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Political Interventions in Space and Place in Uriah Burton's *Uriah Burton* "Big Just": *His Life, His Aims, His Ideals*

Abstract

Uriah Burton's collaborative life story is a rare text, and no research has been carried out on it. Burton makes several important interventions in the politics of space and place in the UK, as he fights, sometimes literally, for peace, rest, and safe living places. He is a self-proclaimed group leader, group representative, and peacemaker, and he fights for authority and influence to achieve his goals. The in-between positions that he adopts intersect with historically inculcated discourses of sedentarism, control, surveillance, and assimilation, and his efforts led to significant interventions concerning private caravan site provision for Romanies, Gypsies, Travellers, and people of no fixed abode. He is religious and fights for justified aims—a just war, which reverberates in his nickname "Big Just". However, he does have to negotiate and compromise to achieve his aims, as well as endure attacks on his personality, his representative status, and his ideas of right and wrong.

1. Introduction

Uriah Burton's 26-page life story, *Uriah Burton "Big Just": His life, His Aims, His Ideals* (1979), is a rare text. According to Phoenix Press (publishers), Burton ordered the book's publishing himself, and "approximately a few hundred were printed." Phoenix also "typeset the text and made negatives to print from but they were destroyed in a fire many years ago." (Smith 2019). In *King of the Gypsies: Memoirs of the Undefeated Bareknuckle Champion of Great Britain and Ireland* (2002), Bartley Gorman dedicated a chapter to Uriah Burton. He refers to Burton's life story as a "small, privately-published book" that is "prized among travelers" (2002, 55) and shares his view of Burton's significance: "When I was sixteen, I admired only two fighters: Rocky Marciano and Uriah Bur-

ton. Everyone had heard of Marciano, the world heavyweight champion who never took a backward step and never lost a fight. But Burton was known only in the secretive world of the travellers.” (2002, 54).¹ I have not found any research that has focused on Burton or his life story, but he has been featured in a few research articles, in local media outlets, on special interest websites and blogs (and their commentary functions), as well as in a few life stories.² Burton may not be well known outside of the “world of travellers”, but he decided to fight to improve his own family’s and others’ “peace”. He also made significant interventions in the politics of place and space concerning the issue of private caravan site provision, and he was the main actor in an informal justice system on his caravan site. This article will focus on these three interconnected interventions in place and space.

In each of these interventions, Burton adopts similar and different I/we perspectives that enable him to use his self-proclaimed roles as family and group leader, group representative, and peacemaker to accomplish his aims. This I/we perspective is neither individual nor collective, but oscillates in the relational in-between spaces depending on the context of the intervention. Burton embodies what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as third space (1994, 53–56), but he occupies two interrelated third spac-

¹ Gorman’s text on Burton is quoted in Keith Duggan’s article in *The Irish Times* (April 20, 2013). The focus of the article is the boxer and Irish Traveller Tyson Fury (world heavy weight champion 2020). Tyson refers to Burton as his great-granduncle and states that he is “fighting royalty. Uriah is on my father’s side and Bartley Gorman, the other undefeated champion, is on my mother’s side.”

² The research articles are included in this article, but Burton has also been mentioned on discussion forums on boxing webpages such as *BoxRec* (*Boxing Record Archive*), Michael Blackett’s *The History Of Bareknuckle Boxing* (2014), and Tapa-talk (2008). Burton also erected a stone memorial to his late father, Ernest Burton—see the webpage *Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales* (2018). Burton is mentioned in Cole Moreton’s *Independent* article on Bartley Gorman’s funeral (2002), as well as a 2013 article by Katharine Quarmby in *The Guardian* about an eviction battle, which includes Noah Burton (a family member). A further mention of Burton is in an archived messageboard, *BBC: Home* webpage “Local Heroes: Bartley Gorman—Comments 2007/8”. Also see Dominic Reeve (2015, 100). Reeve asks about the previous owner of a Bedford Van and informs the reader of the answer: “Uriah Burton the renowned Romani fighting-man who had used it in his carpet selling days”. Also see Currie, 2009.

es. He has to deal with various people, and not just, for example, local residents and council officials, but also the people whom he refers to as “my people”. It is from within these third spaces or in-between positions that his ideals and aims are gradually transformed into practice. Burton learns to negotiate and compromise, while maintaining a focus on accomplishing his goals.

The first intervention begins with Burton proclaiming his aim to literally fight to bring about what he refers to as changes “in my own people” (1979, 5). His aim is to stop the violent and disrespectful behaviour that effectively fragments intra-group and inter-group relations, and to restore forms of behaviour that support cultural and intercultural exchange. Burton refers to himself as a “leader amongst my people”, states that he “would establish himself as stronger man in order to become the best knuckle-fighter in Britain” and make peace (179, 5), and that he has “the help and support of God” (1979, 5). I will frame Burton’s fight as just war because he argues that his cause is just, that he protects the innocent, that he fights for a greater good, and that he has divine guidance (Mosely “Just War”). The second intervention involves Burton’s practical intervention in the politics of space and place, which involves his fight to find and establish safe living spaces for his own people and others. Burton depicts himself, his family and his own people as constantly being moved on (1979: 14), and decides to buy his own land and to develop safer living spaces for others—a caravan site. Burton’s actions involve the intersecting and historically inculcated discourses of sedentarism, control, surveillance, and assimilation, which, in turn, involve the negotiation of regional and local legislation, negative public opinion and in-group opinion. The third intervention involves the informal justice system that Burton fronted on his caravan site. The idea to control behaviour on the site is directly associated with the first intervention’s control and change of behaviour, but the aim here is to create a safe place to live. I will analyse this third intervention as an effort to deconstruct perceptions and projections of otherness, while creating a space that deconstructs the sedentarism-nomadism dichotomy. This last intervention will include analyses of different and overlapping forms of surveillance.

However, before the analysis of the three interventions, I will provide an insight into the construction of the life story, as its construction reveals insights concerning the obstacles that Burton needed to overcome to achieve his goals.

2. The Construction of the Life Story

There is no paratextual information concerning the production process of the 26-page life story, but there are several in-text clues. The title is written in the third person, and the content of the anonymously written "Preface" indicates that the writer knew Burton well (possibly a family member). Late in the life story, the reader is informed that Burton could neither read nor write (1979, 25), which indicates that the life story text is the result of transcription or a series of transcriptions. Someone also organized the text into chapters with headings, chapter-to-chapter cross-referencing and transitions, and included the text from four letters. There are also references to an intended reader, which would not be common in a transcribed or dictated text. It is also clear that the contents of the text that was sent to the publishers for printing and published in 1979 was compiled from a series of texts produced over a longer period of time, and for different purposes.

The life story was produced and packaged in several stages and presumably (re)compiled when it was sent to the publishers. For instance, parts of pages 19 and 20 were printed almost word for word from an article in the November 17-edition of *The People* in 1963. Furthermore, directly after the last page of the life story there is a reply letter dated November 30 1978. The writer refers to "the enclosed account of your life story and work. There is much wisdom in the part headed Uriah the idealist and the final chapter". In his re-reply letter, Burton refers to the text as a "book" and in another letter dated December 8, 1978 a "booklet". Moreover, the reader is informed in the life story text that Burton gave "one of his books" to a "gentleman" in 1978 (1979, 25), and in a letter dated January 26 1979, a booklet is mentioned: "*This booklet has been acknowledged from different ministers and leaders throughout the world*" (1979, inserted between pages 12–13, original italics). There is also a reference to an "article" in the life story text: "Four copies of this article have been sent to every country in the world" (1979, 23). The life story seems to be an assemblage of texts produced over at least a 16-year time span, and several transcribers (and a journalist) were likely involved in its production.

However, the life story does follow a number of the conventions of life story as it begins with the phrase "I was born", closely followed by a statement of primary authentication: "I am a true Romany, and proudly proclaim to be a genuine Gipsy and claim to be a leader amongst my

people” (1979, 1). Burton also adds a further level of authentication: “I am a British citizen, and my family’s roots stretch back into this country’s soil for hundreds of years, and it is for this reason that I claim the right to speak out for the love of my country and for the welfare of all the people of the world” (1979, 1). The introduction infers that Burton’s intended audience is quite broad, which, once more, suggests that the intended audience of this part of the text may not be identical with the intended audience of the text as it is packaged in the published life story itself.

3. Uriah Burton: Fighting for Peace

In this sub-section, I will analyse the beginning of Burton’s aim “to make peace” (1979, 5), which I frame as just war and an intervention in the politics of space and place. He refers to his experiences in Ireland and England and the effects of social changes that he saw “in my own people” and then decides to fight for peace (1979, 5). Burton admits that fighting for peace is “a contradiction and paradox”, but then provides examples of when he was able to “remedy circumstances which could have become ugly” (1979, 5). In order to accomplish his aims, he takes up an in-between position both literally and metaphorically, as he depicts himself using his “ability and gift of strength” (1979, 5) to fight a series of opponents in order to (re)establish a sense of peace. He also states that it was during this process that he “acquired the nickname ‘Big Just’” (1979, 6, original spelling).³ Burton also professes that he has “but one ally, one person on his side, and that is God” (1979, 1, 5), which partly explains his use of religious intertexts and the framing of his actions in terms that suggest just war.

Burton’s decision to fight for peace is fueled by his varied experiences in Ireland and England and various forms of nostalgia. Burton states that he was born in Liverpool and that his early life was “spent around Cork and the Irish Free State” (1979, 1), which included periods spent

³ The spelling may just be a mistake, as different sections of the life story include different spellings. For example, in the first section of the life story, “Uriah—The Man and His Aims” the spelling “Gipsy” is used (1). In other sections, “gipsy”(3), “gypsies” (14), “gipsies” (21), and “gypsy” (25). Bartley Gorman is also spelled Barclay Gorman (10).

in Dublin, Lisburn, and Belfast, where he dealt with "all sections of the community regardless of their religion" (1979, 4). He retells stories of "many happy times in the Free State of Ireland, going to fairs and joining in the events there", including his experiences of seeing "50 or 60 tinker families on both sides of the road" (1979, 4). These nostalgically framed beginnings soon change into a discourse of loss, as Burton states that many of the "tinker families" moved to "England and they have lost the unpolluted beauty of Ireland" (1979, 4), and adds that "Ireland itself seems to have lost much of the happiness that I remember of those times, like the spontaneous 'ceilahs' on the village crossroads, where everyone joined in and enjoyed themselves (1979, 4). This change to reflective nostalgia is consolidated (Boym 2007, 13), as Burton asserts that "not all memories were happy ones", that on "occasions there was suffering and life was hard for many people" and that "many families broke up and in many cases left for England, and people remaining home had to work hard to raise a living" (1979, 4). This particular conflation of present and past reflections motivates Burton to instigate change.

Burton's just war and his efforts to establish peace involve the restoration of particular forms of behaviour that he believes were lost due to societal change. He states that when "I came to England I felt a great change in my own people. I carried on my Romany life, going to horse fairs and race meetings, where all types of tinkers and gipsies would gather, but there was no rest from the continual drunks and bullies and fights would start" (1979, 5). The familiar meeting places are still open for visits and social interaction, but Burton identifies a threat to the meetings' role in the co-maintenance of valued and changing traditions. He then makes a statement of intent: "In order to make peace, I decided I would establish myself as a stronger man in order to become the best knuckle-fighter in Britain." (1979, 5). This expression of restorative nostalgia (Boym 2007, 13–14) includes a desire to restore the rest and peace that characterized his earlier experiences. However, Burton does acknowledge the unconventionality of this statement: "It is perhaps strange that I should take this line, but it was this show of strength and brought rest and contentment for a great number of years" (1979, 5). Overall, Burton's stance does not deny the hardships of the past, or present, but it is a commitment to restore the positive behavioural traits that he had experienced. His just war involves fighting for authority and influence so that he can reinstate self-respect, co-respect and co-recognition and what they can

enable—the ability to be at rest, live in peace and enjoy the horse fairs, race meetings and other gatherings.

Burton tells a particular story that illustrates his aim to make peace, as he literally positions himself between two groups that seem destined to fight. He narrates that he had arrived at the fair in Doncaster with his own family, and “met a large gathering of travellers and for the first time ever, a big group of Irish tinkers, also camped on the site.” (1979, 7). As the story continues, Burton states that the “young men from the tinkers’ side started to have fun by ripping one another’s shirts off. The English travellers did not like this, but I realized for the years I had spent in Ireland, that this was just the usual way of letting off high spirits and having fun” (1979, 7).⁴ The actions of the “Irish tinkers” are misinterpreted, and after the pubs had closed Burton heard voices “trying to stir up trouble” (1979, 7):

The confrontation was between the Irish and English, only a few yards from my caravan. I put on my trousers and shoes and opened the door. I saw a group of English travellers with golf clubs in their hands on my right. I looked to the left and saw the Irish, with no shirts on, getting ready for the fight. I asked first the English, and then the Irish to move back and to my joy and amazement they did. (1979, 7)

In his life story, Bartley Gorman retells this story and comments: “None but the boldest and strongest could have done such a thing” (2002, 58). He also proclaims that Burton “had a strange presence about him, effectively ran the big gypsy gathering at Doncaster races for many years” (2002, 57). The story is significant as it represents a practical example of Burton keeping the peace, including the change of behaviour that he fights for—with some help.

Burton was also religious and states that he could only succeed in his mission with “the help and support of God” (1979, 5), and the religious intertext that he employs is imbued with a history of contestation over safe places and spaces. It is difficult to ignore the intertextual reference to Genesis and Moses’ parting of the sea in Burton’s story (Exodus 14: 19). If the two stories are integrated, Burton has help from a greater power, as one force of nature, the wind, keeps the two faces of water divided

⁴ See Stockins (2000, 126) for a depiction of Irish Travellers “stripped to the waist and fighting one another”. Stockins refers to what he observed as “bare-knuckle tag fighting” and states that they were the first people he “had ever come across who fought purely for fun”.

(two groups). In the Bible version, Moses’s people can then escape their pursuers who want to enslave them (Exodus: 21–24). However, the enslavement in Burton’s story refers to the lack of mutual conventions of conflict that lead to unjust war (Mosely “Just war”), as illustrated by the golf clubs-versus-fists scenario in the story. This lack of mutual recognition is a major obstacle for the peace of mind and rest that Burton wishes to re-establish. Furthermore, the link to Moses is not incidental, as Burton claims to be “a descendent of one of the Lost Tribes of Moses which he led over the Land of Nod and since that time we Romanies have suffered persecution and injustice without a country of our own” (1979, 1). In the Bible, God exiles Cain to the Land of Nod for murdering his brother Abel. He is cursed to be a “fugitive” and “vagabond”, as any crops he attempts to grow will fail (Genesis 4: 15–16). This narrative is similar to the more well-known legend of the nails, which depicts a Gypsy being asked to make four nails, but when he finds out that the nails are for the crucifixion of Christ, he runs away with the fourth nail, and the Gypsies have suffered persecution ever since.⁵ There are various versions of the story,⁶ but in the case of Burton’s just war he has achieved a position of authority through which he could “remedy circumstances which could have become ugly” (1979, 5). His self-adopted in-between position caused the two groups to disperse, and thus symbolizes the kinds of intra-group and inter-group behavioural change that can lead to the peace and rest that Burton fights for. The meeting places and spaces become safer places for cultural and intercultural exchange.

4. Uriah Burton: Fighting for Living Space

This section will focus on Burton’s struggle to construct and develop a private caravan site (1972–73), which, according to Acton, “opened up the route to private Gypsy site provision that had been closed since the

⁵ Shaw identifies a similar usage of this story in Silvester Gordon Boswell’s life story (1970). Shaw argues that Boswell uses the story to convey the possibility of improved relations between Gypsies and their fellow British citizens because of the 1968 Caravan Site’s act (Shaw 2019, 80–81).

⁶ See Pickett and Agogino (1960) and Groome (1899, xxvii–xxxii).

1960 Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act” (1998 and 2019).⁷ By building the site, Burton made several interjections into an ongoing discourse of spatial regulation that involved the actions of, among others, politicians, lawyers, administrators, the police, and local residents, as well as the subjects of the spatial regulation—people who self-identify as Romanies, Gypsies or Travellers and people with no fixed abode. Uriah Burton’s intervention is not just between changing strategies of state and public surveillance and coercive assimilation strategies, but a much more multifaceted intervention. The obstacles that Burton needed to overcome included attacks on his personality, his self-adopted representative status, and his understandings of right and wrong.

The spatial regulation involved the ongoing and changing definitions of rural and urban spaces caused by ongoing practices of enclosure, urbanization, and the movement and resettlement of people. These changes led to a re-imagining of rural and urban spaces and the people who lived there, including their work-related and leisure activities. Bancroft explains that the “transformation of the countryside” after World War II involved an exponential increase in regulation: “Rural areas are designated for either residential or agricultural/industrial use. The home is separated from the workplace. Gypsy-Travellers in the countryside have faced increasing pressures because of this.” (2005, 17). Bancroft also paraphrases McKinley and Taylor (1998) when he explains that the all-encompassing surveillance associated with the Foucauldian concept of the panopticon gave way to light and dark zones—the light, ordered zones are “protected against undesirable individuals” (2005, 17). Burton’s caravan site is positioned on the fringe or periphery of (Greater) Manchester—on the periphery of both rural and urban space, as well as agricultural and industrial space. It would seem as though the “light zones” that need protecting are actually everywhere in Burton’s story. The forms of surveillance that Burton infers in his stories of the change from travelling to buying land and on towards constructing living spaces involve a mixture of surveillance strategies—panopticon-like surveillance and synoptic surveillance.⁸

⁷ See Clark and Greenfields (2006, 79). Greenfields states that the earliest statistics for the number of caravans on private sites was 1,194 in 1979, but by 1994 there were 3,271.

⁸ See Foucault (1995, 201–203) and Mathieson (1997, 219–220).

In a chapter entitled "URIAH—The Creator" (1979, 14–15), Burton conveys his own experiences of the practical effects of the politics of place and space in 1964. He explains his own collectivized knowledge of the system of spatial control and surveillance:

In common with all my people, we were constantly moved off many [sic] many sites, every time we tried to pull in anywhere, we were pushed off. It was not possible to settle down and on one occasion in 1964 we were moved from demolished prefabs in Wythen-shawe and the police told us we had to go. I had another site mapped out, but refused to disclose where it was because had I done so, the police would have been waiting for me and turned me from the site. (1979, 14)

The passage includes several interconnected "I/we" relational narratives, as the situation of stopping, being moved on, stopping, being moved, seemingly *ad infinitum*, is narrated in terms of the collective experiences of a "we" (the in-group affected by the actual experience), "my people" and even "me/we", which are all indicative of Burton's roles of representative spokesperson and self-designated leader. Burton positions himself between the police and the "we" group of people targeted for eviction. The police are also depicted doing their jobs efficiently, making it difficult to ignore the absurdity of this game of cat and illegalized mouse. Burton also keeps his next "mapped out" destination a secret, as he knows the police "would" repeat the eviction process. He has little control over the main events in this game, but he knows the rules—he has a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1990, 66). He knows that he has to delay the repetition of the events in the game, which means that he needs to find a place to stop where the group can stay as long as possible before they are reported, found and evicted.

Even if Burton has experiential and therefore embodied knowledge of the game, he does not control it, as the police and local residents control the eviction process. The surveillance of the few by the many is encapsulated in the term *synopticon*, which relates to the influence of modern mass media (Matheisson 1997, 219–220), which, in this case, refers to regional and local media coverage, as well as the transmission of information by word of mouth. However, not all of "the many" report the presence of the group to the police, which infers the co-presence of both *panopticon*-style and *synoptic* surveillance. This co-presence of surveillance forms is also (in)directly associated with what Robert W. Lake refers to as *Not in My Back Yard* (NIMBY) relations, and *Locally Unwanted Land Use* (LULU). These terms have been used to refer to lo-

cal resistance to the planned usage of community space such as nuclear power plants, prisons, systems, housing projects, prisons, shelters, and clinics” (2008, 87). Burton and those that he refers to as “my people” cannot control this aspect of the game, but Burton does find a way out of the game, only to struggle with the rules of another related game.

When Burton purchases land, the game is interrupted, but he cannot escape the discourse of space and place or forms of resistance. He has to learn another interrelated set of rules and he manages to complete the initial step: “Eventually, I bought a piece of land at Partington and was allowed to have 12 caravans on the site.” (1979, 14). Burton applied for permission to deploy caravans on his own land, but others had to allow him to do so. However, the place itself is part of another (macro) game, as Partington was designated as an overspill estate in the 1960s (700 inhabitants). Manchester council made a decision to demolish “the inadequate Victorian terraced housing in the city centre” and re-house the residents and the population of Partington grew to 9000 by the 1970s (Trafford Council 2020). In a survey of existent local authority residential sites carried out in 2001–2002, it was reported that 70% of sites were located in “fringe areas of towns and villages” and 19% in rural areas (2002, 18). Partington was and is on the “fringe” of Greater Manchester and Burton’s land fits directly into this pattern of peripheralism, but this does not mean that he can avoid the effects of surveillance by the many. He states that he decided to “extend the area. It was necessary to fetch in many hundreds of tons of soil in order that I could build up the land and this led to a lot of trouble with the neighbourhood.” (1979, 14). Even though Burton has previous experience of this kind of resistance, he still does not fully understand the local people’s reactions: “Again, this to me was the usual misunderstanding of my desire to create a place where my people could live, but the general public were opposed to what I was doing and seemed to find all difficulties.” (1979, 14).⁹ The complaints are not mentioned, but in Pat Niner’s summary of obstacles to traveller site provision in Government reports in 1977 and 2002, resistance from local residents was top of the list (2002, 46). NIMBY and LULU objections are still evident, even if Burton owns the periphery-positioned land.

The anonymous writer of the “Preface” describes Burton as someone who does not give up when he has made up his mind, and he continues

⁹ See Richardson and Smith-Bendall (2012, 34–37) on the many reasons for stopping caravan sites from being built.

to work through the system of rules, regulations and resistance to accomplish his goals. He states that he had “meetings with the Council and I was able to create a much larger area of land” (1979, 14). However, he was in need of further planning permission to “make more room for many of my people”, and this was at first refused by the Bucklow Rural District, which led to a public enquiry. He eventually gained planning permission from the Department of the Environment in 1973 (1979, 14).¹⁰ Thomas Acton’s comments on Uriah Burton during a planning appeal reveal different levels of resistance:

I spoke for him at his planning appeal, in 1972, and saw how his rich Gypsy friends mocked his public stance, and how racist villagers denigrated him, and saw him run from the end of his testimony to weep in his motor; and I saw how he triumphed over all these setbacks to create a Romani caravan site on which non-Gypsies were always welcome, where the poor, the rich and the homeless found sanctuary side by side. (1985)

Burton seems to have fought his way through the intricacies of this part of the game, but he had to endure attacks on his personality from “his rich Gypsy friends”, as well as being “denigrated” by the “racist villagers” in his in-between position as representative of the undesired group(s).

Burton did achieve planning permission, but he had to make sure that the site passed an assessment, which included both social and material requirements. The inspector who conducted the enquiry is quoted: “I am of the opinion that one of the most important features of this case is that it relates to an apparently genuine and determined effort by a Romany gypsy family to provide from their own resources, without demands on public authority or charity, a caravan site for gypsies and travelers.” (1979, 14). The positive “features” mentioned relate to both micro-level (the caravan site itself) and meso-level (social) responsibilities, as the family used their own money, and not charity or public funds. The family is also praised for “not overcrowding the site” and for not allowing the site “to deteriorate into scrap sorting nor gathered rubbish” (1979, 14). This discourse of order, control and surveillance relates to the visual appearance of the place from the inside, but, more importantly, from

¹⁰ See Smith-Bendall (2009, 181–207) on being moved on, negative experiences and planning permission issues, dealing with a council, a planning officer, as well as her own role in helping others to gain planning permission. Also see Smith-Bendall, 2013, 161–162 on her life on a private site and different ways of being sedentary, but also travelling.

the outside, looking in.¹¹ The inspector is also reported as stating that “my family had shown the authority with which gypsies could control a site occupied by gypsies and travellers, and also that we had worked extremely hard, and made the completed part of the site into a model of appearance which many caravan site operators could learn from” (1979, 14–15). Burton’s family seems to have learned the intricacies of this particular game, which includes the necessary authority to control the behaviour of the site residents. The assessment of the site as a “model of appearance” also infers that the social and material environment inside the site and outside have more similarities than differences.

The description of the inspector’s assessment of the site intersects with a discourse of assimilation, which in this case infers a movement from travelling to caravan sites, and then on towards a sedentary life-style, but Burton interrupts this discourse. Sibley refers to the “idea of sedentarism as the only appropriate mode of existence is enshrined in property law and reinforced through the valorization of the community, neighbourhood and associated sentiments, like feelings of belonging and rootedness” (2010, 94). This movement towards a “fixed bounded space” (2010, 94) seems to be consolidated when Burton refers to his “tremendous work in providing proper drainage to the site, so that people could have water closets, washing facilities with hot and cold water, and permanent caravans on a site on which they could rest and stay and have little gardens” (2002, 15). However, Burton’s site also includes transit pitches for people who only “wanted a short stay”, which interrupts the ultimate aims of the assimilation discourse, and he “did much work planting trees to screen the site” (2002, 15). The site provides a broad spectrum of living spaces that deconstruct the sedentarism/nomadism dichotomy, and there is a degree of privacy from in-lookers and on-lookers. The family’s maintenance of the site also embodies an interconnected but parallel system of law and order that both aligns itself with and disturbs the methods of coercion that aim to assimilate those perceived as unassimilated.

¹¹ The depiction of the inspector’s use of “scrap-sorting” indicates that the inspector knows that scrap is not just rubbish collection to the people on the site, but one of their ways of making money. However, “scrap-sorting” is still directly associated with “gathered rubbish”, which infers that both are understood as spoiling the order and affecting perceptions of the site. This discourse of order and cleanliness re-inscribes the derogatory stereotype of the dirty Gypsy.

5. Burton: The Caravan Site and Informal Justice

This sub-section focuses on Burton's interventions in the practical aspects of control and surveillance on his caravan site. Burton governs the site by applying his own system of informal justice. He adopts in-between positions with the aim of establishing peace and rest for the people on the site, and improved relations off the site.

Burton enacted his version of law and order on the caravan site: he acted as judge and enforcer of an informal justice system, which infers the control of others' behaviour. Bartley Gorman provides his own description of how Burton ran the site:

In 1964, Big Just bought a plot of land at Partington, near Manchester, and put twelve trailers on it. [...] It became his private fiefdom, which he ruled with his own version of the law. He would preside over open-air trials of anyone who broke the rules of the camp, dispensing fines or ordering men to do physical exercise or hard labour as punishment. Two pairs of boxing gloves hung permanently from the branch of a tree to settle disputes. A track ran around the camp and sometimes Hughie would order a miscreant to rise at 6pm [sic] and run several laps. Young lads would be shackled in a shed, where they had to sleep on straw. Their families could bring them food and water but they would have to spend several days in there as punishment. (2002, 64)¹²

Gorman's description suggests kidnapping, involuntary imprisonment and panopticon-style control, surveillance, and punishment. However, Burton contests this description when he reports on how he received his nickname, Big Just—it was “said that I acquired it because of the way in which I administered justice as I saw it.” (2002, 21). However, Gorman also supplements his assessment by stating that Burton “had iron principles and was known as ‘Big Just’ for his impartiality in sorting out disputes” (2002, 58). Further nuances on Burton's actions reveal the framing and aims of his form of informal justice.

The people who “broke the rules” on the site or beyond the site were held responsible for disturbing the peace on the site, and for the image

¹² Bartley Gorman took over the title of King of the Gypsies from Uriah Burton, which, in this case, meant the title of bare-knuckle champion. He knew Burton from his reputation, rumours and then personally, and he states that his first encounter with Burton was near his home in Wales (60). He recounts a story of a fight for “Burton's vacant crown” (108), which he won, and states that Burton sent him a message: “Hughie himself even sent me a telegram of congratulations” (111).

of the site residents off the site, which infers a conflation of variations of panoptic and synoptic surveillance. Susan Caffrey and Gary Mundy report on a conference on Romani law:

Sylvia Dunn, secretary first National Association of Gypsy Women, asserted at a conference on Romani law, that police would bring errant boys to Uriah Burton, the Romani owner of a site. As long as the parents of the boys would agree to the punishment that the site owner decided for them, the police would not prosecute. Sylvia Dunn said, 'he had a trotting track and used to make them run on it twice a day a number of lengths and he would run alongside them. It was after an exercise like that they soon learnt their lesson the hard way.' (1997, 265–266)

Gorman and Dunn convey similar, but different perspectives on Burton's working methods. However, when the two descriptions are conflated, they reveal the reason that Burton (and his family members) gained planning permission; that he/they had "shown the authority with which gypsies could control a site occupied by gypsies and travellers" (1979, 14). This relates to a panopticon-style surveillance that leads to the behavioural self-regulation of the site's occupants. This may be one reason the police condoned Burton and his family's methods of controlling the site, including the punishments. Burton's knowledge of this changing game leads him to attempt to create a balance between parallel forms of panopticon-style and synopticon-style surveillance. By controlling the behaviour of the residents on the site, and, by extension, their observed behaviour outside the site, Burton and his family attempt to establish and maintain peace on the site, as well as a broader spectrum of acceptance and tolerance within the broader community.

6. Conclusion

The in-between positions that Burton (un)intentionally adopts enable him to make significant changes in the politics of space and place for a range of different people. His own experiences and recollections of life and of social change in Ireland and England acted as catalysts that urged him to fight for peace—a just and justified war. The struggle to create the circumstances where peace can prevail involved negotiations and the ability to compromise without losing sight of his initial aims. Burton made significant interventions in the politics of space and place, and even though his methods may be unconventional, as he states him-

self, he did make a difference. However, he had to endure attacks on his personality, his self-adopted representative status, and his self-acclaimed role as leader of "my people" (1979, 1). The caravan site included transit pitches, enabled a variety of ways to be both sedentary and mobile, and accommodated people from different backgrounds. The informal justice system employed on the site was deemed just, and maintained peace on the site, but it was also an attempt to maintain relations with the broader society. Burton did make a difference, and maybe it is time that his actions were recognised.

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