AUTHENTICITY, EXPERTISE, SCHOLARSHIP AND POLITICS: CONFLICTING GOALS IN ROMANI STUDIES

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Introduction

Even though I am now a professor, I have decided to leave my driving licence in the name of "Dr Acton". If you arrive at an eviction, or want to stand bail for someone, as more and more people are being locked up for the offence of being foreigners, then I have found that "Dr" goes down very well with the police where "Professor" would be merely puzzling. Provided I am respectably dressed and nicely spoken, they treat a doctorate not as an achievement which they have to scrutinise, but as an ascribed status, which they can respect without thinking twice.

Expertise is also such a status. As an expert witness in court cases, I am not required, as I would have to in an academic paper, to make out an evidential case. Rather, I establish my credentials (so many years of study, so many publications) and then offer my opinion, which then, in itself, coming from an expert, becomes evidence. The substance of my opinion will be disputed only if there is also an expert on the other side; and even then the contest will be more of eloquence than of science.

So I go to planning cases, and offer my opinion that various appellants against refusal of planning permission for caravan sites are indeed Gypsies, and therefore entitled to Gypsy status under planning law. It is not enough for a Gypsy to say he is a Gypsy in court; it takes a non-Gypsy professor like me to say it convincingly. There is a certain irony in the fact that I, who started my academic career by "debunking the myth of the true Gypsy" should have come to certifying the authenticity of particular Gypsy individuals within state processes.

This perhaps illustrates the difference between scholarship and expertise. Scholarship is about expanding our knowledge; by definition the frontiers of knowledge will also be where it is most recent and uncertain. The language of scholarship is nuanced and tentative. The consumers of expertise, by contrast, require instant and unambiguous solutions, and usually ones that will help them implement policies, the main lines of which they have already decided, or politically determined.

I engage in such activities, because I believe it is right for me to put my knowledge at the disposal of individual Gypsies to help redress the centuries of oppression of their community (Acton, 1979). But the logic of this self-justification comes disturbingly close to that of the "racial scientists" in the Nazi regime who justified their certification of individuals as Jews, Gypsies or mentally defective to go the concentration camps, by claiming that that they issued as few certificates as possible, and by being careful and scientific in their work were actually able to save many people from the camps by refusing certificates in individual cases (Müller-Hill, 1984). If they had not chosen the people to go to the gas chamber, someone else

would have done and perhaps sent more. In taking part in a system, which allows the majority of planning applications from big business, but refuses the majority of those from Gypsies, and in arguing within planning, immigration and race relations law from premises that I reject both morally and scientifically, am I colluding with an unjust system that I ought to be changing, or at least bearing a more consistent witness against? Till recently, the distinguished Finnish anthropologist Martti Grönfors took such a position, refusing all requests, even from Gypsies themselves, to testify. Am I prostituting my scholarship as mere expertise, when I ought to be using to using it to undergird actual changes in policy?

The answers to such questions depend on our understanding of the tasks of scholarship itself; which looks like a question of moral philosophy. I shall argue in this lecture, however, that contrary to the positivistic separation of debates over values and fact that Hume implanted into British philosophy, in fact our understanding of the purposes of scholarship depends partly upon our epistemology, that is to say our understanding of how we evaluate the truth or authenticity of facts.

"True Gypsies" and Truth

It is a commonplace which I asserted in my own doctoral studies (Acton 1974), and which most recently has been reprised by Willems (1997), the leader of the Dutch school of social constructionist Gypsy history, that whereas most racism consists of complaining that people resemble too much various ethnic stereotypes, when it comes to Gypsies, the most common racist complaint is that they do *not* resemble the historic stereotype of "the true Gypsy".

This paradox has been with me since I began work as a student educational volunteer in Hornchurch, Essex in 1967, with two nomadic groups who call themselves in their own languages, "Romanichals" and "Minceir". I have been working with Gypsies ever since. Frequently, however, I still come across English people, who have never themselves knowingly met a Gypsy, and are fascinated by my life experience, which appears like a bridge to phenomena that hitherto had been a myth to them. After they have heard what I do, they will draw me aside, lower their voices, and ask me, as if they are imparting some great secret, whether I realise that only a few of the people I have met are "True Gypsies" and that the great majority of people living by the side of the road are not real Gypsies any more, but some kind of imposter.

How can it be? What peculiarity of English racist ideology is it that enables these people innocently to suppose that they are in possession of some esoteric general truth about Romani people, that I might not have understood, even though I have actually been working with Gypsies for more than thirty years, and have given advice to ministers and magistrates, popes and presidents.

At one level I have repeatedly given an explanation of this phenomenon (Acton 1974, 1994a, 1995b) in terms of the history of English Gypsy politics and community relations; it is the theoretical work for which I am best known, and I will, later in this lecture summarise my account of the social construction of ethnic identity as it applies to Gypsies, because I realise that pervasive though it is within the field of Romani Studies, it has yet to form part of the common knowledge of the general

reader or listener. In fact, it is hard for it to do so, because at points it contradicts parts of that common knowledge and common sense.

This difficulty points to the realisation that, at another level, the explanation of specific popular misconceptions in their historical context, does not constitute an explanation of the process of misconception as such. That is to say, I may demolish and deconstruct particular racist stereotypes such as the "didekai" or the "tinker" without affecting the gut feeling of the reader or listener that there must be some correct way of characterising those who are not authentic Gypsies. Or, to put it another way, when we consider the notion of the "True Gypsy", it is the notion of "truth" that has to be problematised as much as the notion of "Gypsy". Or, to put it yet another way, why is it that Europeans find such difficulty in operating their criteria of truth or authenticity in respect to the phenomena known as Gypsies? Why, when there are around twelve million Romani-identifying persons in the world am I the first Professor of Romani Studies, and how can I claim any authority to such a title? How do Europeans assess my expertise? How, indeed, do Gypsies? Can their ideas create a common scholarly discourse?

Acknowledgements and the foundations of knowledge

Inaugural lectures, which attempt to assert the authority of new professors, conventionally begin with a display of mock humility, which compensates for its implausibility by an excess of sentimentality in the acknowledgement of obligations. Very real debts of honour compel me to follow suit. First, as a human being I thank God. When we are young, we have a plethora of aspirations; as I have grown old I have realised that to be a teacher who writes occasional books about Gypsies was exactly what was right for me. When I was ten it seemed to me I heard the voice of God asking me whose side I was on. I committed then, and was later baptised in the Baptist Church in Brentwood where I am still a member.

There is much we could debate about why some people are, in the words of Max Weber, "religiously musical" and others not; but what I do know for sure is that had I not at times of greatest difficulty felt the presence of Jesus Christ, or, despite their occasional suspicions of my strange ways, felt the support and love of my religious community, armouring me against the cynical presumptions of the world, there is much that otherwise I never could have done. Of course, as a scholar I think we must criticise everything, and if a line of reasoning challenges faith, we are more, not less, obligated to follow it; it perhaps irks religious friends that my most central belief is that I may be mistaken in anything; but irreligious friends have not understood me if they do not realise that despite my scepticism, anti-clericalism and the numerous personal failings which impair my witness, yet I have faith.

It is my wife and children who keep my feet firmly on the ground , who never fail, in the words of the hymn, to "tell me the same old story/ when [they] have cause to fear/ that this world's empty glory/ is costing me too dear". To my parents, I owe an uncommon experience and example of love and righteousness.

Within Gypsy community work all of us owe more to Grattan Puxon than is realised. His firm belief in and practice of the plasticity of truth helped him to change it. His

was the leadership which secured the 1968 Caravan Sites Act and created the first World Romani Congress and then simply refused, even fled from, the position of pre-eminence which could have been his (but perhaps, he saw rightly , should not have been). He said "The first rule in politics is 'Be there!'" and then, suddenly, he wasn't. He taught us that the impossible in politics is only that whose possibility has not yet been shown.

Another, utterly different, great figure to whom I owe a personal debt is the late Uriah Burton, the man who in 1972 opened up the route to private Gypsy site provision that had been closed since the 1960 Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act. A bare-knuckle boxing champion, unable to read or write, he was a man who believed in speaking the truth and shaming the devil. There are those in the audience who knew him far better than I, and will tell you that all the extraordinary tales about him, kidnapping Irishmen to build a monument to his father atop a Welsh mountain, the way in which he forced those around him to honour their promises and yet kept their respect, his kindness to strangers - all these stories are true (Burton 1979). I have learned since that the club of Yui Burton's friends is a good one to which to belong - and his enemies are people I never cared much for. I spoke for him at his planning appeal, in 1972, and saw how his rich Gypsy friends mocked his public stance, and how racist villagers denigrated him, and saw him run from the end of his testimony to weep in his motor; and I saw how he triumphed over all these setbacks to create a Romani caravan site on which non-Gypsies were always welcome, where the poor, the rich and the homeless found sanctuary side by side.

He was a man who never cared twice about defying Romani tradition if it conflicted with his personal ideas of right and wrong; but was seen by others as almost embodying Romani notions of truth and honour, not for cleverness, but because of the rock-like integrity they perceived in him. And yet he himself was aware that all integrity is relative. Once when I was leaving his caravan late at night to drive back from Cheshire to Oxford, he saw it was raining and that I had no coat. He insisted I take his donkey jacket - the only time I think, that someone has actually given me the coat off their back - and then, as I must have been looking too respectfully at him, he said "Don't go admiring me too much, boy. In some things I am an honourable man, but in other things I am a rogue!"

I take that as recognition that all standards of honour and truth are particular, and so when we judge others by our own, we may be deceived in them. And therefore our ideas of authenticity are the result of a social process; but this social process is disciplined by the real world. Understanding the process is properly the task of sociology and the subject of this lecture.

I owe a great deal also to many other Romani and Traveller friends: Tom Lee, Jim Penfold, Peter Mercer, Charles Smith, Sylvia Dunn and Eli Frankham to name but a few, and a particular debt to those who are also academics, Professor Ian Hancock at the University of Texas in Austin, and Nicolae Gheorghe of the Institute of Social Research in Bucharest. Ian Hancock has been the scholarly conscience of Romani (and Creole) linguistics for 30 years; his dissection (Hancock 1997) of the linguistic effects on non-Gypsy misapprehension of Romani terminology is an exemplary deconstruction of racism, matching his political record as the International Romani

Union representative at the UN, and now a presidential appointee to the US Holocaust Commission. Nicolae Gheorghe is a classically trained sociologist whose dedication to improving community relations in the face of threats and actual kidnap brought me for the first time to share Max Weber's concept of sociology as a vocation.

My greatest debt, however, as a scholar is to my teacher, friend and best man, Donald Kenrick. Throughout my adult life he has held before me an example of committed scholarship, preferring the democracy of adult education to the elitism of the university, researching without personal ambition, in the pursuit of truth and the service of the people. He and my parents are three people whom I have never seen approached for help within their power to give, that they did not give. If Jesus Christ is to be described, in part, at least as a man who went about doing good, then he must have been more like this atheistic Jew than anyone else I know.

Two other scholars without whom my work could not have proceeded are Jean-Pierre Liégeois, (1976) who theorised at a European level that which I intially only theorised at an British level, and Angus Fraser (1964,1967) whose careful investigations in the 1960s, in which he repudiates the then conventional racist explanations, which he himself had once espoused (Fraser, 1953), mark the real beginning of the modern study of Gypsy politics. Fraser's repudiation of racism has, perhaps left him sceptical of theory in general; but in the past 45 years he has read almost everything written about Gypsies in a plethora of languages, as his historical synthesis (Fraser 1992) demonstrates. His scepticism has consequently saved many of us from committing or perpetuating errors. There is no substitute for time in the acquisition of scholarship, and when Fraser describes one of our pet theories as "speculative", the rest of us ignore him at our peril. None of this however, has protected Fraser himself from the criticisms of the radical social constructionists. Willems (1997:293) suggests that he is synthesising a discourse as though it were scientific, when he ought to be deconstructing it, and so is in fact colluding with the myth of the "true Gypsy".

Which came first - the facts or the truth ?

Willems (1997:293) writes

*"In his general overview, **The Gypsies** (1992) Angus Fraser concludes that Grellmann at the end of the eighteenth century restored the ethnic identity of Gypsies by revealing their origins by examining their language... I have tried to convince the reader that it was more a matter of him constructing a Gypsy identity which previously had not existed as such. What took place was not the historical retrieval of knowledge that had been lost, but the synthesis of different approaches and the creation of unity in ways of thinking about diverse population groups."*

I have played my own part in setting up social constructionist paradigms, which may be why some of the social constructionists treat my rebuttals of them as though it were a kind of treachery; but I seek to argue here that knowledge has referents; knowledge is about something more than just itself. At many points Willems' arguments would not be sustainable if he had a more extensive acquaintance with

Gypsies themselves, or Romani dialects. The disagreement between Fraser and Willems, however, has more to do with their different understanding of what it is for statements to be true. Fraser's approach is the commonsense one that philosophers call a "correspondence" theory; that Grellmann (1787) was more successful because his theory fitted the facts better. Willems' view is, as I have said, social constructionist, or, as the Oxford philosophers of my youth called it "constructivist". He suggests that Grellman's views prevailed and led to his academic preferment, because they coincided with the policy approaches being adopted by the German states, following the "reforms" of the Empress Maria Theresa.

There is not necessarily an incompatibility here; it is reasonable to suggest that, after all, ideologies may be more successful when they are also quite plausible. The conclusion which, however, I cannot avoid drawing from Willems, is that he has problematised the authenticity of what scholars say, in the most fundamental way, in the same way that the ideology of "the true Gypsy" problematises what particular Gypsies say. Whether we wish it or not, we have no choice but to engage in philosophy.

Before this cloud of witnesses, however, I tremble to discuss the nature of truth in Romani studies. And I am aware that the religiosity I have just displayed adds to the philosophical problems I pose myself. Our former head of sociology, Mark Cousins, was wont to comment sarcastically about individuals subject to "the illusion of religion" and then look meaningfully at me. The majority of sociologists espouse no religion, and the few of us that do are generally expected to argue our corner within the discourse of sociology as though our personal beliefs had no relevance; that is to say, we deal with the cognitive dissonance involved by adopting the strategy commonly known, in the sociology of religion, at least, as "methodological atheism".

As sociology of knowledge, I find this compromise unsatisfactory. My overall philosophical position is similar to that of Berkeley, (1734,1901) who reconciles his empiricist epistemology with a rationalist ontology and scientific method by assuming that the experience, the perceptions, of God over-determine the perceptions of human beings. (There is somewhat of a parallel here with Althusser's (1969) notion of the material world's over-determination of ideology in the last instance; God is reality for Berkeley in the way that matter is, for Marxists.) If a thinker adopts a position such as Berkeley's they are relieved to some extent of the responsibility of declaring a firm and coherent epistemological position of their own; in other words, admission of the possibility of error is at least psychologically more comfortable than for those the validity of whose overall. approach seems to them logically dependent upon its epistemological foundations. I am not worried by the thought that my account of my epistemological foundations may have been devised from within the overall systems, rather than being, strictly, "foundations".

Romani nationalism and the "True Gypsy"

It is this spirit that I wish to criticise, or at least to speculate about the position that I have held on the authenticity of Romani experience during the 1980s. That position, shared with the great majority of those associated with the International Romani Union might be described as one of Romani nationalism. It was a very mild form of

nationalism, cultural, anti-territorial, and looking to Gandhi and Fanon as its inspirations, (Acton 1974) but nonetheless it did not scruple to call itself nationalism. It was developed in dialectical opposition to the earlier discourse of European states and scholars about the "true Gypsy" which formed a variant of European "scientific racism", well analysed from different points of view by Hancock (1987), Mayall (1988) and most recently, Willems (1997) which has been called "Gypsylorism" (after its flagship publication, the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society). Romani nationalism saw itself as combatting Gypsylorist racism in much the same way as anti-colonial movements had combatted European imperialism, and thus being under the same necessity of "nation-building", of bringing together the diverse Gypsy groups of different countries into a common Romani identity based on culture (but actually not excluding those Roma who still thought off the difference between themselves and Gaje as "natural", something best explained in fairy-tale dialogues between Mr Hare and Mr Rabbit, or Mr Fox and Mr Dog; anti-racism is rarely so strong politically that it can afford to be too sniffy about counter-racisms as allies in combatting ethnic discrimination.)

It is the ambiguities of this nationalism and their criticism by Gheorghe (1997) which lead me to question its philosophical coherence. In order, however, to avoid the temptation of setting it up as a straw man, we should examine (if we still dare, post Willems, present historical syntheses!) why it was necessary; and the ideology that it sought to dethrone.

The Roma in Europe - a tale of two genocides

Roma, descendants in part at least of Indian emigrants, first arrived in Western Europe during the fifteenth century as the boundaries between Turkish and Western domination moved back and forth. At that time Gypsies clearly had sophisticated leadership able either to negotiate (or, Fraser (1992) suggests, sometimes forge) safe-conducts from popes, kings and emperors. Although there is evidence of individual conflicts, and even decrees expelling Gypsies, first as spies or after complaints of theft (which we should not take at face value), they were within the social order of the day. They were excellent smiths; they may even have brought gun metal with them from India to Europe. They practised medicine and entertained in mansions and palaces. Vocabularies collected before the first great genocide show that their language was not in this earliest period a secret, and they may even have known, as the monks of Forli suggested in 1422, that they originally came from India (Vaux de Foletier 1970, pp 18,25). In the mid-16th century, however circumstances changed radically.

The suddenness of this change is disguised in the classical Gypsylorist literature, which presents Roma as steadily subject to persecution (and thence, when enlightenment permitted, to assimilation). I have aged, however, (Acton 1974, 1994a) that Gypsy history is in fact cyclical, with crises of persecution which lead to new adaptations by Gypsies, new symbiotic relations with a host community, until fresh economic or social changes undermine that symbiosis and produce a fresh crisis. In Britain the agitations before the Moveable Dwellings Bills of the 1880s and the Caravan Sites Act 1968 were such crises locally. At a West European level, however, Romani history can be periodised by two main genocidal episodes; one which starts

in the sixteenth century, and subsides as the classic "Gypsy way of life" is created, and one in the twentieth century, which has rendered untenable that traditional adaptation.

By 1600 the sophisticated leadership, and the Romani contribution to scientific, medical and cultural life had been dispersed as though it had never been. Within a generation everything had changed. Expulsion laws could no longer work when most other countries were also expelling Gypsies, and from the mid-16th century we find laws across Europe making it a capital offence merely to be a Gypsy (Liégeois 1987, pp 90-94). These genocidal laws usually come at the point where political crises are forcing the state to mark its territorial and moral-cultural national boundaries; arguably, the systematic killing of Gypsies can be seen as the defining rite de passage in the maturation of the European nation-state. Such laws were enforced with varying rigour until the 18th century and were often not formally repealed till the 19th century.

For a couple of hundred years there was virtually no inter-country Gypsy migration in Europe, apart from small movements of refugees or indentured labour to the Americas. And even the ethnic character of the "pretended Egyptians'" was simply denied. After the 16th century we find no further vocabularies of Romani published till the late 18th century when Europeans (re)- "discover" Romani and its Indian roots. Prior to that we find assertions that the Gypsies have no language of their own, but only a made-up gibberish, mere jargon or slang (Hancock 1988). Relative darkness of skin-pigmentation was asserted to be the result of rubbing on ointments.

One consequence of this unrepented genocidal episode is that when in the 19th and 20th centuries scholars (including some of Romani ethnicity) began to realise something of the scale of what had happened to Gypsies, they tended to explain it in terms of supposed characteristics of the Gypsy community derived from the post-genocidal image of Gypsies which they have projected back onto the pre-genocidal community. Thus we are told that non-Gypsies resented Gypsies' non-adherence to the established church, or their tendency to thievery. But if it were these supposed characteristics of the Gypsy community that led to their persecution why did the large scale judicial murders or hunts of Gypsies not start as soon as they entered Western Europe? Equally, I do not wish to suggest that these persecutions, though undoubtedly racist, can be explained psychologically simply by referring to European racism, as though that suddenly burgeoned all of its own in the mid-16th century.

It was not Gypsies or Europeans who had changed, but Europe itself. It is essential that we do not see these early slaughters of Gypsies as some private Gypsy tragedy, but as part of general economic and political history. In England, for example, the beginning of agricultural capitalism and the foundation of the nation-state were accompanied by inflation at hitherto unknown rates, and the start of unemployment in the modern sense (as opposed to the underemployment in times of scarcity in feudal society). Real agricultural wages in 1600 were a third of what they had been in 1500; there had been massive redistribution from the poor to the rich (Tawney, 1912, 1924). These phenomena led to religious and ethnic hatreds and scapegoating of which Gypsies were very far from the only victims. Jewish, African, French and Dutch people all suffered (Pollins 1982, Holmes 1988); but Gypsies were not only dark-

skinned foreigners; they were also "vagrants". Gypsies above all became scapegoats for the distress underlying and contradicting the glories of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. And when expulsions failed, executions followed.

The dispossesssed agricultural labourers did not readily find new employment; nor, after Henry VIII were the monasteries there to cushion the plight of the indigent. All these redundant labourers could do was to migrate to whatever economic opportunities were available, and in betweenwhiles beg. The "sturdy beggars" and the "vagrants" of Elizabethan England became the hate-objects of the establishment that "welfare-scroungers" are today, blamed without qualification for their own fate (Bindoff 1950, Ribton-Turner 1887). And the solution proposed by the Elizabethan Poor Law was precisely that proposed by establishment experts for third world agricultural countries, such as Ethiopia, encountering the beginning of capitalism today; that the "vagrants" should go back to their own villages and try again, or be relieved there. "Vagrancy" was seen not as the effect, but as the cause of the economic crisis.

Thus, commercial nomadism came to be identified with Gypsy culture. When Roma had first reached Western Europe, commercial nomadism was a vibrant and accepted sector of the medieval economy (Jusserand 1888). Ethnic groups could compete in this on equal terms. The demonisation of vagrancy, however, made all Travellers suspect, able to survive only if at every stage of their commercial circuit they could find trusted customers and protectors/patrons - often the very rural magistrates officially required to expel or exterminate them. Commercial nomads are not actually the same as migrant labourers; where they could avoid persecution, they could make a living. Commercial nomads of whatever ethnicity had to hang together, or hang separately. And so we find emerging, from the 17th century, in every political unit of north-western Europe a single, small, localised commercial nomadic group. Most of these call themselves Romanies or Gypsies; a few, mainly from smaller countries, such as Ireland, must have historically protected themselves from prejudice by insisting they are NOT Gypsies (Acton, 1994b). Even the Romani-identifying groups, however, are usually highly adapted to the majority culture of that political unit. Within the British Isles we have four such "old" Travelling groups - the Welsh, English, Scottish and Irish Travellers, that is, in their own languages, the Kale, Romanichals, Nawkens and Minceirs. And there is only ever one group per 16th century political unit.

"True Gypsies" and Scapegoating

By the late 19th century, when there were fresh waves of emigration from the larger Romani communities of Eastern Europe, West European Gypsies often hardly knew there were Gypsies in other countries. They tended to insist, that only their own immediate associates were "True Gypsies" and all others were half-breeds or imitations. On the other hand, if they were dealing with Gaje who they believed to be prejudiced against Gypsies, it might well be more convenient to insist that that in fact they were only travelling traders, who should not be persecuted as though they were "Gypsies".

The Gypsylorists who sat at their campfires, and bribed them with tobacco and sixpences to tell them Romani words, were immensely flattered that they had met with the "true Gypsies", or even, if they were very lucky, the king of the Gypsies, and wrote books, dressed up in the anthropological jargon of scientific racism, explaining how only a few of their personal friends were "true Gypsies" - and all the rest were disreputable half-breeds or imitations. This then constituted the academic literature on Gypsies down to the 1960s; there was a twenty-year lag between the discrediting of scientific racism in mainstream academia and its being abandoned in Romani Studies (and indeed. Kohn (19 95) shows that in Eastern Europe it has not yet been completely abandoned.)

Policy-makers and local authority officials from the 1920s on read this literature and then went to inspect the Gypsies on their patch. They took in what they saw as the general disorder, as they saw it, of roadside encampments, and asked their inhabitants if they were Gypsies. The Gypsies, well used to discrimination, would answer "Gypsies?, no sir, not us sir!". One response, I have always cherished, shared with me by an old friend who said he always told the police "Well, yes, sir, my name is Lee, but it's spelled "L-E.I-G-H", not "L-E-E", the Gypsy way, sir!"

He told me it never failed; but in fact such a response fitted right into the scheme of things that the local authorities had gathered from the literature; they had read that there were only a few real Gypsies and the rest were scruffy imitations; and lo and behold here, self-confessed, were the scruffy imitations. So in the twentieth century we find a secondary academic social policy literature on the Gypsies, equally racist, but with one important difference. Both agree that Gypsies were divided into the true and the false; but while the anthropological Gypsylorists allegedly spent all their time with the true, the social administrators only ever encountered the false; which of course was which each needed for their own professional purposes; while the Gypsies themselves, if adroit enough, could be true or false as the occasion demanded. But mostly local authorities defended themselves against charges of racial oppression by asserting that those they sought to expel or assimilate were only half-breeds.

The only problem with this complicated but convenient racist ideology is that it was hard to fix on a label for the false Gypsies. For some forty years "didekai", an urban English Romani term of mild derision for rural Gypsies was pressed into service, but it was discredited by Reeves (1960), Fraser (1964,1967) and others in the 1960s. Ethnic rivalry between Romanichals and Minceir in the 1960s led to the term "Tinker" being substituted in the next twenty years, until contemporary ethnography demonstrated - as Irish legislation is about to acknowledge - that Irish Travellers are "an ethnic group in their own right". Most recently, the reified nature of ethnicity in contemporary discourse has brought "New Age Travellers" to act as the label of inauthenticity. Although local authorities have reluctantly accepted that it may, in principle, be wrong to discriminate racially against people because they *are* Gypsies, they are still deeply committed to the idea that it is fine to discriminate racially against people because they are *not* Gypsies (Acton 1992).

The new Romani nationalism of the 1960s reacted against this scapegoating by explicitly seeking to transcend divisions it saw as "tribal". It accepted the variety of Gypsy or Traveller ethnicity, and sought to build institutions which included not only

those populations which had asserted they were Romani, but also a number, such as the Minceir (" Irish Travellers") and self-identified Jenisch in the German-speaking parts of Switzerland whose own traditions asserted that they were, above all, *not* Gypsies. In each case these non-Romani-identifying groups are a relatively small group, within a relatively small nation-state, subject to the economic hegemony of a larger Romani-identifying group in a larger and more powerful neighbouring state with a record of discrimination and occasional genocide against Gypsies. It is hardly surprising then, that from the confused genocidal times of the 16th century onwards the elders of these groups cultivated in their children a resolute denial, eventually internalised and believed by the group themselves, that they did not belong to the discriminated against category of "Gypsy". Such a social strategy could succeed only because of the general assumption of European racism was that claims to indigeneity are self-validating. This is so, however much historians like Willems (1998:309) or Mayall (1988) may see the term "indigenous" as a clear and unambiguous term, rather than as an incoherent ideological construct of the very "primordialist" theory of ethnicity that they profess to despise.

As Hancock (1987) and Willems (1997) demonstrate, however, from the late 18th century on, to belong to one despised Gypsy or Travelling group rather than another, was of, at best, marginal advantage in facing the authoritarian states of the 19th and 20th century. For "racial scientists" like Ritter in Nazi Germany, it was even more important to get rid of the supposed half-breeds and degenerate local stock than of the supposed "true" Gypsies. It was this thorough-going genocidal approach, and the failure of Europeans to stigmatise its theorists and practitioners after 1945 (as happened to those who attempted the genocide of the Jews) that rendered non-viable the particularistic survival strategies of Gypsy groups after the first round of genocidal episodes from the 16th century on. In the authoritarian industrial state, the caravan is as great an offence as the ghetto. The new, universalistic, pan-Gypsy politics was the logical consequence.

The delegations to successive World Romani Congresses, like other anti-racist movements, have in common first of all the common experience of persecutory and genocidal racism. Building on that, they are able to find many other cultural similarities, of which the kinship of Romani dialects and the ways of thinking about cleanliness and propriety are the most obvious. Differences of interests among the different groups, have however, been equally obvious. West European Gypsy politics took wings around the resistances to eviction of commercial nomads. East European Gypsy politics has often actually found the association with nomadism and offensive stereotype, and concentrated in the communist era on the defence of language and culture, with poverty, civil rights and protection from violence becoming more important since 1989. North American and Australian Gypsy politics have emerged as more akin to the kind of anti-defamation movements espoused by other minorities in those countries (until recently when the growing migration of asylum-seekers drew Ronald Lee, an old-style Romani nationalist intellectual, into leading a passionate immigrant defence campaign.) There is also a complicated politics of language around issues of standardisation and the defence of politics (Acton 1995).

Despite the vigorous factional politics of international Romani politics, there has been, more or less consensus that a common national identity has to be built to under-

write common institutions which will be strong and legitimate enough to represent a Romani people internationally, and accept collective reparations similar to those paid to Israel, from states like Germany deemed to be the successor regimes of those who pursued genocide against the Gypsies. This has been encouraged by international institutions, such as the United Nations, (which recognised the I.R.U. in 1979) the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and even the Roman Catholic Church (Woityla 1992), and the Soros Foundation (Kawczynski 1997), who have seen nation-states' treatment of Roma as a paradigmatic case for transnational political intervention to avoid further genocide and persecution, or at least the economic disruption which they see as consequent upon the reduction of the Gypsies to they position they theorise as "an underclass". To legitimate their interventions, such bodies need the most legitimate possible Romani negotiating partner. In this they are continuously frustrated, because the real differences of interest and ideology of Romani politicians have led to a factionalism which, so far at least, has prevented the building of any financially secure institutional base to which it would be politically possible to pay collective reparations. The Pentecostal Romani churches are notably better organised and self-financed by their members than the Romani political organisations.

Nonetheless, Gypsy political activity in civil rights, education, and culture has grown exponentially since the 1960s, stiffened by an ever-growing educated youth ill-prepared to tolerate prejudice their elders took for granted. For these the continual failure of the aspirations that Romani nationalism formulated in the 1960s is deeply frustrating. The failures of Romani political organisations have become the subject of theoretical investigation and debate by Romani intellectuals themselves.

One of the most interesting approaches is that of Nicolae Gheorghe. After analysing the variety of approaches that Romani and Traveller political organisations take to formulating their rights as "indigenous peoples", "ethnic minorities", "national minorities" or an international or transnational minority, and the awkward differences these make to international law (Acton and Gheorghe 1995) he has gone on to point out that all of these minority approaches carry with them some problems as a human rights strategies. When one demands status as a national minority, one implicitly concedes and recognises the rights of the national majority to determine that status (Gheorghe 1997). When one demands full citizenship, one implicitly concedes the right of the state to define and exclude non-citizens. When one demands international minority status, one concedes the right of governments to get together and strike bargains about others' human rights without consulting them. In short, all of these "citizenship" and "minority rights" approaches function to shore up the legitimacy of ethnic majoritarianism and the nation-state. There are no natural ethnic majorities; they are created only by the arbitrary territorial limitations of the nation-state; in short by the shabby compromises according to which ethnic-majoritarian nation-state governments agree to bound their monopolies of legitimate violence in the marches between them. Nation-building in Africa and Eastern Europe in the 20th century, as much as Western Europe in the 16th century and America in the 18th and 19th centuries, has always been marked by ethnic cleansing and genocide against minorities. In accepting or seeking the status of national minority, then Romani politicians may be falling into the trap of fighting on the enemy's territory. They

should, suggest Gheorghe (1997) "play with" their multiple identities to question the various demands for authenticity made upon them.

This almost amounts to an attack on the idea of the nation-state itself. In an official position paper written jointly with Andrzej Mirga for the Project on Ethnic Relations (an American NGO close to the US Foreign Policy establishment), Gheorghe is more cautious, acknowledging "at the present time the ethnic mobilisation option is the strongest", but at the same time, asserting "The Romani community itself needs new ideas to govern and mobilise itself, and it is the Romani elites who must fashion those ideas." (Gheorghe and Mirga 1997;34-5). This "elitism" has been contrasted (on ROMNET, the largest of the Romani e-mail networks) by the linguist Yaron Matras with the "populism" of non-academic Romani politicians like Kawczynski (1997), leading to a vigorous electronic controversy between Mirga and Matras.

Back to the truth

New authenticity, new expertise, new scholarship! I am driven back to that old stand-by of linguistic (or, as it was called where I studied, "Oxford") philosophy, trying to understand the notion of truth itself. The one-time Oxford domination of this debate can be seen from the fact that when a distinguished Princeton Professor edited a reader on the topic for American students (Pitcher 1964), all but one of the papers included came from Oxford. Perhaps, however, the word "domination" should be "self-referentiality". When I was 19 in 1967, (before 1968 changed us all) I introduced my linguistic philosophy tutor to Chomsky, and my politics tutor to Marcuse. What I hope to suggest, by contrasting the subsequent history of two of the philosophers in Pitcher's collection - and their wives - is that theories of truth, even from within the hermetic world of Oxford philosophy, have consequences for social action; and also that these general social consequences have particular consequences for Gypsies.

Pitcher's collection centres on the 1950 debate between Austin and Strawson, in which Austin (1950) tried to present an improved version of the "correspondence" theory of truth, while Strawson (1950) asserted that the assertions that a statement is true are not further statements about the original statement, but merely a kind of repetition or endorsement of it. In other words, Austin argues that to say of a statement that it was true was to say *that the facts agreed with it*, while Strawson thought it was to say t*hat the listener agreed with it*. We may see that there is something of Austin in Fraser, and something of Strawson in Willems. I wish to examine more closely, however, two younger philosophers in the collection, Geoffery Warnock and Michael Dummett, who sought to transcend this debate. I shall argue that the Warnock approach to truth is popular, and gives easy access to the policy debate, without actually helping to resolve policy problems, while the Dummett approach can offer real resolutions of problems in popular knowledge, which, however, make little impact on the popular mood.

Warnock (1964:65-66) tried to reconstruct the consensus of Oxford linguistic philosophy, adopting a kind of middle position between Austin and Strawson. To say something is true, he says, may be a statement about a statement, but he is not quite sure what that statement may mean; it may mean no more than the listener's

agreement suggested by Strawson. Dummett, on the other hand borrows from mathematical intutionism to create an alternative to naive realism, by looking at the criteria which people apply to truth rather than assuming that an immediately accessible reality is *the* criterion of truth. He asserts "*it is possible to hold that the intuitionist substitution of an account of the **use** of a statement for an account of its truth conditions as the general form of explanation of meaning should be applied to all realms of discourse without thinking that we create the world; we can abandon realism without falling into subjective idealism.*" (Dummett, 1959,1964: 110-111). By contrast, Warnock's position might be described as trying to retain both realism *and* subjective idealism.

Geoffery Warnock, though attaining a knighthood, remained all his life within the ivory tower. He had, however, a wife, Mary Warnock, also an Oxford philosophy don, who has led a lifetime of public service and become a baroness. In the 1960s she tried to expound Sartre and Heidegger within the discourse of Oxford philosophy, in the course of which she demonstrated a similar "having it all ways" approach to the notions of truth and authenticity. Thus she finds some "justice" in Sartre's exposition of Heidegger's idea of the way in which the individual should move from inauthenticity to authenticity, but at the same time cuts them down to size by remarking "*that one common effect of the truly Existentialist writer is to provoke in his readers the exasperated desire to rewrite what he says in plain language and show that it doesn't after all amount to more than a platitude"*(Warnock, 1967:15). Finally, she concludes: "*the demands of philosophy, exactness, objectivity and the attempt to say what is true, are the very demands which Existentialism is committed, on principle, to rejecting. Perhaps we must conclude that Existentialism, as a way of thinking, is more naturally suited to express itself in novels, plays, films and other unargued statements of how the world is"* (Warnock, 1967:57).

One can see how this no-nonsense approach may have recommended her to those who appointed her headmistress of a direct grant school, and then mistress of Girton (a college of the university of Cambridge), and why both Labour and Conservative governments turned to her to chair major enquiries. It is remarkable how readily practical people can fall for the line that all this intellectual stuff is easy-peasy if you just take a robust commonsense approach to it, especially if the line is fed to them in an Oxford accent. The extra money for the tutorial system is worth it for that alone. It is only with hindsight that Baroness Warnock has begun to appear as one of the great British muddleheads of the twentieth century. Her 1984 report on Human Fertilisation and Embryology is, I think, now widely regarded as more of a fudge than a compromise, suggesting that if something is morally dubious, one shouldn't do too much of it, (and certainly not in the streets where it might frighten the anti-abortionists).

It is, however, the consequences of her 1978 report on Special Educational Needs to which I wish to draw attention. This started from a consideration of the needs of those with learning disabilities, but went on, in a spirit of fairness all round, to examine *all* special educational needs, including those with physical disabilities, and ethnic minorities (i.e. those handicapped by not being English.) Thus the halt and the lame, the slow of mind, and Black people and Gypsies were all put in the same basket. The recommendation was, however, that these basket-cases should not be segregated, but

resources should be found as far as possible to integrate them into normal schools, and treat them as though they were ordinary people.

And so at the Department of Education and Science, Multicultural Education moved into the section dealing with Special Education. At the time, those of us concerned with Gypsies were marginally cheered in that this enabled Gypsy education to move from being marooned by itself in special education, to being joined by all the other ethnic minorities in the same position, which we saw at the time as some kind of recognition of Gypsy culture. The value of that, however, remains limited as long as English education in general remains resolutely monocultural and monolingual. The perception of ethnicity as disability remains subliminally damaging, especially for Gypsies where the achievement of an antiracist approach remains fragile. But all children lose from the perception of cultural variation as other; the failure of language teaching in our school is surely one of the chronic causes of the United Kingdom's continuing economic decline.

Let us contrast this public career with that of Michael Dummett and his wife Ann Dummett. During the 1960s they founded in Oxford one of the first Community Relations Councils, and co-wrote one of the most influential academic analyses of race-relations to posit racism (rather than immigration or culture) as the core of the problem (Dummett and Dummett, 1969). Ann Dummett went on to serve on what was the Rampton Enquiry into Ethnic Minorities and Education, until Mrs Thatcher decided Rampton was too radical and turned it into the Swann Enquiry (Swann 1985). The Swann Report is in itself a remarkable paradigm of the way scholarship functions in official life; it contains texts at three levels; some scholarly appendices which one can give to students without a qualm; summary chapters which require a critical reading, and finally Swann's own executive summary for ministers which made me wonder if Lord Swann had actually read his own report (Acton 1986). Swann did, however, endorse the main finding, echoing the assertion of the Dummetts, that the problem is not the culture of the minority by the racism of the majority, and that therefore multi-cultural education must be "Education for All".   This has been the charter for our attempt to get Romani materials into schools.

The Dummett contribution to knowledge which best illustrates my point, however is Michael Dummett's (1980) history of the Tarot cards. It might be considered odd that a man who was both the leading mathematical philosopher of the day, and a luminary of radical anti-racism should, in his spare time, also knock off a massive scholarly volume of the history of these cards of ill-repute. It is, however, absolutely of a piece with the rest of his life's work. By meticulous documentary research, Dummett shows that the Tarot cards originated in the middle ages, and for the first couple of hundred years of their existence were just playing cards, used for playing games, without any occult significance. The cards were developed into artefacts of some beauty; the games were challenging and satisfying. Eventually, however, the modern, simpler pack of cards with which we play bridge and poker succeeded it in popular taste. It was not until the French "enlightenment" that a charlatan magician decided to utilise these archaic cards as an aid to his trickery, and simply invented an occult history for them, which has been relentlessly plagiarised by occultists ever since. It was not until the 19th century that Gypsy fortune-tellers jumped on this fashionable bandwaggon.

Still, today we find "New Age" shops full of superstitious texts wittering on about the ancient Egyptian or Gypsy roots of the Tarot; there are even Romani nationalists who claim it as part of Romani culture. In Christian bookshops we can find a counter-literature by the kind of evangelical whose theology appears to be derived more from *The Exorcist* than the Bible, denouncing the Tarot as a dangerous work of the Devil. Each alike presents the Tarot as a deep, obscure mystery.

We are all aware of these two literatures; but I wonder how many of my audience have even heard of Dummett's (1980) book? Yet it completely dispels the deep mystery. Like a true archaeologist of knowledge, Dummett restores to us a beautiful fragment of medieval Christian culture, and presents it to us, intricate and shining as when it was new. And he shows that blaming Roma for the degradation of this thing to an instrument of superstition is a racist invention (albeit one with which some Roma have colluded). This is a gift, not only to Romani studies, but to us all; but one that has been
neglected by the ignorant, the righteous and unrighteous alike, who prefer being thrilled by imaginary demons to being instructed by sober truth.

I hope I have at least *illustrated* my thesis of a difference between the social consequences of a conception of truth as something which mediates between agreement with appearances and the agreement of an audience, and the conception of truth as a pursuit where the seeker after truth must take responsibility for the criteria against which propositions are tested for their truth-values. I cannot really offer evidence for either; but I do minute my preference for the latter.

Of course, to some extent I have overdrawn the contrast. It would be wrong to say there is no value in the Warnockian elucidation of the common understanding of difficult topics, if only because such elucidation makes commonsense views easier to challenge. Equally, I hope this lecture may itself help increase the popular plausibility of the uncompromising Dummett stand on racism; the very participation of Ann Dummett in the Rampton/Swann Enquiry shows how views considered extreme a decade earlier had come nearer acceptance.

I fear, however, that what I have just written will still fail to convince post-modernist social-constructionists or deconstructionists. It might be argued that both these approaches are synthesising reactions to perceived social problems, shaped by their internal logic and presuppositions, leaving us no reason to suppose they correspond in any consistent or scientific way to the actual self-conception of human actors involved in race relations, or special education, or embryology or the Tarot. Indeed, after Lyotard (1984) maybe old theories of truth themselves are no more than relics of the grand narratives which are supposed not to convince us any more.

My response would be to assert that (no doubt insultingly to both parties), I see more in common between Lyotard and the self-proclaimed rational-empiricism of the Warnock approach. Both seek to debunk obscure particularistic theory, and to incorporate whatever is immediately attractive from systems that come their way. Lyotard pretends to abjure grand narratives; but what could be grander, or even more grandiose, than the way in which Lyotard in which incorporates such a glittering range of other perspectives into its own. It takes a very grand narrative indeed to say

it has comprehended (in the sense that De Gaulle said "Je vous ai compris" to the French army in Algeria) all the other narratives. Modernism and post-modernism, totalisation and anti-totalisation, seem to me two sides of the same coin, equally inimical to scholarship. Historians who preach the end of history, theologians who proclaim the death of God, prophets who claim they are the last prophet: history is littered with intellectuals who claim to have achieved the ultimate synthesis, all of them in the end as unconvincing as Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

The Dummett approach is more modest; it does not seek to incorporate all the narratives, but rather to commence the methodology of mapping them onto one another. The methodology of Willems would seem to me, by contrast, to be a prime example of what Dummett labels "subjective idealism". He proclaims the unreliability of historical analyses; yet his own analysis is based on not other evidence; one can hardly suppress a smile when he presents Dora Yates, a byword for partiality even among the older Gypsylorists, as an unimpeachable source (Willems, 1997:93). To say this is not to retreat to an unargued positivism; merely to assert that even socially constructed knowledge is not about empty air. The distinguished British-Australian Romanichal sociologist and geographer Ken Lee is currently hot on Willems' heels in his own investigation of Grellmann and his impact; I await with a certain glee his considered response to Willems' claim to have shown that Grellmann "invented" the Gypsies.

However totalising a narrative, it is possible to offer what Marcuse (1964) calls negation, for just one person to stand up to it and say "That is not true." and mean it. I will conclude with an example, that of Ellen Wilmot-Ware drawing on Fraser (1953) and Acton (1974:140-147).

It is often forgotten that during the 1939-1945 war, the National government encouraged landowners to make caravan sites for the families of Gypsies who had been conscripted to the armed services or to agricultural work. One such was Ellen Wilmot-Ware, and unmarried Gloucestershire lady farming part of her family's land. After, the war, however, the Labour Government moved to get rid of what it saw as part of the inadequate shanty-town housing that had grown up during the war. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act entrenched petit-bourgeois ethics and from 1948 Cheltenham Rural District Council began evicting Gypsies from Ellen Wilmot-Ware's land, and in 1950 began to prosecute the lady herself under the 1936 Public Health Act.

He response was to work with the Gypsies to draw up a petition which she sent, quite naturally for a rural Anglican, to the Convocation of Canterbury. From 1950 to 1953 she wrote letters furiously to bishops and archbishops, MPs and ministers, councillors and ambassadors. She simply ignored the fines and injunctions that were piled on her. "I am a Christian and I am being compelled to act like a Communist" she complained in 1952. Eventually after Cheltenham RDC threatened her family with prosecution also, she was evicted. "I have lost everything I possessed except my dogs". She went down to utter defeat.

And yet, when in 1970 I went to sort out the Gypsy Council papers, the letters and papers she has sent on to Grattan Puxon in 1967, carefully annotated by him, held

pride of place. With hindsight, the need for caravan sites, and respect for Romani culture, and the pointlessness of evicting people on and on without saying where they are to go, have become, at least among some of us, the conventional wisdom. And I believe, with all my heart, that on one last day, the judge of all the earth with turn to a great assembly of men standing on his left, ranks of bishops and journalists, and Churchill and Attlee at the head of all their MPs, and he'll say to them. "Sorry lads, you got it wrong; the one who had it right was Ellen Wilmot-Ware".

The true task of the university is not the pursuit of excellence, which is merely an ersatz version of its real task, the search for truth. Our aim here should not to be better than other people, but to be our own best in making people understand one another. Truth is an aspiration, like socialism and Christianity - and any religion - never more betrayed than by those who pretend finally to have achieved it.

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