

The Holocaust in History and Memory. The Porrajmos: The "Gypsy Holocaust" and the Continuing Discrimination of Roma and Sinti after 1945. Vol. 3, pp. 227-229 (2011) BOOK REVIEW Dileep Karanth (ed.), Danger! Educated Gypsy. Selected Essays; Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010. ISBN 978-1-902806

This is a real Pandora's box of a book: most of the seven deadly sins seem to have been committed against the Romani people, many still are, but at the end there is hope. Intended as an introduction to Romani specialist and activist, Ian Hancock, through the medium of his work, it also acts as something it laments the lack of: a guide for the non specialist or intending student through the plethora of Romani materials available. A family history, scholarly linguistic analysis, some historical research and gentle advice are all peppered throughout with righteous indignation, harsh criticism and the longing to communicate and educate. Hancock is clearly a talented academic and a passionate Romani activist but above all he is a skilled educator, and as such may be doing the greatest service to his people of all.

The first section of the book 'Family Tales' is exactly that; Hancock recalls his family, their way of life, with a wistfulness that will be familiar to anyone who wishes they had asked more questions to relatives now gone. What will be less familiar is the sheer brutality of the treatment faced by some of his ancestors. His father was taken away from his grandparents at just six and a half and raised in an institution in a national program that was supposed to be for the good of Romani children. Hancock points out that while this shocking history is well documented in Sweden, Slovakia and Switzerland, it went on in Britain too. The harshness of state-warranted discrimination is mentioned casually, almost in passing here, but it is only the first of many instances, culminating in the section that deals with Porrajmos, the Romani Holocaust.

From personal familial history, the book moves on to the origins of the Romani people. Hancock is a renowned linguist, working most notably on the Creole languages as well as Romani, and in this chapter he presents a detailed comparison, touching on the work of earlier Romani linguists, that shows the relationship between Romani and various Indian languages. The great difference between the various dialects of Romani is seen as one of the major obstacles in creating political and cultural unity among the various populations. Accompanying this is the tendency for anyone who studies a particular group of Roma, for example Kalderash, to take their findings and then apply them indiscriminately to all other Romani groups. Hancock argues convincingly in support of identifying a common dialect for education and communication purposes while acknowledging the possible problems and inequalities with such a solution. Principally that the propagation of a standard would be far easier among sedentary Romani populations than among itinerant ones, and that there would be the danger of creating what he refers to as a 'linguistic elite' (p. 118) comprising of those who had learnt to use the standard. The conclusion to this section of the book is a very practical proposal for a scheme to bring about the implementation of a national standard.

The problem of education for Romani people seems to be affected by the same issues that affect education for many other ethnic minorities. However, while some moves have been made to accommodate, for example, Islamic cultural differences with the provision of faith schools and so on, little seems to have been done to take into account the particular culture and values of the Roma. Integration, not assimilation is seen as one key to a harmonious and successful relationship between the

gadje (non-Romanies) and Romani. Another fundamental change needed is the identification and debunking of stereotypes deeply entrenched in society's view of the Roma People. Hancock attacks not only those people who cry out against the prospect of Romani 'Gypsy' neighbours, branding them as thieves and tricksters, but also some well known writers. Fonseca, Moreau and even old Virginia Woolf, to name but three, all come in for criticism for their 'persistent, relentless portrayal of Romanies as rootless, lawless, immoral'.

A further problem for Hancock is the existence of a fake Romani culture. This seems to have come about, partly by a romanticising of the Gypsy lifestyle, and partly by individual Romanies themselves who perpetuate the myth in their writings, accepting, according to Hancock 'the "magical" pop culture stereotype created by non-Romanies' (p. 184). Such misconceptions are perpetuated by a kind of 'Chinese whispers' effect where a fact once mentioned is repeated over and over by academics and scholars until it takes on the guise of fact. One linguistic example of this given by Hancock on is the repetition of the idea that Romani lacks the words for 'possession' and 'duty' mentioned in ten different sources, and factually untrue. An unapologetically aggressive section of the book is dedicated to the Porrajmos, the word first adopted by Hancock in his earlier writing, but now used internationally, to denote the Romani Holocaust under the Nazis. The downplaying and even denial of Romani suffering under Nazism is described as common among many academics, especially when comparisons are being made with the Jewish position. But the main target of his wrath is the US Holocaust Memorial Council for what he sees as their systematic attempt to disregard and downplay the enormity of Romani suffering during the Second World War. At one point, Hancock goes so far as to say that 'that body, more than any other, rigorously persists in underestimating and under-representing that truth' (p. 227). Perhaps most moving of all, however, is Hancock's section on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1995. Roma were there, yes, but standing outside of the camp, faces pressed against a fence, staring in at a commemoration for people who included their own lost relatives which, unbelievably, they had not been allowed to attend.

The closing chapter of the book is a positive exhortation, an attempt to move on. Hancock attempts to find how best to unite a diaspora people scattered across every continent. The volume appeared in the UK just as the new coalition government wiped £30 million that had already been pledged to local authorities so that they could support the development of Gypsy and Traveller sites Hancock's tireless and confrontational campaign for his people makes for uncomfortable reading at times, and leaves him with numerous enemies in its wake. However, his particular type of scholarly confrontation is just what is needed if political injustices are to be noticed and redressed and if the kind of respect and protection shown to many other minorities today is to be at last shared by the Roma.

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