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Some political consequences of theories of Gypsy ethnicity

The place of the intellectual

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Representation by the intellectual or academic of ethnic ideologies could be interpreted in a purely scholastic fashion where a chronology of different theories might remain largely unread by the groups themselves. The complexity emerges when it is recognised that ideas have consequences beyond the scholar, both in the larger dominant society and for ethnic groups or minorities. There are historically specific factors which affect the emergence and influence of some ideas as opposed to others. The ideas do not spring from the intellectual as isolate. In addition, while the theories of individual intellectuals may be fully embraced, they may also be ignored, thoroughly distorted or only partially understood.

The question as to whether ideas in themselves bring change or ensure continuity can be situated in an old debate within Marxism. The now generally discredited and reductionist position of economism claimed that ideas merely reflected the mode of production. The 1970s Marxist interpretation of the role of ideas in history (via Althusser and Gramsci) rejects the notion that ideas are mere epiphenomena, but instead may reflect, and in turn affect or overdetermine, the infrastructure. Gramsci (1971) gave special place to the role of the intellectual, while Althusser (1971) emphasised the importance of pedagogy and its ideology as part of the state apparatus.

I start from the theoretical assumption that the power of some ideas as opposed to others depends on the historic moment that gave the context for those ideas to flourish. But in turn those ideas, as crystallised by academics and intellectuals, have the potential to affect history. There are additional complexities in the analysis. It cannot be presumed that intellectuals even in an established position as academics inevitably act as the state's or 'dominant group's "deputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government' (Gramsci 1971: 12). Gramsci is convincingly sceptical of 'that social utopia by which the intellectuals think of themselves as "independent", autonomous, endowed with a character of their own' (ibid.: 8). Nevertheless, I contend that intellectuals and even the most ensconced academics are in a position to present ideas that are inconsistent with and potentially subversive to the currently identifiable policies and ideology associated with either Gramsci's 'civil' or 'political' society (ibid.: 12).

I suggest several broad possibilities in considering the influence of ideas and intellectuals. Some may overlap:

1 Anonymised and generalised

First, there is what can be identified as the generalised and impersonal scholarly influence of ideas and concepts in history. Here the notions have become largely detached from the original writers and theorists. My examples in this chapter include diffusionism and the association of a pristine culture and 'root' language with a single geographical place of origin for all subsequent language users.

2 Named influence within an academic specialism and possibly beyond

In contrast to Foucault's thesis that the individual author counts for little, Said (1978: 23-4) has been concerned with the dialectic between named texts and a complex collective formation. In this spirit, I am concerned with linking individual intellectuals and texts with ideas about ethnicity, and the changing position of an ethnic group.

This second category is where the intellectual's named and referenced text has influence with a specialist readership. The ideas may be utterly plausible within the specific disciplines. If written in an accessible language, the text can reach a wider readership. Some aspects may also be expedient for a specific ethnic group's construction of an ideology at that historical moment, while other aspects may be ignored. Alternatively, the ideas may be absorbed much later. Selectivity can similarly be found in the use to which the text is put by the state's majority representatives.

3 Named but unintended influence

This concerns the influence of the intellectual's ideas in entirely unintended, and possibly distorted contexts. The reading and use of the text may have the opposite effect to that imagined by the originator. Here the postmodernist's 'death of the author' and her/his intentions have relevance. Usually the context is beyond the academic discipline and yet where the texts give authority precisely because they are individually named. The ideas may prove unexpectedly convenient for another group which the intellectual had not directly addressed, for example, in this case New Age Travellers.

4 Policy adviser

A further category of influence is where an intellectual or academic acts as policy researcher or even political adviser. Broadly, the policy adviser is obliged to address the dominant decision-makers within pre-set and often limited procedures. The interpretation of his or her ideas may end up in a different form.

It is this category of influence that is most vulnerable to the immediately recognised interests of Gramsci's 'political' society, especially in Britain. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was an established practice in government of consultation with

intellectuals or 'the great and the good'. My example of the Gypsies in this chapter records varied non-governmental consultations during policy formulations. The historical context has now changed. In the 1980s and 1990s, Royal Commissions have almost disappeared. The great and the good are bypassed, and almost three decades of liberal policies towards the Gypsies have been completely reversed.

5 *Activist*

The intellectual may have influence as an activist. Ideally, the intellectual should be in a position to combine both theory and practice. At the same time, the activist-intellectual draws on special skills as a knowledge base for action. The activist might attempt to effect change by extra-parliamentary means. Some individuals are charismatic initiators. Here the mass media can be exploitable. Again, the historical and cultural context is relevant. Whereas in England, if not Britain, the intellectual has a somewhat subdued and even denigrated position in the power structure, in France there has existed a huge respect for intellectuals beyond the academic portals (Gramsci 1971: 18; Sartre 1978).

6 *The intellectual as insider or outsider*

The ethnic identity of the intellectual is very relevant. Gramsci's rather flexible notion of the organic intellectual is most appropriate (1971). For the intellectual, whether as academic specialist, author, policy adviser or activist, membership of an ethnic group is cultural capital in a struggle of representation. Intellectuals as members of an ethnic group can be found in each of the categories 2 to 5 or all simultaneously. Outsider intellectuals, sympathetic or antagonistic to the ethnic group, have varying influence in the representation of ethnicity. There are also representations by individuals claiming fictive membership of the ethnic group (Liégeois 1976).

I shall examine the range of possible influences and positions for the intellectual in relation to the ideological and political representations of a relatively powerless minority, the Gypsies. Ideologies of Gypsy ethnicity have shifted, intersected or conflicted according to the historical moment. I draw mainly on my multifaceted experience of being involved with Gypsies, non-Gypsy interventions and anthropological research during a period of twenty-five years. The selective readings of my own texts by others and their influences form part of the ethnography of this chapter.

Theories of Origin: Depersonalised or Individually Authored

In the light of the first and second categories of influence, I shall consider the more general effects of non-specific social theories upon the group. Elsewhere (Okely 1983, 1984), I have outlined how the Gypsies were first recorded as 'Egyptians' in Britain in 1505 and under other labels in Europe.

By the nineteenth century, etymologists and scholars had begun to document Romany or 'Gypsy' dialects and 'languages'. Close connections were made to a pre 1000 Sanskrit. These findings were then combined with diffusionist theories of culture. The Gypsies provided a perfect case study: 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. These theories have remained influential without regard for competing theories from the social sciences. Named authors are less frequently referred to. Speculative theories have become hardened 'facts'.

There are powerful attractions in these origin myths. This is less an Orientalism (Said 1978) but more an 'Orientalisation' of Occidentals. It is paradoxical that the Gypsies became acceptable to some only if they could be reified as 'the other' from outside the West. This reification has had some disabling consequences for those so classified, although sometimes exoticism has been perceived as a form of romantic approval. Ideologies of Indian 'race' have been used to single out an acceptable or extinct mythical few. In this, non-Gypsy intellectuals and 'gentlemen scholars' have had influence (Okely 1983).

A counter-theory to Indianism can be seen as an example of the second and third categories of influence respectively As sceptical anthropologist, in' my monograph *The Traveller-Gypsies* (1983) and in 1984, I questioned . the single Indian origin and linear migration as sufficient explanation for the Gypsies' first 'appearance' in Europe. I suggested that it is no coincidence that their visibility emerged with the collapse of feudalism, when a multiplicity of persons was thrown into the market place. Whereas such theories have been absorbed seemingly without huge controversy within the discipline of social anthropology, they have either been ignored by a genre of gypsologists or mistakenly interpreted as an ideological de(con)struction of an ethnic group. Alternatively, my counter-theory has been welcomed by Scottish, Irish (Okely 1994) and New Age Traveller representatives.

During my years of fieldwork among Gypsies in England, Indian ancestry was never claimed nor ever a subject of discussion. Gypsies would sometimes with genuine intellectual curiosity ask me, as an academic expert, where they had come from. The discussions addressed broad philosophical questions.

One evening, several Travellers in my trailer asked me where human beings had come from. When I outlined the Indian origin theory for the Gypsies, one Gypsy woman poked fun at her husband: 'You little Indian you!' She was more likely to be

adding a cultural layer of cowboys and American Indians than the subcontinent to the joke.

Fictive Representatives and Activists

Although intellectuals may be non-literate, in the case of Gypsies there are still relatively few examples of individual ethnic members of the group who are identified as literate intellectuals. A major reason is the Gypsies' history as a non-literate people. So the Gypsies' direct access to ideas emanating from academic texts may be even more distorted than that of a literate population. The other major explanation is the stigma attached to Gypsy ancestry among those individuals who have chosen to work and live in a mainly non-Gypsy ambience. There are, however, historical moments when it is relatively safe or even advantageous to acknowledge Gypsy descent and identity. This has occurred since the 1970s in the West and in the 1990s in Eastern Europe (Beck 1993).

In the 1970s, during my early and main fieldwork, there were very few Gypsy political representatives, let alone literate intellectuals in Britain who operated in non-Gypsy (gorgio) political circles. (Gorgio is the pejorative label given by Gypsies to non-Gypsies.) The Gypsies in Britain in any case do not recognise 'leaders', although they see the utility in relevant circumstances of intermediaries and negotiators with gorgio authorities (Okely 1983). However, there was for a while the curious phenomenon of one or two gorgio intellectual-activists who assumed fictive Gypsy ethnic identity and ancestry. Alleged membership of the group was used both to give authenticity to their writing and to their political participation on behalf of Gypsies.

Here is an example of the fictive member as activist and intellectual, (categories 5 and 6). After the 1960 Caravan Sites Act in England and Wales, local authorities had closed many Gypsy-run camp sites. Wherever Gypsies or Travellers moved, they were faced with greater visibility and increased evictions. Gratton Puxon, a gorgio of middle-class English background, who had made the acquaintance of Gypsies when travelling abroad, became a leading activist. He encouraged non-violent resistance to evictions and informed the press in advance. At its inception in the late 1960s, he became the Secretary of the Gypsy Council, which included both Gypsy and gorgio officers. Both the Gypsy Council and Puxon himself captured media attention and made evictions more controversial. In the public gorgio imagination Puxon was often seen to be the sole Gypsy representative of Gypsies. Yet in my fieldwork I found that some Gypsies had no idea of his existence. Others were very ambivalent about his tactics, as Travellers became vulnerable to more punitive fines, imprisonment and greater visibility to the police. One said, 'It's all very well these gorgios laying themselves in front of the motors, but in the end it's us who are left on the side of the road to pay the fines.'

The Gypsy Council was recognised in negotiations with central government, which hitherto had responded almost exclusively to representations from anti-Gypsy

housedwellers and local councils. Eventually, the mixed blessing of the 1968 Caravan Sites Act was passed. This obliged local authorities to provide sites in return for draconian powers to remove remaining Gypsies from 'designated' localities.

When Puxon was abroad, the Department of the Environment persuaded the Gypsy Council, with all the accompanying publicity, to validate the first set of designations. On his return, Puxon repudiated this strategy, but the political momentum had been lost. He and another gorgio, a linguist with a doctoral thesis on the dialects of Eastern European Gypsies, published an outstanding documentation of the centuries of persecution and Nazi genocide of the Gypsies (Kenrick and Puxon 1972). More speculatively, the authors reiterated the belief in a linear Indian origin and ended with a utopian claim:

The present ground-swell within the Gypsy world will amount soon to a revolution. . . . The message has penetrated, particularly to a restless youth, that we are in an epoch of racial turmoil and resurgent nationalism. It is clear to Roms today . . . that though the first *Blacks* in Europe, they are the last to raise their standard and seek emancipation. (Ibid.: 210, 214)

In the 1995 amended version, all such rhetoric has been erased from the text.

A textual validation of Puxon as Gypsy 'leader' exists in the sociologist Thomas Acton's doctoral monograph (1974). While it contains excellent historical accounts of Gypsies and state policies, when the author considered the 1960s there was an attempt in the text to influence subsequent events by inflating the role of the gorgio individual as Gypsy leader of a massed international organisation (Acton personal communication). At least one review in a social science journal accepted these claims uncritically.

Puxon appeared on television wearing a kerchief, the folklorist's insignia of a 'real' Gypsy, talking of 'my people'. The Gypsies I encountered who knew him always described him as a gorgio. Certainly, the mass media presented him as a Gypsy, and in this my co-authors and I were asked to cooperate. A gorgio associate of Puxon, and the publisher's reader for the jointly authored *Gypsies and Government Policy in England* (Adams *et al.* 1975) requested, unsuccessfully, that we redescribe Puxon as a Gypsy. As the privately educated public-school son of an estate agent, he had no Gypsy kinship links, except that he had recently married a Gypsy from Yugoslavia. To have called him a Gypsy would have been consistent neither with the Gypsies' own criteria nor with those of the larger society, although it was politically expedient with gorgio officials. Puxon was always more successful, and indeed brilliant, as an intermediary in relation to the dominant society than as an indigenous leader seeking recognition by Gypsies and Travellers. In any case, since the 1980s, he has severed links with the Gypsies and is currently described as having 'returned to full-time journalism' (Kenrick and Puxon 1995: frontispiece).

Territorial Nationalism

In the 1960s and 1970s, the pro-Gypsy gorgio activists, like the Gypsies before and after, tried out by hit-and-miss tactics, different identities and strategies. Inspired by the Black Power movement and the anti-colonial independence struggles of the 1970s, there was considerable talk, mainly among gorgio activists, of Gypsy 'nationalism' (Kenrick and Puxon 1972; Acton 1974). There was ambiguity as to whether or not this nationalism also embraced a separate territory and nation-state (Acton 1974: 233-4), especially since Gypsies have an economy which is interdependent with that of sedentary non-Gypsies. A number of gorgios and Gypsy media figureheads, including Puxon, argued for a Gypsy homeland called Romanestan. Given the relative silence on the subject among the mass of Gypsies, this was in effect the ethnocentric imposition of a sedentarist model upon a traditionally nomadic people. Neither another slice of Palestine nor India were suggested, but instead Macedonia. Brian Raywid, a gorgio who had shared life on the road with Gypsies (1964, 1966), wrote to me in the early 1980s with considerable foresight:

I see no point myself in even the mythical concept of a Gypsy state. It would destroy Gypsies. And the location 'chosen' (how kind of visionary gorgios to do this on behalf of Gypsies) is Macedonia, a federated province of Yugoslavia and with a mix of volatile nationalities, not least the Albanians. One wonders that the surface of the moon wasn't suggested as more practical and hospitable.

(Personal communication 1983)

He later recalled how there were discussions among the English gorgio associates as to which of them should be the first president or prime minister of this Macedonian Romanestan utopia.

Another political strategy was the World Romani-Congress which has proved useful in the long run with UNESCO, but at the inception was imbued with nationalist trappings. Here loosely formed organisations came together under the label in 1971 (with Puxon as Secretary) for a meeting in London, followed by a festival on Hampstead Heath. Puxon, as recorded by Acton, 'freely adapted the words of Stokeley Carmichael, to say "to raise the standard of Rom nationalism is like suddenly shouting a secret in a crowded room"' (1974: 235). The Gypsies were presented with a national anthem and flag. However, the French Gypsy novelist, Mateo Maximoff, expressed the opinion that Gypsies neither wanted nor needed a nation-state. The problem was subsequently resolved by Puxon 'and other west European militants [*sic*]' suggesting that 'we must create Romanestan in our hearts' (ibid.: 234). Acton, the non-Gypsy sociologist, has recently expressed a more pronounced scepticism concerning Romanestan (Acton and Gheorghe 1993: 13), but does not acknowledge that gorgio 'leaders' or 'militants' were some of the major instigators of the notion of a homeland. The majority of the Gypsies were never convinced, even in the loosest sense. Acton's own research tacitly confirmed this at

the height of the alleged revolutionary movement: 'The thousand and more heads of families who paid their subscriptions to the Gypsy Council are not nationalists' (1974: 235).

Writing to me in 1993, a decade after his earlier scepticism, Brian Raywid commented,

At least one point, however, seems to have become more rather than less relevant. That is my reference to Macedonia. Between about 1968 and the early 1980s there existed a utopian idea in certain quarters that Macedonia should become a Gypsy state. . . . Even when the idea was first mooted it seemed to me a recipe for disaster, given the obvious facts, clear even then, as to the unsuitability of a Gypsy state and the unsuitability of Macedonia anyway. To save face, those who once propagated this idea, now claim that they never meant it literally.

The curiosity is that gorgio intellectuals and activists with academic credentials should have been the major instigators of this political fantasy imposed upon 'their' othered peoples. The Gypsies rarely responded to the symbolism of flags and national anthems, while an ideology of nationalism remained ungrounded in any material reality, let alone any desire for a homeland. Mercifully for Macedonia, and doubtless the Gypsies, the representation of Gypsy nationalism as a demand for a Gypsy nation-state failed to make headway. In the 1990s, Gypsies in Macedonia, like many in Romania, initiated a strategy used centuries earlier, by recording themselves as 'Egyptians' in census returns, thus claiming minority rights, but through a *non-Indian* origin.

Sometimes the gorgio fictive leaders seemed to be playing a game of schoolboy tin soldiers, with near colonialist delusions of grandeur. Already in 1965, Puxon, an Englishman among Travellers in Ireland, was referring to 'My people, the families on the road and their friends in the settled community'. Describing himself as 'Enemy Number One', he wrote: 'we have been fighting as the rebels distinctly outside the "Establishment"'. Changes in his (unarmed) strategies were metamorphosed as a 'cease-fire' (Acton 1974: I58). Consistent with their masculinist models of a social movement or even of an ethnic group, both Puxon and Acton envisaged only males as Gypsy political representatives and mediators (Acton 1974:159, 235), despite the emergent women's liberation movement. The long-established political role of Gypsy women (Okely 1975a, 1996) was androcentrically kept off the revolutionary agenda. Since the 1990s, throughout Europe the political visibility and initiatives of Gypsy women have been more satisfactorily acknowledged.

However, in the 1970s the gorgio model for Gypsy resistance was not only masculinist but also fantasised as guerrilla warfare. For example, I was rebuked by a gorgio 'pro-Gypsy nationalist' for being part of 'the Establishment' because I was not 'taking machine guns down to a Gypsy camp'. My response was that the Gypsies were too politically sophisticated to need a naive young gorgio woman's advice.

Moreover, the Gypsies had evolved their own means of resistance which were less counter-productive than those that had brought about the tragic massacre of the Black Panthers. So I lost my chance of becoming the Patty Hearst of anthropology.

Gypsies in Dispute with Fictive Representatives

In another example of the construction of Gypsy nationalism by wannabe Gypsies or non-Gypsy activists, the Gypsies elected to take charge of their own representation in the media and in opposition to that of gorgio representatives. In the mid-1970s, Puxon and the Gypsy Council obtained a slot on the BBC TV community action programme, *Open Door*. On a Gypsy site, a raised dais was created on the back of a lorry on which stood various 'leaders' including Puxon and Vanko Rouda, a Belgian-based Gypsy-gorgio (Liégeois 1976: 158). Speeches were made from the lorry which was foregrounded by a small crowd of Gypsies visible only as spectator silhouettes. The self-styled dignitaries presented each other with silver horseshoes for 'services to the Gypsies'. Then a 'Gypsy National Anthem' was distributed on printed handouts to the crowd below, which included gorgio social workers and supporters. The latter, who were largely the only people who could read, led the uneven singing. If the anthem had indeed been of significance to the Gypsies, they would have sung it from memory.

This scene was watched by Gypsy representatives, also filmed live in a studio. After the camp ceremony, Tommy Doherty, an Irish Traveller, declared to camera that the BBC had been 'conned'. He and other Gypsies walked out, leaving only a gorgio gypsologist behind. As in 1971, the Gypsies rejected the ceremonial trappings of phantom nationalism.

Internationalism and Rights as a Minority

With a change in political ideology in the 1980s and even more so in the 1990s, it became more politically expedient for the Gypsies to argue for ethnic minority status with accompanying international human rights. The link with the UN was another of the earlier strategies. In this case, it met with relative success. Whereas this had depended on recognition by the larger international gorgio organisation, the nationalist strategies depended on a unilateral and impracticable consolidation among Gypsies.

Thus the ideology of ethnicity and minority rights has proved more effective both among Gypsies and non-Gypsy organisations than that of Gypsy nationalism. The United Nations and to some extent the EU, are useful bodies to be appealed to over the heads of specific national governments. But the way in which ethnicity has been defined and legitimated, doubtless through previous academic influences, has repercussions for the groups concerned. Here ethnic minority recognition would still appear to rest on a unilinear foreign migration, and one that privileges an original territory. So, again the Indian origin has political mileage. The nineteenth-century

theories of race, conflated with place, retain their hold in the dominant ideologies of states. Indigenous, European ancestry is not seen as a politically useful route to recognition of the Gypsies' autonomous rights. This foreclosing of multiple histories by a geographical 'othering' simultaneously downgrades the identity and potential rights of those travelling groups who neither claim nor are granted foreign ancestry.

The Theory of Self-Ascription

An alternative route to ethnic status had been provided by Barth (1969), whose notion of 'self-ascription' was useful not only on an individual level but also as a way of considering what the Gypsies *themselves* chose as significant markers for group membership. Barth's text offered a route to combining outsider and insider perspectives. This was a succinct way out of having to define an ethnic group by external and fixed 'traits', including geographical origin. Hitherto, the etymologists and linguists had mainly defined 'real' Gypsies by the extent to which they were said to use a form of Romani language. These scholars and others also conflated biological notions of race with arbitrary classifications of physiognomy and even 'behaviour' (Okely 1975b).

Although Barth has been criticised for concentrating on the boundaries rather than what they contained, in the 1970s I moved beyond the suggestion that self-ascription was a free-floating individualistic decision, but saw that instead it could include the content, or whatever the group itself ascribed as significant for their identity, culture or practice (see Cheater and Hopa, Chapter 13 of this volume). Among one of the 'primary' principles which Barth implicitly seemed to suggest that groups might themselves use for inclusion and exclusion was that of descent. Rehfisch, who had made the first anthropological field study of Gypsies in Scotland and in Britain (1958), had suggested that a Gypsy could claim membership if he or she had at least one Gypsy parent. Here the principle of descent operated in a flexible manner.

Policy Adviser and Expert

The discussion of Barth's text and concepts introduces an example of the fourth category in which the academic may be called upon as policy adviser. Depending on the nature of that advice and the political climate, the academic, intellectual and/or representative member may influence government policy. As with the case of the charismatic activist, the conditions have to be ripe both for the intellectual to be consulted and for that knowledge to be heeded. The very term 'expert witness' is hegemonically loaded. In the centres of power it carries with it the notion of detached knowledge and political neutrality. It also presumes that other lay people, including ordinary members of an ethnic group, are not themselves expert witnesses.

In the policy-oriented project of the 1970s in which I was initially involved, I was able to use some of Barth's suggestions to argue for the recognition of Gypsies as an

ethnic group (Okely 1975b). Unlike so many other minorities, they could not appeal to a recent, distant place of origin as a marker. Neither could they call themselves 'black' and then be in a position to use the Race Relations Act (*pave* Kenrick and Puxon 1972). The publication of our book (Adams, Okely. *et al.* 1975) proved opportune for the independent government consultant, John Cripps (1976). It showed not only the Gypsies' identity as an ethnic group, but also the viability of their flexible economy.

Under a Labour government and still in a post-1960s semi-liberal climate, there was a greater openness towards minorities. The Cripps inquiry, initiated by the government, interviewed Gypsy representatives and supporters nationwide. Whereas the 1968 Caravan Sites Act had carried the covert assumption that Gypsies should be sedentarised and assimilated by means of official site provision, by contrast, the ensuing report unequivocally recognised the Gypsies' rights to remain nomadic. A key sentence was: 'The Secretaries of State now have no wish to deny the gypsies [*sic*] a nomadic existence' (1976: 7). Moreover, their identity as an ethnic group was recognised. Cripps introduced the concept of 'self-ascription' as a means of getting round all the muddles of who was a 'real' Gypsy. Much of the report was a flattering plagiarisation of our book, but with a general acknowledgement in the frontispiece. However, in accord with the unscholarly style of government and journalistic texts, there was neither a bibliography nor a system of referencing, with the result that due credit was not given to Barth - an example of the first category of influence where specific theorists are no longer named.

Despite the academic and other contributions to the 1970s policy, the non-assimilationist stance was reversed by the Conservative government in the 1990s. The Criminal Justice Act of 1994 abolished mandatory official site provision and any special planning consideration for Gypsy private sites. The long-term aim is unequivocally the settlement and housing of Gypsies. All the suggestions of Cripps, others' academic research sympathetic to Gypsies and Gypsy delegations have been passed over. Thus the intellectual's influence on ideologies of ethnicity in the state policy sphere are often fragile, dependent on hegemonic approval.

Race Relations Legislation and the Academic as Expert Witness

In some instances, the social scientist may be called upon as expert witness, either to defend or to challenge discrimination. Consistent with category 4, in this case the intellectual's expertise is institutionalised in the law of the dominant society. Although the Cripps Report could be seen as a positive influence, the Gypsies remained vulnerable to racist discrimination, so long as there was no court ruling defining them as an ethnic group. Hitherto, a Gypsy had been defined as a person of 'no fixed abode', so could not complain about discrimination under the 1976 Race Relations Act. In 1988, a letter was forwarded to me from the Oxford Institute of Social

Anthropology. Some local solicitors were trying to defend an Irish Working Men's Club which had refused entry to some Travellers. They sought an expert witness:

the Plaintiff must establish that he was treated less favourably than others on racial grounds or by virtue of his racial grouping. The plaintiff, ... attempts to claim the protection of the Act on the basis of his ethnic origin, saying that a Gypsy or Traveller is a member of an ethnic group You will appreciate that the Expert we are seeking would be one who could give evidence to the effect that 'Travellers' or Gypsies are not member [*sic*] of a racial or ethnic group.

(Ferguson Bricknell & Co. 1988)

The letter assumes that anthropologists are the experts on 'racial grouping' and that they might be relied upon to testify *against* a member of a minority claiming discrimination. Needless to say, I did not follow up the matter. It was not possible to trace the complainant and offer my services instead to him. Later, I discovered that the parties settled out of court and that one Traveller emerged several thousand pounds richer and that a fellow anthropologist Sinéad ni Shuineer, had acted as expert witness on *his* behalf.

An example of category 3, where the influence of the intellectual's theories is unintended and entirely distorted, occurred that same year in London. In a prosecution of a pub that had displayed a 'No Travellers' sign, I heard to my horror that the defence had quoted, without consultation, lines of my 1983 monograph. The extracts referred to my critique of a purely biological or 'racial' model for an ethnic group. The judge was fixated on the biological model for a racial group. After an appeal, the unchallenged verdict was that Gypsies, but not Travellers, were an ethnic group. In some gorgio gypsiologist circles it was claimed that my questioning of a single Indian origin had invited discrimination, because the Gypsies could not be defined by foreignness.

In 1993, I was asked to act as 'expert witness' in a case in Scotland, where a Traveller complained of racial discrimination after being refused a drink in an hotel. I was asked by the Commission for Racial Equality to prove that Scottish Travellers are an ethnic group {Okely 1984, 1994}. Again, Barth's 'self-ascription' and 'principle of descent' were relevant. Given that traditionally neither the Scottish and Irish Travellers, nor gorgio gypsiologists have presented an Indian origin for these groups, any international claims to ethnic recognition for all Gypsies on such grounds would have worked against them. The Traveller understandably settled out of court. Regrettably, the chance to establish a precedent was lost.

Insider Gypsy Intellectuals and Activists as Representatives

The following examples fit with my fifth and sixth categories of influence outlined above; the intellectual as member of, and activist for, the ethnic group. These Gypsy

intellectuals also illustrate the different available ideological positions in relation to the mythical or apparently empirically proven historical origin of the Gypsies. Given the privileging of exoticism in gorgio discourse and institutions, the Gypsies 'Indian' origin(s) continue to be debated as part of their mythical charter of authenticity. Two of these Gypsy academics emerged during the 1980s in Europe and the US. The third, a Scottish Traveller, became prominent in the early 1990s. Ian Hancock, now a linguistics professor at the University of Texas, is also a political activist. He has drawn attention to anti-Gypsy legislation and media misrepresentation. *The Pariah Syndrome* (1987) is his overview of the history of Gypsies. Trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, as a linguist rather than as a social scientist, he is deeply influenced by the diffusionist and etymological theories of non-Gypsies, which authenticate the Gypsies as Indian migrants

Until recently, Hancock was the United States representative for the International Romani Union at UNESCO. The recognition of Gypsies' rights within certain UN organisations, including UNESCO, has been achieved in part because of the declared Indian origin of the Rom or Gypsies throughout the West. Ian Hancock's presence as a forthright and brilliant speaker at international academic or political conferences has a powerful influence on his audiences' perceptions and encourages their granting of ideological space for Gypsies as a persecuted group with valid claims to human rights.

Nicolae Gheorghe, formerly vice president of the International Romani Union, is a Romanian sociologist at the University of Bucharest. As with a number of Gypsies in Eastern Europe, it was for a long time safer for him to pass as a non-Gypsy. Since 1989, some academics have felt encouraged to reveal their Gypsy connections (Beck 1993). In Romania, there are, in contrast to Gypsies in Britain, a number of literate Gypsies with greater access to textually constructed ideologies.

Gheorghe collaborated in research and publication with the American anthropologist Sam Beck and, in contrast to Hancock, suggested an indigenous origin for a group of Romanian Gypsies (Beck and Gheorghe 1981: 19). Subsequently, at a seminar in 1993, and with tongue in cheek, he described with approval how one or two Romanian Gypsy 'kings' have, in the 1990s, made well-publicised trips to India, their 'homeland'. These kings were welcomed by high-ranking Indian officials, so further validating their non-European, exotic status. Gheorghe, with a social scientist's scrutiny, presented these developments as powerfully symbolic and to be exploited, regardless of his or others' scepticism (Liégeois 1976).

By contrast, Hancock described his own visit to India as eliciting feelings that he belonged there. He said that he knew, in some deep mystical sense, that that was where his Gypsy ancestors came from. The description of his experience was part of his 1990 plenary address at an international conference at the University of Leiden. It was offered as proof of the migratory theory which has become part of the ideological construction of Gypsies for some Gypsies and gorgios in the West.

No one is in a position to deny another person's experience of specific emotions and inner knowledge. Hancock's public identity as Gypsy brings an additional experiential dimension to an academic debate. It forecloses any alternative theory about the historical origins of Gypsies. His belief becomes a social fact, as Gheorghe would recognise, and may influence both gorgio and Gypsy ethnic ideologies.

The third example of a Gypsy intellectual is Willie Reid, a Scottish Traveller who attended Stirling University. In 1993 he and other Travellers formed a political organisation for Scottish Travellers. At the first meeting, they decided to incorporate the label 'Gypsy' as well as Traveller in the title. One of the main reasons for this was the apparent need to differentiate themselves from New Age Travellers. Reid declared: 'We've been robbed of the word Traveller by the New Age Travellers.' The label 'Traveller' used by outsiders had previously been used in contrast to the then-stigmatised 'Tinker'. There was also a feeling that the adoption of the label 'Gypsy' meant less ambiguity in recognition as 'an ethnic group'. This latter phrase has now entered common parlance. In the 1970s I never heard it in the field, but more significantly never among the few Gypsies who moved in public gorgio political circles. Again this is an example of the first category of influence above.

Gorgio gypsiologist discourse has not bestowed Indian origin upon Scottish and Irish Travellers (Okely 1994). Reid presents a novel critique of those who have presented varying origins for Scottish Travellers, highlighting the mixed blessings of the Scottish folk revivalists who stumbled on the Travellers in the 1960s. Traveller songs, stories and dances were recorded but then appropriated by the gorgio Scottish Nationalists and folklorists who looked for remnants of the

'pre-Christian era' . . . 'high Celtic Society' . . . the 'neolithic period', 'fallen Cairds' and . . . 'ancient Ossianic hero-tales' among the Travellers. . . . Gypsies/Travellers . . . were more than willing to clad themselves in tartan and play the part. . . . All this . . . presented a very unfair . . . and distorted image. Travellers were seen 'as noble savages . . . whose culture and lifestyle was static. (Reid 1993: 5)

Neatly balancing an insider's view with that of gorgio scholars, Reid rejects the suggestion that Travellers are the custodians of an exclusively Scottish culture. He argues that such folklore belongs to the Gypsy/Traveller community, which transcends Scotland's national boundaries.

At an ESRC workshop in 1993, Reid hinted of his own acceptance of the theory that an independent ethnic group could only be explained by migration from another locality, rather than by self-recruitment and continuing self-generation. He found himself in disagreement with an English Gypsy and representative of the Gypsy Council, who reiterated the theory that English Gypsies came from abroad, whereas Scottish Gypsies were mainly descendants of existing local groups. 'If Scottish

Travellers were only indigenous groups', Reid asked the English Gypsy, 'why did they want to be distinctive?' The English Gypsy had contested that his group had always 'married among themselves', whereas Scottish Travellers had often married outsiders. Reid replied that Scottish Travellers tended to marry cousins. Here was another criterion for authenticity or difference based on extent of group endogamy. Formerly, this debate would have been conducted among gorgio scholars using the language of race, blood and purity.

There were mainly gorgios; some academics, community workers, students and part-time scholars at this workshop. But the dialogue between these two men was a mark of changed times. Two Travellers who had read gorgio texts about their groups, now as self-ascribed members, were using outsiders' theories, but trying them out in terms of their own identities and the wider political context within which Travellers have to survive. The interplay between historical, scholarly theory and the personal involvement of the two discussants had a dramatic intensity that could not be compared with, say, a discussion between individuals from a literate tradition.

Outsider Intellectuals and Theories in Conflict

The encounters at the same workshop seemed at first to be relatively benign. During a lull in the evening social, a New Age Traveller was supporting my alternative thesis that the Gypsies and Travellers could as well have been generated from within as from without. He agreed with the collapse of feudalism thesis and what he called my primarily political and economic explanatory theories. It seemed that such theories could be interpreted as a textual guide to the construction of the New Age Travellers' own 'ethnicity'. I said that I was extremely interested as to whether the New Age Travellers could themselves form a self-reproducing group, i.e. if the offspring of such Travellers were to prefer and choose partners from the current group, which at present consists of self-selected random persons, without a principle of descent. He stared dramatically: 'I can tell you it's already happened.' This was extremely exciting because the emergence of the New Age Travellers could be a late twentieth-century version of the Gypsies' consolidation in earlier European history. The economic consequences of Thatcherism had contributed towards an alternative form of resistance among alienated and disaffected individuals who had taken to the road and exploited solidarity. Here, nearly twenty-five years on from my first fieldwork, I found myself in dialogue with a new form of Traveller and a budding intellectual representative of his loosely aligned group. He had 'left the road' in order to study and take a degree. Just as he was saying to me: 'That's a cracker of a book, yours!', a prominent gorgio supporter of the Indian, 'racial', and 'black' origin of Gypsies came up and gestured towards some Bosnian Gypsy refugees whom he had urged to come along and 'entertain' us that evening with accordion, song and dance.

'Indianist': Well, Judith, they speak the language. Did they pick that up by chance?

Anthropologist: I don't deny the language, like many others, has some Indo-European connections. I question whether those who use Romani dialects can all be said to be descendants of Indians.

'Indianist': How did the language get there then?

Anthropologist: Along the trade and pilgrim routes. There was continuous movement back and forth.

'Indianist': You think they just blacked up their faces and then some went back to China!

Anthropologist: If you're talking about their dark hair, eyes and skin, there are people of the same phenotype in the Mediterranean and parts of Eastern Europe. One of the Bosnian Gypsies said his wife was a gorgio. I doubt she has blonde hair, paler skin or blue eyes.

The irate gorgio walked away, then returned at speed: 'Every time I read your book I want to *burn* it!'

I was taken aback that my attempt to dismantle a potentially racist ideology should have provoked such a reaction. If it had come from an insider Gypsy, I would have felt obliged to think in even more careful ways about the implications of publishing my critique of Indianism, just as I have respected confidentiality on individual details (Okely 1987). However, those Gypsies who have read my work, including Hancock, Gheorghie and Reid, have reacted positively while, as in most intellectual debates, expressing disagreements on some matters. The insider Gypsy intellectuals see me as a resource and I am happy to be in a position to reciprocate something of what I have gained from Gypsies.

The extreme emotional investment that the gorgio scholar above had in Indianism was combined with an archaic and selective view of Gypsy culture as a whole, for his Orientalist interest in Gypsies hardly extended to their contemporary way of life and beliefs.¹ The Bosnian Gypsies, when asked by him to play some music for the assembled seminar participants, declined because at least one of them was in public mourning for his recently deceased father (cf. Okely 1983, ch. 12, for mourning rituals). They delicately avoided embarrassing him by claiming they had 'forgotten' to bring their instruments. Still not getting the message, the gorgio went and found an accordian. The Gypsies told him somewhat unconvincingly that they didn't know how to play that model. Later, the Bosnian Gypsies asked an Irish anthropologist why they had been invited for the evening. Not being professional musicians, they had not understood their function as exotic entertainers. Hitherto, in Yugoslavia, they hadn't experienced the phenomenon of a gaggle of gypsiologists interested in their 'culture'.

These Bosnian Gypsies were a poignant example of the adjustments Gypsies have to make according to the historical moment and transformations in the wider context. Their desperate escape to Britain coincided with changes in their identity,

not only in relation to new types of gorgios who privileged different forms of ethnicity, but also among themselves. One man explained to me in French that the group assembled that evening contained 'Serbs', 'Muslims' and 'Croats'. They were all intermarried, and, like the Bosnians in general, had hitherto not been obliged to reify differences (cf. Bringa 1994). Exile had not undermined their identity as Gypsies, but they would have to experiment with new labels.

Later that evening an English Gypsy drew my attention to the gorgio Indianist, who was teaching the Gypsy a scholastic form of Romani: 'He says you've written that there's no such people as Gypsies!' The Gypsy had not read my book ('I never read') so he was relying on the gorgio's misreading. Here is an example of my third category where a text is distorted beyond the author's control, I explained I did not think that the emphasis on Indian origin was the way to identify all Gypsies. What happened to the Irish and Scottish Travellers and other groups like the Sinti and Yeniche who never claimed nor were assigned a foreign origin? It seemed questionable to set up criteria that downgraded or excluded groups who also believed themselves to be Gypsies. He smiled and said in any case the Irish were not Gypsies, nor even 'real Travellers'. 'So and So' in the International Romani Union wanted them out. I rather mischievously pointed out that the Indianist thought that he, the English Gypsy, was also less 'real' than the Bosnians because he had fair hair and blue eyes. The Indianist was then challenged on this and did not deny his privileging of the Eastern Europeans. I left them to continue the debate.

While the questioning of the mono Indian origin for all Gypsies may be intellectually plausible for social scientists, I recognise that the Gypsies themselves may pick and choose - including from gorgio intellectuals what they see as politically expedient. However, it is puzzling as to why the work of the gorgio anthropologist should be seen as a near-inflammatory threat to gorgio intellectuals and gypsologists. There is psychic as well as political capital in Orientalism. Over the years, no new evidence has emerged to modify my scepticism towards the Indianist line. Meanwhile, the Indianist linguistic discourse is hegemonically extended.

In the wider political and historical context, which the academy inhabits, the intellectual's influence is beyond individual control. The text can be appreciatively absorbed, misrepresented or provide powerful legitimacy. The Gypsies may be largely written about by gorgios, but they have to be acquainted with the dominant society's ideologies and plans for them. They adapt and distort accordingly. If a specific ideological mood has changed, the Gypsies know this. The exotic images enhanced in popular gorgio ideological representations have helped to create, enhance or racialise Gypsy ethnicity. The social scientist may feel compelled to analyse and deconstruct them. Whether or not the appeal of such representations can be dismantled by theoretical scrutiny is another matter. As critics of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have suggested, it is insufficient to expose people's traditions as recent, invented and therefore false consciousness if the circumstances in which they are generated are not

also considered. The anthropologist intellectual can neither choose nor predict what aspects of ethnic ideology a group may need or desire.

At the same time, there are arrogances and dangers in acting as a fictive leader of an ethnic group. Instead, there are more transparent political opportunities for alliance, support or action and individual testimony by outsiders. There are also pedagogical and political possibilities in texts. Puxon and Kenrick's extensively amended (1972) and newly titled volume *Gypsies under the Swastika* (1995) confirms their more grounded and long-lasting contribution as intellectuals. The book evinces less speculation than its predecessor. They have meticulously documented the much-neglected Gypsy Holocaust. One former office holder in Gypsy organisations has relinquished any lingering claims as fictive leader and foreteller of the Gypsies' 'Destiny' (Puxon and Kenrick 1972).

Intellectual and academic writing may influence a subsequent generation, the majority of whom are non-Gypsies who may later acquire hegemonic powers. Some will be Gypsies. Although texts cannot suit every political contingency for vulnerable minorities, their range in critical content has potential for good. Texts can subvert received, racist and repressive representations, and more besides.

NOTE

1 This man simultaneously worked for the Gypsies as an intermediary in asylum disputes.

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