

## NOTES

I am most grateful for helpful comments from Matt T. Salo, Sheila Salo, and Jiri Lípa. I alone am responsible for this communication.

1. Ian Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," *Nationalities Papers*, XIX (3), Fall 1991, pp. 251-268.

2. There are two outstanding books about the Rom: Jan Yoors, *The Gypsies* (New York, 1967), a memoir of the author's years with European Rom that constitutes a most satisfactory, brilliant ethnography; and Olof Gjerdmann and Erik Ljungberg, *The Language of the Swedish Coppersmith Gypsy Johan Dimitri Taikon* (Uppsala, 1963), a thorough, scholarly account of Romanes. Any ethnographic work with the Rom would be unthinkable without the aid of these books. While those who cite these works, of course, do not by that act alone become scholarly observers of the Gypsies, those who fail to refer to these books can hardly be taken seriously. My own booklet on the subject is Werner Cohn, *The Gypsies* (Reading, Mass., 1973). I mention it here only because it documents many of the assertions I make in this communication.

3. Matt T. Salo, "Gypsy Ethnicity: Implications of Native Categories and Interaction for Ethnic Classification," *Ethnicity*, vol. 6 (1979), pp. 73-96.

4. Among the more famous Boasters are the Kwieks of pre-war Poland. Hancock takes them at face value (pp. 259-30). Yoors, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-16, tells us what the Rom thought of them.

5. I will mention only one which is among the most notorious and also, unfortunately, among the most influential: Jean-Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies* (London, 1963), first published in French in 1961.

6. For an insight into the Promoters, I refer the reader to the works by Acton, Kenrick and Puxon, all of which are cited by Hancock.

Werner Cohn  
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To the Editor:

*Nationalities Papers* is to be congratulated on publishing Ian Hancock's paper on Romani nationalism and the reactions of Werner Cohn and Jiri Lipa. Each of these three in its own way is a prime example of various aspects of Gypsy studies. Together, they constitute a set of valuable historical documents for the edification of future scholars in the field.

Hancock is a Gypsy and an academician; Hancock is a Gypsy and an activist. Some academics think one cannot be both a scholar and an activist, so Hancock is not well received by them on that basis alone. Recent developments in social science adopting a perspective that acknowledges the artificiality of treating scientific research as objective and advocates a perspective that views the researcher and the data in a perpetual, dynamic dialogue would encourage reading Hancock's presentation, remembering constantly *who* Hancock is (a Gypsy by birth, a scholar by training, an official

in the Romani Union by choice) in judging the merits of the article. Certainly, assembling so much disparate data in one place is a valuable service to scholars, whether or not one chooses to agree with the interpretations placed on the materials by Hancock himself. Another, equally valuable service is the detailed description by one contemporary Gypsy activist of recent nationalistic political events; in other words, parts of the article can be treated as an original source and others as a primary source, being simultaneously the work of a scholar and a corpus of utterances by a key informant within an oral history project.

Werner Cohn's article could be entitled "The Myth of the Gypsy Paragon" inasmuch as the essay typifies and continues a long tradition in Gypsy studies that assumes the existence of a single, homogeneous, and unchanging entity, "the Gypsy", clearly distinguishable from counterfeits, but only by scholars who are themselves non-Gypsies. The implicit denial of the possibility of being mistaken in one's research conclusions, of erroneously considering the prejudices of one's informants as an accurate depiction of reality manifests in the ingenuous admission by Cohn that, while he knows as little about the non-Rom groups as his informants, he agrees that these groups should not be included as Gypsies. Notice, however, that the Rom opinion is legitimated only through Cohn's endorsement.

Jiri Lipa's article exemplifies the Gypsy paragon tradition among some linguists; that is, scholars of non-Gypsy birth are the ones to decide what is correct vocabulary and grammar for native *Romanes* speakers. These linguists add an additional rule: nonliterate languages must be denied permission to produce a literary dialect after being converted into written languages. Lipa freely acknowledges the borrowing propensity of *Romanes* in the past, but he is outraged at modern instances of borrowing. Presumably, he objects to deliberate, planned borrowing and assumes that past adoption of non-Romanes features was unplanned and accidental. (Assumptions are not hard data, I have argued, and I believe in practicing what I preach. Therefore, if I am mistaken about Lipa's reasoning, I would appreciate being set straight.)

Even hoary traditions are capable of modification over time. The Cohn-Lipa variant of the Gypsy paragon tradition introduces a new element: encouraging readers to conduct their own research, but specifying the research design to be followed. At least one reader, the writer of this letter, is offended by the implication that she is incapable of competently planning her own research and is vexed at the sloppiness of their designs. Prof. Cohn would have us limit our sampling frame to those Gypsies he has labeled Rom when the topic under investigation includes the need to determine who is a Gypsy. He implies that all Gypsies must know about Congresses, flags, *etc.*, to conclude that Gypsy nationalism exists. This ploy is analogous to insisting that all adult Americans queried must be able to recite the planks of the Democratic platform before we can conclude that there is a Democratic political party in

the United States today. Lipa instructs us to employ as our sampling frame *oral* utterances to investigate *literary* dialect. Analogous to his design would be the recommendation that we dissect fishes to arrive at conclusions about amphibians.

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(Former President of the Gypsy  
Lore Society)

Ian Hancock replies:

I thank my colleagues, Lipa and Cohn, for their anticipated observations. The final interpreters must, of course, be the readers themselves; I continue to stand completely by the claims made in the piece under scrutiny, and hope that those who might be persuaded by the protestations of Messrs. Lipa and Cohn go to my referenced sources and decide for themselves.

Their respective arguments seem to rest upon the comparative “recentness” of the Romani reunification and language standardization movements, and the fact that, as yet, comparatively few individuals are involved in them. This is certainly true, as it must be at the beginning of *any* organized movement for ethnic self-determination, but it surely cannot be used as an argument to discredit or delegitimize these efforts. This both puzzles and saddens me.

Briefly (though I look forward to lengthier productive dialogue in future issues), let me suggest that Mr. Lipa would surely benefit by becoming more acquainted with what is going on within the Romani language movement; perhaps he might attend one of our summer schools which have been well attended in different European countries for the past few years. Mr. Cohn is certainly invited to contact The International Romani Union for copies of press and other reports, from various countries, of our congresses, and thereby acquire more “convincing ethnographic detail” about those in attendance.

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To the Editor:

As one of the “Promoters” referred to by Werner Cohn (note 6) and I suppose one of the ‘organizers’ referred to by Ilri Lipa, I hope that I may be allowed the right of reply.