

Print Media Framings of Those Blonde Roma Children

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On October 16th 2013 Police carried out a raid on a Roma camp in Farsala in Central Greece. They rescued 'Maria', a four year old child who was presumed to be the victim of child abduction (Okely 2014). Blonde, with fair skin and green-blue eyes, it was believed that she could not be related to the Roma gypsies claiming to be her family. DNA tests revealed the child was not a blood relative of her Roma parents, who were arrested on suspicion of child abduction. The child was subsequently removed from the camp and placed in the care of a local charity. Greek Police appealed to the international community to help identify Maria. Old myths of child abduction were quickly resurrected within media discourse. Children, it was said, were bought and sold for begging or for claiming social welfare payments. Media commentators asked how many other children might be hidden in such camps, and references were made to high profile missing children such as Madeleine McCann and Ben Needham (Richardson 2014).

While the Maria case was still dominating the global news cycle the Gardaí (the Irish Police Force) invoked Section 12 of *The Child Care Act*¹ (1991) to forcibly remove a seven year old blonde child from a Roma family living in Tallaght. (Logan 2014, 22-63). Within 24 hours, Gardaí in Athlone used the same legislation to remove a two year old blonde child from another Roma family (Logan 2014, 64-100). Both instances arose out of emails sent to the Gardaí by members of the public, alerting them to the existence of blonde children living with Roma families. Both emails referred to the Maria case. The children were returned to their parents within forty-eight hours, once DNA tests revealed they were in fact the biological children of the Roma couples in question. Before the children's return, however, details of both cases were leaked to the media, resulting in headline news stories across the world as well as being the most tweeted about topic in Ireland that year.

The decision to take two children into care and the public controversy which followed resulted in a decision by the Ombudsman for Children to launch an official inquiry (Logan 2014). Her report acknowledges the influential role of the media's reporting of the Maria case. It also points to the leaking of confidential information to

journalists concerning the Roma children. (Logan 2014, pp. 37-38)

Recognising the media's power in determining public discourse and beliefs; in this chapter we take a closer look at how the decision to take two Roma children into care was explained by the Irish print media. Our analysis finds that five distinct media frames dominated in the coverage. The first frame justifies the actions of the Gardaí and the Health Services Executive (HSE) by portraying the case as an issue of child protection rather than one of racial profiling. The second frame suggests that the removal of the Roma children was a case of racial profiling. The third frame focuses on the actions of the HSE and Gardaí, portraying these state agencies as heavy handed and unaccountable. The fourth frame serves to question the media's involvement and reporting of both cases, depicting their role as irresponsible. Finally, the fifth frame examines the trauma experienced by the Roma families involved in both cases. We begin our examination of media framings of the Roma in Ireland by discussing the ways in which the Roma are routinely racialised and excluded in Ireland and beyond. We also plot a timeline of events as they unfolded and note the media's pivotal role in the unfolding moral panic (Cohen 2002).

Racialising the Roma

It is estimated that there are between three and six thousand Roma people living in Ireland (European Union Fundamental Rights Agency 2012; NASC 2013). Roma communities have been part of European societies for centuries. They have been treated as outsiders and subjected to policies and practices that have resulted in repeated evictions and forced migration in search of refuge (ENAR 2014; Guy *et al* 2010; Tosi Cambini 2011; Miskovic 2009).² Roma communities “form a group that is disadvantaged in several respects and is particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, poverty and discrimination” (General Affairs Committee of the Council of the EU cited in Guy *et al.* 2010, 8). Manifesting as lives lived on the periphery of European societies, Roma communities experience structural discrimination in education, health, housing and employment, as well as hate crime and police harassment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009; Guy *et al* 2010; Human Rights First 2009; Sein 2014). Migration offers a potential means to escape such experiences. Fuelled by socio-political discourses and practices that stigmatise Roma communities as “less than citizens” (Human Rights First 2009, 1), and despite *being* EU citizens, European Roma communities have been subjected to mass-deportations

from EU States on the basis that they are a threatening ‘*Other*’ interested only in ‘taking advantage of the system’ (Cahn 2004; Clough and Sigona 2011; Tosi Cambini 2011; Miskovic 2009; Woodcock 2007).

EU wide studies demonstrate that the aforementioned practices of exclusion are not the preserve of any one state (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009). Irish research similarly demonstrates discrimination experienced amongst the Roma communities when accessing goods and services, employment, healthcare, social protection, and housing. Roma are treated as a security risk by the police, subject to practices of ethnic profiling and related incidents of harassment. Instead of being offered protection by the police, Roma in Ireland are faced with a “crime control model of justice” (NASC 2013, 61); a fact made all the more alarming given the exposure to hate crime that the Roma experience. Reports on hate crime in Ireland published by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR Ireland 2015) evidence racially aggravated assaults, verbal abuse, and damage to property directed towards the Roma; fuelled by discourses propagated on conventional and social media platforms.³ It is evident that, whether in experiences of discrimination or hate crime, Roma communities continue to be stigmatised. They are constructed as a racial underclass, the labelling of which further embeds and legitimises the social exclusion of Roma communities in Ireland and elsewhere.

Roma as Diverse Communities

Roma communities are diverse communities. The EU uses the term ‘Roma’ as a collective term which includes a diverse range of communities or “sub-groups” (NASC 2013, 9) such as the: “Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, Manush, Jenische, Kaldaresh and Kalé” (ENAR 2014, 1; see also Guy *et al* 2010). Despite this diversity, Roma have been constructed homogenously as the “ultimate ‘outsider European’” (Miskovic 2009, 209), “a mysterious wandering folk with no links or loyalties other than to kin and clan...with a propensity to crime and fraud” (Cahn 2004, 482). Processes of racialisation lie at the core of these constructions of Roma as ‘Other’ and it is these processes that inform anti-Roma racism.

According to Miles and Brown (2003, 103) “racism is... a representational form which, by designating human collectivities ... functions as an ideology of inclusion and exclusion.” As an ideological formation, racism results in

disadvantage or “exclusionary practices” for those constructed as ‘Other’ (Miles and Brown 2003, 103). Racism is premised upon processes of racialisation, that is processes of signification where meaning is attached to ‘markers’ of the ‘self’ or the ‘Other’, defining those who belong and those who do not (Dunn *et al* 2007, 569; Miles and Brown 2003, 85, 103). Racialisation is not contingent on phenotypical difference but can also operate on what are constructed as cultural or religious markers of difference. Carr (2016) demonstrates the manner in which Irish Muslims have been categorised as outside of Irishness, not on the basis of phenotypical difference but for not bearing other constructed aspects of belonging, in this case Catholicism. Carr and Haynes (2013) argue that for those constructed as the ‘outgroup’, processes of racialisation present the ‘Other’ as innately and negatively different, categorising who belongs to the in-group while contemporaneously legitimating exclusionary practices toward the ‘Other’. Thus the process of racialisation underscores the manner in which ‘races’ are socially constructed as opposed to “biological realities” (Miles and Brown 2003, 89). Further, racialisation is not just about defining the ‘Other’, it also involves defining the ‘self’ and idealised notions of who belongs and who does not (Miles and Brown 2003). Racism infuses an “explicitly negative evaluative component” to constructions of the un-belonging ‘Other’ (Miles and Brown 2003, 104). Representations of the ‘Other’, infused with the negative evaluative component affirm the place of those with the power to define who belongs, informing racist practices and beliefs, resulting in lived experiences of hostility and discrimination among the outgroup (Miles and Brown 2003, 103).

State Abduction or State Care? A Timeline of Events: October 2013

On October 20th, TV journalist Paul Connolly⁴ received a message on his professional Facebook page which stated:

“Hi Paul, Today was on the news the blonde child found in Roma camp in Greece. There is also little girl living in Roma house in Tallaght and she is blonde and blue eyes. Her name is [names her] and her address is [address is given]. I am from [Eastern European country] myself and it’s a big problem there missing kids. The Romas robing [sic] them to get child benefit in Europe”.

Connolly forwarded the information in this Facebook post to the Gardaí on the morning of 21st October.

The Children's Ombudsman's report (Logan 2014) details the key events surrounding the decision to take the children into state care. Connolly's email received the attention of a Garda Sergeant at 2pm, and the Sergeant spent the next hour and a half carrying out preliminary enquiries. These included checking child protection records, speaking with a Garda colleague who knew the family, contacting the Principal of the local school, contacting the Department of Social Protection, and contacting the HSE Social Work team. It emerged that the child was commonly known by a name that differed to official records, but there were no recorded concerns relating to the child, and the school principal had no concerns relating to the child or her family.

Although the sergeant attempted to make contact with the author of the post on Connolly's Facebook page, this had not happened prior to the decision being taken to progress the investigation further by calling directly to the child's house without the aid of an interpreter. Upon doing so, the Gardaí decided to invoke legislation designed for the protection of children in urgent, compelling, (and thus rare) circumstances in order to remove the child from her family and place her in the care of social workers without the prior agreement of a district court judge. In the subsequent inquiry, the Sergeant cited the following key reasons for his making this decision:

- The child did not resemble her family (Logan 2014, 70)
- The hospital at which she was born was unable to immediately find a record of her birth (Logan 2014, 70)
- Whilst her mother produced a PPS number (social security number) for her, she did not have a birth cert or recent passport available (Logan 2014, 70)
- A consultant doctor, contacted by phone, advised that it was highly unusual for a blonde and blue-eyed child to have two parents of dark hair and eyes (Logan 2014, 70)
- The child went by a name different to her official name (Logan 2014, 70)
- Extended family members had criminal records and resided outside the state and the family was thus deemed a flight risk (Logan 2014, 71).

The following morning, news of the story broke and a large number of journalists began to arrive at the home of the Roma family. Citing Garda sources, minute details of the events as they unfolded at the child's house were revealed. These included: who was in the house at the time Gardaí arrived, the child's appearance, her place and date of birth, and the opinion of the consultant doctor previously contacted by phone.

Having spent two nights with a foster family, the child was returned to her parents when DNA testing revealed she was, in fact, their biological daughter.

The Special Inquiry Report (Logan 2014) also evidences the key events leading up to the removal of the second Roma child. On the morning of 21st October, Gardaí in Athlone received an email, which had been sent to the Missing Persons Bureau from a member of the public with the subject heading of "Suspected Child Abduction". The author of the email had been at a festival that summer where her daughters had their hair braided at a stall run by a Roma family with a baby boy:

While my children were getting their braids in I preoccupied myself with the little baby. He had very blonde hair and the bluest eyes and his complexion was also fair...apart from the baby, all the others were completely dark in complexion, eyes and hair...the recent news about the little Maria who was found made me realise that I should have reported it.

Because of the subject heading of the email, the Gardaí deemed it necessary to treat the case as potentially high-risk and requiring urgent action. Having checked Garda records for any concern relating to the child and having found none, the decision was made to visit the child's home address. Once there, the child was found to indeed be blonde, with blue eyes and a pale complexion. The child's birth certificate did not include the father's name. A local Garda who knew of the family had not known of the child, and so the family were asked to attend the Garda Station. An interpreter was not sought at any time. Although the local hospital confirmed the birth of the child, it was finally decided that evening to invoke Section 12 of *The Child Care Act* (1991) in order to remove the child from his family and place him in the care of a foster family. The reasons cited by Gardaí in this instance included:

- The child matched the description given in the email

- A local Garda had knowledge of the family, but had never seen the child before
- The family were deemed to be transient and were thus a flight risk (Logan 2014, 29).

The following morning it was ascertained from medical records that the child had albinism, and this accounted for his fair hair, eyes and complexion. He was returned to his parents, but crucially, not before the story was leaked to the media, and there was a media presence outside of the family's home when they returned having collected him from the social worker.

<Insert Figure 9.1 here>

Print Media Framings⁵

Frame One: An Issue of Child Protection:

The first frame identified from our sample of articles⁶ contained twenty nine articles and constructed the incidents in Tallaght and Athlone as issues of 'child protection'. The frame was evident in nine articles published in the Irish Independent, eight in the Irish Examiner, seven in The Irish Times, four in the Irish Daily Mail and one in the Irish Daily Mirror. Twenty two of the articles were news reports, six were opinion pieces and one was an editorial.

The frame functions mainly through the voice of Government sources (seventeen articles in this frame) and also to a lesser extent through the voice of journalists (five articles) and columnists (four articles). According to both Entman (1993) and Reese (2001) media frames are "organising principles" which serve to structure information through the processes of selection and salience. This frame is structured on the basis of a "moral panic" (see Cohen 2002) that is anchored mainly on the 'Greek case' but also on previous high profile child abductions and cases of Irish child abuse. These 'reasoning devices' combined to produce a clear and consistent 'interpretive package' that invoked a heightened sense of risk and focused attention onto the idea that it is always 'better to be safe than sorry' when dealing with matters concerning children.

[Headline] "Family vows child belongs to them in case similar to Greece".
News Report – Irish Daily Mirror 23/10/2013)

‘Emphasis Framing’

This frame functions like an “emphasis frame” by focusing attention onto a particular “subset of potentially relevant considerations” (Iyengar 2005, 5). For example, on October 23rd, seven of the thirteen articles published on that day highlighted the supposed similarities between the circumstances surrounding ‘Maria’ and the events concerning a Roma family in Tallaght, Co. Dublin. The articles ‘othered’ the Roma families in question on the basis that the ‘blonde haired’ and ‘blue eyed’ children looked physically different from their ‘dark’ parents and siblings. In addition, eight of the thirteen articles questioned their legitimacy by expressing doubts over the authenticity of their birth certificates, medical records and passports, thus increasing suspicion and placing the burden of proof onto the Roma families in question. This in turn justified and normalised the actions of the Gardaí and the HSE.

[Headline] “DNA to test if girl is Roma couple’s daughter”. (News Report – Irish Examiner 23/10/2013)

Comparisons were also made with the high profile abduction of Madeleine McCann in four of the articles. One of these articles, an editorial/opinion piece written by a columnist from the Irish Independent, suggested that the Greek case and the Tallaght case would cause people to re-evaluate what happened to Madeleine McCann, noting towards the end of the article that there had in the past been reported “sightings of Madeleine” with a “tall swarthy man” (Editorial/Opinion Piece – Irish Independent 23/10/2013).

In eighteen articles an attempt was made to move the focus away from the idea of racial profiling, and a more sympathetic view of the State institutions involved in both cases was made salient. For example, in a news report published by the Irish Independent on October 25th entitled “Damned if they did and damned if they didn’t...” a comparison was made to a widely reported incest case, in which (in a subsequent inquiry report - see Gibbons 2010) the HSE was criticised for failing to intervene on behalf of the children involved. The suggestion here in relation to the cases in Tallaght and Athlone was that the Gardaí and the HSE were in a ‘catch twenty-two’ position given that they had been criticised in the past for not acting swiftly to protect children.

Similarly, one news report published by the Irish Independent entitled “Gardaí have powers to take a child from family into care”, (Irish Independent 23/10/2013)

saw this argument emphasised through the voice of child law expert, Geoffrey Shannon. He stated that *Section 12* is only used in circumstances that are deemed by the Gardaí to be “absolutely urgent” and that “there had long been criticism of state agencies for being too slow to act in protecting children” and said “the State had a duty to do so”. This sentiment was also expressed in two statements issued by the Irish Association of Social Workers and was also adopted by Government sources.

Use of Sources

The majority of direct and indirect sources quoted in articles in this frame originated from Government officials. In particular they articulate the voices of the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, the then Minister for Justice, Alan Shatter and the then Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald. These voices were apparent in both the main body and in the headlines of articles.

[Headline] ‘Always a balance to be struck on child safety says Taoiseach’.
(News Report – The Irish Times 25/10/2013)

Eighteen statements made by the Justice Minister Alan Shatter sought to sympathise with and minimise the actions of the HSE and the Gardaí by stating that they were ‘acting in good faith’ in response to public concerns. A further nineteen statements issued by Government representatives and five statements issued separately by the Gardaí contextualised these cases as being about child protection and deflected attention away from questions of institutional racism. What is noteworthy here is that the Special Inquiry Report conducted by the Ombudsman for Children into the incidents in Tallaght and Athlone found no evidence that the children at the centre of these cases were in any immediate danger and that there were no child protection concerns on record relating to these children (Logan 2014, 34, 66). In this respect, it appears that it was primarily the Government that constructed these two cases as issues of child protection.

Frame Two: A Case of Racial Profiling:

The second frame identified constructs the incidents in both Tallaght and Athlone as cases of racial profiling. Characteristics of this frame featured in twenty nine articles. Of these eight appeared in the Irish Independent, six in by the Irish Times, seven in the Irish Examiner, five in the Irish Daily Mail and three in the Irish

Daily Mirror. Twenty three articles were news reports and six were opinion pieces. Again, this frame operates mainly through the voice of sources (twenty two of the articles) from groups such as Pavee Point,⁷ the Roma Support Group, the Immigrant Council and members of the political opposition. Five articles written by columnists and one by a journalist expressed, to varying degrees, the view that the actions of the Gardaí and the HSE amounted to racial profiling.

Use of Sources

There were thirty eight direct and indirect statements made by Pavee Point which compared the events in both Tallaght and Athlone to a ‘witch-hunt’, and argued that the State’s actions were based on appearances rather than evidence. On that basis they called for an independent inquiry into the actions of the HSE and the Gardaí.

[Headline] “Pavee Point says taking children into care shows racial profiling in the extreme”. (News Report – Irish Times 24/10/2013)

Six statements came from members of the political opposition, five came from the Roma Support Group, four came from NASC Irish Immigrant Support Centre, and one statement came from a Government official, Doras Luimni, the European Roma Rights Centre, Amnesty International and the Integration Centre. All of these statements expressed similar views.

[Labour TD Aodhán Riordain] “What is really at the core of this whole episode, this whole circus, has been a pure raw, naked, poisonous, racism that lies at the heart of Irish society,” he said”. (News Report – Irish Examiner 25/10/2013)

Twelve statements from the Immigrant Council condemned racial profiling and called on the Government to provide assurances that there were safeguards in place against it citing the ‘*Incitement to Hatred Law*’ as being ineffective in dealing with racism.

‘Thematic Framing’

This frame is somewhat comparable to Iyengar’s (1990) conceptualisation of a ‘thematic frame’ in that it places the incidents in Tallaght and Athlone into a wider contextual perspective. In contrast, ‘episodic frames’, examine issues in terms of

‘single instances’. The degree to which content is framed either thematically or episodically can impact on how the reader attributes responsibility to an issue. With thematic frames, this responsibility is likely to be attributed to systemic causes whereas episodic frames will focus on the individual. This frame contained four articles which took an historical look at the Roma community and highlighted the racism and poverty experienced by both the international Roma community and those living in Ireland. Attempts were also made in three articles to deconstruct some of the common myths and stereotypes commonly attributed to the Roma, such as being labelled as ‘child snatchers’.

“The myth of a particular ethnic group being behind child kidnapping has been perpetuated in Europe before. The myth of the blood libel, which has ebbed and flowed for the best part of a millennium across Europe, led hysterical Christians to believe that Jewish people were kidnapping young children and using them in ritual sacrifice during Passover. Even after the Holocaust, such ridiculous accusations continued. In 1946, in Kielce in Poland, 40 Jews were killed by a mob following a false tale of child kidnapping and blood libel.” (Opinion Piece – Irish Times 24/10/2013)

A news report entitled “Many of them come here to escape persecution”, (Irish Times 25/10/2013) explains that many of the Roma came to Ireland in the 1990s to seek asylum with many gaining refugee status. Another opinion piece written by the Irish Times columnist Una Mullally highlights that the Roma are commonly the victims of crime and quite often live in poverty. Similarly, a separate opinion piece written by representatives from Pavee Point called “Cases highlight the plight of vulnerable Roma children”, stressed the racism and hostility experienced by the Roma. (Irish Examiner 24/10/2013)

Although the idea that racial profiling took place was a strong theme in the reportage, the argument tended to be framed in the context of, or in reaction to, the problem of child protection. This pattern was evident in news reports and to a lesser extent in opinion pieces, where structurally the racial profiling frame and the child protection frame appeared in relation to one another as either the first or second half of the article. One possible explanation for this pattern is that the approach being employed here by the print media professional is to fulfil the journalistic principles of ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ by being seen to present two sides of the story. This

practice is not uncommon. Tuchman's (1972) analysis of media professional's conceptualisation of objectivity revealed that the notion of objectivity is best understood as a "performance strategy" whose function is to protect journalists from criticisms of bias and libel accusations. By using statements from both sides of a debate, the journalists in question believed that by introducing someone else's opinion they were removing themselves from the story and allowing the 'facts' to speak for themselves.

Frame Three: Heavy Handed, Incompetent and Unaccountable:

This frame portrayed the Gardaí and HSE as being heavy handed in their approach, incompetent, and unaccountable. Words and phrases such as 'shambolic', 'monstrous invasion' and 'omnishambles' were used to describe the actions of both the HSE and the Gardaí in both cases.

[Headline] "Shambolic episode as HSE is forced to return two children".
(News Report – Irish Independent 24/10/2013)

This frame featured in twenty four articles; fifteen news reports, seven opinion pieces and two editorials. Unlike the previous two frames discussed, this frame operated mainly through the voice of the media professional (with seven articles being written by newspaper columnists and journalists respectively) and from a combination of the political opposition and Pavee Point (who were a source in eight articles). The by-lines of three articles could not be identified. Focusing on the voices of media professionals, one opinion piece written by the Irish Times columnist, John Waters entitled "Racism isn't the most ominous aspect of these child snatchings" stated that:

"Racism is arguably among the least ominous aspects of what happened this week. Far worse was the denial of due process, the misuse of the law, the trampling on constitutional rights and the cruelty to the children and families involved - all perpetrated by people charged with upholding the Constitution and protecting citizens". (Opinion Piece – Irish Times 25/10/2013)

A separate opinion piece written by the Irish Daily Mail columnist Brenda Power, entitled "Go into the mind of this poor child and ask yourself: who are the kidnappers and who are the rescuers?" outlined that:

“An essential element of our social contract with powerful State agencies is an understanding that they will not abuse their power, but that they will use it without fear or favour when it is required. And another element of that contract is that we can trust them to tell the difference”. (Opinion Piece – Irish Daily Mail 24/10/2013).

Another news report published by the Irish Times on October 24th questioned the decision-making practices of the Gardaí and whether the public could have faith in the country’s child protection policies:

“Gardaí as well as the HSE have failed children who were at risk. Now, this heartrending episode which left a little girl traumatised and her family distraught, raises new concerns about the decision-making at the highest level of the Gardaí in particular [...] would this stand up to an independent test by experts on child protection? What kind of discussion took place with paediatricians? The veil of secrecy surrounding so many cases means we don't know how many other families may be, on the face of it, targeted in this way. Cases are argued behind closed doors in courts not open to the public”. (News Report – Irish Times 24/10/2013)

A further seven articles in this frame questioned the nature of the investigations into the removals of the Roma children, suggesting that by carrying out their own internal reviews, the HSE and the Gardaí were essentially investigating themselves. This they argued, lacked transparency and accountability. This view was mainly expressed through the voice of sources such as Pavee Point and members of the political opposition.

[Martin Collins - Pavee Point] “In relation to the format of the inquiry Pavee Point is not happy at all,” he said. “It is not a full, independent, transparent investigation”. “It is a case of the HSE and the Gardaí carrying out internal reviews and passing them to the ministers who will forward it on to the Ombudsman for Children”. (News Report – Irish Examiner 25/10/2013)

Frame Four: Irresponsible Media Reporting:

Sixteen articles in this sample, to varying degrees, referenced the role of the media in these cases. Of these, six were published by the Irish Times and the Irish

Independent respectively and two were published by the Irish Examiner and the Irish Daily Mail respectively. Of these articles, eleven were news reports and five were opinion pieces. In nine of these articles criticisms of the media's reporting of the cases and the close relationship between Gardaí and the media featured only through the voice of a source. Of these sources, five statements were made by politicians, two were made by Pavee Point, and one was made by representatives of the European Rights Group, the Roma Support Group and the Integration Centre.

[Independent TD Clare Daly] 'Elements in the Gardaí are feeding their pet poodles in the media' as she hit out at "a media frenzy and irresponsible journalism', (News Report – The Irish Times 25/10/2013)

Separately, an opinion piece written by the leader of the Socialist Party, Joe Higgins, entitled "Demonised: Blonde Roma children and the jobless" (Irish Daily Mail 25/10/2013) pointed to the stereotypical assumptions made by journalists and to the role of the social media platform Facebook in the initial breaking of the story. In contrast, there was one news report published by the Irish Independent on October 23rd entitled "How anonymous Facebook tip led to drama", which detailed the role Facebook played in tipping off the 'Paul Connolly Investigates' TV programme on TV3, and subsequently the Gardaí, to the fact that the child in Tallaght looked different from its parents. These events and the actions of the journalist, however, were normalised in the story and presented as being unproblematic.

There were three opinion pieces all of which were published on October 25th written by columnists, which criticised media reporting of these cases. Two appeared in the Irish Times and one in the Irish Independent. For example, an opinion piece written by Irish Times columnist, Una Mullally entitled "Questions to ask now the Roma hysteria is over" criticised the Irish media's role in perpetuating anti-Roma discourses in an effort to get "the good story".

"Truth, nuance, shades of grey and patience are often seen as irritants that journalism just doesn't have the time to deal with when there's a scoop to be pursued... The story spread rapidly both here and internationally. At a loss for a photograph, newspapers republished the one of the Greek girl "Maria". Conversations online and off were in many cases coloured with prejudice against Roma people. Then the unfortunate truth reared its head to disrupt this

“good story”.” (Opinion Piece – The Irish Times 24/10/2013)

Overall, it would seem that although there were some print media professionals who engaged critically and reflexively with the media’s role in these cases, in the main the reportage across the time period examined as part of this analysis was firmly focused to a much greater extent on the actions of the State. This pattern subsequently moved the attention away from the role of the media in reporting both in the incidents in Tallaght and Athlone, and in general, in constructing Roma as the racialized ‘Other’. It is important to note here in relation to the statement made by the Independent TD Clare Daly in the previous section, that the Ombudsman’s report into these cases also criticised the close relationship between the Gardaí and the media and the leaking of confidential information concerning the families involved (Logan 2014, 101).⁸ The report also noted the influence of the Greek case on Irish reporting of the incidents in Tallaght and Athlone, “namely the mistaken view that the Roma community does not include individuals with fair hair and features, combined with an immediately heightened suspicion that the presence of such children with Roma families would be readily explained by abduction” (Logan 2014, 99).

Frame Five: ‘Episodic Framing’ – The Ordeal of the Roma Families:

Twelve articles in this sample were categorised on the basis that they fitted the characteristics of an ‘episodic frame’. Episodic frames construct issues in terms of ‘single instances’ and unlike ‘thematic frames’ they typically lack in contextualisation. This type of framing was a strong feature of the tabloid publications accounting for nine of the twelve articles in this frame (six published by the Irish Daily Mail and three published by the Irish Daily Mirror). Two articles were published by the Irish Independent and one by the Irish Examiner. All twelve articles were news reports and provided a human-interest angle to the issue. Unlike the previous frames, the voice of the Roma families was dominant in this frame and was used to explain the ordeal they had experienced as a result of the actions of the Gardaí and the HSE.

[Headline] ‘I cried and I cried – Roma child tells of trauma after being taken from family for three days’, (News Report – Irish Daily Mail 25/10/2013)

Although these stories humanised and sympathised with the Roma families

involved in these specific cases, their lack of depth and consideration of wider systemic problems, such as poverty or racism, which have historically impacted on the Roma community in general, would suggest that these sympathetic accounts may not be enough to counter stereotypical constructions of the Roma. It should also be pointed out that these humanising accounts only emerged on October 24th after it was revealed that DNA tests proved these children had not been abducted. Up until that point these very same publications had played a role in heightening suspicion of child-kidnapping by the families involved.

Conclusion

In October 2013 sensationalist and racist media discourses concerning the plight of the 'Blonde Angel' Maria gave rise to yet another moral panic concerning the Roma. Media coverage of the Greek case rehearsed previously circulated tropes and myths about alleged child stealing and Roma criminality more generally (Tosi Cambini 2009, 653). The media generated moral panic, which ensued after the discovery of Maria, was clearly influential in the actions of those who reported the sightings of blonde Roma children to an Irish journalist and to the Gardaí.

We hold that the media's reporting of the Greek case replete as it was with ethnic stereotypes, racism and suspicion served as a trigger for the subsequent actions of the Irish authorities. Our chapter raises some important questions concerning the ways in which the Irish print media reported on the events in Tallaght and Athlone. The first concerns reporting practices. The Children's Ombudsman's report into these events notes how personal confidential information was leaked to and used by some of the media. Similarly, respect for the right to privacy in what was obviously a very sensitive matter was also ignored. The case demonstrates not only source bias but also a relationship between sections of the media and state authorities, which appears to be too close.

The framing of the Greek and Irish Roma cases took place in a media setting. Media frames are never neutral. They represent the social world in ways that are partial, biased, ideological and particular. This chapter points to the ways in which the media manage to create the illusion that they are objectively reporting on things as they happen.

Our critical analysis of the media frames employed shows how a moral panic was generated through an initial emphasis on child protection and by the repeated

suggestion of there being parallels between the Irish and Greek cases. While the media discourses examined here do allow for some consideration of whether or not racial profiling had taken place, the focus in the coverage moved quickly to blame the state for being too hasty to act. In that context, and with some notable exceptions, the lack of reflexivity on the media's own part, as to their role as the primary definer of these is quite striking.

¹ Section 12 of the Child Care Act, 1991, relates to the power of An Garda Síochána to take a child to safety and is available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1991/act/17/section/12/enacted/en/html>. The provision requires that a member of An Garda Síochána have reasonable belief that “(a) there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of a child, and (b) that it would not be sufficient for the protection of the child from such immediate and serious risk to await the making of an application for an emergency care order by a health board ...”

² See Miskovic (2009) for a brief introduction to the history of Roma communities in Europe.

³ In relation to conventional media, an article published, for example, in a national broadsheet described Roma communities as a “parasitic, ethnic underclass” and “criminal Roma” (O’Doherty 2013, cited in ENAR Ireland 2015a, 14). Various racisms also persist on social media platforms (ENAR Ireland 2015). In October 2014, an anti-Roma mob-demonstration, numbering up to 200 individuals gathered and attacked the home of three Roma families in Waterford City (Holland 2014; Hosford 2014). This ‘demonstration’, organised via a Facebook page entitled “Get Roma Criminal Gypsies Out” (Holland 2014), resulted with windows being broken and terrified men, women, and children being evacuated for their safety by police (Hosford 2014).

⁴ Paul Connolly is well known in Ireland for his tabloid-style investigative programmes, that have in the past, focused on Roma in the context of begging and alleged gang criminality. He has also presented programmes focused on the alleged

criminal activities of the Irish Traveller Community.

⁵ A framing analysis approach was adopted as the main methodological framework of this study and draws on both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. In essence, framing is concerned with the ways in which culture and the gamut of interests involved in the communication process converge to produce clear and consistent ways of understanding the social world. With its emphasis on ‘how’ media texts are structured and organised, this approach is a particularly useful way of capturing meaning and the ways in which media texts are both discursively and ideologically constructed (for an elaboration see Reese 2001).

⁶ The analysis of print media articles was conducted by capturing data from the 23rd - 25th of October 2013. Using the Lexis-Nexis database, data were sampled from three broadsheet newspapers (Irish Times, Irish Independent and the Irish Examiner) and two tabloid newspapers (Irish Daily Mail and the Irish Daily Mirror). This data was drawn from this database using the search terms, ‘Roma’, ‘Gardaí’, ‘HSE’, ‘Tallaght’ and ‘Athlone’. The final sample contained 57 newspaper articles for analysis. These articles included a mixture of news reports, editorials and opinion pieces. Letters to the editor were not included in the study. These stories were then systematically examined for the use of framing and reasoning devices (see Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Entman 1993) with the aid of *NVivo*. Both the headlines and the main body of the articles were considered during this analysis.

⁷ Pavee Point is the Irish Traveller and Roma Rights Group.

⁸ On the 28th of May 2015 a Senior Garda officer was arrested over his alleged dealings with journalists when the two Roma children were removed from their families. On May 29th the Garda Press Office confirmed that the officer had been released without charge and a file was being prepared for the Director of Public Prosecutions. This case is still live as of September 16th 2015.