators explicitly attempted to account for her behavior

through reference to the 'hidden' character of Traveller society, implicitly linked to criminality:

> The Travelers are a closed society that has shunned the public eye and avoids public attention. They marry in their own group, they speak their own language, based in part on Gaelic. […] Authorities say many Travelers are involved in criminal ventures, often conning elderly persons into paying for unneeded residential repairs or for legitimate work that is never completed. Other Travelers, authorities said, specialize in sweetheart scams, telemarketing fraud, sweepstakes and lottery fraud, load fraud, caregiver cons and shoplifting schemes.[27]

Other reports included references to films such as *Into the West* and *Snatch* (both of which feature representations of fraud or crime),[28] while others focused on the ostentatious lifestyles of Travellers, describing them as "an odd composite of Old World and McWorld" and noting that "Traveler women draw stares when they go into town, dolled up with layers of makeup and halos of hair".[29]

These accounts, with their emphasis on criminality and (implicitly tasteless) ostentation, offer a number of parallels with the construction of 'white trash' stereotypes in American cinema. Annalee Newitz has examined the theme of "white-on-white class conflict" and the racialiazation of white poverty in films such as *Kalifornia* (Dominic Sena, 1993) and *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991). She suggests that whiteness acquires visibility in these narratives because it is identified as "primitive or inhuman". Citing the work of Marianna Torgovnick, she notes that racial difference is often associated with temporal discrepancy - between a civilized

present and a primitive past. She argues that in American cinema "class differences tend to be represented as the difference between civilized folks and primitive ones. Lower class whites get racialized, and demeaned, because they fit into the primitive/civilized binary".[30]

Newitz's account offers an interesting point of contrast with Irish cinema, in that both *Into the West* and *Country* highlight violence directed *against* Travellers as a means of critiquing notions of progress central to the idea of a 'civilized present'. These films (and those discussed in more detail below) also articulate a more complex relation to the past than is allowed in Newitz's discussion. But her exploration of 'inhuman' violence is pertinent to the representation of Irish Travellers, and other nomadic groups in American cinema, discussed in the latter part of this article. In the US feature film *Traveller*, for example, two different modes of Traveller identity are explored and while one is valorized, the other is more clearly associated with a 'primitive past'.

Although Travellers are racialized in the US news media through recourse to the "white trash" stereotype, there is perhaps less evidence of the overt racism that has often marked the Irish context. As Mac Laughlin demonstrates, anti-Traveller prejudice in Ireland became even more pronounced following the formation of the Free State, to the extent that Travellers were "scarcely even considered as citizens and were viewed instead as wards of the state".[31] This situation had worsened by the 1950s, primarily because Travellers' traditional way of life, like that of many craft workers, had been undermined by increased industrialization, and specifically by the displacement of tin goods in favor of plastics. They were increasingly out of step with the dominant modernizing ideology of Ireland under Taoiseach Sean Lemass, a

contrast noted by the various British and American anthropologists who 'rediscovered' Irish Travellers in the post-war period.[32]

Traveller society did not remain fixed, however, and during the 1960s new forms of employment, such as scrap-dealing, began to replace traditional craftwork and differences in class and income within the community became more pronounced. Travellers migrated to cities in larger numbers and several poorly serviced ad-hoc encampments developed around the outskirts of Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Galway, adding to the dissatisfaction of already marginalized working class residents. Many Travellers continued to participate in traditional gatherings at rural fairs and festivals on special occasions, but again they faced growing hostility from settled communities. Their very presence was regarded as largely incompatible with tourism because, as one local politician pointed out, "they might be photographed by tourists and would show the Irish people in a poor light".[33]

Many urban Travellers gained access to unemployment assistance during this period and state policy became more focused. Reports such as the *Commission on Itinerancy* (1963) argued strongly for the *assimilation* of Travellers into 'mainstream' society, through the provision of education and accommodation, a strategy that did little to improve relations between the two communities.[34] Since the late 1960s, the overall population of Travellers in Ireland has increased, partly because many Travellers returned from Britain during the Thatcher years.[35] These returning Travellers, defined by local authorities as 'transient', have been greeted with particular suspicion and their demands for even basic social serves are often regarded as an unacceptable burden. Bryan Fanning has analyzed the social exclusion of Travellers, within the context of a broader study of racism and social change in Ireland. He cites numerous examples of institutional racism in relation to the

treatment of Travellers, and provides a detailed case study of policies employed by Ennis Urban District Council (UDC) in County Clare, since the 1960s. Fanning points out that the representation of Travellers as a "deviant and dangerous underclass"[36], undeserving of the same rights and entitlements as others, was central to the Council's discourse of social exclusion. Elsewhere in his study, he emphasizes various commonalities between the marginalisation of Travellers and the more recent experiences of asylum seekers, stating that "forms of racism, spatial exclusion and lesser access to services experienced by dispersed asylum seekers were, in many ways, similar to the forms of apartheid historically experienced by Travellers".[37] For example, in 1972, one member of the Ennis UDC proposed replacing Travellers' cash benefits with vouchers for essentials. This suggestion was not adopted in relation to Travellers but, in 1990s, it became standard practice to provide vouchers rather than cash to asylum seekers, who are denied the opportunity to work until they achieve refugee status, and are dispersed to reception centers to await processing of their claims.

Fanning emphasizes that the infrastructure of support developed for asylum seekers is as inadequate as that provided for Travellers and notes that "even where right to services exist, in areas such as education and health, asylum seekers along with other members of the new immigrant communities may experience institutional barriers which resemble those encountered by Travellers".[38] Statistics on the nationalities of those seeking asylum in Ireland are difficult to obtain but approximately 50 per cent are from two nations: Nigeria and Romania (including large numbers of Roma). The policy of excluding them from employment has contributed to a public perception, fuelled by certain sections of the media, that asylum seekers simply do not wish to work. Similar anxieties have also been

articulated with respect to the (predominantly white) citizens of the ten newest EU member states, and their entitlement to work and claim social welfare benefits in Ireland.[39] It would appear that patterns of suspicion and intolerance, developed in relation to Travellers, are readily extended to encompass other racialised minorities, even when they too are classed as 'white'.

Travellers, Racism and The Tiger Economy

With the arrival of increased numbers of asylum seekers and migrant workers, academic debate around race and ethnicity in Ireland, and the status of Travellers, has expanded. Writing in 1997, Michael A. Poole acknowledges "a growing, though not uncontested, opinion that Ireland's Travellers […] constitute a distinct ethnic group."[40] But he elects to omit both Travellers and "racially defined groups of non-European origin" from his empirical analysis of Irish ethnicity, and instead deals exclusively with the use of the term 'ethnicity' to describe Catholic and Protestant traditions. Since 1997, however, academics and activists have focused attention on parallels between the experiences of Travellers and other racialized groups in Ireland.[41] Some theorists, most notably Ronit Lentin, have suggested that Irish racism is at least partly rooted in the traumatic collective experience of emigration, an experience painfully reactivated by the increasingly overt presence of migrants.[42]

This collective memory of migration might seem to provide a starting point for an *anti-racist* politics, but this memory is fraught with contradiction. This becomes apparent in Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's analysis of intertextuality in *Into the West*. As I have already noted, her discussion highlights the parallels that are established (both directly and through various intertextual allusions) between the contemporary marginalization of Travellers in Irish society and the Native American experience of

colonization and forced migration. She emphasizes that the inscription of Irish Travellers as 'Indians' is reinforced, and complicated, by the fact that the "racism habitually shown towards [the Travellers] by Southern Irish 'settled people' echoes the racism of *white settlers, including those of Irish descent,* towards the Native Americans."[43] As such, the memory of migration invoked by *Into the West* involves an acknowledgment of the privileged status of whiteness.

Cullingford goes on to imply that *Into the West*'s critical metaphor can be extended to encompass the experiences of other marginalized groups within the Irish context. She states:

> The travellers are white Others who have been 'blackened' by a previous group of white Others, the Irish. (Eastern European immigration is currently creating an analogous situation).While it is Utopian to expect that the experience of racism would, by ideological inoculation, prevent the victims from spreading the contagion themselves, *Into the West* uses the cowboy metaphor to indict the indifference or hostility of the Southern state towards a marginalized sector of its own population.[44]

Yet even if the cowboy metaphor acts as a productive reminder of the settled majority's own historical experience (of otherness and 'othering') *Into the West* can still be seen to perpetuate a tendency to align Travellers with an earlier moment in the settled past.[45] As such its potential as an anti-racist critique remains somewhat limited.

Steve Garner has examined the historical development of Irish racial consciousness, with particular attention to the construction of Irishness through various processes of exclusion. Garner notes that nineteenth century nationalist

discourse ignored the presence of indigenous minorities (such as Travellers and Jews) as well as centuries of "métissage" when it located the formation of a 'core people' in the twelfth century.[46] He also points towards a parallel process of exclusion in much of the popular discourse surrounding the formation of the Irish diaspora, which fails to address the shifting, and at times contradictory, racial status of Irishness.[47] He emphasises that exclusionary ideologies, not based on skin colour, have a long history within the Irish context, and co-exist with newer racisms that may centre on physical appearance or 'illegitimate' claims to the nation's resources.

Garner's analysis highlights the fact that racism in Ireland intensified during the boom years of the 1990s and this might seem, at first, to contradict arguments linking racial tension to resource competition. The Celtic Tiger economy (1994-2001) has certainly given rise to greater overall levels of employment and wealth, and a shortage of skilled labor. But levels of social *inequality* are if anything more pronounced than ever, as the boom period was also marked by an expansion of insecure (contract-based) employment, uneven regional development, declining public services and increases in personal debt. It is within precisely this context that fears about competition between nationals and foreigners, for employment and welfare, are likely to become pronounced.[48]

Perhaps most significantly, Garner notes that the boom period has given rise to "increasing tension over defending property, which comprises a growing physical stake in territory".[49] This increasing tension has particular implications for Travellers. Since the 1970s various advocacy organizations have called for the provision of appropriate accommodation for Travellers, in the interests of improving relations between the two communities. Appropriate accommodation (in the form of housing

and serviced halting sites) has been repeatedly promised but it has not been provided, partly as a result of ongoing resistance from political representatives.[50]

Citizen Traveller (1999-2002), a communications campaign devised by a number of Traveller groups with the support of the Irish government, highlighted the consequences of this ongoing discrimination. The campaign noted the link between poor accommodation and increased mortality rates within the Traveling community, emphasizing that "Travellers can now expect a life expectancy comparable to that of the settled community in the 1950s".[51] The campaign also explicitly addressed the fears of the settled majority with regard to accommodation: "When Travellers are accommodated in proper serviced halting sites or group housing schemes, opposition to Travellers living in the area greatly diminishes or evaporates. Also, where halting sites are well serviced they have little or no *negative impact on the property market*."[52] This statement is a response to the widespread public perception that property will fall in price if a Traveller halting site is built nearby. If homeowners cannot sell (because of anti-Traveller prejudice or because of a crash in property values) they will of course be rendered *immobile,* a frightening prospect within an increasingly fluid labor market. It has been suggested that Travellers face particular prejudice because their nomadic way of life is out of synch with settled society's valorization of rootedness and property-holding. Yet, within the current economic context, Irish settled society has perhaps begun to develop a new relationship with property, as *capital*. The fear of immobility has (paradoxically) given rise to new forms of territorialism.

In his analysis of social policy in County Clare, Fanning calls attention to the criminalization of nomadism, and to the gradual exclusion of Travellers from unauthorized (yet long established) halting sites around Ennis. In recent years, this

policy has acquired even greater legitimacy, following the enactment of the 2002 'Anti-Trespass' Bill.[53] Paul Delaney notes that this legislation is regarded by Travellers rights groups as assimilationist and in keeping with principles of the 1963 Commission on Itinerancy, which defined nomadism as an outdated 'custom' and sought to obliterate it through the provision of housing. Delaney argues that by identifying nomadism in this way the Commission denied its significance and complexity as a living part of Travellers culture, to the extent that the nomadism of Irish Travellers is now often dismissed as "a deterioration of the truly nomadic practices that are carried out by other, more legitimate groups, like the Roma".[54] Citing the Roma scholar Jean-Pierre Liégeois, he emphasizes that nomadism is not dependant on acts of physical movement, but is instead suggestive of a certain approach to life. As Liégeois states: "whereas a sedentary person remains sedentary, even when travelling, the Traveller is a nomad, even when he (or she) does not travel. Immobilised, he (or she) remains a Traveller".[55] This distinction (while perhaps not unproblematic), highlights the fact that Travellers may actually be far *less* mobile that other sectors of the population, by virtue of the fact their movements are constrained by their lack of security, in terms of accommodation.[56]

One final issue, with respect to the ethnic status of Travellers, needs to be considered before returning to representations in Irish and international cinema. One of the key aims of the Citizen Traveller communications campaign was to achieve balanced media coverage of Traveller culture, lifestyles and achievements. The campaign sought to position Travellers as an ethnic group within Irish society but also to encourage them to embrace their own identity as a community.[57] A billboard and radio campaign was developed, including a number of posters featuring black and white portraits of individual men, women and children. The images largely conformed

to the conventions of the professional studio portrait (few details of clothing were visible and the lighting and composition of each shot focused attention on the face of the subject) but each image was overlaid with seven one-word captions, varying in size and color, and featuring the terms 'traveller' and 'citizen' amongst a list of different roles. (INSERT ILLUSTRATIONS 1 AND 2)

The rich cultural heritage of Travellers was subtly foregrounded in this poster campaign. So, for example, a middle-aged man was identified not simply as a Traveller and Citizen, but also as a 'Storyteller', 'Carpenter', 'Father', 'Slagger' (Joker) and 'Husband', while the image of a young woman was accompanied by the captions 'Flautist', 'Mother', 'Woman', 'Comedienne' and 'Midwife'. Each poster also included the standard Citizen Traveller by-line; "It's time to value Travellers as people with their own culture, needs and contribution." As already noted, the cultural traditions of Travellers have attracted the attention of professional and amateur enthusiasts since the nineteenth century. Yet the state itself has been relatively slow to support Traveller's culture, or to even to document its existence[58] and, as such, any recognition of this culture in a state-funded initiative could be seen to represent a step forward. But it is perhaps significant that this appeal for the basic human right of racial tolerance is reinforced by (if not predicated on) claims to a distinct cultural heritage, a commodity that has a particular currency within the Tiger economy.

Myth, Motherland and Mobility in *Into the West*

Some of the contemporary anxieties of the settled majority, in relation to issues of home, mobility and territory, find expression in Irish heritage cinema. In his 1995 analysis of *Into the West,* Joe Cleary examines the various different notions of the 'west' mobilized in the film. He notes a profound opposition between the literary,

romantic, Celtic west and the political west of the United States, Western Europe and advanced capitalism, symbolized by the "visually drab, spiritually desiccated world of the city".[59] This binarism is complicated, however, by the construction of a third space – the "Wild West of Hollywood legend: the cinematic west into which Ossie and Tito like to imagine they are fleeing". Through its references to the cinematic west, 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 Traveling community in Ireland. Instead, drawing upon Jameson's 1979 analysis of *The Godfather,* 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.[60] Jameson's account focuses on the reinvention of the figure of the gangster in the *Godfather* saga and, specifically, on the displacement of the lone hero or anti-hero of Classical Hollywood *g*angster and Noir film, by an ethnicized family group. This ethnic group is the object of both prejudice and envy: "The dominant white middle class groups - already given over to anomie and social fragmentation and atomization - find in the ethnic and racial groups which are the object of their social repression and status contempt at one and the same time the image of some other collective ghetto or ethnic neighborhood solidarity."[61]Cleary's account also calls attention to a striking *difference* between Irish and American figurations of utopian desire. He notes that, in *Into the West,* the pre-capitalist Traveller community is presided over by a 'Spirit-mother', rather than a 'God-father'. In this way, the return to the past is coded in terms of a return to maternal origins, perhaps suggesting a culturally specific investment in "myths of motherland".[62]

The consequences of this return to a pre-modern past, particularly for women, are not fully reconciled within the narrative and this is evident in the ambivalent representation of maternity and femininity. Towards the close of the narrative, it emerges that Ossie and Tito's mother died in childbirth. In the guise of the horse, however, the spirit-mother facilitates a recovery of the family. The only living female within the narrative is the Traveller guide Kathleen (Ellen Barkin). Although she appears to be an independent, strong-willed figure, Cleary suggests that she functions simply as a "surrogate" for the spirit-mother. When Papa finally comes to terms with the loss of his wife, underscored in the scene in which he burns her caravan and possessions, he is free to enter into a new alliance with Kathleen. This trajectory is, of course, apparent to many viewers from the start because Barkin and Gabriel Byrne were married at the time of the film's production. (INSERT ILLUSTRATION 3)

In order to fully understand the significance of this imaginary Traveller community, it may be useful to return to Jameson's discussion of *The Godfather*. He reads the mafia family not simply as a figure of ethnic collectivity, but as a substitution for a very different form of "organized conspiracy" – American business, which (at least in the late 1970s), remained largely immune to popular criticism. Jameson states, "For genuinely political insights into the economic realities of late capitalism, the myth of the Mafia strategically substitutes the vision of what is seen to be a criminal aberration from the norm, rather than the norm itself".[63] From this perspective, the figure of the Traveller in *Into the West* might be read as a representative of social formations that are associated with the *postmodern* (rather than in terms of a more general anxiety around modernity).

In general terms, the Traveller could be regarded as a privileged (mythic) signifier of the peripheral, the marginal and the mobile. If postmodernity is

conceptualized according to the economic, social and cultural shifts specified by David Harvey, the Traveller economy could be seen to offer certain superficial parallels with highly mobile globalized capitalism, as it has developed within the Irish context. *Into the West* calls attention to similarities between the Traveller and the Tiger economies in various ways. The film opens with a small scale fraud, in which Ossie and Tito are temporarily renamed (by Papa Riley) so that another family can claim larger social welfare benefits. The Travellers are not the only Irish community to evade regulation, however, and much of the film's plot centers on another fraud, in which an unscrupulous horse breeder, with the assistance of a corrupt Garda sergeant, steals Tir na nÓg and turns him into a show horse. Given that the horse breeding industry continues (like multi-national capital in general) to benefit from Irish tax concessions, the personification of state and corporate corruption in this way seems highly suggestive. But although the Traveller and big business economies are portrayed as equally fraudulent, *Into the West* ultimately positions the Travellers (and particularly Ossie and Tito) in an opposing relation to capitalist interests. The children rescue Tir na nÓg from the film's only true 'gangster', the horse breeder, and their action forces Papa Riley to abandon his fraudulent lifestyle.

Memory, Trauma, Migration

As Cleary demonstrates, *Into the West* fails to offer any alternative to dependency, other than the mythic land of Tir na nÓg. A small number of films have, however, attempted to disrupt the dominant pattern of representation, whereby Travellers are constituted as 'others' through an alignment with the past. At least one challenge to the dominant mode has emerged from the margins of Irish heritage

cinema, a genre that in recent years has been marked by a particular concern with traumatic memory.[64]

In *This is My Father*, James Caan (who first came to prominence in *The Godfather*) plays Irish-American Kieran Johnson, a middle-aged man in crisis. His career as a Chicago high school teacher is unsatisfying, and his failure to achieve career (or personal) ambition is portrayed as a function of his troubled family history. Kieran never knew his father and although his mother is still living, she is in many ways absent from his life, as she refuses (and perhaps cannot) speak about the past. A breakdown in communication has also occurred between Kieran's sister and her son, and a trip to the 'homeland' is proposed as a form of therapy.

In many ways the character of Kieran is reminiscent of Sean Thornton, *The Quiet Man* who sought to recover a past coded in maternal terms. In Ireland, Kieran acquires a maternal figure in the guise of an elderly Traveller woman, and professional storyteller, Mrs. Kearny. She was a witness to many of the key events in Kieran's mother's life and her willingness to verbalize the past stands in pointed contrast to the other woman's silence. By framing the past as the story of a Traveling woman, *This is My Father* might be seen to conform to dominant patterns of representation, whereby Travellers are constituted as the literal and metaphorical representatives of an earlier moment in the history of the settled community. Yet this familiar temporal relation is disrupted in various ways. Mrs. Kearny is herself a mother, and her son Seamus owns the Bed-and-Breakfast in which Kieran and his nephew are staying. As played by Colm Meaney, Seamus is a camp, kitsch 'Mammy's Boy', and something of a caricature. Yet *This is My Father* remains one of the few Irish film narratives to feature a Traveller engaged in gainful employment within a contemporary setting. Seamus's position as the bourgeois owner of a Bed-

and-Breakfast also tends to work against romantic, essentialized notions of nomadism in Travellers culture.

A certain disjunction between the landscapes of past and present also becomes apparent as the narrative unfolds in a series of flashbacks linked to Mrs. Kearny's stories. The landscape of the present seems largely devoid of aesthetic appeal, framed as a blighted by-product of mismanaged industrialization (and likened by Kieran's nephew to 'Chernobyl'). By contrast, the predominantly agricultural past retains a desolate beauty, in accordance with the realist conventions of 'hard primitivism'.[65] Yet the veracity of this remembered landscape remains uncertain. Many of the storytelling sessions take place, in the dining room of the Bed-and-Breakfast, decorated by a kitsch oversized poster of a tropical beach. Recalling the scenic backdrops employed in *The Quiet Man*, this setting serves as a reminder of the charged relationship between memory, landscape and desire. Ultimately the distinction between the remembered past and the present is rendered ambiguous, particularly at the point when Mrs. Kearney finally reveals the fate of Kieran's father. He was found hanging from a tree on a hill – in a landscape that is uncannily similar to one encountered by Kieran in a book about Ireland, *before* undertaking his journey. Through its exploration of the interplay between past and present, and between Kieran and Mrs. Kearney, *This is My Father* seems to suggest a parallel between the figure of the Traveller and the condition of the migrant. This exploration of Traveller subjectivity remains somewhat underdeveloped, however, and in order to find a film drama that is explicitly concerned with this issue it is perhaps necessary to return to a much earlier moment in Irish film culture. Joe Comerford's *Traveller* (1981) forms part of the new wave of Irish filmmaking, which emerged in the late 1970s with the support of Irish and international state funding.[66] It is loosely based upon a script by

Neil Jordan, which in turn reworks elements of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World,* and the production team featured a number of other Irish filmmakers, such as Thaddeus O'Sullivan and Cathal Black.

The narrative of Comerford's film centers on the relationship between two young Travellers (Angela and Michael) who are unwillingly matched and forced to marry. On a trip to the North of Ireland, smuggling goods at the behest of Angela's father, they meet Clicky, a hitchhiker with a mysterious Republican past. Angela develops a bond with Clicky, telling him of abuse suffered at the hands of her father, which resulted in her institutionalization. They part company and, after Michael robs a post office, the couple hide out in a series of desolate locations (a decaying rural mansion, an off-season seaside town) and begin to resolve their differences. On their return to Limerick they are reunited with Clicky, and Michael uses Clicky's gun to kill Angela's father. *Traveller* could perhaps be seen to rehearse a familiar opposition between familial belonging and individual freedom**.** But while comparable narratives such as *Into the West* can be seen to borrow from the classical Hollywood western, Traveller's mode of address is far more indebted to European and British avant-garde cinema. Various formal strategies are employed to disrupt identification; visual barriers such as reflective or distorted glass are repeatedly employed, and short animation sequences map the movements of the three central characters. There is little synchronized speech, and the disjunctive use of voiceover undercuts the development of the plot.

Comerford also chose to work primarily with *non-professional* actors and the lead roles of Michael and Angela are played by Davy Spillane, a well-known Irish traditional musician and Judy Donovan, a member of the Traveling Community. Donovan's participation might be thought to lend an air of authenticity to the

production but expectations of authenticity are countered by the use of sound, and the thematic exploration of performativity. Donovan's character is in fact voiced by, and openly credited to, another actress (Marian Richardson). This use of dubbing was not intended to make the film more accessible to international audiences, because Richardson delivers the lines with a strong accent and the finished film was actually subtitled in English for distribution in Britain.

Instead, the use of dubbing seems to recall strategies from avant-garde film. In Godard's *Tout Va Bien* (1972), for example, the voice of Jane Fonda is frequently misdubbed, precisely in order to "sabotage the fictive unity of voice and image".[67] Similarly, Amy Lawrence points out that avant-garde documentary filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha employs English speaking actresses to re-voice the words of Vietnamese women in her film *Surname Viet, Given Name* Nam (1989). Lawrence suggests that "the use of actresses - literally putting one person's words into another body -seemingly undermines the traditional documentary's construction of speech-as-subjectivity where sync 'proves' an essential link between image/sound track/being".[68]

In addition to its exploration of form, *Traveller* is characterized by a thematic concern with gender and performativity. For example, at Angela and Michael's wedding reception, the singer Agnes O'Donnell (positioned off-screen) launches into the song 'One Day at a Time'. As she sings the words "I'm only a woman", we see O'Donnell for the first time and she is revealed as a strikingly androgynous older woman, dressed in a tuxedo. In a later scene, set in a Republican social club, Angela and Michael both take to the stage as performers, exposing the inauthenticity of Angela's singing voice. Finally, in a scene that marks her growing dissatisfaction with

her lot as wife and daughter, Angela decides to change her own identity and she swaps her wedding ring for fashionable new clothes.

In a contemporary review, Kevin Barry highlights Comerford's pronounced and deliberate use of "impaired speech, silence and music"[69], reading it in terms of an exploration of disjunctive cultural identity. More recently, Comerford has stated that the various alienating strategies employed in *Traveller* constituted a *response* to the experience of working with performers like Donovan. He notes that, during the course of the production, the actress' own persona altered: "She started changing, she started using lipstick for the first time, she started dressing in a non-traditional way. But this was happening in her life. It wasn't a film. It was happening in her life."[70] The temporal and narrative inconsistencies of *Traveller* can, then, be read as the product of Comerford's self-reflexive engagement with the conventions of film documentary, and his experience of working with a member of the Traveling community. Keith Hopper, however, is highly critical of Comerford's approach and he suggests that Comerford's film invites an "allegorical reading", whereby Travellers stand for "the dispossessed people of the North".[71] Hopper argues that the film fails to address the 'real' marginalization of the Traveling community. But Comerford's film is, arguably, one of the few Irish film dramas to *reject* the reduction of Travellers to the status of symbol.[72] Instead, anticipating projects such as Citizen Traveller, it refuses to essentialize Traveller culture and foregrounds a mobile identity that is structured by many of the same historical and social forces that shape settled society.

Finally, instead of relegating *Traveller* to the periphery of settled history, or to a rural West that is coded as pre-modern, Comerford's film concludes with an exploration of the various possible futures open to Michael, Angela and Clicky. The final (animated) sequence suggests that all three will follow in the footsteps of earlier

migrants – tracing familiar routes to the US, England and even Australia. By recasting its central characters as migrants in this final sequence *Traveller* invokes a wider cultural memory of migration. In this respect it anticipates (and offers parallels with) the exploration of memory in *This is My Father*.

Beyond the National Context: Travellers Outside Ireland

In many of the Irish films that I have discussed, images of Travellers provide a means of negotiating the dynamics of migration, memory and identity and some of these themes can be seen to recur in *Chocolat, Snatch*, and the US film *Traveller* (1997). In each of these narratives, Traveller characters are positioned in relation to an array of other 'types' and clearly marked as 'heroic', perhaps confirming the appeal of Irishness as an ethnic identity in late twentieth century U.S. culture. *Snatch* and *Traveller* (US version) both explore an ethnicized criminal underworld, but *Chocolat* is more easily located in relation to the heritage genre.

Chocolat is a comic romance, set in rural France in the 1950s. The central character*,* Vianne (Juliette Binoche), is a habitual wanderer torn between her daughter's need for the security of small-town life, and her own need for independence. Her nomadic lifestyle and skill with chocolate are both explained in racial terms, as a consequence of her maternal ancestry – she is a descendant of a mythic Aztec tribe. Vianne decides to settle temporarily in a conservative small town, and begins to dispense chocolate in an effort to undermine the repressive social order represented by the devoutly Catholic mayor. When the unexpected arrival of a band of gypsies exposes the prejudices of the townsfolk, Vianne provocatively establishes an alliance with their leader Roux (played, with a touch of an Irish lilt, by Johnny Depp). Roux and Vianne flirt but she is reluctant to enter into the traditional role of wife and

mother, a reluctance that seems justified, not least because her independence allows her to rescue other women from domestic abuse. In the course of the narrative, however, Vianne is forced to confront her own past, and she eventually decides to settle for her daughter's sake, breaking the pattern of wandering inherited from her own mother. This compromise is softened, however, by the likelihood that she could develop an open and equal relationship with the open-minded and free-spirited Roux.

Like *Chocolat, Snatch* is a highly stylized work, operating within the conventions of the heist movie, and featuring a crew of assorted colorful criminals and a complex 'score'. Moving between American and British settings, it recycles an array of familiar stereotypes, from dapper Mafioso's and cheeky cockneys to Jewish hustlers and somber Eastern Europeans. The 'Pikeys', led by Mickey O'Neill (and unbeatable boxer, played by Brad Pitt) are the newest addition to this ethnic assortment, and their incomprehensible dialect provides the focus of the film's humor. In his review of *Snatch*, Roger Ebert reads the presence of the Pikeys as a comment on the reception of Ritchie's' earlier film, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998). He states, "In the previous film, some of the accents were impenetrable to non-British audiences, so this time, in the spirit of fair play, Ritchie has added a character played by Brad Pitt, who speaks a gypsy dialect even the other characters in the movie can't understand".[73]

Snatch would seem to have evaded criticism within the British and US press because of its even-handed stereotyping, its novelty and its non-naturalistic form. Irish critics have, however, noted that *Snatch* perpetuates some very well established conventions in its representation of Irishness as otherness, most notably the (acknowledged) 'simianization' of Pitt through special effects make up and prosthetics.[74] *Snatch* also shares a number of thematic similarities with Irish film

narratives, in terms of its emphasis on the 'maternality' of Traveller society. Mickey O'Neill's family is dominated by a beloved matriarch and her sudden death motivates much of the action. Pitt's character 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. It is perhaps significant that Pitt's performance as Mickey O'Neill was read by some critics as a "satiric" commentary on an earlier work, *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999).[75] In *Fight Club,* Pitt played a hyper masculine 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 moment, through reference to contemporary stereotypes surrounding Traveller society.

The US independent film *Traveller* seems to be informed by a more personal concern with the experiences of Irish Travellers. Yet it many respects it too perpetuates familiar myths and stereotypes, offering parallels with both Irish cinema and ethnic sagas such as *The Godfather,* but also working within the conventions of the heist movie. Co-producer and leading actor Bill Paxton plays Bokky Sherlock, a Traveller and a successful con artist who pays his dues to the family 'Boss' but works independently. His routine is disrupted by the arrival of Pat O'Hara (played by Mark Wahlberg), the son of a deceased Traveller and a settled woman. Pat demands to be inducted into the Traveller clan, and this provides a narrative device whereby the 'hidden' ways of the community are revealed. In the course of his induction into the community, Pat learns that Travellers have a tradition of early 'fixed' marriage and a private language called Cant (because, according to Bokky, "we can speak it and they can't"). He is taught to distinguish between Irish, Scottish and "Turkish" Travellers and to perform a number of reliable scams. All of those outside the clan are fair game,

as evidenced in one scene where Bokky attempts to distract a possible 'mark' with comments about her "Irish" red hair.[76]

Bokky and his cohorts ply their trade in the suburbs, while staying in motels, and by comparison with the Turks (or indeed the Pikeys) they retain a degree of anonymity. They only return to the clan for family gatherings and it is at a communal funeral that the structure of the community is first revealed to Pat. This scene is set in a forest clearing and marked by a certain "Southern Gothic" ambiance, not least because of the unlikely proximity between the family graves and trailers. The otherworldly character of the community is also underscored by the figure of 'Ganny', Bokky's elderly blind grandmother. As guardian of Traveller lore, she upholds Pat's claim to Traveller ancestry with these words: "Though a man lose his way on the dark roads of life, if he come from the belly of a *real Traveller woman*, isn't that man yet a Traveller on the day he dies? The boy's got the blood and blood don't lie." This statement is perhaps significant, although highly contradictory, in that it defines Traveller identity in terms of the *maternal* line (a definition that would actually exclude Pat, since his mother was a settled woman). The emphasis on the maternal, as source of authentic identity, becomes more pronounced as the narrative unfolds. Following Ganny's death we learn that Bokky's own wife died in childbirth, and it is only through coming to terms with this event that he is able to begin a new life, with a settled single mother and her daughter.

Traveller offers striking parallels with *This is My Father* and *Into the West*, in terms of its privileging of the maternal supernatural, its failure to engage with experiences of living women and its focus on male trauma. *Traveller* is also clearly marked by an opposition between the realm of family and domesticity and the sphere of business. The Traveller economy is governed by the 'Boss', and much of the plot

centers on Bokky and Pat's rivalry for his approval and power, a dynamic explored through Pat's affair with the boss' daughter. Bokky and Pat clearly represent two quite different notions of Traveller identity – Bokky's allegiance is to the free-wheeling independent life (and to the memory of his wife) while Pat seeks the reassurance of blood ties. It is through the character of Bokky that the Travellers are Americanized, and rendered 'sympathetic'. At one point Bokky is pictured with a beer in his hand, enjoying the World Series and relaxing with his friends and family at a barbeque – just like any other American. In contrast, Pat's desire for acceptance and status in this close knit community appears somewhat obsessive.

The representation of Travellers as conmen also invites analysis. In many ways the film anticipates, and perhaps exploits, the desire for inside knowledge articulated in the media coverage of the Toogood case. But while US media accounts have tended to censure Travellers as untrustworthy or duplicituous, *Traveller* seems to celebrate the artistry and independence of the con artist. The scenes in which Bokky teaches Pat the tricks of the trade evoke a cinematic tradition extending from *Paper Moon* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1973) to *The Grifters* (Stephen Frears, 1990). Many of the scams are perpetrated against unsuspecting suburbanites, portrayed as naive and greedy, and they are structured by a moral code. So when Bokky unwittingly defrauds an impoverished single mother, Jean, he feels he must make amends – against the wishes of Pat. This honest act initiates a relationship that will ultimately lead Bokky away from the clan.

As is typical of the heist or con genre, the drama culminates in one final, large scale, scam – involving in this case the sale of currency plates to a rival gang of Turkish gypsies. The sting lies in the fact that the currency plates do not exist and the high quality 'forgeries' shown to the 'Turks' are actually real banknotes. When the

con is discovered, the gang members kill one of the Travellers and pursue Bokky and Pat to Jean's home. In a scene of extreme violence, typical of the kind of foregrounded by Annalee Newitz in her discussion of racialized primitivism, the gypsy gang attack Jean and her daughter. Bokky and Pat are rendered helpless and are only saved by the arrival of the Traveller Boss and an armed posse, who meet violence with violence.

The resolution of the narrative confirms the opposition, established throughout the narrative, between the two modes of identity represented by Bokky and Pat. Two new unions are formed; Pat returns with the Boss to the clan and Bokky leaves town with Jean and her daughter. Given his earlier involvement with the Boss' daughter, it seems likely that Pat will finally acquire the status of a 'real' Traveller. Yet his claim to Traveller identity is undercut by the fact that the structure of the clan is patriarchal and so not fully authentic according to the maternal terms specified by *Ganny*. By establishing a union with the independent single mother Jean, Bokky seems to abandon his identity as a Traveller. But it is only through his knowledge, and acceptance, of traumatic memory (facing the loss of his wife) that Bokky can enter into a new, and different, relationship.

Conclusion

This analysis of Traveller identities, as they are constituted in Irish and international cinema, would seem to suggest that the figure of the Traveller provides a conduit to the recovery of the past, a recovery coded as therapeutic. My 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 organization. This dynamic is perhaps most pronounced in the international films discussed, such as *Chocolat, Traveller* (1997) and the Irish-American narrative *This is My Father*. Yet it is also suggested by the conclusion of Joe Comerford's film, one of the few narratives to deal explicitly with the experiences of a Traveller woman. In some of the Irish examples discussed, however, such as *The Field* and *Into the West,* the recovery of lost histories fails to disrupt the dominant order.

The prominent position of Travellers in Irish heritage cinema is clearly structured by cultural, social and economic factors extending beyond the Irish context, and I have highlighted the dependant status of Irish cinema within the international marketplace. Mac Laughlin, Garner and Lentin suggest that representations of Travellers have been shaped by a variety of historical factors associated with the experience of colonization and migration, and the formation of Irish nationalism. In its current form, however, Irish racial discourse is also underpinned by the Celtic Tiger economy, which has contributed to an increased investment in property as capital, and growing tensions around ethnic and cultural difference. As Irish society has become more overtly ethnically diverse, patterns of intolerance established in relation to Travellers have continued to inform attitudes towards other, newer, minorities.

One of the key issues to emerge from this analysis of Irish and international cinema is the recurrent emphasis on Traveller society as inherently, and ideally, maternal. The coding of the settled past (and by extension Traveller culture) in this way would seem to have particular implications for women, and this invites further analysis. Another key issue is the extent to which Irish cinema can hope to engage

with the lived experiences of Travellers, given the place that they have been assigned with the Irish, and international, cultural imaginary. A possible point of departure is suggested by Comerford's *Traveller*. Through its exploration of performativity, and female subjectivity, it articulates a critique of the traditions of representation that continue to shape relations between Travellers and the settled majority in contemporary Ireland.

[1] Ruth Barton, "From History to Heritage: Some Recent Developments in Irish Cinema," *The Irish Review* 21 (1997): 41-56.

[2] See Andrew Higson, "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film," in *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, ed. Lester Friedman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and UCL Press, 1993), 109-129.

[3] Barton, "From History to Heritage," 51.

[4] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others; Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press and Field Day, 2001), 183. She emphasizes that the film is marked by a thematic exploration of memory and nostalgia and highlights various intertextual references to nostalgic screen fictions, such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969) and *Back to the Future Part III* (Robert Zemeckis, 1990).

[5] Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others*, 183.

[6] See Sinéad Ni Shuinéar, "Othering the Irish (Travellers)" in *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*, ed. R. Lentin and R. McVeigh (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002), 177-192.

[7] An exploration of contemporary Traveler identity can be found in the feature length documentary *Southpaw: The Francis Barrett Story* (Liam McGrath, Ireland, 1999) about Francis Barrett, an Irish Traveler and Olympic boxer. The documentary *Traveller* (Alen MacWhiney and John T. Davis, Ireland, 2001) also develops a complex examination of the relationship between a photographer and his former subjects, a group of Travelers.

[8] See the analysis of *Trojan Eddie* (Gillies MacKinnon, Ireland, 1996), *Southpaw* and MacWhiney's *Traveller* in Ruth Barton's *Irish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 185-186.

[9] Diane Negra, in the Introduction to this volume, 13.

[10] Stephen Crofts, "Reconceptualising national cinemas," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* l4, 3 (1993): 58.

[11] Barton, "From History to Heritage," 50.

[12] Joe Cleary, "Into Which West? Irish Modernity and the Maternal Supernatural" in *Literature and the Supernatural*, ed. Brian Cosgrave (Dublin: Columba Press, 1995), 147-173.

[13] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (1979), *Signatures of the Visible*, (Routledge, New York, 1992), 9-34.

[14] Jim Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland:, Whose Country, Whose History?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 19.

[15] Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland*, 9 [italics added].

[16] Ibid.,, 11.

[17] Aparna Rao, "The Concept of the Peripatetics: An Introduction", in *The Other Nomads*, ed. Aparna Rao (Cologne: Bohlau Verlag 1987), 12.

[18] Ibid., 9.

[19] Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland*, 16.

[20] Paul Delaney, "Representations of the Travellers in the 1880s and 1900s", *Irish Studies Review* 9, 1(2001): 65.

[21] Irish Traveller groups, such as the Pavee Point Travellers' Centre estimate the numbers of Travellers in Britain and the US at 15,000 and 10,000. In the US Traveller communities can be found in Texas, Indiana, South Carolina and Tennessee.

[22] See especially the work of George and Sharon Gmelch; "The Emergence of an Ethnic Group: The Irish Tinkers." *Anthropological Quarterly* 49, 4 (1976): 225 – 238; *The Irish Tinkers. The Urbanization of an Itinerant People* (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings Publishing Company, 1977). I have found little evidence of in-depth research by American scholars into Irish Travelers in the US, with the exception of linguistic analyses such as Ian Hancock, "The Cryptolectal Speech of the American Roads: Traveler Cant and American Angloromani", *American-Speech* 61, 3 (1986): 206-220. In contrast, the history and culture of Irish Travelers has proved to be of some interest to Irish scholars and filmmakers. See the entry on "Travellers Outside Ireland" by Sinead Ni Shuinéir, *Encyclopaedia of Ireland*, ed. Brian Lalor (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2003) 1073-1074, and also

the profile of the Irish Traveler community in Murphy Village, North Augusta in the documentary *Stories from Irish America: The Travellers of Murphy Village* (Radharc, 1995). I am indebted to Kevin Whelan for calling my attention to both the encyclopedia entry and the Radharc film.

[23] Rao, "Concept of the Peripatetics," 11.

[24] Margery Eagan "Options available for girl in taped beating not Toogood," *Boston Herald*, 24 September, 2002. Toogood was eventually released, after serving a custodial sentence.

[25] Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women* (New York and London: Free Press, 2004), 151.

[26] Ibid., 170-171.

[27] *Washington Times*, "Arrest Aims Light on Nomad Travellers", 7 October, 2002. See also Melody McDonald, "Woman videotaped hitting child believed linked to Irish Travellers", *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 20 September, 2002.

[28] Jennifer Mathieu, "Ties of Texas" *Dallas Observer*, 10 October, 2002.

[29] Amanda Ripley, Mairead Carey and Daren Fonda, "Unwelcome Exposure", *Time* 160, 15 7 October, 2002.

[30] Annalee Newitz, "White Savagery and Humiliation, or A New Racial Consciousness in the Media", in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 135.

[31] MacLaughlin, *Travellers and Ireland*, 34.

[32] Ibid., 36.

[33] Brian Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 136.

[34] The 1963 Report of the Commission on Itinerancy (Dublin: Government Publications) remains an influential work, and its publication conformed the rise of the term 'itinerant', in place of the pejorative 'Tinker'. Itinerancy clearly carries negative associations, however, and the term 'Traveller' is prominently foregrounded in contemporary anti-discrimination campaigns (discussed

below).

[35] Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland*, 45.

[36] Fanning, 136.

[37] Ibid., 172.

[38] Ibid., 173.

[39] The ten new countries are Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. See Damien Kiberd, "Keep the door open to a labour opportunity," *Sunday Times*, Business & Money section (Irish Edition), 15 February, 2004, 6

[40] Michael A. Poole, "In Search of Ethnicity in Ireland," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 129.

[41] Two recent publications dealing with both racism and anti-racism in Ireland incorporate analyses of the experiences of Travellers. See Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh, (eds) *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002) and Fintan Farrell and Philip Watt (eds) *Responding to Racism in Ireland* (Dublin: Veritas, 2001).

[42] Ronit Lentin, cited by Steve Garner in *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 24.

[43] Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others,* 181 [Emphasis added].

[44] Ibid., 183.

[45] This strategy is very much in keeping with the processes critiqued by Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[46] Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience*, 89.

[47] Ibid., 112-3.

[48] Ibid., 196

[49] Ibid., 48.

[50] Ibid., 131.

[51] Citizen Traveller, "Fact Sheet Traveller Health Issues," Dublin: Citizen Traveller 1999.

[52] Ibid.[emphasis added].

[53] Nomadism has effectively become a criminal offence following the enactment of Section 24 of the Housing (Miscellaneous provisions) Act of 2002, commonly known as the Anti-Trespass Act. The legislation has already resulted in the conviction of members of Traveller families.

[54] Paul Delaney, "A Sense of Place Travellers, Representation, and Irish Culture", *The Republic: A Journal of Contemporary and Historical Debate,* 3 (2003): 85.

[55] Jean-Pierre Liégeois, cited by Delaney, 2003, 86.

[56] Delaney cites Jane Helleiner's research into this area, which notes that 'housed' or so-called 'settled' Travellers are often more mobile that other members of their community, who fear loss of access to facilities, 86.

[57] Citizen Traveller Charter, Dublin: Citizen Traveller, 1999 [unpaginated] Documentation of some of the campaign images can be found on the website of the Irish Traveller Movement at http://www.itmtrav.com/frame2.html.

[58] Mac Laughlin points outs that the Irish Folklore Commission established to document Irish traditions and customs largely ignored Travellers, *Travellers and Ireland*, 37.

[59] Cleary, *Into Which West?*, 155.

[60] Ibid., 159.

[61] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 32-33.

[62] See Richard Kearney's analysis of "Myths of Motherland" in *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 108-121.

[63] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 32.

[64] *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1998), *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002) and the television film *Sinners* (Aisling Walsh, 2002) all deal with institutional abuse, and its denial. Traumatic memories associated with migration and social deprivation also find expression in *Korea* (Cathal Black, 1995), *Angela's Ashes* (Alan Parker, 1999), *I Could Read the Sky* (Nicola Bruce, 1999) and *This is My Father*. The latter film is the only one of this series to incorporate a

representation of Irish Travelers.

[65] Luke Gibbons, "Romanticism and Realism in Irish Cinema" in *Cinema and Ireland* Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill, (London: Routledge, 1988), 200.

[66] Comerford's film was co-financed by the Irish Arts Council and by the Production Board of the British Film Institute, an agency responsible for the funding of a diverse range of avant-garde works. For an analysis of the role of the Production Board in Irish avant-garde film culture see Maeve Connolly, "Visibility Moderate? Sighting an Irish Avant-garde in the intersection of Local and International Film Cultures," *boundary 2: International Journal of Literature and Culture* 31, 1 (2004): 244-265. For details on Traveller within the context of Irish cinema see Richard Haslam, "Irish Film: Screening the Republic", *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-99*, ed. Ray Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), 130-146.

[67] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "The Cinema and Babel: Language Difference and Power", *Screen* 26, 3-4, (1985): 51

[68] Amy Lawrence, "Women's Voices in Third World Cinema", *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* ed. Rick Altman (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 189.

[69] Kevin Barry, "Discarded Images: Narrative and the Cinema", *The Crane Bag* 6 (1982): 45 –51.

[70] Joe Comerford, interviewed by the author, 8 May 2001.

[71] Keith Hopper, "'A Gallous Story and a Dirty Deed': Word and Image in Neil Jordan and Joe Comerford's *Traveller* (1981)", *Irish Studies Review*, 9 2 (2001): 186.

[72] Alaina Lemon calls attention to a parallel current within contemporary Russian cinema, an exploration of identity (as both hidden, and mobile) articulated in farces such as *Shirly-Myrly* (D. Menshov, Russia, 1995), *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 68-69.

[73] Roger Ebert, "*Snatch* (Review)", *Chicago Sun-Times* 12 January, 2001 http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/2001/01/011905.html

[74] Sinéad Ni Shuinéar, "Othering the Irish (Travellers)," 189.

[75] See Mick LaSalle, "Pitt finds his Groove", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 January, 2001.

[76] See Amanda Third's essay on the semiotics of red-headedness in this volume.