

Ian Hancock

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CONTROL OF IDENTITY

Migrant and Nomad: European Visual Culture and the Representation of "Otherness"

Essen: Blaue Eule Verlag 2007 pp. 41-60.

The Indian connection has *only* been posited linguistically and it remains, to say the least, vague (Sandland, 1996:386).

The Roma are genetically closer to Asians than to surrounding Europeans. This conclusion can hardly be described as exciting news; it has taken genetics 70 years and several thousand blood samples to confirm what has been known to linguists for the last 200 years (Kalaydjieva, Gresham & Calafell, 1999:13).

"A gennelman come 'ere one day and said as we is all from India," one old Gypsy woman told me. "So I says to 'im, "Well, maybe we is, Surr, but it don't make a mighty difference, now, do it, Surr?" (Reid, 1964:170).

Nine or ten of us were sitting in a semicircle on folding chairs, beer bottles in hand, glad that it wasn't any one of us who had the responsibility of keeping the thirty-pound pig turning over the coals under the blazing Texas sun. That obligation belonged to the young boys.

The conversation was about two movies with Gypsy characters which had shown in 1996 in cinemas all across America: *Thinner*, by Stephen King, and Walt Disney's cartoon version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The responses were varied. One person was angry, and suggested that legal action should be taken against the hurtful stereotyping, and wanted to know whether they'd dare make such films about any other minority population. Someone else said it wasn't worth worrying about because the characters depicted were nothing at all like real Gypsies. Someone else said he enjoyed both films simply as entertainment and didn't make a connection with any experience in his own life. Overall, the older men were less upset by the films than the younger men were. Their point was that Romani life was so far removed from that of the gadje (non-Gypsies) that it didn't matter what they thought. Several of the younger men disagreed.

The discussion gradually turned to the question of where we had originally come from, our status as a “legitimate” ethnic minority, and whether we were really recognized as such by the U.S. government. And we talked about Romanies (1) as a world population, and about numbers. One estimate of forty million was proposed, which pleased everybody, but when it came to what the total was for America, the generally acknowledged figure of about one million was challenged on the grounds that not everybody really qualified, because a good many of those people called Gypsies were not actually Romanies but *Bayash*, a cover-term for various non-Vlax (2) American Romani populations including the Romanichals (3), the Bashalde (4) and the Romungre (5), besides the actual Bayash themselves (6).

The talk at that slava (7) in the May of 1997 highlighted some anomalies: first, that there was no single, acceptable designation which served to include all populations who define themselves as Romani except a foreign -- and for some people a pejorative -- one, “Gypsy,” secondly, that while all Romanies were Gypsies, not all Gypsies were Romanies, and thirdly that when it came to estimating how many of us there were globally, those considerations didn’t matter if it made us appear to be a more numerous. For me, a fourth presented itself: the great dissimilarity between the “small-g-gypsy” of Hollywood, and actual Romani people, and what the repercussions of this were in terms of perceptions of identity.

When it comes to the question of “what is a Gypsy,” the Romani understanding is as vague as that of the non-Romanies. And because unity and cooperation outwardly, *i.e.* with the larger society, cannot possibly become a reality until it has been achieved inwardly, *i.e.* among ourselves, this fact must be resolved both outwardly and inwardly before we can move ahead. Given that populations defined as “Gypsies” exist in their millions throughout central and eastern Europe especially, and given that everywhere their relationship with the surrounding societies is one either of conflict or else of malign neglect, the ingredients are already there for a crisis of major proportions -- another *porrajmos* (8)—to take place.

Reasons for the Existing Situation

When journalists writing a Gypsy-related story for their newspaper or magazine telephone me for background information, I routinely fax them a reading list, and ask them to call me again once they’ve made use of it and have specific questions to ask. I make the point repeatedly that they cannot *hope* to understand the contemporary situation of Romanies unless they see it as the present-day end of a continuum reaching back into history, and the reading list I send them emphasizes this. For unless the unique problems of the Romanies are understood in this context, no attempt to analyse or understand those problems will ever be successful.

Antigypsyism and the Popular Image of the Gypsy

Elsewhere (9) I attempted to analyse the reasons for the prejudice which exists today against Romanies, and listed seven: (1) the association of Romanies with the Islamic takeover of parts of the Christian world, (2) colour-prejudice, specifically the association of darkness with sin, (3) the exclusionary nature of Romani culture, which does not encourage intimacy with non-Romanies and which as a result creates suspicion on the part of those excluded, (4) fortune telling, which inspired fear but which had to be relied upon as a means of livelihood in response to legislation curtailing Romani movement and choice of occupation, (5) the unchallenged function of the “gypsies” as a population upon which mainstream notions of immorality and lawlessness can be projected and which thereby serve to define that mainstream’s own boundaries, (6) the fact that Romanies have no territorial, military, political or economic strength and are therefore easily targetable as scapegoats because they cannot retaliate, and (7) the fact that the “gypsy” persona has an--again unchallenged--ongoing function as representing a simpler, freer time, a representation which becomes more and more attractive in an increasingly complex and regimented world.

Various of these factors have combined over the centuries and in different places to become part of the fabric of the Western world view. People who never met a Gypsy in their lives are nevertheless able to provide a fairly detailed picture of how they think Gypsies look and how they live. Their mental image, partly negative and partly romantic but mostly inaccurate, is the result of the response to a Romani identity which has become institutionalized in the Western tradition to the extent that it has become part of its cultural heritage; and the racism directed at Romani populations is intrinsically a part of that heritage, and so is not recognized for what it is. Just as no one would seriously question the fear children have of goblins, or argue for trolls’ rights, the fear of Gypsies likewise goes unremarked. Although trolls and goblins are not real and Gypsies are, and although trolls and goblins are never encountered but the six million or so Romanies throughout eastern Europe are highly visible, still it is the Gypsy Image of storybook and film, and not the real population, that people think of.

This reidentification of Gypsies as “images” in the cultural fabric underlies the rationalization by a Greek Orthodox priest after he criticized the United States for its racial intolerance. When the person talking to him (10) pointed out that Greece was similarly bigoted towards its Romani minority, the priest replied that prejudice towards Romanies in Greece didn’t count; it was a different thing entirely because they were only *Gypsies*. This kind of shocking moral insensitivity on the part of a representative of the Church may surprise us, but it is nothing new. The Eastern Rite, the Catholic and the Protestant churches legislated against Romanies for centuries; the priest was merely reiterating an attitude rooted in tradition.

Once ideas become institutionalized, they may never be challenged, and misinformation can easily become the established “conventional wisdom.” This is particularly true in the case of Romanies, about whom the most bizarre things have been written and presented as fact. These range from such wild statements as those claiming that Gypsies originated on the Moon (or in Atlantis), that Gypsies have an intrinsic horror of water and washing, or that Gypsies have no native concept of obligation or danger or ownership, to such self-serving ones as those which have maintained that Gypsies don’t feel pain, or that they enjoyed slavery, or that they have no interest in organization, education or leadership. The most-often cited Hungarian “expert” on our people for many years has been József Vekerdi, whose article on “the Gypsy problem” in his country is based wholly on this “conventional wisdom;” it begins

The Gypsies’ ancestors began leaving northwest India probably about the seventh century AD. They are characterized as robbers, murderers, hangmen and entertainers. These professions were prescribed for them by the rules of the Hindu caste system. Thus they belonged to the so-called ‘wandering criminal tribes’ of India and were obliged to lead a parasitic way of life. Among the numerous outcast groups, they occupied the lowest rung on the social scale (11).

But the Romani origins assumed in it are quite wrong, and the time of the exodus out of India is off by four centuries. His acceptance of this false history is everywhere reflected in the scorn which characterizes his writings, and one must wonder whether his scholarly approach would have been more charitable had he known the true history of the Romani people. Racism is everywhere, but when it is expressed in the academic domain, to which policy-makers turn for their information, it acquires tacit institutional acceptance.

Despite the usually quite evident physical differences distinguishing the Romani minority from the surrounding population--most obviously physiognomy, habitat and dress—and the less obvious but hardly hidden factors of language and culture, it has generally been the case that administrations have classified Romanies in terms of social behaviour rather than by ethnic or racial distinctiveness. This is again the result of attitudes becoming ingrained before notions of “race” began to take shape in the 19th century. The glaring exception to this was during the Nazi era, when it was specifically racial considerations which provided the rationale for attempted genocidal obliteration.

Hiding Identity

One man taking part in the conversation at the slava claimed that the reason he was not upset by the two films was that he believed nobody would associate their content with him because nobody (in the non-Gypsy world) knew that he was a Gypsy.

In fact he found it amusing that the gadje were so excessively ignorant of true Romani identity, a state of affairs he was actually helping to maintain by intentionally hiding his identity as a Rrom. I know of very few Romanies who weren't warned as children to keep their ethnicity to themselves outside of the community. I was reminded repeatedly at home that telling gadje what I was wouldn't help me and would almost certainly have the opposite effect. I was told the same thing by my dissertation supervisor, Dr. David Dalby at London University, and by Professor Edgar Polomé who took me under his wing when I was a new faculty member at the University of Texas many years ago. I mention their names certainly not to be vindictive, for both were very good to me and I gratefully acknowledge that, but I do so to emphasize that I have heard this all my life, even from people who had no idea how painful and confusing a message was being sent, and who thought in all sincerity that they were offering good advice. That hurt doesn't diminish with adulthood, but the anger it engenders does begin to assert itself. On my mentors' parts, their own negative stereotypes and their desire to help my career were the motivating factors; but on the part of my own family, and of my friend who said (in effect) that he didn't care about antigypsyism because he could pretend to the outside world that he wasn't a Gypsy, we must be dealing with an institutionalized response to a racism so deeply rooted that it prevents people from acknowledging their own ethnicity for fear of the consequences.

His response was atypical in one respect. In his case, he didn't care about antigypsyism because he could hide his ethnicity. In most cases, however, Romanies care very much about antigypsyism while having to hide their identity. I have another friend, a successful businessman, who asks for all Romnet (12) transmissions to be forwarded to him but who is quite unwilling to be subscribed on Romnet himself or to participate, for fear that his identity as a Rrom be revealed in some way. This man is a tireless collector of anti-Gypsy press cuttings, and lives with a frustration which has no outlet.

Ownership of Identity

For a very long time, Gypsy identity has been in the hands of the non-Gypsy specialist, especially politicians and academics, whose ideas about who and what we are have given sustenance to the Gypsy Image. The words of a Native American activist, speaking about academics in particular, apply equally well to the Gypsy case:

They invented culture. They need culture so they can get PhD's and gain power in universities. And people who have that kind of power control culture, because they control the definitions, the symbols and the masks they've constructed about culture (13).

Folklorists and anthropologists select those aspects of their subjects which appeal to them, while ignoring others, for a number of reasons, creating a new, more easily manageable identity--less threatening, or else simply one more attractive or "exotic". The extent to which this selectiveness can place the expert in the position of bystander is well illustrated in a study by Lepselter (14); in an analysis of the topics covered during a ten-year period embracing the Holocaust (1937 to 1947) in *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, the leading publication devoted to Romani Studies, she found that the contributions dealt with, *inter alia*, "Welsh and New York Gypsy life, Hungarian Gypsy fiddlers, linguistic work on the Spanish Gypsy dialect and Polish Romani vocabulary." She goes on to ask

Why would professional Gypsiologists [maintain . . .] an essentially apolitical journal at such a crucial moment in the lives of their subjects? . . . Scholars of Romani culture did not, or could not, vigorously protest the fate of those they studied and befriended. They did not engage in political critique which might have led to action (15).

A much more recent example of the real Gypsy experience taking second place to what interests the gypsiologist is found in a statement by Claus Schreiner, who would seem almost to welcome anti-Romani racism if it meant that the Gypsy music he loved so much would be enriched as a consequence:

. . . lately a new wave of Anti-Gitanismo has reportedly again raised its head in Andalusia. If so, it might prove beneficial for gypsy-Andalusian flamenco, for pressure creates counterpressure which could well lead to a revitalization of flamenco from within (16).

It has always been the case that non-Gypsy specialists have attempted to control and define Romani identity. When Gypsy behaviour has asserted itself in ways contrary to the specialists' expectations, it has been seen as a shortcoming on the part of the Gypsy. Thus Paspatis could say that "works published in Europe, several of them even by authors who wrote down what the Gypsies dictated to them, are often inaccurate because of the stupid ignorance of the Gypsies" (17). Doris Duncan, writing about the difficulties of analysing the Romani verbal system, attributed this to the fact that the "major problem is that no Gypsy really knows what a verb is" (18). Ivanow was equally frustrated by his Gypsy informants, and also blamed his own linguistic shortcomings upon them: "It is very hard indeed to obtain from the average Gypsy any adequate linguistic material; their stupidity is sometimes beyond all description" (19). A Czechoslovakian spokesman defended his government's programme of taking Romani children from their families and placing them in foster homes, by saying that it was "the Gypsies' fault, for refusing to let their children be civilized" (20).

This situation has become so well entrenched because until recently it has never been challenged. Because of a history which has excluded Romanies from access to the educational skills necessary to combat prejudice, and because of a culture which placed restrictions on functioning too intimately in the mainstream, the Gypsy Image has taken on a life of its own, and real Romani populations have been administrated and studied through the filter of that image. There is another, more disturbing political aspect to the created identity, reflected in the increase in post-Communist Europe in the presentation of the Gypsy as illiterate, inarticulate buffoon. Such characters--played by non-Gypsies--appear in variety shows on television in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and elsewhere and, like the "black and white minstrels" of 19th century America, help maintain a status quo in which Romanies are figures of fun, and therefore non-threatening. Martin Croghan has written about this technique in an article about the artificial "stage Irish" dialect of the British music halls, which he shows to have been intentionally created by those in power who have used it as an indicator of ignorance and submission on the part of its speakers as a political weapon to sustain the popular conception of the Irish as a deviant population (21).

It has only been in the past few decades that Romanies have been in a position to resist the manipulation of identity on the part of government agencies. Up until then, in the face of such vigorous non-response, such agencies, as well as journalists and writers of fiction, have been able to continue with their legislating and romanticizing and demonizing entirely unhindered. While Romanies are now beginning to speak out against antigypsyism, we have a long way to go before our voice is taken seriously. When the publishers of a book of children's verse (22) was asked to remove a poem called "The Gypsies are coming," with its accompanying illustration of a hag-like Gypsy woman with hooked nose, earrings and scarf carrying a sackful of stolen children over her shoulder, the only concession was that subsequent editions changed the word "Gypsies" to "Googies." The illustration remains. When a British comic (23) was asked to remove a cartoon strip entitled "The thieving Gypsy bastards" it replaced it with the sarcastic "The nice honest Gypsies," keeping the offensive cartoon characters. Manufacturers of the "Gypsy Witch" card game (24) refused to rename it on the grounds that it was one of their best selling items; they weren't worried about any possible legal action. The producers of the two films mentioned earlier didn't even bother to respond to a single request for fairness and accuracy from Romani organizations, at least six of which wrote to them while they were still in production.

In order for things to change, the Gypsy Image must be deconstructed, and a more accurate one put in its place--in the bureaucratic structures as well as in the textbooks. For all his peculiar observations about humanity (25), H.G. Wells was right when he said that "human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

Resolution

Education, both of Romanies and of gadjé, is clearly the key to avoiding another catastrophe involving our people, and the means of attaining some measure of understanding, if not respect, for Romanies and Romani history and culture. But identifying the solution goes only a short way to resolving it.

Before educational programmes can be put in place, the facts of Romani history must be understood and the notion of identity made acceptable to both Romani and non-Romani populations. Given the great number of differing interpretations of these very basic considerations, reaching a consensus will not be easily achieved. And assuming that such a consensus *were* achieved, bringing about its formal implementation will be attended by a whole new set of problems, not least of which involving considerations of funding.

History

The facts of the two major events in European Romani history--the five and a half centuries of slavery (26) and the Holocaust (27)--are becoming better known and documented all the time. But the details of early Romani history, who our ancestors were and where they came from, are not so well known. For more than a century and a half, the same stories have been repeated tirelessly and uncritically in each new publication, in particular that the first Gypsies were a group of ten thousand musicians given as a gift by the Maharajah of India to his son-in-law the Shah of Persia in AD 439. In time, this story goes, the people moved away, some remaining in the Middle East, some going into Armenia, and some continuing on into Europe, arriving there in the 13th or 14th century. As early as 1844 the name *Rrom* was associated with the Indian word *Dom*, and this was thought to provide a further clue to Gypsy identity, because the *Dom* are a population of menials and entertainers in contemporary India, and the similarity in social status was easily assumed. Kenrick, however, has shown this to have been a misinterpretation of the word (28).

In recent years, a small group of scholars (29) has been investigating Romani history from a more scientific perspective, and the first new findings in the field since the 1920s are being made. Their technique has been to take the various historical and geographical possibilities and to match them with evidence found in the Romani language itself. The picture which is emerging indicates that the ancestors of the Romanies were a composite population from the very beginning, who were deliberately assembled into a military force to resist the spread of Islam into India.

This is how we arrive at these conclusions. Two of the Romani words for “non-Gypsy” are *gadjo*, which comes from an earlier form *gajjha*, meaning “civilian, non-military,” and *das*, which in India means “prisoner of war, captive, slave.”

Words in the Romani vocabulary such as “sword,” “spear,” “battlecry,” “horse,” “fight,” “gaiters,” (*xanrro, bust, chingar, khuro, kuriben, patava*) are Indian, and were not acquired later from other languages. Words for metalworking and agriculture, on the other hand, are all foreign adoptions. Romani has linguistic features in its grammar, vocabulary and sounds which point to an exodus at the beginning of the early Middle Indian period, *not* during the Old Indian period, and so a movement out of India before *ca.* AD 1000 could not have taken place. This means that the story about the fifth-century musicians must apply to quite a different Indian migration, not the migration of the ancestors of the Romanies. We can also determine the route by looking at the sources of the Romani vocabulary. While it is basically Indic, there has been a substantial acquisition of Dardic words, especially from a language called Phalura, as well as a small number apparently from Burushaski, a non-Indic, non-Dardic language spoken only in a small area of the Hindu Kush. Because Dardic and Burushaski words exist in Romani, the migration out of India could only have been through the areas in which they were spoken.

We then have to examine the map to see what possible routes led from here through the mountains to the West. The passes far enough north to match the linguistic factors are at Baroghil and Shandur; from here, routes lead down to the Silk Road which runs westwards south of the Caspian Sea. There are two words in Romani for “silk,” *phanrr* and *keñ*, again both of them native Indian terms. The fact that there is practically no influence on Romani from the Turkic languages or from Arabic also helps us to determine the route taken, which was along the western shore of the Caspian, because of the Iranian languages represented, and across the southern Caucasus, because of the Armenian, Georgian and Ossete words in Romani, and through the Byzantine Empire--probably along the northern Turkish coast--where Greek items began to be acquired, into Europe. We can also pinpoint the time of departure from India, because while there were seventeen Muslim raids between AD 1001 and AD 1027, only two of them took place in the area which matches the linguistic evidence: in 1013 and again in 1015 at Lohkot, in Kashmir. The existence of a Mongol word (*mangin* “treasure”) in Romani places the migration through the eastern Byzantine Empire at no earlier than AD 1250, which is when the Golden Horde first became a presence there (30).

Identity

Lepselter concluded from her analysis of mid-20th-century gypsiorism that the Gypsies are both “the ‘heart’ of Europe and radically ‘other’ to it” (31). The debate this anomaly naturally provokes has centred around the “real” identity of the Romani people, both in terms of genetic descent and in terms of our status as “Europeans.” The most succinct statement describing this two-sided identity is found in a recent Project on Ethnic Relations report:

Another serious problem is raised by the concept of the Romani diaspora itself. It goes beyond the borderlines of Europe, since Romani communities are found in the Middle East, Central Asia, both Americas, and Australia. Thus, why do the Roma have to be recognized as a “European” or even a “truly European” minority (as in the Brussels Declaration of 1966)? Some Romani intellectuals and leaders recall the Roma’s Indian origin and heritage as a basis for their political status and identity, while others eagerly affirm their European roots and heritage and consider their Indian past as irrelevant to the current Romani causes and claims (32).

The Indian Origin

Although the Indian origin of the Romani people is beyond dispute, not only on the basis of linguistic but also of cultural and serological evidence, this remains largely the concern of the academic. While early Romani populations on their arrival in Europe were able to say that they had come from India, this fact has become lost in time, and is still generally not known to the vast majority of Romanies, many of whom have internalized instead the notion of an origin in Egypt. And those who learn about the Indian connection and put it to the test by comparing their Romani with the Hindi, Sindhi or Panjabi of the ubiquitous Indian convenience-store managers in the United States find this interesting, but little else. From Hungary, Michael Stewart reported the same response:

. . . the fact is most nonintellectual Rom do not seem to care where their ancestors came from. In all the time I have spent in Harangos, I have never once heard a spontaneous conversation about the geographical or historical roots of their own people (33).

A recent observation by a Vlax Rrom is more explicit:

Just suppose the entire Gypsy population of the world had returned to an already overpopulated India. India can hardly handle the education and health issues of its own population. Plus the fact of the matter is we Gypsies consider even Indians gujze (non-Gypsies). Even the Gypsies of India themselves who are called Banjarra call all other Indians gujze [gadje].

Though Gypsies come from India there is a distinct difference between Hindus and Gypsies. For example, there is the Kama Sutra, which is the book of lovemaking and which is considered by Hindus to be holy. While Gypsies all over the world consider the art of lovemaking as taboo, [and] sexuality is kept secret. So even if you were to place all Gypsies in India, it would be no different from placing them in Germany. They would still be considered outsiders by the Indians and the Gypsies would feel no differently (34).

For very particular reasons, I have been among the most vocal in insisting that Romanies are a composite people who originated in Asia. I take the position of the sociolinguist, who sees language as the vehicle of culture, and we speak a language and maintain a culture whose core of direct retention is directly traceable to India. I believe that the acknowledgement of this position is essential, because the alternative is to create a fictitious history and to have, again, our identity in the hands of non-Romani policy-makers and scholars. They are defensible scientifically because they are supported by current academic research, and they are defensible practically because Madame Indira Gandhi openly acknowledged Romanies as an Indian population outside of India and it was the Indian government which was instrumental in helping our people achieve representation in the United Nations, and in creating our First World Romani Congress, and which is now supporting our claims for return of the gold and other possessions taken from Romani Holocaust victims and currently on deposit in Swiss banks. Without the backing of such a national government, the Romani voice would have been carried away by the wind, and these things would probably not even have happened. Those who minimize the Indian connection are not linguists or historians, although they frequently feel entirely qualified to make linguistic and historiographical pronouncements (35). Sandland (36) says that “notwithstanding the best attempts of the so-called Gypsyologists or gypsy lorists, however, the Indian connection has *only* been posited linguistically and it remains, to say the least, vague”--ignoring the serological and cultural evidence, and basing his position solely on a second-hand acquaintance with the Traveller population in Britain. While such scholars dismiss the arguments, they offer no evidence to support their dismissal. The most elementary cultural/linguistic evidence, such as the fact that the Romani word for “cross” (*trushul*) originally meant “Shiva’s trident,” is left unaddressed. It is hard to reconcile facts such as these with the “indigenous origin” argument that Romani language and culture were passed like a relay-runner’s baton from population to population along trade routes, rather than being brought with one migrating people.

The European Origin

The idea that Romanies are really local people who have intentionally darkened their skin and who speak a deliberately-concocted secret jargon is not a new one; it goes back at least to Renaissance times. In 1973, Werner Cohn maintained that “Gypsies are thoroughly European . . . a majority of their ancestors probably came from old European stock” (37). Judith Okely (38) and Wim Willems (39) are among the most recently vocal champions of this view, both of them maintaining that Gypsies are “a motley rabble of diverse origin,” an indigenous western population, which has had its identity “invented” for it over time by writers and policy-makers. In a more recent publication, Okely has challenged the Indian origin directly:

By the nineteenth century, etymologists and scholars had begun to document Romany or ‘Gypsy’ dialects and ‘languages’. Close connections were made to a pre AD 1000 Sanskrit. These findings were then combined with diffusionist theories of culture. . . all similarities among such groups were explained by migration from India, the Aryan cradle. It suited the Indianists to privilege a linear migratory explanation for some linguistic elements, but not for the European vocabularies and languages found among Gypsies (40).

A point made in an earlier paper by the same writer, was that it was “no coincidence that their visibility emerged with the collapse of feudalism, when a multiplicity of persons were thrown into the marketplace”(41). It should be emphasized that neither Willems nor Okely denies an *ethnic* identity (or series of identities) for Gypsies; the argument is simply that Romani origins are ultimately mixed and mainly European, and that the “Rrom” is a product of nineteenth-century European orientalism and ideas of human group classification. The linguist Paul Wexler, citing Okely in support of his own theory, maintains that

Most of the members of each Romani community are of indigenous origin . . . Romani is not of Indic origin and did not acquire its Asian component by direct contact with, or by inheritance from, Indic languages (42).

Also much persuaded by Judith Okely’s arguments is Ralph Sandland, who also perceives some kind of victory in minimizing or disproving an Indian connection:

The Gypsiologists have not been able to identify the precise locality within India from which the gypsies (*sic*) began their travels, nor whether there was one or more migration . . . Okely has argued more persuasively [that] the evidence is strong that the appearance of gypsies (*sic*) is linked to the breakdown of the feudal social structure and the consequent displacement of dispossessed peasants, and that contemporary gypsies (*sic*) in Britain are as likely or unlikely to have indigenous origins as members of the sedentary population (43)

Compromise

The question of their Romani identity may keep some individuals anguishing privately, and for all Romanies it is an ever-present awareness because the outside world provides a constant reminder that the barriers are in place; but for the great majority, it is an awareness which is overridden by the more pragmatic concerns of work, shelter, safety and providing for the family. For the average Rrom, whether we are European or Asian or neither or both is not a matter of much consequence; just being different brings trouble enough. For the leaders, however, it must be.

The future of the Romani population is in the hands of those Romani intellectuals who interact with the representatives of national governments, and with human rights and educational agencies, and in whose power it is to influence the decision makers. But these individuals too face a double task, for it can be as difficult for them to reach the vast majority of ordinary Romanians as it is to reach the establishment.

For all that the growing academic trend represented by Okely, Willems, Wexler, Sandland and to some extent Mayall is attempting to dismiss the genetic distinctiveness of the Romani populations, it has been *precisely* because of it that Hitler's intent to eradicate us as a people was put into effect. The recently-released news that Sweden had been selecting individuals for compulsory sterilization on the grounds of "undesirable racial characteristics . . . recognizable Gypsy features" (44), and the existence of similar programs in Switzerland, Denmark, Slovakia and elsewhere also testify to the dangers of being of Romani descent in the real world, despite what these academics want to believe.

Approaches

There are three approaches to the formalizing of a consensus on Romani identity: treating us either as Europeans, or else as Asians, or as both. Each is attended by arguments, for and against. The case for being considered European, for some at least, rests upon the fact that over the centuries our genetic makeup has acquired a generous infusion of European "blood," for some Romani populations clearly far outweighing the original gene pool. Secondly, we might be considered European because of our widespread geographical dispersion as a truly transnational people. But as Mirga and Gheorghe have pointed out (45), we are a global, not just a European, population. Are the Romanians in Peru also "true Europeans"?

One's identity has to be evaluated in terms not only of what one perceives oneself to be, but also by whether members of the population that one sees oneself as identifying with also share that perception. And it depends, furthermore, upon the attitudes of the out-group, which is the third dimension; in other words, one might be attempting to become part of a population which has no intention of letting one in. On page 26 are the results of a 1993 poll which asked both the Romani and non-Romani residents in Kremnica, Slovakia, whether Romanians "should live together with Slovaks and have the same living conditions as Slovaks have." One hundred percent of the Romanians said "yes." Ninety one percent of the Slovaks said "no." In the late 1970s, Guyana--an English-Creole-speaking South American country with an almost entirely African and Asian population--mounted a national campaign to reidentify itself as a Latin American nation.

It did this because of its location, and for reasons of regional trade. The rest of Latin America, however, did not see Guyana as being in any way a part of their cultural and linguistic world, and the attempt withered and died.

I spent a couple of hours in a local bookshop going through several works with such titles as *An Encyclopedia of Western Culture*, *A History of Europe*, *A Compendium of European History*, *A History of the Western World*, &c., but no Romanies graced their pages. For whoever wrote them, we were not considered to be part of European history or culture. Interestingly, H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History* (1920) was the only work of this kind I found, which devoted any space at all to our existence. We can't be Europeans unless Europeans want us to be as well, and the very clear message is that they don't, as the title of a recent special Romani issue of *Transitions* reflects ("Still Knocking on Europe's Closed Doors").

I have lived in the United States long enough to see that despite the best intentions of representatives of the African American population to bring the Black minority into the mainstream, prejudice is still an everyday fact of life and African Americans remain the "other." The same is true of the Aboriginal experience in Australia.

Although the collapse of Communism and the spread of Western ideas has introduced racist rhetoric from the West, and while it is beginning to find expression in eastern Europe, where journalists are increasingly using the terms "black" and "white" to distinguish Romani and non-Romani populations, this distinction has always been a part of the Romani world view. Another term for "non-Gypsy" is *goró*, which in India means "light-skinned," while a Romani self-ascriptive label found in northern and western Europe is *Kaló*, which means "black." One Romani term for eastern Europe, where the highest concentration of Romani lives, is *Kali Oropa*, i.e. Black Europe, while western Europe is *Parni* ("white") *Oropa*. Traditional Romanichals in America, British Gypsies who are largely indistinguishable from the general Anglo population, nevertheless talk about "white people" in contrast to themselves. These are boundary-maintaining labels which persist in culture while no longer having any manifestation physically (46).

The arguments for an Indian origin have already been made. In these times when Europe is divided into nation states, and national minorities in other countries have governments to speak in their defence, then being identified with an actual homeland brings legitimacy and a measure of security. Furthermore, it is the *Indian* factors, linguistic, genetic and cultural that different Romani populations share; it is the more recently acquired *non-Indian* factors which divide us. If I want to speak in Romani to a speaker of a dialect different from my own, it is the European words we must each avoid, not the Indian ones.

But are Romanies in fact “still” Indians? From the very beginning, the population has been a composite one, and acknowledging this fact constitutes a third approach. In any case, the label is a geographical, not an ethnic one, since evidence points to Dravidian, Scythian and even East African (Siddhi) input into the early mix of militia and camp followers. Words do not travel independently of people; they have no lives of their own, and we must accept that, during the prolonged stay in Persia, long enough for over a hundred Persian words to come into Romani, social intercourse insured that the gene pool was further added to; likewise in the Byzantine Empire, when over two hundred Greek words were absorbed into Romani. In Europe the migration, by this time a conglomerate ethnic population whose diverse speech had crystallized into one language, encountered other mobile populations and in some cases joined and intermarried with them. Sometimes the Romani cultural and linguistic presence was sufficient that the newly-encountered populations were absorbed and became Romanies in subsequent generations; sometimes the Romani contribution was not sufficient to maintain itself, and other, non-Romani populations such as the Jenisch emerged. During the centuries of slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia, and elsewhere in Europe under conditions of oppression, Romani women have given birth to unwanted babies by non-Romani fathers. Cohn (47) estimates the mean percentage of European “blood” in the European Romani genetic makeup to be 60% (48). Sandland (49), basing his argument on Fraser (50), says that

even assuming that Gypsies were a ‘pure race’ on entering Europe, four marriages for every hundred would have led to a latter-day population which is 70 per cent non-Gypsy in ancestry; even one in every hundred would have realized a Gypsy population less than 50 per cent ‘pure.’

The rate of out-marriage obviously differs from place to place, evident in even a cursory comparison of phenotypical features between the Romani populations in, say, Macedonia from those in, say, Finland. Sandland’s reference to a ‘pure’ race is outmoded and potentially dangerous, and in any case smacks of a double standard; the English people are composed of Saxon, Celt, Norman and Viking, but have nevertheless an extremely strong sense of single and even superior identity, one which prompted historian Thomas Macaulay to call the English “the greatest and most highly civilized people that ever the world saw,” (51), and an editorial in *Fraser’s Magazine* to declare that “the English people are naturally industrious, they prefer a life of honest labour to one of idleness. They are a persevering as well as energetic race. . .” (52). Race is clearly in the mind. But it is no less real in those minds because of that.

The fact of having multiple origins is not unique. It is the very capacity to absorb and acculturate disparate populations which is particularly characteristic of the Romanies.

The truly remarkable thing is that it has been possible, despite this kind of incorporation of outsiders and despite the lack of a national territory, to maintain a linguistic and cultural cohesiveness which stretches back for a thousand years. As weak as it may be, it remains strong enough to identify all Romani groups as being exactly that--*Romani* groups.

Many of the problems which Romanies are having with non-Romanies are rooted in the vague and muddled notions of who and what Romanies are, and what the Romani experience in Europe has been, and what Romanies have contributed to European culture. Our safety and well-being do not rest upon proving that we are either Asian or European in origin; those are issues of *human* rights and the acceptance of the fact that wherever we are from, we are a people with a distinctive language and culture, in that respect no different from the Germans or the Italians or the Slovaks, and equally deserving of acknowledgement and respect. One step towards ensuring a safe and productive future for Romani populations in Europe is to develop educational programmes for the schools, both Gypsy and non-Gypsy, where Romani history and culture can be taught and the findings of current historical and linguistic scholarship made better known. Legitimization will lead to respect, and in this way the foundation will be laid for a clearer understanding of Romani identity, and a more credible image of our people.

Asian or European?

In recent years, a body of scholarship has emerged which has sought to minimize, or even contradict, the Indian origins of the Romani people (53). While it does not deny them ascription as “real” ethnic groups, or that for the same reason such groups might deserve protection from abuses of their human and civil rights, the consuming argument is that any alleged Indian connection is vague or even non-existent, that “Gypsies” have in fact crystallized out of the indigenous European populations, and that their widely-assumed identity is a fabrication which originated with Heinrich Grellmann two centuries ago.

This is the polemic which challenges what Lucassen *et al.* define (in order to challenge) as “the almost unshakeable conviction that in the end all Gypsies have the same origin and that up to the present day they can be considered as one people, scattered throughout the world, not unlike the Jewish diaspora” (1998:5). Willems has more explicitly summarized this, also with the purpose of dismissing it, saying that “on grounds of linguistic correspondences between Romani (the ‘Gypsy language’) and Hindi (the language of north-eastern [*sic*] India),” this view holds that Gypsies came originally from India, departing from that homeland somewhere after the ninth century for reasons about which there is still ongoing speculation. Like the Jews, they subsequently spread over the globe, arriving in west and central Europe at the turn of the fifteenth century.

There, comparatively unharried, they lived for decades as nomads, later to be confronted with continuous stigmatization by government officials as the result of the inevitable burden to the sedentary population that they came to represent (Willems, 1997:4) (54).

The Willems-Lucassen position had already been taken earlier by Werner Cohn (1973:65), who maintained that “Gypsies are thoroughly European . . . a majority of their ancestors probably came from old European stock”—although it is hardly a new idea that “Gypsies” (more often “gypsies”) are a behaviorally-defined segment of European society and one drawn from it; allusions to this date from the early 1500s.

The notion became academic, however, with the writings of “scholar gypsy” Judith Okely (1977ff.) (55). Examining the groups in Britain whom she refers to as the Traveller-Gypsies, she maintained that it was “no coincidence that their visibility emerged with the collapse of feudalism, when a multiplicity of persons were thrown into the marketplace” (1984:56). Dismissing the Indianist position, and at the same time elaborating upon Okely’s “dispossessed peasantry” hypothesis, Sandland says that

Notwithstanding the best attempts of the so-called Gypsyologists or gypsy lorists, however, the Indian connection has *only* been posited linguistically and it remains, to say the least, vague . . . The Gypsiologists have not been able to identify the precise locality within India from which the gypsies began their travels, nor whether there was one or more migration . . . Okely has argued more persuasively [that] the evidence is strong that the appearance of gypsies is linked to the breakdown of the feudal social structure and the consequent displacement of dispossessed peasants, and that contemporary gypsies in Britain are as likely or unlikely to have indigenous origins as members of the sedentary population (1996:386-387).

Judith Okely had in fact already challenged the Indian origin directly some years earlier:

By the nineteenth century, etymologists and scholars had begun to document Romany or ‘Gypsy’ dialects and ‘languages’. Close connections were made to a pre AD 1000 Sanskrit. These findings were then combined with diffusionist theories of culture . . . all similarities among such groups were explained by migration from India, the Aryan cradle. It suited the Indianists to privilege a linear migratory explanation for some linguistic elements, but not for the European vocabularies and languages found among Gypsies (1977:224-225).

There are some questionable assumptions in this passage; there is no connection between the specific language one speaks and one’s *genetic* history—this is 19th century racist thought(56). And if she is referring to ‘race’ this is equally misguided, since ‘Aryan’ is not a racial classification, regardless of what Europeans have made of the term.

And if by “linear migratory explanation” she means line of direct descent, then of course any Indian items would conform to this definition, while lexical adoptions from languages spoken outside of India obviously would not. Rather than “privileging” the Indian words in Romani, it is precisely from an examination of the *non-Indic* content of the language that contemporary research on Romani dialectology is being moved forward (see *e.g.* Bakker, 1999). The pioneers of Romani Studies—Pott, Miklosich, Sampson and others—in fact devoted very considerable attention to the “European vocabularies” in Romani. One must wonder whether their work had ever been examined before such a statement was made.

The linguist Paul Wexler, citing Okely in support of his own theory of the origins of the Romani language, has stated more explicitly than anyone else so far, that

Most of the members of each Romani community are of indigenous origin . . . Romani is not of Indic origin and did not acquire its Asian component by direct contact with, or by inheritance from, Indic languages (1997:2,16).

His position is that whatever Asian component there is in the Romani lexicon was passed like a relay-runner’s baton from population to population along the trade routes, rather than being brought with one migrating people, and that Romani grammar was appropriated from various sources along the way. Though not a linguist, Okely questions whether the lexicon of Romani really is traceable to Sanskrit:

The Sanskrit linguistic link may also have been overconstructed. For example I would welcome an alternative examination of Sampson’s dictionary *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales* (1926). Ambiguities as to a word’s etymology seem to have been ignored always in favour of a Sanskrit connection. The Indian connection has been used as what Malinowski called a ‘mythical charter’ to give cultural respectability and long overdue rights to Gypsies throughout Europe (1980:7-8).

Willems, Okely, Mayall (1988), Reynolds (2002), Nord (1998 and 2001) and others in their camp see the Gypsy Lore Society as being largely responsible for exoticising and Indianizing the Romanies; but while the rationale for the creation of that organization, and its approach to the objects of its study have come under increasing criticism in recent years, it is unfair to attribute to it totally the hard-core Indocentrism with which it came to be associated over time. On the very first page of the very first issue of *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, which appeared in July 1888, three different hypotheses were acknowledged, including the non-Indianist position that Gypsies have been a part of European society for more than two thousand years.

Though it declared on the same page that “the final solution of the Gypsy problem . . . has already been solved,” the editor contradicts himself by then adding that “the true answer still remains a matter of doubt, if indeed the true answer has ever yet been given.” The opposing arguments evident there—whether Gypsies originated in India or not—are complicated by the fact that even among those who do recognize such a connection, interpretations are divided. The most widely-repeated Indianist account (also included in that *JGLS* editorial) is that the first Romanies were a group of several thousand musicians presented by the King of Sindh to the Shah of Persia in the fifth century AD; practically every book which deals with Romani origins includes it (57). It provides (a) an explanation for why Romanies left India in the first place, (b) the presence of other, presumably related “Gypsy” groups in the Middle East, and (c) the traditional means of livelihood among Gypsies in the West.

The most recent paper in which this position is upheld is Matras (1999:1), where he says that

Indic diaspora languages [are] spoken by what appear to be descendants of itinerant castes of artisans and entertainers who are spread throughout Central Asia, the Near East and Europe. They include . . . Romani.

These traditional views, whether pro-Indianist or not, need re-examination. It is glib, and perhaps even arrogant, for Sandland (*loc. cit.*) to call the Indian connection “vague,” and to state that “‘Gypsy,’ in other words, is merely a job description” (*op. cit.*, p. 384), or for Judith Okely to assume that “[i]t suited the Indianists to privilege a linear migratory explanation for some linguistic elements, but not for the European vocabularies and languages found among Gypsies” (1977:225). And while Okely would like to see alternative, non-Indian etymologies for the hundreds and hundreds of Indic-derived words in Sampson’s Romani dictionary, she offers no suggestion as to what those etymologies could possibly be. Similarly, while she describes the same cultural behaviour among English Romanichals that is shared by other Romani populations outside of Britain, and which furthermore has demonstrable parallels in India, she neither comments on that fact nor explains why Romani culture in England should be so different from that of the coexistent non-Romani population, and certainly from that which one might associate with dispossessed English peasants, or how a word that is Indian in both its etymological origin and cultural reference (*mochadi*, from Sanskrit *mrakati* “to smear”) came into their speech:

They have separate bowls for washing the body and for washing utensils. Gorgios [non-Romanies] are thought dirty for using sinks for mixed purposes and having [toilets] in caravans. These practices are explained by notions of an inner self, like the inside body which must be kept separate from the outside body.

Waste from the outer body must not contaminate the inside, hence the importance of protecting crockery which touches the mouth, the entry to the inner body. The inside of the trailer must also be kept clean, like the inner body. Neither death nor childbirth—polluting events—should take place inside a trailer, but preferably in a gorgio hospital. Animals are judged clean or unclean by how they wash and eat. A cat is filthy because it licks its fur and swallows it; no cat should enter a trailer. A horse is perfectly clean, partly because it doesn't lick itself. The gypsy word *mochadi* means ritually unclean, not merely grubby, and is used to describe dirty habits, for instance, washing a cup in a bowl used for washing the hands (1979:31).

The most elementary cultural/linguistic evidence, such as the fact that the Romani word for “cross” (*trušul*) was originally a Hindu term meaning “Shiva’s trident,” or that, as in Hindi, Panjabi, Sindhi, etc., though unlike in any European language, the word for ‘big’ and ‘very’ are the same, and there are two different words for ‘old’ depending upon whether the referent is human or not, is left unaddressed. It is hard to reconcile facts such as these with the “indigenous origin” argument, or to explain how, if only *words* were passed from group to group, such area-specific cultural components could come with the package too.

Despite the insistence that the Indianists presume an undiluted, unbroken continuum with 5th (or 9th or 10th or 15th) century India, an examination of the principal representative sources does not in fact reveal this argument. Racially-motivated notions of the “true Gypsy” emerged in the 1800s in tandem with Darwinism certainly, but nowhere is the claim explicitly made that the original gene pool has remained pristine for fifteen hundred years. The closest allusion to this is the frequent reference to degree of “Gypsy blood,” considered to manifest itself in darkness of eye, skin and hair. Labelling individuals as “pure” Gypsies or “half” Gypsies was (and is) racist and meaningless, though the Nazis turned such categorization into an art. It should be remembered too, that the literature of the period also referred to the “Scottish race” and the “English race,” heedless of the Celtic, Saxon, Norman and other elements which have gone into the makeup of those populations. There no doubt exist nationalistic Welsh and Irish who have no Celtic ancestry at all. Applying Sandland’s criterion and his term, they too ought to qualify as simulacra, which the dictionary defines as “something that has a vague, tentative or shadowy resemblance to something else.” But clearly a double standard is operating here.

The adherence to traditional means of livelihood, and “deep” use of the Romani language was also part of the notion of purity, and it is here that the heart of the conflict lies. The composition of our overall identities as individuals and as members of ethnic populations is both internal (inherited) and external (acquired). It may indeed be entirely acquired, as is the case for some Gypsies or some Irish or some English.

Whether we might have brown eyes or not is inherited, but whether we know how to bake a hedgehog is not; it's learnt—still these two components have been confused. The only constant is the genetic one, in the sense that we have no power to modify it in ourselves. Yet if this inherited component is not acknowledged in the context of the acquired one, it can mean nothing. The Nazis dispatched scores of individuals on the grounds of their Romani ancestry, of which those same individuals had been totally unaware (58). I'd be most surprised if native-Romani-speaking activists, colleagues of mine such as Rudko Kawczynski or Ondrej Giňa or Orhan Galjuš knew how to gut and bake a hedgehog or make artificial flowers in the traditional "Gypsy" way, but none of them doubts for a moment his Romani identity. The constructed Gypsy must not be allowed to obfuscate the identities of actual Romanies.

Ownership of History, Ownership of Identity: Who Speaks for Whom?

The evidence for the single migration of a composite, military entourage out of India during the first quarter of the 11th century is strong. The onus is upon those who are not persuaded by that evidence to provide convincing arguments to disprove it. If the impetus to leave were not military, the presence of a military lexicon of Indian origin in Romani needs to be explained. If the first migrants were a single group of entertainers, why is the relevant semantic area not represented in the language, and why does the overall lexicon represent mixed linguistic sources? If there were several migrations over a period of time, how did they manage to find each other and reassemble before entering Europe?

For some reason, the possibility that the ancestors of the Romani people were not "robbers, murderers [and] hangmen" as Vekardi (1988:13) would have it, or even the metalworkers or musicians of conventional Gypsy exohistory, but instead were individuals of some historical stature with a demonstrable origin, seems threatening to some specialists. In a statement appearing in the *American News Service Online* on January 12th, 1998, Sheila Salo of the Gypsy Lore Society stated that "there may be political motivations for advancing that theory," an attitude echoing that of Isabel Fonseca in her influential book *Bury Me Standing*:

Gypsy writers and activists . . . argue for a classier genealogy; we hear, for example, that the Gypsies descend from the Kshatriyas, the warrior caste, just below the Brahmins. There is something ambiguous about origins, after all: you can be whoever you want to be (1996:100).

Surely such cynicism masks a certain unease on the part of those who seek to define and limit Romani identity. It is difficult to believe that this kind of scholarship is serious, and its purpose may indeed have been simply to generate controversy and debate; but its existence is dangerous at a time when the number of administrators and policy makers who would exploit this scholarship in their decision-making is growing. The work of the supporters of this notion is already being quoted in anti-Romani

literature, even at the governmental level; Judith Okely demonstrates considerable naïveté when she complains “I am appalled that apparently sentences in my book *The Traveller-Gypsies* (1983) have been used against the Gypsies in a legal wrangle.” (1990:4).

When specialists in other disciplines allude to genetics or linguistics to make their case, their arguments are weakest. The observation has been made more than once that those who do so may feel, perhaps subconsciously, that less academic rigour is required when researching Gypsies than when studying other peoples, thereby revealing prejudicial attitudes of their own.

Non-Romani organizations have been created to study and define Romani populations, even to cultivate our thinkers and leaders. The Open Society Institute’s Roma Memorial University has a “scholarship program to support the creation of a broad-based Roma elite.”

Non-Romanies, exercising an intellectual authority over our people, decide on the standardization of our language (most recently at a meeting in Budapest in Summer, 2003), and non-Romanies have represented themselves as our political spokesmen. Non-Romanies in their droves have decided that arranged early-teen marriage among Romanian Romanies is reprehensible (though no similar outrage has been directed at India, where it is also common and where the Romani custom originated; *see* BBC 2003).

Remarkably, the Council of Europe has released an “official” account of our history (Wogg, 2006), something they’d scarcely do any for any other nation: what would the Germans or Russians say if an official history had been imposed upon them without their having been once consulted? Marcel Courthiade (in *p.c.*) has observed that they do this with the coelacanthus, the dodo or the platypus.

Conferences on Romani issues have been organized without any Romani participation whatsoever (59) — reminiscent of meetings of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in the early 1900s where Native American issues were discussed in the absence of any Indian participation or representation; a Black Studies conference with no African American presence would be unthinkable; a Jewish policy symposium with no Jewish voice would be an outrage. Academics and politicians who have never met a Gypsy in their lives make their opinions about Romani policy known in the national press. At the same time some of those who *have* seem to feel threatened by Romanies who are educated or who are branded as ‘activists,’ as though this were automatically a bad thing, thereby wasting the resource potential of such marginalize individuals when so few degreed Romanies exist.

Surely if groups or individuals who identify themselves as Romanies seek to assert their ethnicity, and to ally themselves with others similarly motivated, then this is entirely their own business, and the non-Romani anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists and others who have taken upon themselves the role of ethnic police are interfering and presumptuous at best, and are perpetuating paternalistic attitudes. I call for a new respect and a new cooperation between Romanies and gadje, and an end to the 19th century cultural colonialism that lives on in only slightly modified guise.

Notes

1. *Rrom* (plural *Rroma*) is the term officially adopted by the International Romani Union to refer to all people of Romani descent, regardless of self-ascription. Where a Romani population has a different name for itself, the policy is to use that name, thus one Romani population in northern Europe refers to itself as *Sinti*, those in Spain, Finland and Wales as *Kalé* and so on. Confusion arises because Vlax-speaking Romanies use the term only with reference to themselves, having other names for other Gypsy populations. The spelling used here, with double-rr, reflects the usage in the New Standard Orthography established by the Language Commission of the International Romani Union. I prefer to use “Romani(es)” as a cover-term for *all* Romani groups, since all dialects use this word in the same way, unlike the disparate use of *R(r)om* by Romanies themselves and its often ungrammatical use by non-Romani journalists.

2. Vlax (Vlach) Romanies are those descended from the populations held in slavery on the Wallachian and Moldavian estates between the mid-14th and mid-19th centuries, tens of thousands of whom have subsequently left Romania for other parts of the world. The principal Vlax groups include the Kalderasha, the Churara, the Lovara and the Machvaya. Most Vlax Romanies in North and South America are Kalderasha.

3. The Romanichals are the Romani population in and from England. They are referred to as *Gipsurja* or *Dñipsurja* by Vlax Romanies. American Romanichals refer in turn to the Vlax Romanies disparagingly as “Turks” or “Ragheads.”

4. The Bashalde are a Romani population originally from Hungary and Slovakia.

5. Romungre here refers to the new (post-1989) wave of non-Vlax, non-Romani-speaking Romanies from Hungary.

6. The Bayash (or Beyash or Boyash) are descendants of Vlax Romanies who, during the period of Balkan slavery, worked in the houses of the landowners and were forbidden to speak Romani, consequently losing that language.

The ethnic language of the Bayash in America is Romanian, though it is everywhere giving way to English. Vlax Roma use the label to refer to various Gypsy populations who don't speak Romani.

7. A Slava is a saint's day feast, such as St. Anne's or St. George's.

8. The word *porrajmos* means, literally, the "devouring," *i.e.* of Romani lives. There have been several *porrajmata* during the European experience, such as that in 1721, when King Charles the Sixth of Germany ordered the extermination of Romanies everywhere, or in 1740, when all Romanies throughout Bohemia were to be hung by decree. The *Baro Porrajmos* or "Great Devouring" was the Holocaust when, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Research Institute's former senior historian Dr. Sybil Milton, as many as one and a half million Romani victims had been murdered by 1945.

9. Colijn & Littell, 1997:19-49.

10. Diane Tong, in personal communication.

11. Vekerdi, 1988:13-26.

12. Romnet is an internet e-mail list of between 150 and 200 individuals from all parts of the world, and is a forum for the exchange of ideas and information. For further details see <http://www.rroma.com>

13. Nagle, 1996.

14. Lepselter, 1996.

15. *Op. cit.*, pp. 40 and 51.

16. Claus Schreiner (1990), in the introduction.

17. Paspati, 1870: 28-29.

18. Duncan, 1969: 42-43.

19. Ivanow, 1914: 444.

20. Rosenblum, 1984: 1-C. The title of this article, "The Gypsy problem grows: East Europeans can't control Gypsies," is revealing.

21. Martin Croghan, 1986: 259-269.

22. Shel Silverstein, 1984.

23. *Viz Comics*, The John Brown Publishing Co., Ltd., London. The comic strip ran in 1990.

24. The U.S. Playing Card Co., Cincinnati, Ohio.
25. Wells was in fact a proponent of the idea that “lives unworthy of life” should be eradicated, which was a policy fundamental to Nazi race theory.
26. See Hancock, 1987.
27. Hancock, 1996: 39-64.
28. Donald Kenrick, 1995: 37. The contemporary interpretation of *dom* is different from its meaning a millennium ago, when it simply meant “person.”
29. This group, functioning within the framework of the International Conference on Romani Linguistics, will present its findings in subsequent volumes of the papers there presented, published by John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia.
30. A more detailed discussion of this historical-linguistic investigation is found in Hancock, 2004.
31. *Op. Cit.*, page 47.
32. Mirga & Gheorghe, 1977: 22.
33. Stewart, 1997: 28.
34. Kwick, 1997: 92-93.
35. This has been a major criticism of Fonseca(1996).
36. Sandland, 1996: 386.
37. Cohn, 1973: 65.
38. Okely, 1983.
39. Willems, 1995. The position of Willems, Okely and others has been cogently discussed by Janet Lyon (2004). Nevertheless Lyon, like others among an emerging number of similar scholars who have discovered Gypsies, bases her observations on literary representations by other non-Roma rather than on interacting with us directly—and as a result fails to understand the fundamental essence of Romani identity.
40. James et al., 1977: 224-243.
41. *in* Vermeulen & J. Boissevain, 1984.

42. “Could there be a Rotwelsch origin for the Romani lexicon?,” paper submitted to the Third International Conference on Romani Linguistics, Prague, Winter 1997, and to appear in the Proceedings. *Pp.* 2,16.
43. Sandland, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-7.
44. Heintz, 1997: 3.
45. *Loc. cit.*
46. See also Kohn, 1996: 21-23.
47. *Loc. cit.*
48. This can be compared with an estimated non-African representation of 30% in the African American gene pool.
49. *Op. cit.*, p. 399.
50. Fraser, 1992: 24.
51. Williams, 1966: 49.
52. Lebow, 1976: 40.
53. *Romani people* refers here only to those populations which speak Romani or that descend from populations which spoke Romani at some time in the past. Note that the term *Gypsy* is used to refer to many groups who do not meet this criterion besides those of actual Romani descent; the looseness of its application clearly fuels the arguments of Lucassen, Willems, Okely, Reynolds, Mitchell and others discussed here. It is noteworthy that the recently-published *Encarta World English Dictionary* lists *Gypsy* as “an offensive term for a member of the Romani people” (1999:800).
54. It is interesting—particularly in the context of their own arguments—that both Lucassen and Willems compare the Romani diaspora with that of the Jewish people, whose ethnic homogeneity they appear to assume without question.
55. Okely calls herself this in (1990:1). The term of course is Matthew Arnold’s, and Okely is not a Gypsy of any kind.
56. The traditional nineteenth-century Eurocentric interpretation of the social history of India and its Indo-Aryan languages is in serious need of revision: see among a growing literature on the subject Misra, 1992, Taligeri, 1993, Frawley, 1994, Thapar, 1995 and Feuerstein, Kak & Frawley, 1995.

Like the first Afrocentrist literature—an equally necessary challenge to western exohistory—some earlier Indocentric statements err on the side of brashness, *e.g.* Jain (1994:121) confidently states that Indian scholarship “has taken on proponents of Aryan invasion/migration theory, *demolished* their case and established that northern India is the original home of the Indo-European family of languages,” while Danino & Nahar (2000:27) more cautiously call it “*almost* a proven ‘fact’.” It seems to have escaped the current scholarship that a century and a half ago Curzon was already arguing that the Indo-European languages (whose divisions he refers to as ‘Indo-Celtic’, ‘Indo-Hellenic’, ‘Indo-Slavonic’, &c.), “have all sprung, at different chronological periods, from the Sanskrit” (1856:177).

57. This account is discussed at length in Hancock (1998).

58. Obviously if some of those acquired genetic characteristics are clearly evident, so that one is what is nowadays called a “visible minority,” the larger society may still treat the individual as belonging to a particular group, despite what that individual regards as his own place in that society. The reverse of this is “passing,” where lacking phenotypical characteristics allows one to present an alternative identity. The psychological consequences of this for Romanies in particular have not been examined; such a study would surely be of considerable interest and value.

59. Most recently (at time of writing) the Roma session at the Ninth Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities held at Columbia University in April, 2004.

WORKS CITED

- Bakker**, Peter, 1999. “The northern branch of Romani: Mixed and non-mixed varieties,” in Dieter **Halwachs** & Florian **Menz**, eds., *Die Sprache der Roma*. Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag. Pp. 172-209.
- BBC** 2003. “Inquiry into Gypsy child wedding,” *BBC World Service News Online*, October 2nd.
- Cohn**, Werner, 1973. *The Gypsies*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.
- Colijn**, G.J. & Marcia Sachs **Littell** (eds.), *Confronting the Holocaust: A Mandate for the 21st Century*. University Press of America, Lanham, 1997. Pp. 19-49
- Croghan**, Martin, 1986. “The brogue: Language as political culture,” in **Harris**, et al., pp. 259-269.
- Curzon**, A., 1856. “On the original extension of the Sanskrit language over certain portions of Asia and Europe; and on the ancient Aryans, Indians or Hindus of India-proper,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 16:172-200.
- Danino**, Michel & Sujata **Nahar**, 2000. *The Invasion that Never Was*. Delhi: MIR.

- Doyle**, Laura & Laura **Winkel**, 2005. *Geomodernisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Duncan**, Doris, 1969. "The rocky Romany road," *Quinto Lingo*, December, pp. 42-43.
- Feuerstein**, Georg, Subhash Kak & David Frawley, 1995. *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization*. Wheaton: Quest Books.
- Fonseca**, Isabel, 1996. *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and their Journey*. New York: Random House.
- Fraser**, Angus, 1995. *The Gypsies*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Frawley**, David, 1994. *The Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India*. New Delhi: Voice of India.
- Hancock**, Ian, 1987. *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution*. Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, Ann Arbor.
- Hancock**, Ian, 1996. "Responses to the Porrajmos: The Romani Holocaust," in Rosenbaum, 1996: 39-64.
- Hancock**, Ian, 1998. *On the Origin and Westward Migration of the Romani People*. Austin.
- Hancock**, Ian, 2000. "The emergence of Romani as a koïné outside of India," in Thomas **A. Acton**, ed., *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies*. London: Romanestan Publications.
- Hancock**, Ian, 2004. "New thoughts on Romani origins," in Marsh & Strand, 2004.
- Harris**, J., D. **Little** & D. **Singleton**, eds., *Perspectives on the English Language in Ireland*. Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin.
- Heintz**, Jim, 1997. "Sweden regrets its eugenic past," *The Guardian*, August 26th, p. 3.
- Ivanow**, W., 1914. "On the language of the Gypsies of Qainat," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* n.s., 10(11):439-455.
- James**, A., A. **Hockley** & A. **Dawson**, eds., "Some political consequences of theories of Gypsy ethnicity," in *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*. London: Routledge.
- Kenrick**, Donald, 1995. *Les Tsiganes de l'Inde à la Méditerranée*. Collection Interface, Toulouse, 1995.
- Marek Kohn**, Marek, 1996. "Are 'Gypsies' black?," *The Jewish Quarterly*, Summer, pp. 21-23.
- Kwiek**, Gregory, 1997. *Gypsies: The Unknown Nation*. Unpublished manuscript, New York.
- Lebow**, Richard, 1976. *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy*. Institute for the Study of Human Issues: Philadelphia.
- Lepselter**, Susan, 1996. "The poetics of folklore discourse," *Roma*, 44/45:39-51.
- Lucassen**, Leo, Wim **Willems** & Annemarie **Cottaar**, 1998. *Gypsies and other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Lyon**, Janet, 2004. "Gadže modernism," *Modernism/Modernity*, 11(3): 517-538. Also

in **Doyle & Winkel**, 2005:187-205.

Marsh, Adrian & Elin **Strand** (eds.), 2004. *Contextual, Constructed and Contested: Gypsies and the Problem of Identities*. Malmö and Istanbul: Transactions of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul No. 13.

Mastana, Sarabjit, & Surinder **Papiha**, 1992. "Origin of the Romany Gypsies—genetic evidence," *Zeitschrift für Morphologische Anthropologie*, 79(1):43-51.

Matras, Yaron, 1999. "The state of present-day Domari in Jerusalem," *Mediterranean Language Review*, 11:1-58.

Matras, Yaron, 2004. "Typology, dialectology and the structure of complementation in Romani," *Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs: Dialectology Meets Typology*, 153:277-304.

Mayall, David, 1988. *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*. Cambridge: The University Press.

Mirga, Andrzej & Nicolae **Gheorghe**, 1977. *The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper*. Project on Ethnic Relations Monograph, Princeton..

Misra, Satya S., 1992. *The Aryan Problem: A Linguistic Approach*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Mitchell, Timothy, 1994. *Flamenco Deep Song*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Nagle, Joan (ed.), *American Indian Ethnic Revival: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. The University Press, Oxford, 1996.

Nord, Debora E., 1998. "'Marks of race:' Gypsy figures and eccentric femininity in nineteenth-century women's writing," *Victorian Studies*, 41(2):189-210.

Nord, Debora E., 2001. "Seen by rare glimpses: The phantom Gypsy in nineteenth-century culture." Paper presented at the *Locating the Victorians* conference, Cambridge, England, July.

Okely, Judith, 1977. "Some political consequences of theories of Gypsy ethnicity," in A. James, A. **Hockley** & A. **Dawson**, eds. *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*. London: Routledge, London. Pp. 224-243.

Okely, Judith, 1979. "Along with the raggie-taggle Gypsies, o!." *The Countryman*, Summer, pp. 27-32.

Okely, Judith, 1983. *The Traveller-Gypsies*. Cambridge: The University Press.

Okely, Judith, 1984. "Ethnic identity and place of origin: The Traveller-Gypsies in Britain," in **Vermeulen & Boissevain**, 1984: 50-65.

Okely, Judith, 1987. "Fieldwork up the M1: Policy and political aspects," in Anthony **Jackson**, ed., *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock Publications. Pp. 55-73.

Okely, Judith, 1990. "The invention and inventiveness of Gypsy culture," paper presented at the

- Centennial of the Leiden University Fund Congress conference, “*The Social Construction of Minorities and their Cultural Rights in Western Europe*”, Leiden, 1990.)
- Okely**, Judith, 1991. “Participatory experience and embodied knowledge,” in Judith **Okely** & Helen **Callaway**, eds., *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge. Pp. 1-28.
- Paspati**, Alexander, 1870. *Etudes sur les Tchinghianés ou Bohémiens de l’Empire Ottoman*. Karoméla, Constantinople.
- Sandland**, Ralph, 1996. “The real, the simulacrum, and the construction of ‘gypsy’ in law,” *Journal of Law and Society*, 23(3):383-405.
- Reynolds**, Bryan, 2002. *Becoming Criminal: Transversal Performance and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Especially Chapter Two, “Becoming Gypsy, criminal culture, becoming transversal”, pp. 23.
- Rosenbaum**, Alan S. (ed.), 1996. *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Rosenblum**, Mort, 1984. “The Gypsy problem grows: East Europeans can’t control Gypsies,” *The San Antonio Express*, March 25th, p. 1-C.
- Schreiner**, Claus, 1990. *Flamenco: Gypsy Dance and Music from Andalusia*. Portland: Amadeus Press. The original German edition appeared in 1985.
- Silverstein**, Shel, 1984. *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Singh**, K.S., ed., 1992. *Ethnicity, Caste and People: Proceedings of the Indo-Soviet Seminars Held in Calcutta and Leningrad, 1990*. Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India, and Moscow: Institute of Ethnography.
- Stewart**, Michael, 1997. *Time of the Gypsies*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Talageri**, Shrikant G., 1993. *The Aryan Invasion Theory: A Reappraisal*. New Delhi.
- Thapar**, Romila, 1995. *Recent Perspectives on Early Indian History*. Delhi: Prakashan.
- Vekerdi** József, 1988. “Gypsies and the Gypsy problem in Hungary,” *Hungarian Studies Review*, 15(2):13-26.
- Vermeulen**, H. & J. **Boissevain**, eds., 1984. *Ethnic Challenge: The Politics of Ethnicity in Europe*. Göttingen: Herodot.
- Wexler**, Paul, 1997. “Could there be a Rotwelsch origin for the Romani lexicon?,” paper submitted to the *Third International Conference on Romani Linguistics*, Prague, Winter.
- Willems**, Wim, 1995. *Op Zoek Naar de Ware Zigeuner: Zigeuners als Studieobject Tijdens de Verlichting, de Romantiek en het Nazisme* [= “In search of the true Gypsy: Gypsies as Objects of Study from the Enlightenment and the Romantic Period to the Nazis”]. Utrecht: Van Arkel Uitgeverij.
- Willems**, Wim, 1997. *In Search of the True Gypsy, from Enlightenment to Final*

Solution. London: Frank Cass.

Williams, Eric, 1966. *British Historians and the West Indies*. London: André Deutch: London.

Wogg, Michael, *ed.*, 2006. *Roma History: From India to Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Directorate General IV.

Copyright

Ian Hancock & Micheal O Haodha

Resource

https://radoc.net/radoc.php?doc=art_d_identity&lang=&articles=true