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Gypsy Intermediaries Guide the Stranger: Bringing Reciprocity, Some Misunderstanding, but Protection from Outsiders

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Abstract

An independent Gypsy and policy project inspired unexpected controversy from both the Research Centre and State. Committed to ethnographic long-term fieldwork, the anthropologist eventually succeeded in living on Gypsy sites. She was guided by key individuals- here recalled, celebrated and contextualized. These Associates were all literate in a then largely non-literate culture. As intermediaries, they could point to specific challenges across the cultural divide. The future author, wherever possible, hoped to reciprocate their gifts of knowledge and know-how. Select readings of early “Gypsiologists” and pioneering anthropologists proved insightful. Countering populist stereotypes in the dominant majority society, all the Gypsies encountered in fieldwork were protectors of that young woman. This was in contrast to a few maverick outsiders, invariably from other disciplines, who seemingly resented a female intruder on “their” territory and specialism.

Keywords: *Controversy; fieldwork; ethnography; associates; outsiders.*

Research Context

Gypsies have invariably been classified as strangers, whether exotic, romantic or indeed menacing. The mass of literature about Gypsies, Romanies, Travellers or Roma has largely been written by outsiders. Much is romanticized projection and fantasy. There is simultaneously a body of grounded non-fiction, based on direct encounters. Here the earlier, pioneering *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, despite some controversial texts, included core contributors, drawn by respectful interest in and concern for a much-maligned group. Moreover, the label “Gypsy” (originating from “Egyptian”), albeit now a global term with a full variety of meanings both positive and negative, was to be celebrated. It is therefore with delight that the new *Journal of Gypsy Studies* has again embraced this term. It recognizes that, despite continuing pressure emanating from EU lobbyists, there are still people in England and perhaps beyond who proudly call themselves Gypsies, if sometimes only among themselves.¹

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¹ Before my keynote in Berlin 2004, I was informed by the senior academic that the EU had “banned” the label “Gypsy” from all public domains. But an EU specialist informed me that they



As introduction, I present some context of this anthropologist's initial engagement with Gypsies or Travellers: life-changing through decades. Having completed a Cambridge postgraduate anthropology diploma, I was committed to intensive fieldwork thanks to previous experience (Okely, 2009) which was consolidated by the Cambridge courses: Leach on Malinowski, Tambiah, Fortes and Goody on politics, ritual, kinship and economics.² Weeks later, by serendipity, I saw a *New Society* advertisement for a researcher on Gypsies and government policy at the independent Centre for Environmental Studies (CES). Barbara Adams, the civil servant who oversaw the government census of Gypsies in England and Wales (MHLG 1967), judged the ensuing legislation had overlooked the Gypsies' perspectives. Obtaining secondment, ostensibly for housing research, she planned instead to focus on Gypsies— with the CES Director's full support. Despite considerable competition, my application was successful.

Shockingly, the permanent researchers at the Centre called an emergency meeting objecting that “their” money was being diverted from traffic studies and housing towards research on Gypsies. One geographer, later celebrated as a critical pioneer, explained to me: “After all, they are *only* a minority!” Given her future expertise on space, it is strange that her exclusion of nomads echoed conservative capitalist hegemony. Fortunately, the Director, David Donnison, obtained independent funding from the Rowntree Memorial Trust. But a Ministry official, learning of Adams' real aim, sent the Director a threatening letter declaring that *all* research on Gypsies should be under government supervision. As the multi-cultural anthropologist, I never anticipated such controversy, both from the state and, worse, from would-be revolutionaries.

Literature Review and Methods

Barbara Adams, the project director, immediately demanded a “literature review” consisting, in her terms, primarily of local authority reports on Gypsies. These proved revealing not for “facts,” but insights into outsiders' stereotypes and racial profiling. Fortunately, she also produced the unpublished “Tinkers of Perthshire and Aberdeenshire” by Farnham Rehfisch (1958). Here was an anthropologist who embraced fieldwork and had, like Malinowski (1922) decades earlier, “pitched his tent in the village”— this time, with Scottish Travellers. It was a delight to visit Rehfisch at Hull University later with Marek Kaminski, who had studied Gypsies in Poland and Sweden (1980). In his subsequent edited volume, to which some of our peer group contributed, Rehfisch (1975) reprinted an article by another pioneering anthropologist of

had no such power. I ignored any decree that self-ascribed Gypsies from henceforth be called Roma; a label they never used, only Romany.

² A Bulgarian historian declared recently that Okely had been indoctrinated by Anglo-Saxon anthropology. Among the most influential mentors, Tambiah was Sri Lankan Tamil (Okely 1983: 237). Fortes of S. African, Jewish descent, Malinowski was Polish. My official Oxford supervisor Lienhardt was part Austrian.



Gypsies: Frederik Barth (1955). This was a study of stigmatized nomads in the anthropologist's own country — Norway. These anthropologists were not only pioneers in the study of Gypsies, Roma or Travellers, they also did fieldwork in Europe.

Regrettably, even in the late 20th century, there was an ethnocentric bias against the social anthropology of Europe. Such research was deemed “easy” because already “known” (Bloch, 1988). “Europeanists” got the message of exclusion. So it is ironic that the core anthropological method was first labeled “participant observation” by Western sociology researchers of Chicago, USA, having recognized they knew next-to-nothing of their own variegated city.

The Chicago sociologists, like anthropologists, soon learned the counterproductive impact of being the intrusive interrogator in the name of scientific detachment. The classic Appendix for Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943/1955) gives crucial insights into fieldwork “at home” and was one of the few publications on ethnographic methods then available to convince my project director. Barbara Adams prioritized quantitative methods, via mass questionnaires, producing depersonalized charts. Thankfully, I had already experienced ethnographic fieldwork, accompanying my then-partner in Western Ireland (Brody, 1973; Okely, 2009). In disciplines unfamiliar with ethnography, participant observation risks dismissal as “merely anecdotal.” But Whyte countered such scientific arrogance. Studying Chicago gangs, he was befriended by an insider “Doc” who crucially advised him to stop asking questions and just “hang around.” This was the “native” intellectual drawn to assisting the outsider. Similarly, *Soulside*, a study of ghetto culture in Washington DC (Hannerz, 1969), inspired. Hannerz, as Swedish outsider anthropologist, needed insider allies.

Only after fieldwork could I conduct an alternative literature review, especially of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (JGLS)*. However, in contrast to academic priorities, my nine-to-five presence was demanded in a shared office whenever I was away from Gypsy camps. The *JGLS* was dismissed naively as concerned only with “superstitions.” Therefore, I was obliged to take days out of my annual leave to visit the Kensington library where the *JGLS* collection was available. Fortunately, the postgraduate Cambridge anthropology course had long convinced me of the importance of a holistic approach to ethnographic research.

Despite some ethnocentric generalizations and conflation of culture with race, there were scattered gems in the *Journal*. T.W. Thompson, writing in the *JGLS* before WWII, was utterly inspiring. Spending extended time befriending local Gypsies and occasionally citing anthropologists, Thompson practiced forms of participant observation with informal exchanges— never confrontational interrogation. Indeed, an alleged “anecdote” buried in a footnote offered a “Eureka” understanding of animal categories (Okely, 1994: 30). In my monograph, 12 of his articles, from 1910 to 1930, are cited with due

deference (Okely, 1983: 246-247). Such scholars were driven by genuine curiosity about a persecuted people surviving the labeling of difference.

Subsequent to Thompson, the American anthropologist Rena Cotten published overviews in the *JGLS*. She adapted the classic term among anthropologists for any regional expertise (e.g. Africanist), in this case, the term “Gypsiology” (1954). My work also cited her articles deferentially (Okely, 1983). In 1973, when visiting the Liverpool University Romany archive, I encountered, with awe, Dora Yates who likewise embraced the term “Gypsiologist” (1953).

Associate/Friend not Informant

It has been rightly suggested the role of the “key informant” in social science has often been undervalued. The term “associate” is preferable. Informant implies devious collaboration, if not espionage. Instead of near-mechanical informants, anthropologists frequently depend on indigenous intellectuals who may become joint researchers. They may also have their own agendas. Many have been deeply affected by Doc’s interventions in Whyte’s subsequent Appendix (1955). Moreover, Whyte commences the monograph with details of Doc’s life story thus emphasizing the role of key individuals.

Another anthropologist, Roger Sanjek, recognized the indispensability of insider individuals in ethnography (1993). He focuses more on persons employed formally or informally as interpreters, data gatherers or interviewers. In such cases, the anthropologist risks being confined to a managerial role.³ It is indisputably unjust if the anthropologist, as final author, does not give due credit to his assistants. Anthropological fieldwork is very different from mass questionnaires administered by depersonalized employees, where the latter are rarely acknowledged. We cannot call it anthropological fieldwork if the anthropologist/author never encounters, let alone engages, with the people studied and recorded in the emerging text.

Decades after fieldwork and after multiple publications, I reconsidered the vital role of key individuals when living with Gypsies, both at the outset and through months of integration. I pondered the specificities of those who chose to be my close associates. Necessarily, when writing up and publishing, I had been more concerned to ensure anonymity. Just changing names was insufficient. In my monograph, statements were split across renamed “individuals” or were combined from multiple persons. Thus no person could be simplistically identified. I addressed the importance of disguise or concealment both of the Gypsies’ alternative conflict resolution and especially when encountering the powerful (Nader, 1974) or official *gorgio* [non-Gypsy]

³ Such top-down research Okely experienced when, years earlier, employed as cheap data gatherer, for a doctoral student at Nuffield College. The methodological problems of preordained, ethnocentric questions were immediately apparent. This methodology and the inappropriate application of ethics drawn from medical practice are challenged (2015: 132-133).



corruption (Okely, 1999).⁴ Gradually, re-living “the imponderabilia of everyday life” (Malinowski, 1922) in fieldwork, key associates emerged in sharp focus. They had been intermediaries, allies and sometime-friends. It is now safer for them to be singled out, although still not given their true names. They were my protectors.

Only when asked to address the 2014 Royal Anthropological Institute postgraduate conference and assess fieldwork individuals did I realize those with whom I formed exceptional rapport were all literate—despite the fact that the majority of Gypsies encountered in the 1970s were non-literate. The four key Gypsy individuals discussed here are two men and two women. They inspired new understandings across space and time. This is doubtless because they had, in more specific ways, lived both sides of the ethnic divide. They were sensitive to the stranger’s ignorance of what is familiar to the Gypsy insider. In contrast to other groups identified as nomads, namely hunter-gatherers or pastoralists, Gypsies are interdependent with a dominant, gorgio political economy. Thus they need to know the non-Gypsy/gorgio hegemony and the sometimes-persecuting enemy.

Although the key associates who befriended this anthropologist were less interested in outsiders’ writing about Gypsies, they had all undergone some non-Gypsy schooling. They had, in the course of achieving literacy, experienced the dominant “Other” institutions and priorities, often contrasting with the communities where they chose to live in adulthood. They were familiar with, indeed extra-sensitized to contrasts across the ethnic divide. Thanks to what seems retrospectively a miraculous level of trust, these individuals welcomed the stranger-anthropologist, perceived as an unthreatening young woman in her 20s. Intellectual reciprocity developed within emergent friendships. In some instances, these individuals welcomed the opportunity to articulate at length the differences between Gypsy and gorgio (non-Gypsy). What was familiar and taken-for-granted within the camps and community was explained in detail to the stranger anthropologist. Friendships developed.

Ethics, Process and Unpredicted Outcomes

At the outset of my research, the objective was to gain insights into Gypsy experiences of the government’s provision of sites following the enforcement of the 1968 Caravan Sites Act. I never imagined becoming a university lecturer and then professor. Indeed, I did not foresee my subsequent intensive research, writing, and publications, and therefore could not have communicated that to the Gypsies with whom I worked at the outset. Instead, I explained that I wanted to return to teaching, and one day there could be Gypsy children in my

⁴ My subsequent engagement with research by 20 anthropologists of 16 nationalities revealed that all had shifted their focus in some way, extensive or minor, once immersed in fieldwork (Okely, 2012).

class. Thus, I needed to know something of their traveling way of life and way in which site provision worked. And indeed, much of this became true. My postgraduate students have included a Scottish Traveller, Bulgarian Roma and a New Age Traveller. Other Gypsy students have whispered to me their hidden ethnicity.

In the UK in the 1970s, 1980s and later, there was no such thing as “informed consent”, whereby all research subjects had to sign a detailed form in advance. As Sharon Macdonald (2010) has noted, if such procedures had been imposed decades earlier, the innovations in classical anthropology would never have occurred. Non-literate peoples have invariably interpreted the signing by thumbprint as proof of state intervention and control. Today some university multi-disciplinary ethics committees demand an advance list of questions, as if ethnography can be reduced to pre-planned interrogation where changes are prohibited (Okely, 2015: 132). Among the Gypsies, I soon learned that the very act of questioning is considered intrusive. Only gorgio officials asked questions. So, even before the imposition of managerial ethics, research was challenging. Nevertheless, this anthropologist always sustained an inner moral commitment never to betray this persecuted people who were to welcome and trust her.

As it happened, what was to be a simple policy-oriented report for the Centre for Environmental Studies (CES) grew unanticipatedly into a joint authored book (Adams, Okely et al., 1975). Superbly, this independently funded study influenced the 1977 Cripps Report which changed the Labour government's policy. Cripps fully acknowledged his debt to Adams, Okely et al (1975). The Ministry's early patronizing presumption that the Gypsies should be housed and forced into settled wage labor employment was challenged by the detailed ethnography:

Whatever the previous policies, the Secretaries of State now accept the Gypsy's right to a nomadic existence for so long as he wishes to continue it. There is no intention to put pressure on him to settle or assimilate unless he wishes to do so (Cripps, 1977: 1).

Only after the project did I complete my doctorate with a postgraduate grant and write a monograph (Okely, 1983). I did not foresee that I would do so at the outset of fieldwork. In addition to the postgraduates mentioned above, I now have English Gypsy women, engaged in doctorates about their people, visit me for advice and support. There is a wonderful exchange of shared insights. Through this exchange, many aspects do not need elaboration since taken for granted. The anthropologist in this context does not have to humanize the ethnic group to supposedly “educated” gorgios (Okely, 2008). Some Gypsy scholars supervised by specialists from quantitative disciplines can be reassured about ethnographic analysis. They are still teaching the anthropologist, once a total stranger. I can, in turn, offer intellectual reciprocity and encouragement.



Entry Nearly Endangered

Given that the initial CES project was a relatively limited overview of the Gypsies' perspective vis-à-vis recent legislation for site provision, this researcher's entry was never imagined as deception, let alone betrayal. Social anthropology respects and celebrates the full range of human cultures, especially the persecuted. Indeed, both the Centre's Director and Barbara Adams had put their reputations on the line by initiating the independent research, provoking extreme controversy in the Ministry because Adams was seen as too empathetic towards this persecuted minority. Despite Adams' defiance of the Ministry, within weeks of Okely moving onto a Gypsy site, a gorgio specialist on Roma language(s), heard that some alleged "posh" Oxford woman was living with Gypsies. He asked around the activists' network what she looked like and where she was encamped. A sympathetic local activist revealed to me that this self-styled "rival" intended to visit the site and inform the residents that I was a government spy! Thus a gorgio specialist, who should have been an ally, perceived me, the young female graduate, as threatening "his" specialism without considering that acting on such reckless intentions could endanger me.

The linguist, like some non-social scientists, had no understanding of ethnographic fieldwork. These terrifying threats encouraged me to be extra cautious. More importantly, needing safety in anonymity, I avoided national activist gorgio meetings, including their fantasy that Macedonia should become the Gypsy "Homeland" (Okely, 1997: 230-1).⁵ Here the familiar/strange dichotomy was constructed between gorgios. A young female had invaded territory, hitherto monopolized by outsider males from other disciplines. More seriously, "the self-styled rival" was so ignorant of the minority's culture and ethnic loyalties that he would have risked the young woman's very life if his espionage calumny had succeeded. Several years earlier, these site residents had been involved in a murderous feud all triggered by one Gypsy man betraying another to the police for a minor felony. The latter crime led to imprisonment, triggering revenge killing by the man's kin (Okely, 2005).

Years later, as an author, I would be perceived as more threatening to the established linguist. At a university workshop where he also showed disrespect towards Bosnian Gypsies in mourning for a dead comrade, he yelled at me: "Every time I read your book I want to *burn* it" (Okely, 1997: 240). Next he circulated on the Internet the exact location of my long-term fieldwork, ostensibly to argue that qualitative research defied authentic generalizations—something long disproven (Leach, 1967). This "self-styled rival" failed to recognize that identification of the field site exposed the local Gypsies, not the

⁵ At the university of Malta, when lecturing to a class, including two Macedonians, and then in Northern Greece, I outlined to incredulous students this neo-colonialist gorgio plan to appropriate Macedonia. The imagined utopia exposed hegemonic ignorance of the Gypsies' economic tradition as service nomads: always interlinked with another dominant economy (Okely, 1983: Chapter 4).

belittled anthropologist, to multiple risks. She had scrupulously concealed the locality in publications and long ago left the area.

Four Key Individuals

Here, I pay tribute to key individuals who inspired and strengthened my ever-unfolding quest for anthropological knowledge through intensive fieldwork. The familiar/strange dichotomy was, in three of the four Gypsy individuals, to bring creative reciprocity from the outset and the long term. But, in the other case, a total misinterpretation caused a devastating rupture. By contrast, in one of the three, I successfully exploited a “posh” identity as Oxford graduate by appearing as Character Witness for a Gypsy at the highest court of the land, the Old Bailey. I was defending a Gypsy man charged with abduction, firing a gun and attempted murder.

When I was recruited for the research project on Gypsies and government policy, my director only gradually recognized the value of in-depth participant observation. Her original aim was for me to travel (more than the Gypsies!) throughout England and Wales, administering a 20-page questionnaire to this largely non-literate people. Adams was an embodiment of classical positivism and provoked counter perspectives that influenced my subsequent methods book (Okely, 2012). One comment was that we were not getting the “*real insider*” perspective because, she astutely noted, the individuals most willing to talk, indeed confide in us, were those who had not been “isolated” in the “true” Gypsy community. Some had experienced living in a house and had schooling, if only intermittently.

My eventual ethnographic realization was that these “untypical” individuals were most articulate *precisely* because they had experienced the other side. They could describe, as insider/outside, the contrasts and comparisons with their own way of life. They knew the difference and, most poignantly, witnessed, if not identified with, my own problems of integration. They saw and recognized my naïve mistakes because I did not know the rules (Okely, 2012). They had also learned gorgio rules through trial and error. Moreover, this acute experiential awareness of difference came to be something they wanted to analyze and discuss with me, the outsider. I was thus in a privileged position.

Another role of the stranger anthropologist may be that of the confidante as amateur therapist. In one case, especially in my first weeks on the Gypsy site, I was welcomed as the outsider/listener by a traumatized mother whose young child had been killed in an accident a year earlier. By the time of my arrival, no one else in the camp wanted to listen yet again to her tragic repetitive, extended narrative. “Gemma” would invite me into a broken down van at night and, in the flickering lamplight, she poured out her tale of grief and loss.



Identification

The possibility of classic confidentiality is far more challenged and problematized in the era of the Internet with Google and Facebook. The latter may be more personally controlled but, compared to the pre-Internet times, articles, book titles and overviews can now be located online, if not in the bookshops, and cherry-picked by the sensationalist media.

In the early days of anthropological fieldwork, especially beyond Europe and/or the anthropologists' other residence and place of publication, there seemed little concern about identification of associates in the field. The texts were certainly not written for local readership, especially as the peoples were usually non-literate. Malinowski's controversial *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929) gives the names and close up photographs of individuals, thus making it possible to reconstruct every nuance of their intimate, interconnected lives. It was never imagined that such persons or acquaintances would hear of, let alone read, the published texts. This was very different decades later, especially in European contexts. Fonseca, a former journalist writing on Gypsies, named and provided photographs of women as having had numerous abortions (then criminalized in Albania) never considering the serious consequences of revealing that information (1995: 55, 66, 67).

In some pre-literate societies, literacy has been seen as a source of near-magical power. Lévi-Strauss (1955/73) gives a revealing example in the Brazilian Tropical Forest of a chief who, while non-literate, recognizes the symbolic power of writing and borrows the anthropologist's pen to imitate his movements on paper— all to impress his people. Imagine my problems approaching fieldwork among the Gypsies in the 1970s. I already knew they were largely non-literate, even though living in Southern England not many miles from Oxford and the M1 motorway. Marilyn Strathern (1987) asks what happens to anthropological knowledge and inquiry when the conceptual and theoretical language of the discipline is shared with our research participants. But my publications at first were not shared.

I had already learned caution in a literate, neighboring country, namely the West of Ireland (Brody 1973, Okely 2009). During unofficial fieldwork with my then-partner, it became clear that it was inadvisable to ask questions, let alone bring out a notebook and pen, even though this was a national and local culture marked by literacy, embedded in celebrated poetry and prose. My initial caution was confirmed. The part-time social worker who first introduced me to Gypsy encampments warned me that I was in no way to identify myself as a researcher. "Pamela" insisted she introduce me as a friend. We exchanged biographical essentials before she drove us into the Gypsy camps.

Seven years later, I felt compelled to ban my Oxford doctorate from circulation for 30 years *not* because I feared the Gypsies reading it, but because the material was vulnerable to misuse by irresponsible outsiders. Only the subtitle revealed the Gypsy label. But whatever title is selected, there are misconstrued interpretations decades later (Okely, 2014, note 3). The Gypsies

described and indeed off-loaded to me, as listening outsider, the details of a feud, some years back. The two kin groups secretly agreed before the court case, to “stitch up” the original person who had triggered the feud, not the woman whose action had finally caused a dramatic death. Unlike the comfortable distance of Malinowski researching in the Trobriands, this anthropologist was dealing with legal controversies a few miles from the metropolis and high courts. I rightly feared mischievous gorgio self-styled rivals who, given open access to her doctorate, might triumphantly publicize the “real” criminal’s identity. My subsequent article (2005) addressing aspects of the feud was strategically published in a journal ignored by non-social scientists, and long after the “guilty” individual’s demise.

No Pen No Camera

In my early fieldwork, the very sight of a pen was perceived as the weapon of the enemy, whether policeman, council official or even sympathetic journalist. Days after my first arrival on a site, in casual conversation with a Gypsy man, I learned as he gestured someone pulling open his jacket: “As soon as ever we see someone pull out a notebook and pen from his inside pocket, we know it’s a *gavver* [policeman].” Thus I instantly learned never to appear with pen and paper even among literate associates. Extensive field notes in the form of a diary were written up at night or in a local library (Okely, 2011).

Not only the pen but also the camera, especially the movie camera, were associated with enemy outsiders. Taking photographs was linked to a fearsome means of identification for future entrapment. Here indeed was the authoritarian gaze as explored by Foucault (1977) using prisons and the Panopticon as case studies. Thus, for Gypsies, the camera was the outsider’s controlling gaze. In those days, photos were not required, not even for their driving licenses. So Gypsies were more likely to associate identification images with police arrests and journalists outside courts. No surprise that I found very few photos of working Gypsy males in the local news archives. The best images of some men I knew were taken at large inter-county or national fairs and events like the Derby Day races at Epsom, far from my field sites. Then the individual men tolerated being photographed because they could not be traced to the localities where they usually circulated. In some trades, they hid their stigmatized ethnicity.

They had similar reservations about journalists: “When they come on the site with those whirring cameras, we threaten to smash ‘em up.” Paradoxically, I found a superb collection of still photographs in the offices of the local newspapers and ordered copies. It was clear that they were taken with full consent. Frequently, these were of the very people I lived with. The newspapers have since closed. Meanwhile I accumulated a superb collection and, given they could only have been taken with consent, I reproduced them in the monograph,



simultaneously *never* revealing that these same individuals were the people I knew and lived alongside. No images of the four key individuals were published.

After a year of extended shared residence and trusted friendships, I produced a very simple camera for select images. I never published these in my books, except where individual faces were not visible, for example, the older man breaking up small objects for scrap metal recycling (Okely, 1983: 55).

Decades later, the now-literate Gypsies, with mobile phones and the Internet, have special websites where not only photos of elaborate caravans and horses are displayed but also family groupings. Maybe my treasured collection of images will be welcomed if donated to a Traveller/Gypsy website.

Individuals

GEMMA

Gemma was the devastated mother. I was initially seen as someone just passing through. Moreover I did not know I was going to live on her site for many months before moving to another site. We would meet up in her high-roofed van turned into a quiet meeting place, complete with coal fire and opened up space for a chimney. While mainly re-telling the trauma of her son's death in this charged late night atmosphere, she also confided details about Gypsy skills.

There are added complexities which the Internet may subsequently have transformed. In the 1970s, it was taboo to display the photograph of a dead relative in the trailer. The bereaved mother who confided in me shocked camp residents by having on permanent display a tiny blurred photo of the back of her child's head. It was the only photo she ever possessed of this toddler. To display photos in the trailer was to summon up the ghost of the dead (Okely, 1983). But this bereaved mother revealed that she did this precisely because she wanted to see her little boy just one more time.

The anthropologist's outsider role is likened to that of the driver offering a lift to a hitchhiker (Lavolette, 2014). Years earlier, between terms at the Sorbonne, when I was hitchhiking through France, drivers would confide in me precisely because we would never meet again. The driver, invariably a lone male, sought no insights from the younger, guest passenger. It seemed sufficient that the driver just free-associated in confessional monologue. He gained release by offloading intimacies to a permanent stranger in a *liminal*, non-place (Augé 1995). By contrast, the professional therapist is fully trained and prepared for such projection. Confidentiality is integral between the patient and therapist, engaged in an ongoing rapport. Unlike the hitchhiker, the therapist is expected to make key interventions and insightful, healing interpretations in what becomes an ongoing, but necessary semi-detached exchange.

Considering these parallels, in anthropological fieldwork, the incomer fieldworker may be the chance therapist, whether as passive listener or eventually as dialogic co-resident, moving from observation to participation. But the anthropologist is there to write up, albeit without the betrayal of identifying individuals, as can be found in some psychoanalyst's publications.

I listened, as empathetic stranger, honored to be useful as amateur therapist for Gemma. It was also in that charged atmosphere that she told me insider details about the art of fortune telling. I was given insights never repeated. They served as core understanding and analysis of my future article on fortune telling (Okely, 1996: Chapter 5). Through the months, I was unexpectedly allowed to stay on the site. Gemma treated me as a friend. She corrected my choice of clothing and pointed out other mistakes. But never again was I witness and listener to such confidences. I was, of course, honored to be invited to join her family in their weekly visit to the little boy's grave.

But beyond Gemma's control, I was exploited by other residents as outsider in order to punish her husband for a past womanizing reputation and as a distraction by a gorgio woman. She was concerned to hide her own misdeeds while her Gypsy husband was in prison. This has been explored elsewhere (Okely, 2005). The article ends with my own response to the use of the outsider to resolve internal scandals. Rumors were spread by mischievous co-residents that I was pregnant with a child by Gemma's alleged womanizing husband. It was getting beyond a joke. Finally, I marched into Gemma's suitably crowded trailer, clutching a doll wrapped up as a baby. Claiming I had just "given birth," I demanded paternal support from Gemma's husband. Everyone shrieked with laughter. The earlier tricky invention by co-residents, projected onto the outsider as a means of censoring Gemma's husband, was exploded. I was congratulated: "You can muck in!" The comedy was relayed around all encampments and the reputation of the stranger anthropologist was protected, indeed enhanced.

AUNT MOLL

In the case of Aunt Moll, I was useful as an outsider for independent economic activity. Aunt Moll was of Showmans Guild heritage (i.e. the Circus and Fair People with a different history). But she was on hard times, partly because her married daughter had escaped a violent husband and left the powerful affinal group that had been housed in a suburban cluster. Literate, like many of her people, "Aunt Moll" joked about being seen wearing glasses by Gypsy neighbors. People would say: "Oh dear here comes the welfare." She lived with her husband, divorced daughter and granddaughter in one trailer on my second site.



Ever alert, Aunt Moll, when she saw my acquisition of a 15cwt van, suggested that she go out “calling” with me for business in surrounding villages. Her daughter “Rita” accompanied us. The little granddaughter was left with her grandfather on the campsite. Here was a perfect means of learning by participant observation (Okely, 1996: Ch 1.) We got to know each other well, though never with the same intimacy as with Gemma. There were not detailed exchanges of autobiographies. I was mainly useful as a means of transport for work. Her husband had his own lorry and work commitments and did not share much of the proceeds. Despite our shared literacy, there was another insight into the then absence of the Internet, laptops and mobile phones. Aunt Moll revealed she had relatives, a brother and nephews, and perhaps one son, who had emigrated to Australia several years previously. They travelled around, exploiting their customary skills of repairing roofs and painting houses. Aunt Moll had initially received word of their arrival when she and Rita had been housed with a fixed postal address. But when they had to leave so that Rita could escape her marriage and affines, they lost all contact. With new mobile technology today this would no longer be the case.

Most gratifying for me then, and through time, was Aunt Moll’s comment: “I bet old Judy is writing a book.” At the time I had no such plans. My response to Aunt Moll’s query about writing a book was: “Would anyone mind?” They said no. They revealed they had met the then-famous Dominic Reeve who had written his autobiography (1958) and indeed continues to publish. Not a Gypsy, he took to that way of life. Aunt Moll said he tried to dress like a Gypsy as was then customary, with a red spotted scarf, called a *dicklo*, round his neck. “But as soon as ever ‘e opened ‘is mouth ‘e revealed ‘e was no Gypsy. He was too educated.”

Thanks to my working friends, I learned firsthand the minutiae of calling at houses for cast offs and, more especially, the full range of reception by gorgio house-dwellers. I have detailed elsewhere Aunt Moll’s incorporation of an impromptu claim to a house-dweller that I was working for charity (Okely, 1996: Chapter 1). Aunt Moll recycled this when faced with racist abuse by another gorgio house-dweller.

I recounted to Aunt Moll a family legend. I had Cornish ancestry, including smugglers. One married a Spanish Gypsy. She declared: “That’s why you’ve come back to us. It’s in your blood!” If only I had published this earlier, I might have been safer from gorgio academics who attack an alleged Anglo-Saxon ethnicity.

NATT

Natt was highly literate — he had been in the army and imprisoned in a German camp before the end of WWII but had not been recognized as a Gypsy. He learned early on the art of disguise of ethnicity. He was also a bare-knuckle boxer. He seemed to want to initiate me into his way of life. Just recently, a Gypsy woman asked me how it was I learned about scrap metal

dealing and visiting the scrap yard. She was puzzled as to how I was trusted to accompany a man on his own except for his little boy. Here it was precisely that I was a stranger but known to have a steady partner, that allowed his reputation to remain intact. A man must never normally be alone with a woman, especially a gorgio, not because *she* is vulnerable but because it was said that a gorgio woman will “go behind the hedge with anyone” (i.e. the exact parallel with gorgios’ stereotype of the seductive Carmen-like woman).

Maybe, for once, my “upper class” boarding school accent was perceived by this metropolitan man as a sign of respectable trustworthiness. The link with Diana Allen, the radical solicitor who helped Gypsies fight for land access and other legal problems, was initially an advantage, but tragically this contributed to the end of our friendship.

I never described myself to Natt as an academic but, as with others, someone concerned with Gypsies’ rights, as was Diana Allen who introduced us. When I last saw him, I had not concealed registering at Oxford initially for a B. Litt., and was writing up. I had submitted chapters for the joint authored book in press. By then, he had moved from a caravan back into a council house because he wanted his son to attend school. I was invited into the new home. His second younger wife, also literate, had a new baby girl and stayed at home. Natt was thrilled that his wife trusted him to go out with me in his lorry. Often his young son, Natt Junior aged about six, went with us. I took a photo of Natt and his son at the scrap yard, but never published it. Here was an important record of the Gypsies at work and engaged with recycling, now recognized nationally as central but pioneered by Gypsies. All along the drives to and from the scrap yards, I listened to his accounts of various skills, which extended also to fortune-telling. He did joke once: “Every time I talk about pollution things, your ears come right out!” I had thus unconsciously revealed my interest in rituals of difference.

We regularly met at the house of Diana Allen, far from the sites where I once lived. Eventually, when my fieldwork on Gypsy camps had ended, Natt visited the London home I shared with my partner, a philosophy lecturer, whom Natt met several times. Thus Natt moved beyond being an “informant” in the field to being a friend. He spoke emotionally about how he had prepared the spare bedroom in his council house if I ever wanted to stay.

In late 1976, I obtained a lectureship at Durham University and, with many weekend hours commuting back to my London home and partner, return visits to Gypsy sites ended. Sometime in the 1980s, I visited Diana the mutual friend and solicitor, now too frail to drive. She suggested we do a tour of the new sites. The ones where I had lived had been closed and bulldozed. Diana had the up-to-date knowledge. We drove into a new site. Suddenly I was informed that Natt had moved there after the tragic death of his wife from cancer. He was back in the caravan community which supported this lone parent. I recognized Natt in the distance and pulled down the car window greeting him with excitement. But Natt lifted his hand in a way I recognized as a sign of



banishment: "I don't know you. I cry you dead!" he said. I drove off in shock, in tears, asking Diana why this was so.

Eventually, she confessed to having naively shown him my co-authored book *Gypsies and Government Policy in England* (Adams et al., 1975), a relatively expensive hardback. Diana revealed Natt's unexpected anger, mistakenly believing I had become super rich because of the price. In fact, the tiny royalties were all given to the Gypsy Council. Authorship of individual chapters had been deleted, against my consent. I was not responsible for the early chapters he may have read. My anonymized ethnography was buried in the middle. Additionally, no specific Gypsies could be identified, let alone the locations. The opening chapters by my former employer were legalistic accounts of policy, and might have had phrases and discussions that perhaps were seen as objectifying. I did not agree with all the content. I never had the chance to learn what Natt had read. The hardback's predictable, relatively high cost was totally misinterpreted by the stranger to academia as proof of massive profit and ultimate betrayal by the anthropologist, once friend. Moreover, this young gorgio woman had never planned nor anticipated such emergent in-depth research when first befriending him.

I was totally devastated. I had lost a friend and remained helpless in defending my case. Did he think I betrayed him? My consolation is that the only other known person of Gypsy heritage who encountered the book in the late 1970s was very supportive. A literate community worker in the field locality, he loved my ethnographic chapters, saying, "You put into words what we want to say."

My subsequent single authored monograph (1983) has never been commented on by any of my former site residents precisely because they were mainly non-literate. Moreover, I had lost all contact with my former co-residents. The sites had long been demolished and the residents scattered. Decades later, it is tragic that after the conservative government in 1994 abolished the duty to provide sites, the Gypsies have been subject to enforced sedentarization (Smith and Greenfields, 2013; Okely, 2013). Over time, my major consolation — indeed joy — has been the subsequent positive reception by later literate, university-educated Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. When recently attacked in a terrifying email by another self-styled rival academic, I conveyed my shock to a London-based lecturer of Gypsy heritage. I received this reassurance:

"If you need someone to vouch for your character give me the nod...your work changed my life, and not a few others...you were my discovering that someone was interested in us, so making it possible for me to be interested...that was an evening "O" level sociology class...the start of some travelling of the mind" (Anonymous, personal communication, 31 May, 2014).

In 2014, at a UK workshop on Gypsies and Travellers, I was greeted by a Gypsy woman, studying for a Ph.D., with a distinction in her MA. She said it was an honor to meet this author. At the European Association of Social

Anthropologists (EASA) conference in Estonia, a Hungarian Roma man personally thanked me for what I had done for the Roma people. The same happened that year in Helsinki when a Roma “leader” again thanked me after my presentation on the social context of Anglo-Romani. Thus I console myself that subsequent access to my publications by literate Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are welcomed. I determined never to betray those people who gave me hospitality and changed my life.

GEOFF

Geoff was also well-schooled. He rarely lived on sites but rather on the side of the road with a lorry and several trailers. We engaged in extensive intellectual discussions whenever he visited the site and my trailer. He would reminisce about once working at scrap collection with a horse and cart. One named horse, he jokingly declared, was so intelligent she would read any newspaper scraps on the road.

Geoff had adopted one Gypsy boy as his son to whom he was devoted. Sometimes he welcomed stray young men who were non-Gypsy but who seemed to be homeless, maybe ex-borstal. They worked with him and learned a trade.

After my fieldwork, I suddenly heard of a gun incident through Diana. Geoff had apparently somehow been involved in a dispute when he visited the East London council housing block where the parents of one of the late teenager lads lived. Geoff fired a gun into the ceiling, then departed. The gorgio parent reported “the Gypsy” to the police. Next, Geoff was charged with abduction, illegal gun ownership and attempted murder. Rumors spread around the campsites that he was gay. A search was called for him. Eventually he handed himself in.

I heard all this from the solicitor, Diana, because by this time I was again no longer in the camps but writing up under the supervision of my employer. I heard Geoff was awaiting trial while incarcerated in Wandsworth prison. The Gypsies shunned him. Diana learned no Gypsy would speak in his defense in court. I went to visit him in prison. Clearly, scandalizing rumors had been circulated by the prison wardens, because I noticed bruises on his face. I said: “I don't care what you are in for, we've got to get you out of here.” Later, he said he was greatly comforted by these words by me, his only visitor.

Diana found a Legal Aid solicitor who skillfully persuaded me to describe, without interruption, my rapport and extended conversations with Geoff. I casually mentioned his words to me: “Can I tow my trailer next to yours?” This was the standard Gypsy, jokey chat-up line. Brilliantly, the solicitor saw this would be good for dispelling gay rumors, instead, confirming “normal” heterosexuality. The solicitor also worked out how my Oxford education and “class capital” could be exploited for my presentation as a Character Witness at the Central Court of the land, the Old Bailey. He rehearsed his questions. My



answers were delivered with the appropriate tone. For once my “accent,” imposed at my dreaded boarding school, was of use (Okely, 1996: Chapters 7 and 8). It worked. Geoff proved brilliantly articulate in court with cross-questioning. Here again is an example of someone who knew both sides. The Gypsy has to know the enemy. The so-called cultural isolate, as “true informant,” is less articulate in crossing borders. Prison wardens asked him, as he was led down to the cells, “Coor where did you find that one?” referring to the anthropologist “upper-class” performer.

Found guilty only of possessing and firing a gun into the ceiling, Geoff received a minimal prison sentence. Meanwhile, his father died, but he was forbidden to attend the funeral. All requests to attend with an official escort were refused. Non-attendance at a relative’s funeral was not only emotionally damaging but also culturally unacceptable (Okely, 1983: Chapter 12). Here I could use my own skills with the media. I tracked down and purchased photos of the funeral cortege, with black carriage and horses, and I gave them to the grieving son. This was much appreciated as appropriate reciprocity.

Concluding Comments

Decades later, my publications have been engaged with by literate Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, now university graduates. Regrettably, the only disconnect has come from occasional gorgio academics, misinformed about or deliberately misrepresenting social anthropology. Despite the ever-unfolding Internet trolls and published malice from insecure individuals as stranger-enemies, I am consoled by the continuing support from new generations of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. I have been able to use my intellectual and cultural capital as some reciprocity for what they have given. I have been not just author, teacher and character witness, but also an expert witness contributing, in one of the cases, to the first recognition of Scottish Travellers as an ethnic group (without claiming Indian origin). I was invited to celebrate this at the Scottish Parliament. A Scottish Traveller, whose doctorate I supervised at Edinburgh University, is now a full professor. A Roma MA student successfully competed with several hundred applicants for a key NGO position.

Thus the anthropologist moved from apprentice student to a stranger among Gypsies, whereby many taught and sheltered her, to an occasional advisor and mentor for ensuing generations of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. They themselves are trying to become familiarized in a distant academic world dominated by gorgios, the Gypsies' own stranger “Other.”

Fortunately, I was welcomed and initiated into key aspects of this culture by special insiders. Additionally, I can never forget one older Gypsy man, whose name I here record as celebration: Mark Chapman, my immediate neighbor on the site. Seeing this seemingly naïve young woman about to spend her first night

in a trailer, he advised: “If anyone knocks on your door, don't open it. Just holler. Give us a shout. You'll be alright with *us* to look after you.”

He was right. From his perspective, the danger came not from *within* the site but *outside*, where seemingly, he believed gorgio thieves, rapists and possible murderers lurked. Sadly, in the long run, via print and Internet trolling, where intellectual reputation and integrity are core, there were rather different threats from gorgios lurking in alien corners. By contrast, this professor has *always* been safe with the Gypsies as protectors, guides and mentors. Edmund Leach confirmed, decades ago (1967), that mass surveys in multiple, scattered locations, risk merely repeating errors on a quantitative scale. By contrast, intensive, long-term fieldwork in one locality reveals the overall system, explaining others beyond. Similarly, outstanding individuals embedded in the one locality helped show me this and more.

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