Judith Okely

Constructing Difference: Gypsies as "Other"

Anthropology has privileged the study of geographically "isolated" cultures, often artificial constructs. Gypsies are a case study of the construction of difference between or within any cultures and to be found in Europe. Whereas Gypsy culture is posited as once self contained, I argue that it is created by selective choices and oppositions.

Gypsies were hardly studied in anthropology before the 1970s. Rena Cotten published some outstanding articles in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* in 1954 and 1955. Frederik Barth wrote an exceptional article on Norwegian Travellers (1955). It was a bit of home field work within cycling distance from his university, so he informed me recently. Rehfisch did a pioneering field study of Scottish Tinkers (1958). In the 1970s, Evans-Pritchard wrote an astonishingly cavalier and ill informed introduction to a book on Gypsies from the Theology department of Oxford University (Trigg 1975). The book was a Frazerian Golden Bough of gypsiology, reiterating the original ancient cults. Godfrey Lienhardt defended Evans-Pritchard to me by suggesting that Evans-Pritchard had probably never read the text. But this only confirms the insouciance towards studies of the other on the anthropologist's home ground. Evans-Pritchard would have been less likely to write a legitimating preface to a suspect study of the Nilotics in Sudan. All of the early piecemeal anthropological work, done, it seems, on an ad hoc basis tells us something about the status of Gypsy studies in the discipline. The very reasons why they were not studied are the same reasons as to why they might be of interest now to social anthropologists.

They were by-passed because:

i) They were largely associated with Europe, despite the fact that equivalent groups can be found in every continent.

ii) Even if Gypsies were considered "foreign" and "other", allegedly from India, they were now considered too domesticated or "contaminated" by western culture. Even if they were seen once as exotically rural, this image was tarnished by their increasing urban visibility.

iii) Gypsies as nomads are not associated with their own geographical territorial space, nor can they ever approximate to the kind of self sufficiency classically associated with "pure" nomads, either hunter and gatherers or pastoralists. Therefore, Gypsies were not deemed a "separate" culture in the standard anthropological typology.

Privilege in social anthropology has been given to seemingly remote, isolated, non westernised cultures. These were in fact often an artificial construct by the anthropologist who in fieldwork practice and the final text minimised trading, missionary and colonial influence, despite the fact that his/her presence was facilitated by such historical interventions (Okely 1975a). The anthropologists concentrated, for a variety of reasons, some intellectually valid, on what was believed to be traditional, essential and uncontaminated culture and structure. Lévi-Strauss convincingly argues that the anthropologist looking for the "New World" or the "real Lahore" arrives at the moment when it has been changed by the western arrival (1961). Alternatively, the pristine, original untouched place is exposed as always a fantasy.

The status of Gypsy studies within social anthropology is thus explained in part by the history of the academic discipline. Social Anthropology began as the study of "the other" in non-western areas of the globe. As well as a quest for knowledge of humanity in its entirety, the discipline's history is linked to Occidental exploration, trading, domination and to colonisation. Even within those regions the study of peoples has been partial. Emphasis has been on the exoticised and indigenous. Western immigrants, e.g. Europeans who migrated to North America, and the politically powerful have tended to be excluded. The "Other" as suitable subject for study has been one who can be most exoticised.

In fact the Gypsies could as well fall into the exotic category: - they have been identified as nomadic, nonliterate and the object of inversion and stereotypes. Indeed, among non anthropologists they have appeal because they are open to exoticisation, even orientalisation. They have been given an Indian origin by linguistic etymologists and folklorists. However, their primary exclusion from the classical anthropological map rests on their association with the geographical and political region of Europe. The Gypsies have been too

close to home for comfort. Despite their now recorded presence in all the other continents, they have not been generally linked to the regions privileged by the anthropological academy.

Regionalism, in the anthropological traditions with which I am acquainted, is a fundamental trope. In taking to task the contributors in Clifford and Marcus (1986) for essentialising the Other, Fardon (1990, 24) has aptly pointed to the institutional context of anthropology which has regionalised both the other and the anthropologist. Despite Fardon's problematisation of regionalism, he continues to exclude the West from his intellectual map and fails to address the exclusion of Europe.

In so far as anything of the European region has been coloured by others on the British anthropological map, it is mainly the mediterranean south which has been exoticised by the northern European gaze. Today, anthropologists from southern Europe are contesting this appropriation. Thanks in part to the pioneers, such as Jeremy Boissevain, aspects of European anthropology have blossomed. Nevertheless, they have come to be associated again with a geographically constructed region, namely the Mediterranean, and one which until recently, has privileged that which the metropolis has defined as remote.

The anthropology of Europe is gaining ground, but there remains a powerful resistance. Here my comments are based on an ethnography of British anthropology, but I suspect that there may be parallels in French and possibly German anthropology. In at least one department of social anthropology in Britain, students have been strongly discouraged from choosing Europe as their area of study. Maurice Bloch who holds Malinowski's chair at the London School of Economics has expressed regret that a university post should go to any anthropologist who has done fieldwork in North America or Europe:

> "If the study of Europe or of North America gets a toehold in anthropology departments it tends to rapidly push out studies of other societies because frankly, such studies appear easier to research students ... I am keen on preserving an oddity (the association of anthropology with the exotic)" (in Houtman 1988, 19 f.).

This justification for the exclusion of Europe from the anthropological map and the rejection of the anthropological gaze turned in upon itself reveals the belief that an anthropologist is above all the voice of a region rather than a theory or intellectual innovation. It presumes that the anthropology of one's own country is easier as well as relatively uninformative. The demands by minorities or the

decolonised that anthropologists study up and investigate the unexoticised outside both the Occident and Orient go unheeded. It is also presumed that the west is anthropologically known.

Those who have found themselves to be enthusiastic anthropologists of Europe have been obliged to reassure others that of course the discipline must continue to embrace all continents. By contrast, the historical and political basis of selectivity, even within the other areas of the globe has not been adequately addressed. The regional specialisms within the discipline mask great gaps and silences. Claims to regional authority are often meaningless. Moreover, the peoples selected for focus within those regions are idiosyncratic and reveal the political or exotic priorities of the outsider researcher (Gilsenan 1990; Street 1990).

Today, we who have studied groups within the western anthropologists' territory, are finding out the rather shaky secret that those who studied exotica abroad were not ensconced in hermetically sealed cultures. Our scepticism is now confirmed from even the remotest tropical Amazonian forest. The assumptions of "isolated" communities can no longer be sustained in any part of the globe. Anthropologists elsewhere are waking up to the fact that seemingly isolated peoples are not only affected by new invasions and changes, but also that they had a history.

Here, anthropologists of Gypsies are well versed in questions of inter group boundaries and construction.

However exoticised and ruralised and racialised as other in the popular imagination and the dominant ideology, Gypsies are closely associated with the urban and a once industrial economy. Their roadside sites cannot be compared with palm tree, tropical forest or coral strand. While being the objects for welfare and educational studies, or the victims of state controls, they have not been seen as suitable territory to be cordoned off by anthropological patrons. Those anthropologists who wanted to learn about them did not have to compete with academic rivals. In many cases, if we examine the research of the last two decades, the anthropologist chose to study the Gypsies living in his or her own country or current academic place of residence. Many of these were women and again this reflects the gender power structure of the discipline with women on the periphery, i.e. the Gypsy as "other" has been studied by women who are "other" (Okely 1986). It seems for many their choice was fortuitous rather than through patronage.

One of the unexpected advantages of anthropology's resistance to turning its gaze upon its home territory of the metropolis, Europe or the Occident is that those anthropologists who strayed onto such uncolonised territory were free of all the established paradigms and the founding Fathers of the discipline. They were not expected to look for Africanist descent systems, they could discover new nomads, they could continue a dialogue with their own culture. Despite the early struggles and stigma, I now look back with gratitude and relief that I had to invent my own anthropology, while grasping at the few available anthropological papers (Cotten 1954-5; Barth 1955; Rehfisch 1958).

Even though anthropologists of Gypsies and of Europe were free to create new approaches, there is inevitably a time lag before the work is fully incorporated into the discipline. After all, reputations are made sometimes by either testing the theoretical questions set by those with academic power or indeed by debunking the Big Mens' previous paradigms. Europe was not the territory for earlier theoretical questions from the discipline, precisely because of anthropology's fixation on regionalism and the non western other. Anthropologists of Gypsies have indeed engaged with many questions raised within the discipline, and most creatively from any region of the globe. If the anthropology of Europe had been considered central long ago, the anthropologists would have risked being routinised and trapped in a gridlock of dominant paradigms.

Anthropologists of Gypsies have not come up with the same check list of aspects demanded in classical monographs. But now that the classical format has been de-stabilised, the discipline should be increasingly open to the innovative themes and approaches half explored in Gypsy studies, e.g. the creative and provisional character of culture. Unlike the cultural isolationists, anthropologists of Gypsies have been obliged from the outset to examine the Gypsies' perceptions of Gajés (non-Gypsies), the Gypsies' own other. Since Gypsies are economically interdependent with the wider society, they have to confront them as daily practice, while at the same time resisting persecution and assimilation, Gajés are never erased from the picture.

The anthropologists' equivalent of regional literature for me was mainly that of folklorists, gentlemen scholars and romantic fiction. The diffusionist folklorists posited the image of a once isolated Gypsy tribe or people who migrated from India, centuries back and by implication diluted their "culture". By contrast, I contend that the Gypsies provide a superb extreme case of a

people whose culture is constructed and recreated in the midst of others. There are no geographical boundaries, such as rivers, oceans, mountains, tropical forests, unique ecological habitats of desert or tundra. There are no national borders which other anthropologists have relied upon for defining difference. Gypsies cannot be pinned down to a region. Although other nomads move about by definition, their relationships with other peoples have not been as economically central as those maintained by Gypsies. Hunting and gathering and pastoralism provide, if only as ideal, an element of self sufficiency. This can never be posited for the Gypsies, despite the folklorist and etymological claims. Unlike earlier nomadic typologies, the example of Gypsies breaks for ever the last vestiges of the evolutionary typology which places nomads prior to settled societies. I have argued that Gypsies were in part generated by the collapse of feudalism and the transition to capitalism. In addition, contemporary studies by anthropologists document how Gypsies may switch between travelling and sedentarisation; from tent to house, to caravan and back either within one generation or over generations. Such evidence, alongside that about others, undermines the notion of a "pure nomads".

Anthropologists have been obliged to examine Gypsies in their relationship with Gajés (non-Gypsies) both at local and global level. This is something different from an accumulative body of knowledge about other anthropological studies in a geographical region. Anthropologists among Gypsies have drawn on concepts, themes and theories from around the globe. They have also found intellectual reward in comparing studies of Gypsies in all continents. Here we see the long standing globalist perspective. There are intriguing similarities but also significant differences. The groups cannot be seen in isolation from their specific context.

The history of Gypsy-Gajé relations has also had political implications for the discipline of anthropology and continuing field studies. Given that physical anthropologists collaborated with the Nazi state in compiling genealogies and racist typologies of Gypsies (Kenrick & Puxon 1972), little or no field research appears possible in Germany today. Instead, detailed studies of the Gypsy holocaust are being conducted by historians. Despite this heinous flirtation with the concept of race by physical anthropologists, social anthropologists have long been in the position to challenge the biological basis of its use. They have also provided a case study of a group with little or no pretensions to being labelled black or of immigrant culture. The racism directed towards Gypsies

cannot conveniently be explained in terms of perceived phenotype differences. As Barth so vividly explored over twenty years ago (1969), ethnicity as an alternative term to "race" depends neither on geographical nor biological isolation.

Given that Gypsies are fixed neither in a locality nor a region with which they can be identified, they de-stabilise prevailing spatial and regional paradigms. This fluidy of insider/outsider itself feeds back onto the discipline. Anthropologists who have worked among Gypsies are in a position to present the more flexible and experimental character both of their fieldwork and the texts (e.g. Williams 1984). Being free of regional academic hegemony, they have offered and can offer new forms of writing and theoretical questions and ethnographies from around the globe, where indeed Gypsies are found. The Gypsies, without a fixed territorial space, raise questions about the provisional nature of space, even among sedentarised cultures, and certainly among groups open to migration as opposed to more flexible nomadism.

Anthropologists are looking at

a) syncretism. The very term acknowledges that the meeting of two cultures is not merely a recent phenomenon. The term has of course to be examined with care, since groups may elaborate or downplay aspects of a culture with which it claims past connections. The direction of cultural influence is neither one way nor is it linearly predictable.
b) Anthropological studies have had to respond to the existence and concept of globalisation. As with the concept of syncretism, a danger might be that there remains a premise of long distinct cultures only recently in collision and collusion, when in fact Gypsies are transnationals.

The Gypsies represent an important case study for both the discussion of syncretism and globalisation. I contend that Gypsies can never be seen as a once self contained culture, by their very construction they are a group formed from multiple sources. They are bricoleurs, their culture is a bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966). That should not allow us to fall back on any presumption that bricolage is derogatory. We need to re-think what is meant by culture. Despite my contentions about Gypsies, I hasten to add that the constructed and bricolage characteristics of Gypsies' experience and world view are still highly contentious among others who study Gypsies or who identify themselves as their protagonists. The literature has tended to posit the Gypsies as a once self

contained culture which has been diluted through migration and inter culture contact over centuries.

My argument is that they have never been an isolate but are a group which is perpetually created in opposition to the dominant and surrounding societies which they inhabit and from which they are partly created. They both embrace continuing aspects of the surrounding Gorgio society and invent or invert other aspects. Nonetheless, the resulting heterogeneity produces an internal coherence. I hesitate to introduce the concept of hybrid because it carries with it the suggestion of incongruity.

In opposition to the theory first posited by linguistic etymologists and diffusionists that the separateness of Gypsy culture is entirely explained by a near mythical Indian origin, I have suggested that Gypsies have in part, if not wholly, been generated from within the European continent where and when they were first recorded. Others have indeed migrated from Europe to the Americas. Ultimately, in the discussion of culture and identity, it should be irrelevant as to whether the "original" Gypsies first existed and then migrated from India before 1000 AD as the purists would claim. Social scientists should be more concerned with how Gypsies have survived and continued in more recent centuries.

I find myself now in good company concerning the suspect privileging of "origin" and "roots". It is less contentious and absolutely historically unquestionable that blacks in North America, the Caribbean and now through migration to Britain from the latter are in part the descendants of African slaves. The black power movement and some American black intellectuals in the 1980s elaborated these historical facts. In some cases, black culture was amorphously labelled "African" with regard neither to historical change nor to the extensive differentiation within that continent. By contrast Paul Gilmore has recently resisted this monocausal analysis and instead suggested that *The Black Atlantic* (1993) be seen as composed of synthesis and selective reworking of aspects of the dominant white cultures. The slavery origin assists in the analysis of history but the African antecedent says nothing of how blacks have re-formed, resisted and possibly had to acquiesce.

Similar shifts appear to be happening in the study of the American literary canon. In a recent review of Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* 1993, Peter Messent argues that;

> "Neither black nor white American writers can be seen, or taught, in sharply demarcated ways. In Fishkin's words: 'a shift in paradigm is in order. Understanding African-American tradition is essential if one wants to understand mainstream American literary history. And understanding mainstream literary history is important if one wants to understand African-American writing in the 20th century. We can no longer deny the mixed literary bloodlines on both sides' ... The way Twain blends black and white voices in Huckleberry Finn provides, Fishkin contends, an effective deconstruction of 'race' as 'a meaningful category'" (1993, 20).

Fishkin poses questions about the distinctiveness and difference of the African American tradition.

In social anthropology we are also confronted centre stage with such questions. The traditionalists are holding back an ever surging tide of scepticism about the distinctiveness of exotica. Edward Said has, from a position which straddles the Middle East and the U.S., confronted westerners with the tradition of orientalising the other (1978). It is not simply that the globalism of the economy and communications has broken earlier boundaries, intellectually, there has emerged an interest in reanalysing the older presumptions of rigid, noncontingent boundaries between cultures, societies and peoples. If not existing through chronological inertia nor geographic determinism, then the most interesting questions concern their arbitrariness, malleability and self conscious creation and/or construction from outside. Postmodernism, despite some of its tendencies towards a-political cynicism, encourages us to look at the provisional character of social phenomena.

In the case of the Gypsies, how does this construction work? Here there is an inter play between the members and the external definers. I have pursued in earlier publications and especially in my book *The Traveller-Gypsies* (1983), in some detail as to the first recording of persons labelled "Gypsies" or more accurately Egyptians in Britain. This was in 1505, the early sixteenth century. Elsewhere in Europe there are scattered recordings of similar persons, variously labelled Tsiganes, Zigeunes, Bohemians, and in Scandinavia, Tartares. It is significant that these labels often denoted a place name and one which was elsewhere; from another place than the Gypsies' current location. I have been informed by a classicist that the term Egyptian was widely used for anybody seen to be an incomer, stranger or possibly foreigner. It did not denote any strict belief that people so labelled actually came from the land of

the Pharaohs. But as an exotic label it stuck and seems to have been adopted by the labelled. However, we do not have any first hand records of these non literate persons' own self definitions. In Britain, after a while, it was necessary to avoid being so labelled when it became a hanging offence to be an Egyptian after the policy of deportation as foreigners failed. The people rightly argued that they had been born in the country which planned to deport them.

It was only in the late 18th century and early 19th century that another exotic origin was presented to Gypsies by outside scholars. Linguistic scholarship revealed connections with some of the Romany language or dialects and pre 1000 AD Sanskrit. There were also words from Greek, and other European languages. Migratory routes were reconstructed. Any reference to musicians or wandering groups or individuals found even in territorially relevant literature of several centuries was taken unproblematically to be evidence of Gypsies en route. Soon Gypsies were racialised. Still today physical anthropologists subject Gypsies to blood tests for Indian blood groups, although it is unclear whether the evidence could as well prove endogamy rather than indisputable links with persons uniquely from the Indian sub continent. Through the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* we find attempts to classify specific groups of Gypsies in terms of their "true Indian" culture and customs. Any similarities, e.g. pollution beliefs, are explained by migration and diffusion, rather than by structural similarities. The "true" Gypsy culture is seen as once Indian and self contained and partially or greatly eroded by migration and contact with others en route.

As outlined above, I have been and remain highly sceptical of this origin myth. It is more fruitful to accept that Gypsies have had a dynamic and changing history in Europe as elsewhere over the past centuries ever since they were first recorded by westerners. Rejecting the "roots" explanatory model for an analysis of their culture, it is better to explore their culture as bricolage. I have also rejected the term syncretism for Gypsies because it implies a merging of two once separate cultures. The Gypsies cannot be posited as of some distinct oriental culture now mixed with another equally bounded or homogeneous western culture. Instead I argue that the cultural coherence and boundaries found among Gypsies emerges from selection, rejection or inversion, if not subversion, of aspects of the dominant society in which they are politically, economically and symbolically embedded. What's more this continual creation and renewal of culture could be presented as an extreme model for many other

sedentary cultures and peoples. Their boundaries, likewise are constructed, in part through interaction. People may define themselves in opposition to what they are not. They may also invent differences with others, even where there may be similarities.

The Gypsies play with difference. This is not to ignore their history of harassment, persecution and genocide. The Gypsies' difference, I contend, is not so much from their alleged Indian foreign origin with all the legacy of exotic culture and racialisation. Instead their difference arises from their political and economic or material relations with a dominant sedentary society. From their first recording in Europe they were noted for their geographical mobility. They astutely presented themselves as pilgrims in line with an established legitimation for long distance movement. I have argued that it is no coincidence that they first "appeared" with the collapse of feudalism when many former serfs and others were thrown onto the labour market. There had already been extensive movement along the spice trails, trade routes and crusades. This explains the pre 1000 AD Sanskrit plus other Europe wide vocabulary and grammatical structures.

A parallel can be found today in the market trading slang where we find many "Romany" words used by traders with no Gypsy connections. Instead of explaining the Gypsies' appearance solely in terms of linear migration, I have suggested that groups were formed from landless peasants and others who took to the roads by choice or accident. They found opportunities in multi occupations and geographical flexibility. Over time they married persons from the similar circumstances and group endogamy was the preference. They became a self reproducing group in contrast to single artisans or vagrants who either left their families in one location or remained single.

This thesis goes against the notion of a "nucleus" Gypsy group from the east who then suffered accretions or dilutions en route (Fraser 1992, 69). Labelled "Egyptians" by outsiders, these travelling groups adopted the name for themselves whenever convenient. Faced with hostile legislation, they also learned to hide behind multiple identities.

I have explored how in more recent times the Gypsies use their identity, adapting to the context. They may conceal (0), degrade (-), exoticise (+) or acknowledge (+ -) their "Gypsiness" in relations with non Gypsies whom they call Gorgios. It is plausible that this same model of interaction was used in the past. Certainly we have evidence of exoticisation through the womens' practice

of fortune dealing. Similarly, it is likely that many of their occupations remained unrecorded as "Gypsy", either because they were not exotic or because they did not fit the alternative negative image projected onto the Gypsy as thief, beggar or child murderer. Thus the Gypsies have survived economically by both adopting unusual occupations and also by working in more acceptable ones which nonetheless exploit geographical mobility and self employment.

Whether by accident or design at the outset, they have resisted wage labour in a capitalist or communist state economy. When resorting to wage labour it has either been of a temporary nature or as near as possible on their own terms alongside other Gypsies. They have also had a different approach to sedentarisation. They have travelled with wagons and horses, vehicles and trailers for all or part of the year. In colder climates, e.g. Scotland (Rehfisch 1958) and Finland, they have spent the winters in temporary housing. Elsewhere, as for example in the United States, Gypsies may be housed but not settled (Sutherland 1975). They move regularly between rented accommodation and migrate for work, e.g. fortune telling in Miami at key annual junctures.

Both these key aspects of their broad culture;- a) Resistance to wage labour and b) geographical flexibility make the Gypsies hard to control by the state for registration, tax and other purposes. Today I would add a third key material aspect of difference, namely the Gypsies' resistance to and defiance of literate bureaucratic legal control. Since the post industrial decline of mass employment through wage labour, so that there is less likelihood of Gypsies being compelled into this economic structure, the Gypsies are more vulnerable to other controls associated with welfare, and restrictions on movement. They have, through practice, developed the means to disappear; to be "here today and gone tomorrow" as the favourite saying goes. Gypsies are therefore seen as uncontrollable, threatening or enviably "free". Thus they choose to be and are made different, but with post 1989 upheavals in Europe, they have become especially marked as scapegoats. Their covert entrepreneurial skills within communist states are now denigrated and subject to rivalry, envy and open competition. They were covertly mobile but now compete with refugees from a sedentary and fixed place of origin. Anti-Gypsy rhetoric may be uttered without the same public caution as anti-Semitism.

A major corollary of their resistance to legal rational gorgio authority is the Gypsies' cultural tradition of non-literacy. This is partly explained by their

semi-nomadism given that they were not fixed and settled in one place to attend non Gypsy schools. This is not a sufficient explanation. Other nomadic groups in the world such as those in the Middle East have inculcated literacy in their young, through the reading of the Koran. For Gypsies, literacy has not been a priority, nor has it been an economic necessity in their choice of occupations. It is more important for children to accompany their parents at work and learn how to make their future living that way. Besides, they can always make use of the friendly Gorgio or spouse for the occasional document. Well wishers who favour a literacy programme and formal schooling often naively cite the need for Gypsies to read road signs. This presumes that the travelling Gypsies haven't made it their business to know routes. When out travelling with them on uncharted territory, I noticed how they simply asked passers by and showed an exceptional memory recall, something which I suggest non literate peoples have cultivated to a sophisticated degree.

The Gypsies' non literacy, far from being an inevitable cultural handicap in all circumstances, may in many key areas become a source of freedom. They are free from the education system, and what Althusser has described the ideological state apparatus. By avoiding this intensive training and cultural indoctrination, their consent, if we are to heed Gramsci's theory seriously, is not won over within the dominant hegemony. I found in fieldwork direct examples of their cultural liberation from the state's intimidation through literacy. The written text, such as a legal summons in all its terrifying minutiae was a meaningless piece of paper to be screwed up and thrown away.

These material marks of difference are their very survival. There are other aspects which the outsider definer is not always fully aware of;

i) their use of kinship, ethnic self ascription through rules of exclusion and incorporation,
ii) their strategies for dealing with the Gorgio and
iii) their pollution beliefs.

i) The Gypsies' criteria for membership which includes the minimum that a person should have at least one parent who is a Gypsy, subtly enables the group to absorb the occasional outsider and undermines any notion of the so called "pure blooded race" which the exoticists and traditional gypsiologists entertained. There is sometimes an ideology the Gypsies hold themselves about "blood", but their everyday practice belies this.

ii) The Gypsies' strategies for dealing with the Gorgio reveal the ambiguities in their cultural difference. In order to survive, they must have regular economic relations with persons from the dominant economy. Long ago I defined the Gypsies' unique form of economy as

> "the occasional supply of goods, services and labour where demand and supply are irregular in time and place" (Okely 1975b, 114).

The Gypsies have to become acquainted with the economic openings and learn in the modern idiom to "market themselves". They certainly have to speak the local language. The suggestion by some that the Gypsies only spoke Romany and have been gradually linguistically corrupted makes no economic sense. It is, however, plausible that when migrating to or fleeing as refugees to a new country they may have to depend more than usual on a single and non verbal occupation such as begging. There are ample examples of this today in the Gypsies' mass movement from eastern to western Europe.

To know the economy, the language and the potential customer whether as fortune telling client, farmer, scrap merchant, house dweller in need of tree lopping or new driveway or antique owner, the Gypsies must also know the culture in which they are also embedded. There are also areas of unknowing. I recall being asked by teenage Gypsies, "What's it like living in a house, Judith?" How could I answer that? Their question is often a good answer to those non Gypsy interlocutors who expect me to describe what it is like for Gypsies to be nomadic. That which is taken for granted as one's own cultural experience from birth becomes ingrained common sense, rather than a peculiarity to be adequately described.

The Gypsies' acquaintance with their other, the gorgio, means that they can play with gorgio culture. They choose difference or otherness but not always as expected by non Gypsies. They are chameleon like in their relations, switching persona according to context. Sometimes they may switch identity in a singly encounter, one minute being aggressive, then compliant and subdued and compliant the next. Indeed police and military interrogators have institutionalised this method of unpredictability for their own purposes. The Gypsies have used such devices for centuries. When faced with persons of goodwill rather than explicit persecutors, Gypsies may also use similar confusing or chameleon

techniques. This is why casual encounters with Gypsies for research projects have often reproduced the Gypsies' strategies of confusion.

iii) Lastly, the Gypsies' way of maintaining difference often unknown to outsiders is in their pollution beliefs. As a people with a nomadic history, they have a different sense of place. They may not be rooted to a single location for their identity. They have disposable and portable property. But they take their bodies with them. The body becomes a sacred location for the consolidation of boundaries and difference. In my monograph (Okely 1983), I have detailed the way in which Gypsies can be said to distinguish between the inner and outer body. Daily practices of eating, drinking and washing, as well as the symbolic construction of space inside and outside the trailer continually reaffirm their separation from the gorgio. Their beliefs only make sense if they are juxtaposed with gorgio practices and more significantly what the Gypsies *believe* the gorgio practices to be. It is a selective reading of the dominant local or national gorgio culture. The Gypsies' beliefs work through opposition to perceived aspects of gorgio day to day culture. Similarly, the Gypsies' classification of animals as polluted, pure, touchable, untouchable, edible or inedible only make sense in relation to the gorgios' alleged classification of animals. My analysis of Gypsies' animal classification was intended as a development of questions raised by Lévi-Strauss in *Totemism* (1964) and *The Savage Mind* (1966) and Leach (1972), Douglas (1966) and Tambiah (1973), all of whom tended to discuss animal symbolism as an expression of a bounded society. By contrast, the Gypsy classification can only be understood in terms of their relations with Gajés and their beliefs about Gajé classification. Similarly, the Gypsies' death rituals can only be understood in the context of those practised among the settled society. The Gypsies' view of death cannot be divorced from their relations with Gajés (Okely 1983). The Gypsies' funeral rites enact the process of eventual sedentarisation of the dead who have also become polluted. They are ideally buried on gorgio sacred ground because they have taken on the negative characteristics of the gorgio. There appears to be no benign Gypsy after life. The symbolic construction of difference between gorgio and Gypsy is broken by death.

Gorgio selective use of Gypsies

Just as the Gypsies selectively take aspects of the dominant ideological hegemony for their own reinterpretation and construction, inversion or even parody, so non Gypsies make selective symbolic use of the Gypsies to make statements about the dominant paradigm (Okely 1983, 37).

It should also be asked why the non Gypsy needs to construct the Gypsy as different in ways which are beyond material reality, i.e. in fantasy as threatening or seductive difference. Lévi-Strauss argued in his interpretation of *Totemism* (1964) that animals are good to think with and that the differences between animals are used by humans to make statements or constructions about the differences between humans. In my analysis of Gypsy animal classification, I argued that the differences between animals are used to make statements about the differences between Gypsies and gorgios. It is possible to take this theory further. I suggest that non Gypsies use Gypsies (like animals) to construct differences between the dominant system or the gorgio self and the Gypsy minority, the "other" who are made almost non human. Gypsies are therefore good to think with. Sometimes the animal metaphor is explicit. Cocteau compared the Gypsy to a tiger. Tambiah's analysis of totemism (1973) in terms of moral rules and prescriptions could also apply. Gypsies are used by the dominant hegemony to affirm the moral and legal order. The actual or alleged difference perceived among Gypsies is constructed as an opposition.

There is also the other exotic side to the Gypsies as different. Gypsies are not only good to think with, but also to dream and exoticise, perhaps because they are good to forbid. The cultural taboos and attractions are elaborated in opera, poetry, literature, music and painting.

Mary Douglas (1966) fruitfully posed the problem of the anomaly which is seen to threaten a classification system because it does not fit in. Gypsies can be seen as an anomaly. I would also argue today that they are threatening or exotically taboo not just because they do not fit within the system, but because they are *part* of the system. We are confronted by something more powerful than Lévi-Strauss' intellectualism. The heavy symbolic load which the Gypsy is obliged to carry can be pursued on a psychoanalytical level, where strong emotions of love and hate are implicated. Melanie Klein explores the infantile mode of splitting the good and bad which then goes beyond the self. The bad is safely placed outside and beyond. Both Gypsy and Gorgio project onto their

respective other the parts which they seek to reject from with their own selves or groups. Yet they are part of the same larger social system and history. The difference cannot rest on explanations based on "race", geographical and regional separation, nor on myths of origin. Their cultures are intertwined and mutually interdependent. The anthropologist as participant observer in her own country lives through these splits (Okely 1984; 1992). Gypsies are both inside and outside the dominant culture. Their outsider status is imposed, but also chosen.

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