# 8 Constructing the ethnic Gypsy

## Themes and approaches

In 1974 Thomas Acton, writing in *New Society*, stated that the Gypsies, 'or more properly Rom, or Romanichals, are an Indian people who, leaving India in the tenth century, have slowly dispersed, like Jews, all over the world'.[1] In one sentence correct ethnic labels are applied, origins identified, indications given of a diaspora and parallels made with the Jews. In short, ethnicity is established. Although the approaches and style of the many authors forwarding an ethnic definition vary in points of detail, the primary intention is to present the Gypsies as a legitimate ethnic group with the same cultural distinctiveness and, importantly, rights as any other ethnic people. For most Gypsiologists the primary and linked determinants, the solid core, of ethnicity are Indian origin, Romani language and distinctive culture. An image is provided of ethnic unity and of the Gypsies as being a 'unique example of an ethnic whole perfectly defined'.[2] In order to give further weight to this representation it is also claimed that Gypsies now see themselves as an ethnic group, adding the all-important element of self-ascription.[3] One key indicator of this approach is the use of the terms 'Rom', 'Rrom', 'Romany' and 'Roma' which separates Gypsies from non-ethnic Travellers and also from non-Gypsies, usually referred to as *gadzo*, *gajé*, *gajo* or *gaujo*. The case for Gypsy ethnicity is built by confirming that Gypsies meet all the criteria for ethnicity identified in the previous chapter.

However, although there is a *de facto* acceptance by most contemporary Gypsiologists that Gypsies do, unquestionably, form an ethnic group, the precise meaning of this ethnicity and the boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion can and do vary considerably, and there are important differences in emphasis with both the Indian origin and cultural components. From the jumble sale of ethnic criteria the different commentators select their favoured items, which, when used to dress the Gypsy, result in a general ethnic picture, but one in which there are significant variations in detail. In fact, in some of the more extreme cases the common elements become lost behind an exaggeration of certain features so that it is possible when reading the work of leading Gypsiologists and proponents of an ethnic definition to believe that they are talking about different groups of people.

To further complicate matters, contrasting or confused definitions of the ethnic Gypsy also appear not just in the works of different authors but also

within the writings of a single author. On occasion, the concepts of race and ethnicity overlap and are used interchangeably, which is understandable, though problematic, as both use essentially the same criteria for establishing identity. In addition to the blurring with racial categorisation, there is also a similar overlap with the concepts of nation and nationality. There can be little dispute with the argument that different national groupings of Gypsies exhibit different features and characteristics, both physical and cultural. However, the difficulty then becomes one of identifying the relative balance of this nationally derived identity against that belonging to the Gypsies, worldwide, as a people separate from the nations of which they form a part. The language of 'ethnicities within ethnicities', 'sub-ethnicities', 'mosaics' and 'kaleidoscope of ethnicities' is an attempt, albeit ultimately an unsatisfactory one, to come to terms with this dilemma. As with the race concept, and its application to Gypsies, the idea that it might be possible to find a commonly agreed definition and usage of ethnicity, and of the ethnic Gypsy, should be quickly abandoned.

The following section will consider the components of Gypsy ethnicity as put forward in the works of a variety of key non-Gypsy commentators, and will illustrate how the idea of a separate ethnic identity is conveyed by such notions as survival, obscurity, diaspora, taboos, exodus and persecution. In short, a separate identity, an ethnic identity, is established by reference to shared origins (the starting place of the exodus and diaspora), cultural separateness (obscurity and taboos) and persecution by (and so distance from) others. The chapter will conclude by returning to some of the key theoretical issues and problems raised in the preceding chapter around notions of ethnicity, many of which concern the primordial, natural or innate dimension of ethnic identity and the problems of homogeneity and global identity.

## Components of Gypsy ethnicity

It has already been seen that the notion of the ethnic Gypsy consists of a number of strands, with primary emphasis normally given to origins and diaspora. This in turn gives rise to a range of distinctive cultural features, such as descent, ancestry, kinship and marriage patterns, language, social organisation, taboos, political organisation, employments and economic organisation, nomadism, codes of morality and also, often, a particular state of mind. The final component of the ethnic jigsaw is provided by the history and present experience of persecution. Not all commentators refer to each of these features and the balance of factors changes from one writer to the next. It is the purpose of the next section to review the arguments that are presented under each of these headings and to draw out their significance for the ethnic construct.

### *Origins, migrancy and diaspora*

Origins are seen by many as the central foundation stone, essence and heart of Gypsy identity. To assert common Indian origins is to provide the Gypsies with a



shared homeland. The subsequent migrancy and relations with a variety of 'host' societies then also contribute to a shared past and history. It is further argued that such cultural features as language and customs have their roots in that original homeland. This link between remote origins and current cultural practices and beliefs is a major component of many of the ethnic definitions of the Gypsy, and to prove Indian origins is therefore to prove ethnicity. This is conveniently expressed in a shorthand manner by Kenrick and Bakewell when they talk of North West India as forming 'the cradle of the Romani nation'.[4] Such statements as this, presented as objective fact and not inviting criticism or challenge, are commonplace.[5] Marek Kohn, in his influential book *The Race Gallery*, stated that 'as biologists, linguists and historians all agree, the Roma...originated in India', again suggesting the absence of debate or discussion on this issue.[6] Gypsiologists, perhaps as a result of a general unawareness within the Gypsy group itself of the precise nature of their origins, have been almost obsessively preoccupied with trying to prove the facts of common descent from an original migratory group. The manner in which a distinctive geographical origin and identity provide the explanation for a range of other characteristics such as language, culture and beliefs shows a marked similarity with the system of racial classification.

Although speculation and theories about origins still often begin any discussion of the Gypsy group, this frequently then gives way to a consideration of their dispersal and migrations through Persia, the Byzantine Empire, the Balkans and into Europe.[7] Indeed, the notion of Gypsies as a diaspora people has become an essential component of the ethnicity argument, a development that parallels the more general interest in the subject that has emerged as a result of the weakening of ties to nation-states and increased worldwide population movements in the post-1945 period.[8] The relationship between diaspora and collective identity is complex and can take various forms.

It might be expected that diaspora and dispersal would serve to dilute and break up any sense of a collective identity by the fact of removal from the unifying features of the homeland and by spreading a population around the world. However, this threat to collective identity was often compensated for by the migrant group concentrating in specific geographical locations in the host societies, and in these circumstances collective action in defence or pursuit of common interests was able to develop and cultural practices became consolidated and reaffirmed. Importantly, migrants tend to relocate among their own kind, and by congregating in a geographically limited area and by remaining there for some time it was possible for the political and social expressions of their shared identity, such as places of worship and leisure activities, to emerge. For example, Jews, historically a diaspora people, have traditionally settled in quite specific locations within nations, developing identifiable Jewish quarters. Also, migrant peoples with some recent connection with their homeland take with them at least certain symbols and practices, such as diet, dress or support for a sporting national team, in order to retain their identity in a different environment and context. In both these cases the status of the homeland takes on a high

degree of importance, in the sense that it is the political objective of an ethnic people either to create a state founded on the geographical integrity of their homeland, or else, if migrants, at some time to return to the place of their ancestors or otherwise to keep the memory alive in various forms.

The situation with Gypsies, and the status of their homeland, is rather different. The place of origin of their ancestors is located so far in the distant past as to be little more than, at best, a remote memory. Also, migration and dispersal were not usually balanced by significant geographical bunching in the host territories. Gypsies have become dispersed not only the world over but also within Britain, if not in all nations, into relatively small family units and encampments, and this has delayed or prevented the building of the normal ideological and institutional mechanisms for asserting common identity.

However, even if the actual experience of the Gypsy diaspora might have had a negative effect on group identity, it can be argued that this has been compensated for by the story, or perhaps the myth, of diaspora providing a sense of a shared history and a past in which constant movement and persecution have served to strengthen a sense of otherness. The language of migrancy, exodus and diaspora, replete with the biblical connotations of a persecuted minority, echoes the history and experience of the Jews, a parallel that is made all the more forceful when persecution and, later, the Holocaust, are introduced into the equation. The notion of dispersal and migration carries with it the idea of an original homeland from where the first ancestors departed and so provides a basis for a sense of national identity. For some, it even becomes a land, like Israel for the Jews, to which the Gypsies will one day return, the final political goal and peak of spiritual fulfilment.[9] The notion of diaspora suggests that at least for the duration of the movement the migrant people remained largely separate from the indigenous populations of the countries through which they travelled, and so were subjected to the persecutory treatment often reserved for nomads, newcomers, strangers and outsiders. Both the experience of persecution and the memory of it, passed on through generations, contribute to the creation of boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. The question that must be asked, though, is whether this sense of the past belongs to the people themselves and is part of their tradition and collective memory, or whether it is something that has been largely constructed in the writings of outsiders.

In recent years there has been a drift towards a general belief that migration westwards from India occurred in several stages, probably beginning in the ninth century. However, it is premature to talk in terms of a consensus among Gypsiologists and, once again, there is little unanimity concerning the precise original location, the timing of and reasons for the migration or migrations, and whether ancestry and exodus can be traced back to one original group or many. If the latter, then the formation of a single body occurred outside India and followed rather than preceded migration.[10] While many texts make reference to the Gypsies' Indian or North Indian origins, the details are often left imprecise, and this is despite a shared and concerted attempt to relegate earlier theories about origins and migrancy to the ranks of legends and myths and to replace



these with alternative theories based primarily on more sophisticated linguistic and genetic analysis.[11] As will be seen, there is the danger that old myths are simply being replaced by new ones.

Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton identify two periods of migration, the first from North India around the seventh century, creating the Nawari Zott communities of the Middle East, and the second, also from North India, around the tenth century, creating the Romani communities of Turkey and Europe.[12] Donald Kenrick locates migration from India to Persia more broadly in the period from AD 224 to AD 642, although, elsewhere, he talks of Gypsies being descendants of 'people who emigrated from India between the fourth and tenth centuries'.[13] Elsewhere Gypsiologists refer to both separate and single migrations, and to descent from several tribes or castes, and the date of migration is variously given as from AD 800 to AD 950 and as between AD 500 and AD 1000.[14]

The uncertainty over the impetus for and timing of migration can also be seen in the doubts that exist over the nature of the original group. Gypsies have been said to derive from a loose confederation of nomadic tribes living and travelling in India and Iran.[15] Alternatively, and in contrast to the view which holds that the Gypsies of Europe belonged to an ancestral chain that could be traced back to a single Indian group which migrated westwards, Kenrick suggests that they derived from Indian immigrants from various tribes who intermarried and intermixed in Persia, forming a group known as the Dom or Rom. Elsewhere, Kenrick traces the origins of European Gypsies to a group known as Zott, a mixture of Persian land-workers, soldiers, and their families and persons of Indian origin called Dom, who included among them nomadic craft-workers and entertainers.[16] The evidence for this is at best circumstantial,[17] and yet Kenrick has moved from traditional views on single origins, and even from an earlier position of his own, to suggest the multiple origins from India, with the Gypsies only being formed as a group, with presumably a distinctive identity, after they had intermarried and intermixed with other groups in the countries through which they travelled.

A further, though in some ways similar, alternative is provided in the recent work of Ian Hancock, a noted Gypsy and professor of linguistics, who sees the original group as consisting of a military band of non-Aryan Indians and possibly African mercenaries (called Siddhis), drawn from different ethnic groups and speaking different languages, who had been brought together in the first two or three decades of the eleventh century to halt the assault of the Islamic troops under the Muslim general Mohammed of Ghazni, who was trying to push Islam east into mainly Hindu India.[18] This mixed military band then moved further west, through the Byzantine Empire in the thirteenth century and eventually into Europe, continuing their fight against Islam and picking up other peoples, and their languages and dialects, on their migrations/travels. They eventually formed their own distinctive group, known as Rajputs, established a separate identity and developed their own language (called Romany), presumably a hybrid of all the collected languages and dialects. Hancock describes them as 'a continuum of distinct ethnic groups constituting a larger whole'.[19] The evidence offered by

Hancock to support his theory that this group were the original ancestors of modern-day Gypsies is provided by the retention of Rajput clan insignia among some Vlax populations in Europe and other 'linguistic and historical' evidence, the precise nature of which is not clarified.[20]

Even this brief review of some of the theories of the dating of migrancy and concerning the original group indicates the dependence on broad generalisations and the absence of consensus. The initial ambition of producing a new factual account of origins and migrations to replace the previous legends soon gives way to 'almost certainties', 'probabilities', 'possibilities' and 'likelihoods'. If the drift towards any kind of agreement can be discerned, it is towards the idea of multiple migrations and diverse origins rather than a single time-specific migration of a particular group. The process of forming a Gypsy people occurred *after* the original migrations and as part of the experience of the diaspora itself, with various groups coming together as one people as a result of the attitudes and responses of outsiders and host societies 'erecting a boundary against them all'.[21] However, even this revised and more flexible approach remains speculative, largely as the sources for the early history of the Gypsies remain partial and contradictory.[22]

Each of the theories concerning origins and migrations relies primarily on linguistic evidence, still seen by many as the most reliable way of establishing origins and indicating patterns of migrancy. Following similar lines of enquiry to the nineteenth-century philologists, the albeit imprecise Indian origins have been established primarily by means of an alleged correspondence of either sound, grammar or words, or any combination of these, between the Romani and Indian languages. Ian Hancock has noted that the Romani language has the same 'morphological, syntactic, phonological and lexical features as several of the Indic languages. The closest is Western Hindi, which itself emerged from Rajputic.'[23] It is often stated that the Romani language is derived from Sanskrit and has many links with other Northern Indian languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Gujerati, Bengali and Sylheti.[24] In order to affirm the Indian connection and the notion of an unchanging core, Ian Hancock has claimed that '[t]oday, the Romani language, like the Romani people and Romani culture, remains at heart Indian, despite being modified through contact with others over the years'.[25] As well as the Romani language being used to establish Indian origins, it also becomes a major component of current Romani ethnic identity and is often presented as 'the kernel' or 'cornerstone' of Gypsy identity. The argument is simple and follows the same path as the nineteenth-century philologists and Gypsy lorists: the roots of the language reveal the roots of the people who speak the language. In this instance, though, the crude assumptions about how language is acquired and the link between the ability to speak the language and purity are abandoned, and an ethnic rather than racial identity is the outcome.

Increasingly, there is the admission among some Gypsiologists that the comparative linguistic and physical anthropological approach is flawed and that any conclusions which are drawn must necessarily be extremely tentative. The speculative nature of the linguistic evidence is revealed most sharply by the



continued disagreements among Indianists and the constantly changing views about Gypsy origins. Angus Fraser, in a text which otherwise seems to reaffirm the Indian origins of the group, offers a word of caution:

> the study of Romani can reveal a great deal about the origin and evolution of the language itself. How far that can be equated with the origin and evolution of Romani-speakers is a more speculative matter, and the equivalence cannot be taken for granted.[26]

As Fraser states, the case for saying that Romani is a language of Indian origin remains unproven.[27] This matter has occupied the attention of many philologists, linguists and Gypsiologists for a period spanning over two centuries and it now seems unlikely that any new text sources, or indeed linguistic methodologies, will emerge to prove the case conclusively one way or the other. Donald Kenrick, one of the foremost proponents of the Indian theory, concedes that the attempt to construct the early history of the Gypsies is like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle when pieces are missing and parts of another puzzle have been put in the same box.[28] While this is a useful analogy it perhaps fails to recognise the extent to which many pieces are lost for ever and the manner in which other pieces have intruded, resulting in a picture that has been forced together largely on the basis of guesswork and assumption and, perhaps, also on the basis of a pre-formed image of the desired end result.

The linguistic test of origins appears, then, to have reached the end of a long and bumpy road filled with many potholes, only to find a dead-end awaiting, and Gypsiologists are now following an alternative route which employs research into genomes, blood groups and population genetics. It is hoped in some quarters that this relatively new science might conclusively and finally answer the question whether or not the Gypsies were of Indian origin. Genetic anthropology, or molecular anthropology, uses blood samples and an analysis of DNA to identify distinct genetic profiles which can then be used to trace origins on the basis of comparison with other groups in other places and times.[29] To date, genetic research in relation to the Gypsies has investigated the possibility of links with existing populations in India and with non-Gypsy populations among whom they have travelled and lived. Also, the extent of genetic difference among the Gypsy groups themselves has also come under the DNA microscope.[30] Ian Hancock has used the results from various researches to claim the following:

> Every single group identifying itself as Roma and from whom blood samples have been taken (by a team led by Dr Peter Underhill of the Centre for Human Genetics in Perth), demonstrates the existence of an Indian polymorphism on the male Y chromosome. This kind of testing has also been undertaken by researchers from Slovakia and India, with the same conclusions.[31]

Hancock's confidence in the ability of the results to prove Indian origins is not, though, widely shared. At the time of writing, the evidence drawn from various studies, some dating back to the 1920s but mostly concentrated in the post-1945 period, still remains inconclusive. Some studies have identified similarities in the blood group systems of Gypsies and North Indian populations, while other, later studies have pointed to contrary conclusions by identifying 'considerable genetic variation' and heterogeneity among Gypsy groups in Europe, finding that Gypsies only resemble populations in the Indian subcontinent in some limited respects.[32] The currently available data, necessarily based only on relatively small samples, have been described as insufficient and at present conclusions are varied and speculative.[33]

If the evidence for origin, whether linguistic or genetic, remains speculative and inconclusive, then the facts about the timing and direction of the diaspora are also, at best, contentious. The 'evidence' is based largely on linguistic analysis in order to identify the direction and length of stay, and the extent of assimilation in particular countries and areas is determined by discovering similarities and patterns in word and grammatical usage. While such an approach is clearly of some value, there are also other factors to be considered when assessing this kind of evidence, notably the nature of the relationship between the group and the society of which they (temporarily) formed a part. In addition, commentators such as Kenrick also base their arguments on material found in early Persian texts, though on his own admission the evidence remains more circumstantial than factual, more partial than total. Any attempt at uncovering the earliest history of the Gypsies necessarily involves making assumptions, connections and associations which, however probable, are and will remain unproveable. This is only a problem if the resultant speculation about origins and migrancy is taken as factual truth by others.

As a result of the unreliability of sources and so the continued doubts that remain about the Gypsies' early history, some writers who otherwise remain within the ethnic paradigm have moved, with varying degrees of urgency and speed, away from an emphasis on Indian origins. In his inaugural professorial lecture Thomas Acton referred to the Roma as 'descendants *in part at least* [my emphasis] of Indian emigrants'.[34] The qualification is significant as it concedes that Gypsies have origins and ancestral links to places and people other than India and Indians. It is not clear, though, whether this is to follow the Kenrick theory outlined above, or whether it takes into account the many generations of intermixing and intermarriage since the original migration. At the very least it allows for degrees of assimilation and is thus moving some steps away from the long-held notion of separateness. Indian roots are then, to some degree, being reduced in importance and are seen as of less significance in understanding the nature and identity of the present-day Gypsy community. Similarly, Angus Fraser, in his major study *The Gypsies*, seems also to question the value of continuing the long-running debate about origins. He writes:

> After the lapse of so much time it may be a forlorn hope to seek to prove with any certainty the precise people (or combination of peoples) from which the European Gypsies sprang in the past or which is most closely related to them today.[35]



However, while these writers question and qualify though do not entirely reject the theory of Indian origins, Judith Okely argues for its abandonment. Okely, a professor of anthropology, has come forward with a more radical position which has resulted in a degree of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, spiced with not a little animosity and accusations of 'glibness' and 'arrogance'.[36] Her approach to the question of origins has led to strong condemnation and criticism from the Indian theorists, who argued that by denying Indian roots the fundamental basis of Gypsy identity and ethnicity had been removed. One of her foremost critics over a number of years has been the eminent Gypsiologist, now professor of Romani studies, Thomas Acton. In particular, Acton is concerned with what he terms Okely's 'de-ethnicising' position, which he believes has opened the way to further discrimination against the group as the legal and political defence against racism, that of being a legitimate ethnic group, had been removed.[37]

Despite her work being interpreted by lawyers and others to justify 'de-ethnicising' the Gypsy, Okely herself makes it clear that she defends the notion of them as a legitimate ethnic group even though her version of ethnicity has moved away from the alleged Indian roots of the group and towards an alternative analysis which stresses the indigenous origins and development of the English Gypsies.[38] Okely's own response to the criticisms of her work has been to suggest that there has been misuse and falsification of her writing by lawyers, politicians and other academics.[39]

Okely's ethnic definition emphasises common attributes, culture and tradition, but she does not base these on any notion of shared foreign origins from which all else derived. Her argument is grounded in self-ascription and her own 'historical' research, from which she concludes that the Gypsies of Britain were of both foreign and indigenous origins. The group which emerged over time could lay claim, she argues, to culture and traditions which represented an amalgam of influences both foreign and native. So, rather than concentrating on origins, Okely selected another of the old lorist concerns, that of rites, ceremonies and beliefs, as the basis of Gypsy identity. Regulations concerning pollution and cleanliness were thus transferred into a contemporary setting. Okely refutes the single-origin theory, thus challenging the sacred cow of both the racial and ethnic definitions, not in order to deny ethnicity to the Gypsies, but rather so as to confirm it by other means. The obsession with Indian origins is seen as belonging to non-Gypsies rather than Gypsies, whose own identification, argues Okely, is with their current country of residence rather than a remote alleged place of origin.[40]

Having broadly challenged the notion of Indian origins, Okely then applies this to a specific case study by means of an examination of the nature and identity of English Gypsies. She questions whether the group of 'Egyptians' present in sixteenth-century England were of foreign origin and suggests instead that the label 'was nothing but an assumed identity for many persons with no foreign origin'.[41] In abandoning theories of Indian origins, and its explanation of Gypsy language and culture, Okely looks elsewhere for the basis of Gypsy ethnicity.

Although admitting that her sources are 'sketchy', she proposes that English Gypsies emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from indigenous roots, formed from the coming together of persons who, at the time of the collapse of feudalism and fundamental social and economic change, rejected wage labour and adopted itinerant trades and services.[42] In effect, Okely locates the emergence of a self-forming and self-identifying Gypsy group as the outcome of specific material circumstances and the rational choice of formerly sedentary natives to become mobile economic and family units:

> ultimately an ethnic group emerged which exploited geographical mobility, self-employment, and exotic or other occupations. Specific beliefs, practices and linguistic codes were adopted and elaborated to affirm an ethnic boundary.[43]

To an extent Okely's proposition, based on a clause in the 1562 legislation concerning 'counterfeit Egyptians' and other evidence that indigenous 'wayfarers...rovers...and landless peasants' disguised themselves as Gypsies by, for example, darkening their skins, is a reasonable one.[44] Although convincing evidence is lacking, it does seem likely that groups of indigenous travellers and nomads imitated the Egyptians, probably for reasons of financial gain, and possibly even intermixed and intermarried with them, as has been discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, some qualified support for her analysis can be found in the work of Angus Fraser, who writes of

> the considerable non-Romany element in the ancestry of the British Gypsy population and the long history of other travelling groups which were in existence well before the Gypsies came and which overlapped with them in many aspects of their social life and means of livelihood. The literally insular nature of British society as a whole has led to a blurring of ethnic distinctions within the Traveller population.[45]

Similarly, Thomas Acton, a major critic of Okely's work when it was published, also writes of the creation of a new group of Gypsies in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries formed out of the 'fusion' of original immigrants/descendants and indigenous nomads.[46] There appears, then, to be little disagreement that intermixing certainly took place between Gypsies and indigenous peoples, though the extent of this must remain as pure speculation. The notion that 'many persons' adopted the Egyptian title has to remain a strong possibility; however, to then extend the argument to claim that 'many *if not all* [my emphasis] of the first recorded Egyptians in the British Isles' were not of foreign origin and that 'groups of so-called Egyptians were composed largely *if not entirely* [my emphasis] of disenfranchised and indigenous persons who adopted and exploited an exotic nomenclature' is a step too far.[47] Such a view remains unsupported by evidence and too casually dismisses the possibility that the label was probably *not* an assumed title for equally as many persons who were of foreign origin.



As ever, when discussing the early history of Gypsies the sources can be misleading and ambiguous, and while Okely suggests that the evidence for foreign/Indian origins is based on either speculation or distortion, it should also be noted that her own argument, in favour of indigenous origins, is equally open to the same charges. This, though, is to perpetuate the debates around origins. Over fifteen years ago Jean-Pierre Liégeois was arguing that '[i]t is now often arbitrary – and sociologically, politically, anthropologically and culturally irrelevant – to separate groups of Indian from those of indigenous origin (and sometimes even impossible to do so)'.[48] The arbitrariness and impossibility of the task are beyond question, and yet it continues to occupy a prominent place in any writing or discussion about the group.

### *Descent/ancestry/kinship*

Ideas of descent, ancestry and kinship feature in most accounts of the ethnic Gypsy and in some instances are even placed above origins as the key component of identity. The importance of establishing ancestry/kinship is that it excludes from the group those who might adopt a superficially similar style of life but otherwise lack the history and traditions. Most obviously, in the present climate, this would exclude New Age Travellers from the Gypsy category. Again, the emphasis on descent and ancestry provides a past and an identity shaped around family and kinship networks. A Gypsy identity, and so Gypsy ethnicity, is therefore something an individual is born with rather than something that can be acquired, or even abandoned, later. Importantly, the main criterion adopted by Gypsies themselves is said to be that at least one parent must be Gypsy.[49] However, it is not thought that descent and ancestry are sufficient on their own, and identity has to be validated, reinforced and reproduced through the experience of the community and its way of life, culture and values.

### *Culture*

A key aspect of any ethnic classification is the notion that a group can be defined according to a shared culture. For most commentators this results in a search to identify the nature and origins of that common culture, which together contribute to the distinctive identity of the group. This has resulted in an analytical spectrum that, at one end, presents the ethnic group as possessing a core culture which is shared by all the group, everywhere. In relation to Gypsies, this remains as the most common approach. However, more recently, the scale has been widened, often still retaining the concept of core culture, but now also recognising the variety of cultures among the Gypsies, some borrowed and interpreted from the 'host' society. Moreover, it has also been suggested that the core culture is more an abstract or idealised form and 'would not belong in its entirety to any actual Gypsy population'.[50] The central components of the core culture are variously said to include self-employment, knowledge of the group's language, an ideology of travelling, distinctive habitat, dress, rituals and codes of behaviour (especially in relation to cleanliness), forms of economic, social and political organisation, and a general

ideological separation from non-Gypsies.[51] Laws and customs relating to pregnancy, childbirth, baptism, puberty, virginity, clothes, food, cooking, hygiene, marriage, death and funerals together comprise the core system of allegedly distinctive Gypsy beliefs and practices.

There are two main ways in which Gypsy culture is presented. First, culture is linked, in a linear fashion, with the Gypsies' alleged Indian origins. In an argument that resembles the racial explanation of physical difference, cultural features are shown to have their roots in India, and, often, the connecting line is presented as static and unbroken.[52] Second, a modified version of this accepts that traditions, culture, beliefs are distinctive, and that although they were possibly rooted in an Indian past they have subsequently evolved and been transformed over a period of time by incorporating features from non-Gypsy society.[53]

In a twist that reverses a popularly held image of the dirty and unclean Gypsy, a major recurrent theme in writing on the beliefs and practices of Gypsies is the notion of cleanliness rituals and ideas concerning pollution. These codes are applied to such everyday practices and events as food preparation, personal cleanliness, clothing, relations between the sexes, menstruating women, childbirth, the body below the waist, and anything to do with bodily wastes.[54] These are variously referred to by the terms *moxadi*, *mokadi*, *mochadi*, *marimé*, *mahrime* and *marimo*.[55] The attempt to discover and codify these practices has occupied the attention of outside observers from at least the early nineteenth century to the present day. Indeed, the behaviour and beliefs concerning pollution are often presented as static and unchanging over generations, and there is often little to distinguish the nineteenth- from the twentieth-century accounts. In particular, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this area of investigation has been particularly favoured by anthropologists, and Michael Stewart has remarked that in anthropological literature cleanliness beliefs 'are perhaps the single most commented on feature of Gypsy "culture" '.[56]

The existence of such codes shaping behaviour contributes to the ethnic classification of Gypsies in various ways. First, they are said to have originated in the practices and beliefs held by their ancestors. This not only presents the culture of the group in a positive and favourable light, but the continuation of past practices and beliefs lends *gravitas* to group behaviour. Moreover, while certain of these practices and taboos around cleanliness are certainly followed by other groups, such as the Zoroastrians and Jews, other parallels are rare and specific. Importantly, they are not shared by the majority societies in which the Gypsies have found themselves and so form one of the barriers that separate Gypsies from non-Gypsies. Judith Okely, for example, sees these beliefs and practices as the key to Gypsy distinctiveness and separateness and she writes that 'the tea towel hanging separately to dry on a line becomes a flag of ethnic purity'.[57] Fonseca takes this even further when she refers to the codification of 'hundreds of unwritten laws and superstitions enforcing symbolic purification', and to the 'tangled underbrush of prohibitions' which forms the hedge between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.[58] They provide a sense of shared identity as all Gypsies are said to 'strictly and unquestioningly' honour the codes and



taboos. They become the 'universal language' of the Gypsy and constitute the basis of 'Romipen', or Gypsyhood.[59] English Gypsies were thought to risk pollution if they even mentioned the name of animals, such as snakes and rats, which were considered dirty or polluted. Pollution of any kind was therefore to be avoided, even to the extent that relations with non-Gypsies were kept to the absolute minimum required for economic survival in order to avoid any risk of contamination. Furthermore, the significance for the establishment of an ethnic identity was enhanced by the additional comparisons that could be drawn between Gypsy codes on pollution and purity and the codes governing Jewish behaviour, for example in relation to food and diet, to be found in the Talmud.

The key notion, then, is that these codes, beliefs and practices, influential in many aspects of daily life, define and maintain the boundaries between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.[60] Again, the key issue is not whether Gypsies do or do not follow these practices,[61] nor whether they are rooted in some remote Indian past, nor whether they provide the main boundary between insiders and outsiders. The important point is that the concept of pollution has been used in all these ways to identify the group as a distinct ethnic group.[62]

The racial definition of the Gypsy placed great importance on nomadism as an essential characteristic of the Gypsy, linking it with a range of other hereditary characteristics. The problem for the racial theorists, as it is for those presenting the ethnic classification, is that there is no simple and straightforward match between Gypsies and nomadism: it is often stated, quite accurately, that not all Gypsies are nomads and not all nomads are Gypsies. Indeed, it is even argued that the link between Gypsies and nomadism has been the invention of *gadjo* romanticism. However, *purposeful* nomadism continues to have importance for the ethnic classification for a combination of reasons. First, a nomadic way of life is seen as traditional, and so to settle can be seen as a movement away from and break with past (distinctive) practices. Also, second, settlement can mean that the group is becoming acculturated to the ways of settled society, thereby losing its distinctiveness and adopting the ways of the dominant host. The settlement of Gypsies has long been an ambition of various members and sectors of settled society, not only because it undermined the negative aspects of travelling but also because it would permit assimilation and absorption into the wider value system of the receiving society. There is sufficient evidence, for English as well as foreign Gypsies, that settlement, whether temporary or permanent, has for a long time been a feature of the Gypsy population. Perhaps for this reason, recent commentators on the English and European Gypsy populations place much less emphasis on the need for group nomadism.[63] But in order to ensure that evidence for settlement is not taken to mean that Gypsies are losing their distinctiveness, an argument has now emerged that identifies nomadism not as an actual situation or way of living but as a state of mind. This means that it is possible to travel and yet remain sedentary, just as it is possible to live a sedentary existence but remain a nomad. It is worth quoting the presentation of this argument in some detail:

> Whereas a sedentary person remains sedentary even when travelling, the Traveller or Gypsy is a nomad even if he does not travel. Immobilised, he remains a Traveller. It is therefore preferable to speak of Gypsies and Travellers who have become sedentary rather than of sedentary Gypsies and Travellers, since the sedentary condition is for them *a priori* a provisional state – more clearly illustrated by the former phrase – for people for whom movement is of vital significance. Nomadism is more a state of mind than an actual situation. Its existence and importance are frequently more psychological than geographical. The Traveller who loses the hope of setting off again and the possibility of doing so, also loses his identity as a traveller.[64]

This argument is repeated in the work of Kenrick and Bakewell, who also assert that nomadism is 'a state of mind rather than a state of action'.[65] This is an important development, as identity is now being located less in actual experience or in visible and measurable differences than in psychological differences with non-Gypsies. An echo of the old racial arguments is evident in this approach. Liégeois continues his line of argument: 'If you are a Gypsy or Traveller, it is something you know, feel and live. It is a lifestyle based on ways of being that are undefinable [*sic*] and intangible, and on ways of doing which may be variable or ephemeral.'[66] By a quick sleight of hand the fact of nomadism has been reduced almost to insignificance, and sedentary Gypsies remain as much Gypsies as their nomadic brothers and sisters by mentally retaining the values and spirit of nomadism. Difference is now seen less as matter of origins, history or culture and more as a 'sense', a 'feeling', a 'state of mind'. The problem for the outsider is that values and spirit, which are largely invisible, indefinable, intangible and ephemeral, are now being identified as components of the boundary between the Gypsy and non-Gypsy. Emphasis is being given to abstract qualities which define ethnicity. Whatever the attractions or merits of such an argument, the problem remains that such criteria remain outside the bounds of objective measurement.

It was seen in an earlier chapter that the nineteenth-century lorists and philologists made elaborate claims about the value of speaking Romany as a test of identity. While the simplistic expression of this argument is no longer acceptable, it nevertheless remains true that many commentators still use language as a key indicator. Indeed, Marcel Courthiade, writing in *Interface*, states that language 'is the most stable cultural reference point'.[67] The argument is that other cultural traits are either variable, changing or ephemeral and that language remains as the single most consistent and objectively measurable characteristic. As the acquisition of language through birth into a particular linguistic community is undoubtedly a key indicator of origins and identity, there can be little dispute with the proposition that this applies equally to the Gypsy community. However, the tendency to represent Romani as a single language understood by all Gypsies has now given way to a growing acceptance that, although it might have a single origin, it now consists of more than 100 dialects or even separate languages, often mutually unintelligible despite the existence of some core words.[68]



The social organisation of the Gypsy group, and the codes and rituals which reinforce this, consolidate the ethnic picture. Many commentators refer to the extended family and kinship networks as the core structure of the Roma. While intermarriage takes place, as previously recognised, various explanations and justifications are offered for this. It is argued that a new type of hybrid group emerges, that the Gypsy aspect is dominant, that it is a means of strengthening the group and of hiding from the authorities, and is also a way of disguising ethnicity. More usually the fact of intermarriage becomes lost in the details of the mechanisms employed to exclude outsiders and to ensure that marriage takes place within the community: 'the selection of a spouse from outside disrupts the pattern of social and economic bonding that maintains stability within the community'.[69]

In order to strengthen the boundaries and set up criteria for inclusion/exclusion a distinction is frequently made between the true ethnic Gypsy, alternatively labelled Rom, Rrom or Romany, and those groups that have been formed by intermarriage between the Rom and the host populations. This includes the Travellers in Scotland, the Yenische in Germany, Tatari in Scandinavia and didicois in England. As the origins and possibly even the culture and beliefs of these groups are seen as different from those of the ethnic Gypsy they are identified and treated as groups apart. Further distinctions are often then also made between ethnic Gypsies and other nomadic groups with whom there has been no or minimal intermixing and intermarriage, such as the Irish tinkers and New Age Travellers, who share certain features and a way of life in common but who have their own separate origins, culture and even language.

The distinctive social organisation of the Gypsies is mirrored in the ethnic definition by their own forms of political organisation. The idea that Gypsies have their kings and queens and a system of formal leadership no longer seems to be accepted by most contemporary commentators and there is no unanimity on the nature of the Gypsies' polity. Various versions are put forward, including the idea of Gypsy councils or tribunals, or *kris*, and references can also be found to Gypsy law and the Council of Elders. An alternative, to be found in the work of Jean-Pierre Liégeois, is of a more informal arrangement based around kinship ties and what he refers to as 'the judicial regulation of tensions and conflicts between different groups'[70] – in short, a loose, unstructured form of political, social and judicial organisation, but one which does to some extent overcome the diversity of the population by the existence of a shared and autonomous system of justice.

### *State of mind and the Gypsy spirit*

As has been seen, some of the works that argue in favour of the ethnic Gypsy also make reference to the idea that Gypsy separateness and ethnicity can be defined by a distinctive Gypsy spirit, character, state of mind or distinctive Romani worldview. Fonseca, for example, uses the nature of the Romani language as the linguistic expression of a much broader Gypsy personality. In a variation of the traditional argument, more important than the actual words is

the 'spirit' of the language, which is seen as 'hyperbolic, gregarious, typically expressive of extreme emotion'.[71] For Fonseca, then, the spirit of the language and the character of the people are the same: not peaceful, quiet, thoughtful and rational, which by implication are the characteristics reserved for others, but rather loud, outgoing, emotional and passionate. She adds to this picture of distinctive behavioural characteristics, which, it is implied, are common to the whole group, of loving noise, having no need of privacy, and of using disguise, misrepresentation and secrecy as a means of survival.[72]

Fonseca is not alone in emphasising attitudes and character as defining features of the Gypsies, and this has been seen previously in relation to nomadism. Similarly, Michael Stewart identifies the distinctive Gypsy characteristics as being those of style, panache and charm, a cultivated insouciance and a careful disregard and attentive disdain for the non-Gypsy way. He refers to their sense of egalitarianism and individualism, the Gypsy way of doing things (*Romanes*), the ethos of sharing and the idiom of brotherhood.[73] Their core identity is therefore an attitude and a distinctive 'Rom sense of what it is to be human', which is revealed in the way they 'invert or subvert' the meanings of 'objects, representations and practices' found in the non-Gypsy world.[74] Elsewhere, Clébert talks of the Gypsy love of freedom, their flight from the bonds of civilisation, their need to live in accordance with nature's rhythm and their desire to be their own masters.[75] This attempt to ascribe particular mental or spiritual qualities to the Gypsies has clear echoes of the old racial classification which viewed them as innate, inherited qualities transmitted by blood.

It is evident that Gypsies are not the only nomadic people in the world and that not all Gypsies are nomadic; equally, certain beliefs, such as purity rituals, are not exclusive to Gypsies any more than they are practised by all Gypsies. However, the distinctiveness is in the combination of features, and in this the twentieth-century Gypsiologists arguing in favour of the ethnic classification have to a considerable degree been using the same arguments, language and evidence as the nineteenth-century Gypsy lorists. Both have set out to identify the 'essence' of the Gypsy and both systems of classification place a similar emphasis on the importance of separateness and difference. However, some components, such as the lorists' obsession with biological and physical difference, have been largely abandoned and new components added. Of these, perhaps the most important has been persecution.

### *Persecution*

Alongside themes of origins and diaspora a further major component of the majority, if not all, ethnic definitions of the group has been that of discrimination and persecution. It is commonly and regularly asserted by scholars, by Gypsiologists and by Gypsy pressure groups themselves that both the history and present position of Gypsies are dominated by various forms of unremitting persecution and harassment, including executions, brandings, mutilations, whippings and rape.[76] This history of the group was first brought within the arena of



international politics in 1968, when a Swedish resolution ensured that the hostile treatment of Gypsies was passed for investigation to the Council of Europe's Social and Health Committee, and it has remained a key policy area since that date. This story of the Gypsy past and present has now extended beyond a specialised audience and increasingly is being brought to public attention by newspaper articles, notably in the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, reporting the continued hostility shown to the group. Not only does such journalism represent an aspect of the media representation of the group which challenges or at least qualifies the notion that the printed media is at the forefront of hostile stereotyping, but it also plays a major role in challenging popular perceptions and establishing the group as a people whose rights have traditionally been threatened or denied.

Not surprisingly, and also not without significance for the construction of the ethnic classification, much emphasis has been given to the treatment of Gypsies under Nazism. The Gypsy Holocaust, once described as 'forgotten', is now being remembered much more widely, and in written histories as well as museum exhibitions the experience of Gypsies is considered alongside that of the Jews and other persecuted groups. But the Holocaust is also placed in the much wider context of hostile treatment by a wide range of 'host' societies which both preceded and have followed the genocide attempted by the Nazis.[77] Indeed the concept of genocide has even been given an extended currency and is used by Thomas Acton to refer to the 'surge' of persecution which occurred throughout Europe between 1520 and 1600.[78] The intention here is evidently to establish some kind of continuity in the extreme forms of treatment of the group and to make a parallel between historical and more contemporary responses. Whether the various strategies of diverse early modern states, such as enslavement, forced labour, exclusion, banishment, imprisonment and dispersal, compare with the specifically targeted and racially motivated policies of Nazi Germany is, of course, a point of debate. For our purposes, though, of more importance is the way in which this presentation of the past and the analysis of the relations between Gypsies and non-Gypsies contributes to the development of the ethnic classification.

Persecution, whether experienced or learnt as part of group history, helps to establish Gypsy ethnicity by consolidating a sense of group identity and by establishing ethnic credentials in the eyes of the non-Gypsy population.[79] Discriminatory treatment by outsiders strengthens group identity by creating a defensive response to such hostility. Also, the knowledge and experience of hostile treatment, in both the past and the present, of self and others similarly situated informs the living memory of Gypsies and becomes part of the oral tradition and culture of the group. Indeed, this forms one of the 'historical threads' that serves to unify the people.[80] In other words, persecution heightens the sense of difference, strengthens in-group feeling and creates an 'us and them' mentality.

Persecution rallies activists together, and the history of past and even present ill treatment is a starting point for the demand for equal rights. Indeed, a key objective of political activism is to *create* an ethnic identity as part of this

overall strategy. In this way the story of persecution is being used deliberately and consciously for a political purpose. For some this has reached an unacceptable level:

> Much of this discourse about the discrimination against and the victimisation of Romanies is highly ideological. They are realities but there is also a political exploitation of those realities in creating a language to promote it. I have found this language less and less satisfactory. It has become a ritualistic presentation and interpretation of history only from the point of view of discrimination and victimisation of the group.[81]

This criticism, for the moment, remains primarily confined to debates among the activists themselves, despite raising important questions about the way Gypsy history is being written and the processes of constructing, and manipulating, identity.[82] In terms of a more general public awareness of the issues, the campaign for equal rights and the demand for recognition of Gypsies as a legitimate ethnic group founded on previous and existing discriminatory treatment are now being endorsed by a wider public sympathetic to such issues. As their history and treatment parallel the history of other important ethnic groups, notably and most obviously Jews, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to deny rights and ethnic status to one group while allowing it to others similarly situated and treated. This has even led to various degrees of collaboration and mutual recognition of the histories shared by the two groups. Articles in the journal of the *Institute for Jewish Policy Research* have commented on the 'numerous parallels' between the history of anti-Gypsyism and anti-Semitism, with similar stories of demonisation in books, sermons, drama and art, ghettoisation, and the shared myths and stereotypes which draw on images of the wandering Jew and the nomadic Gypsy, spreading disease, and tales of child abductions, murder and violation. Daniel Strauss has noted that the violence of the anti-Gypsy stereotype has been 'rehearsed, learned and handed down in a manner rivalled only by the anti-Semitic stereotype'.[83] Undoubtedly partly as a result of these parallel pasts, some of the main champions of the Gypsy cause are of Jewish origin and collaboration has now begun to take on a more organised form with the emergence in the United States of America of the Romani–Jewish Alliance.

Even so, the link with identity is also a problematic one. As well as the contribution made to ethnicity, the history and experience of persecution can also have an opposite effect. A common response of persecuted groups is not to further announce their separateness but rather to adopt strategies calculated to minimise the differences with the host precisely in order to avoid further persecution. The demise of difference and a separate identity is seen as a price worth paying. Such strategies might involve speaking the same language, wearing the same style of dress, adopting indigenous names and pursuing a way of life which does not mark out the group for any special treatment. In this way some of the more obvious and visible manifestations of a separate identity are concealed or lost through processes of integration and assimilation. While this does not necessarily mean that the more private aspects of a separate identity are not retained, it does raise obvious problems for the maintenance of a separate group, and ethnic, identity.



## Ethnic boundaries, kaleidoscopes and mosaics

The construction of the ethnic Gypsy, both by outsiders and by Gypsies themselves, shows the complexity of the debates that surround the concept. There are differences in terms of identifying the essential characteristics of identity, and we can find a host of varying perspectives around issues of origin, diaspora, language, culture and persecution.

Having considered the dominant and influential representations of the ethnic Gypsy as found in scholarly texts and from the group itself, it remains now to return to some key questions about the nature of ethnicity itself raised in the previous chapter. In particular, it is necessary to consider the extent to which the ethnic Gypsy has been formed by the group itself or from outside, where this identity fits into the primordialist/circumstantialist/constructionist debates, and whether the identity is static and unchanging or something which is constantly remade and remodelled. Finally, it is necessary to consider issues around group homogeneity and the value, and indeed accuracy, of seeing the group as having a transnational identity in which ethnicity supersedes and overcomes difference within the group and competition from alternative identities.

The various perspectives on ethnicity present contrasting analyses of how we should understand processes of group formation and identity. The primordialists offer an essentialist analysis which depends on the idea of a fundamental core or essence which is natural, unchanged and unchanging. In contrast, the other perspectives, which talk of myths, inventions and constructions, indicate that groups and group identities are not natural and instinctive but, rather, are built, developed, reproduced and changed.

Much of the writing on Gypsies remains locked within the primordialist straitjacket and Gypsy identity is seen as unchosen, traditional and inherited. Most of the ethnic advocates, albeit sometimes unwittingly and unknowingly, adopt an approach and arguments which have clear parallels with the Gypsy lorists, but with the more excessive crudities of nineteenth-century racial theory removed. A belief in fixed, impermeable barriers and a natural given identity remains strongly evident in many writings. This is presented as such an unchallengeable position that alternative analyses are treated not only with suspicion and derision, but also with the accusation that they are an attempt to deny Gypsies their true ethnic status. Rather than seeing the other perspectives as alternative ways of understanding the nature of ethnicity, the language of myths and construction present in the circumstantialist and constructionist perspectives are taken to indicate that any sense of a distinctive Gypsy identity is false and artificial and that ethnicity has no meaning in relation to the group.

Therefore to a large extent the primordialist perspective continues to present a picture of an identity which has remained, in all its main essentials, static over

a long period of time. Inevitably there is a recognition that there have been a few changes, for example, in employments and specifics of lifestyle, but changes in the Gypsies' social structure, normative systems, culture, beliefs, rules, taboos and character are thought to have been minimal.[84] Often, the unchanging or traditional features are seen as the core, and the modern features as superficial or deliberate façades. When mention is reluctantly conceded of the latter, the details of the changes are often left vague.[85] By resisting outside pressures and the 'vagaries of history', the Gypsy essence has remained strong.[86] The strength and persistence of this original identity and character are explained by their marginal status as outsiders and traditions of persecution which see them remain isolated from other groups. Also, it is argued, their traditional culture, or *rromanipé*, only permits as much involvement with the non-Gypsy world as is necessary for social and economic survival,[87] with intermixing seen as leading to defilement and spiritual disharmony.

This desire to identify the essential core of 'Gypsyness' has reaffirmed the old Gypsy lorist, and racist, belief in an unchanging and static identity. While this has long been the standard and traditional way of understanding and representing groups, and is an inevitable outcome of the processes of stereotyping, in recent years there have been signs of a shift from this position. Increasingly it is being recognised that identities are not fixed but instead are flexible, and are mobile rather than naturally self-perpetuating.[88] This newer perspective is evident, for example, in some recent works on Jews: 'The term "Jew" is far from being a fixed identity (there are many competing definitions of group membership and of "who is a Jew".'[89] Webber continues: 'Like all social groups, Jews are constantly redefining themselves – which today means also reformulating the main features of their historical consciousness.'[90]

It is now possible to identify similar arguments being used in relation to Gypsies. Okely notes that Gypsy culture is in constant evolution, borrowing from and interacting with majority culture as part of the process of continually creating and recreating the Gypsies' cultural autonomy.[91] Similar arguments can be found in the work of Jean-Pierre Liégeois, where reference is made to the 'shifting universe' of the Gypsies, especially in relation to culture. He writes:

> Gypsies and Travellers as a whole must not be considered a static society, rigidly set since time immemorial and reproducing itself in an identical mould.[92]

> Gypsy culture, like all cultures, is in constant evolution, and more so than others because change is one of its traditions and adaptation a constant necessity.[93]

Instead, then, of a Gypsy culture that is static, we are presented with a picture that focuses on its dynamic nature, able to borrow from and interact with non-Gypsy society, not as a mark of deference, subordination, dilution or assimilation, but as a form of reinterpretative ingenuity and creativity. Indeed the concept of change and adaptation is even identified as a distinguishing feature of the group, linked to processes of survival in a hostile and persecutory environment.[94]



The notion of change has been introduced into the debate out of a recognition that ideas of static and unchanging identity, character and culture are not sustainable. However, the difficulty remains that although change is now more often referred to there is little attempt to map exactly the nature and extent of these changes or to address the critical issue of how or if changes and variations in values and cultural traits undermine, strengthen or have little effect on the key defining features, the so-called 'essential core', of Gypsy identity. The significance of this modification in approach can be found in the broader discussions about the homogeneity or diversity of Gypsy cultural identity.

The concept of ethnicity, by virtue of its search for common characteristics and its emphasis on these features as the primary definers and essence of a people, inevitably has a homogenising effect on group identity. Priority is given to those features shared by the majority, if not all, of group members wherever they may be situated in time and place. While, of course, the identification of shared characteristics as the basis of group identity is entirely valid, it is also the case that differences within the group must be acknowledged and accommodated. Even limited reading on the nature and experience of Gypsies worldwide reveals that major differences exist between Gypsies in different nations and also between groups or tribes within nations. Of concern, then, is how those advocating the ethnic definition of the Gypsy address these problems.

Too often there is a tendency and temptation simply to ignore diversity as this is mistakenly taken as an admission of the weakness of the boundaries that have been created. A common approach is therefore simply to deny or downplay differences, to reassert the image of Gypsies as one people, and to focus almost exclusively on the shared features and similarities, such as ancestry/roots, physical appearance, beliefs and values, and taboos. Boundaries are thus maintained without challenge or complication, and separateness remains unchallenged.[95]

However, a second response is to allow and even highlight difference and diversity:

> It is a mistake to think, as novelists and screenwriters tend to do, that Gypsies constitute a homogeneous population. As the migrating population spread out into Europe, the different groups became associated with different countries, over time acquired local characteristics, and intermarried with local populations.[96]

The acquisition of local characteristics and the probable assimilating effects, partial or total, can be multiplied across all Gypsy populations and migrations, over an extended period of time. This has led to the logical admission by some that Gypsies do not form a unified ethnic whole and that there is no such thing as one single Gypsy culture.[97] There is now growing mention of different groups of Gypsies, each with their own cultural heritage, origins and lineage, and of the

'very different' groups going under different names who 'distinguish themselves sharply from one another'.[98] Significantly, the idea of 'multiculturality' rather than monoculturality has begun to appear in the ethnic discourse.[99] Moreover, it is also noted, in a challenge to the idea of a worldwide brotherhood, that these varied groups often have little or no contact with each other and in some cases are even hostile to each other. Jean-Paul Clébert talks in one instance of the ethnic unity and homogeneity of the group, but then states that differences in customs, manners, taboos, laws, justice, superstitions and religious beliefs can be found not only between groups but within groups; that is, differences in precisely those areas that other commentators take as the basis for common identity.[100]

The most obvious explanation of diversity is that it stems from the varied national origins and development of the worldwide Gypsy population. This is variously indicated by the fact that the label 'Gypsy' is often prefixed by a national affiliation, or even that the label itself or the spelling denotes a particular country of origin. This means that the Gypsy population is permitted to have certain features which are shared in common with the majority national community. Of these, perhaps the most important are the ways that they assimilate into the customs of the country in which they live. They are a part of that community, with an identity and loyalty to that state, shown by their willingness to fight and defend that country in time of war. Yet, despite sharing aspects in common with other indigenous inhabitants of a particular state which then also separate them from Gypsies in other nations, they are also said to be apart from it by virtue of a transnational identity which extends beyond national borders and unites all Gypsies behind the banner of a non-geographically specific Romani nationalism. In other words, Gypsies have a dual identity and a dual nationalism.

The notion of national difference is taken one stage further by reference to the notion of tribes. These may cut across nation-state borders or exist within them. For example, Michael Stewart, writing on the Hungarian Gypsies, identifies three tribal groupings: the Hungarian Gypsies, the Boyash and the Romany-speaking.[101] More widely, the various tribes of the Romany include the Romanian coppersmith group known as Kalderash (or Kalderas/Calderari/Kalderari), Tshurara, Lowara/Lovari/Lovari Bare, Macraya/ Macharaya, Polska Rom, English Romanichals, Bashalde, Manus, the Sinti and Rom of Germany and North Europe, the Kaale or Kale of Finland and Wales, the Boyash/Beash of Romania, Vlah/Vlach, the Churari/Cherhari/Chergashi of Bosnia, Erlii (the sedentary Muslim Roma in Bulgaria), Rudari, and the Nawwar of the Middle East.[102]

The recognition of difference has, then, permitted the construction of an image of the group as an ill-defined, diversified and 'extremely heterogeneous' people who do not share a common nationality, language or dialect, social or economic organisation, occupations, customs or culture.[103] The question is how such differences and heterogeneity can still be accommodated within the ethnic paradigm. First, it should be noted that the desire to present Gypsies as comprising one part of a larger totality is found more among the writings of outsiders than among the group themselves.[104] Essentially this is achieved in three main ways. First, a belief is retained in some sense of shared core identity that



pulls together this disparate population and, despite diversity, reference is still made to the 'cohesion' of Gypsy societies derived from 'the force of collective awareness'.[105] Despite going further than most commentators in identifying differences among Gypsy populations, Michael Stewart then writes: 'Gypsies are a part of our world and yet are distinct from the rest of us. They live in the world we know, yet they seem to offer an alternative way to be in our world.'[106] Next, the Gypsy identity is reaffirmed by separation and distinctiveness from the host population and, finally, linked to this, from other nomadic groups who lack the ancestry, traditions and culture of the Gypsy population. Tribal differences are seen as being perfectly compatible with the 'one people' definition. For example, in Germany the Sinti and Rom are seen as two distinct ethnic groups, different in terms of their origins, lifestyle, housing, education, employments, language and religion. Yet, despite this, they are brought together by virtue of their original point of origin from the Punjab region of North India.[107] Moreover, and importantly, the Gypsies' separate identity is consolidated by comparison with the host population, and particularly with those who appear to be closest to them in terms of lifestyle and behaviour, other nomadic groups. This would include groups who have no claim to Indian ancestry, such as the Irish Travellers, Dutch *Woonwagenbewoners*, Norway's *Omstreifere*, Germany's *Jenische*, Spain and Portugal's *Quinquilleros*, Scottish tinkers, and English didakais and New Age travellers.[108]

Having established broad grounds for inclusion/exclusion, many contemporary Gypsiologists then describe the worldwide Gypsy population as a complex and rich 'mosaic of ethnic fragments', a kaleidoscope, an archipelago of separate 'sub-ethnic' groups, and also as a people among whom there are 'many ethnic groups' or a 'range of ethnic groups'.[109] The difficulty caused by allowing ethnicities to exist within larger ethnicities for the most part remains unacknowledged by those putting forward this version.

The general picture that has been constructed is of a large transnational population consisting of separate tribes, national and occupational groupings in a kaleidoscope of identities. This in itself does not present a problem, as probably any dispersed population with varying patterns of settlement will show similar divisions without necessarily threatening the overall ethnicity. The Jews provide probably the most obvious example of this. The idea of multiple and even competing identities contained in the language of mosaics and kaleidoscopes, and the proposition that an individual, or a people, can take on a combination of characteristics, roles and identities, are both attractive and entirely reasonable. However, a problem does arise when these sub-groups are described as forming separate ethnicities within the larger ethnicity. Taking any of the definitions of ethnicity and the criteria for inclusion in an ethnic group, it is impossible to understand how one ethnicity can exist within another, or how one individual can simultaneously belong to two ethnic groups, without some dilution of at least one of these categories. The process of differentiation is not being undertaken on the basis of class, income, religion or other variables which might serve to divide groups, but on precisely those criteria of origin, behaviour and belief that are said to define ethnicity. In effect, the tribes are being attributed with an ethnic identity different from the larger Gypsy ethnicity.

Such a situation can only be possible if the criteria for one are specific and for the other loose and general, so that both can be accommodated. A possible comparison would be with the use of Asian as an ethnic category, which conceals within this broad, and to some worthless, label a large number of national and ethnic groupings. Of central concern is how a people will identify themselves, and whether their self-identification is with the larger or smaller grouping. With the Gypsies, some of the sub-ethnic groupings refuse to recognise anything in common with each other, are often antagonistically opposed to each other, and lack any sense of an overall common identity given to them by others. Despite this, Gypsiologists still show a reluctance to abandon the transnational, global grouping. Essentially, though, the value of the larger and broader category has been brought into question. As soon as precision is lost the concept of ethnicity becomes flabby and worthless, and to talk of ethnicities within ethnicities serves only to confuse further an already complex concept.

A similar point is made in Jonathan Webber's recent and controversial examination of Jewish identity, where he questions the value of the larger, unifying category and replaces this with the diversity of sub-ethnicities. Webber is keen to move away from the analysis of Jewish identity which 'stresses the intrinsic if not indissoluble bonds [culture and destiny] which link diaspora Jewish communities together'.[110] This approach, which holds on to the notion of a worldwide, transnational Jewish identity, is described as 'a quasi-mystical, mythological or essentialist view of world wide Jewish bonds'.[111] Webber suggests an alternative starting point for identifying and defining Jewish identity when he stresses:

> the infinitely large set of different ethnic histories which characterise the experience of Jews in the different countries and societies in which they have lived.[112]

The question thus becomes one of balance and dominance. In the case of an immigrant, nomadic and diaspora people, the main question revolves around the identity taken by these people in the various countries in which they live and work and whether national differences become more or less important, in the sense of defining who a people are, than any original, pre-diaspora group identity. Specifically, in relation to Gypsies the question has to be asked whether there is such a thing as an overarching Gypsy ethnicity which transcends national boundaries and unites the Gypsy people wherever they may be. When a claim is being made for a transnational ethnic Gypsy identity it is based on some notion of a core, or essential, identity based on the criteria discussed previously. This in turn creates a boundary that excludes those who have married outside the group and also those pursuing a similar lifestyle but of different origins. The difficulty comes with the next stage, which attempts to accommodate marked differences between identified Gypsy groups by taking the overall identity and then breaking it down into a kaleidoscope of sub-divisions. In one form the divisions are referred to as tribes and reflect variations between and within nations, based on objective and visible differences in, for example, language, culture, behaviour, social and economic organisation, or origins.



In effect, the argument is whether there exists a distinctive and exclusive core, or essence, and whether this is to be found in their cultural or spiritual identity (or both), and the extent to which this is shared and recognised by all members. The alternative, which abandons the idea of an essence or core and instead focuses on difference, if followed to its logical conclusion could raise doubts as to the whole notion of Gypsy ethnicity.

## Conclusion

The struggle for the recognition of ethnic status for Gypsies has largely been achieved within the specialist academic community engaged in Gypsy studies, but only small headway has been made outside this limited field. In order for Gypsies to be brought within the legal provisions outlawing discrimination and racism, Gypsies and their legal representatives had to win a hard-fought prior ruling that they constituted an ethnic group. In an attempt to win public sympathy for the plight of Gypsies, especially those victimised by public and official persecution in central Europe, journalists in the broadsheet media implicitly or explicitly favour the ethnic representation of the people. Yet this official and journalistic categorisation is not one necessarily accepted by the readership of the press and the wider public. In short, the arguments in favour of an ethnic identity for Gypsies have left many observers, commentators and outsiders unconvinced. The significance of this should not be underestimated. The battle to achieve recognition that they form a legitimate ethnic group is of crucial importance as the linked issues of civil rights and ethnicity cannot be separated.

In many respects the way that Gypsies have been seen and defined as an ethnic group takes no account of the problematic nature of this classificatory system or the debates taking place around the constructed nature of ethnicity. For many years, the ethnic school of Gypsiologists remains locked within the primordialist/ethnographic paradigm, reifying culture, stressing Indian origins, and keen to identify the elusive unifying core of Gypsyness. A considerable portion of writing on the ethnic Gypsy was embroiled within the primordial stew, serving up the same diet of a mono- and essentialist culture. The search for a real or true past, in the case of Gypsies, remained the holy grail pursued by Gypsiologists, and the obsession with 'proving' Indian origins continued with the advent of DNA testing. Whether this is proven or not is, though, largely immaterial, as the myth or belief in such origins has been formed and cemented as the essence of the people. Ethnicity was therefore portrayed as something which was natural, organic, given and fixed. That is, the conceptual approach to understanding Gypsy identity has to a large degree remained in the first phase of the evolution of the ethnic concept and fails to incorporate or even address the later perspectives. In particular this has meant that the complexities raised by multiple and competing identities and the changing character of identity have been largely, though not entirely, unexplored.

Within much of Gypsy studies there appears to be a shared but unstated belief that to accept notions of social construction, and with it the idea of the role of myths, imagined pasts and invented traditions, is somehow to deny the validity of the concept of ethnicity and shared identity. This, though, should not be the case. There is now an acceptance that national identities, also based on notions of boundaries and shared characteristics, have been constructed on precisely the same kind of imagined pasts, and yet there is no doubting their validity or force. Indeed an identity built on such foundations can be stronger and more real than anything built on truths and facts. The same can be said for ethnicity. There is a movement away from ideas of monocultural ethnicity towards a recognition that individuals and groups are constantly in a process of negotiating and renegotiating identity. Jonathan Webber has made this same point forcefully, if controversially, in his discussion of Jewish identity:

> The idea that Jews are a single people possessing a single, or at least united history assuredly has great power at the level of theology or political ideology; but, in practice, the overwhelming majority of European Jews today also function as citizens of the respective countries in which they live. To put the point more strongly but no less accurately, they are only *partially* [original emphasis] Jewish in the sense that their cultural identities as Frenchmen, Italians, and so on operate alongside, if not in competition with, their identities as Jews... . It means that the assumption that Jews form a single, transnational collectivity (whether in Europe or world-wide) needs careful empirical, ethnographic qualification.[113]

The word 'Gypsy' could easily be substituted for 'Jew' throughout this extract. The key issue is of multiple identities, and a main concern is with the outcome of any such co-existence and competition and whether identities are abandoned, diluted or rendered partial in the process. The work by Webber is undoubtedly sensitive and there will be those who fundamentally disagree with his analysis. However, this should not obscure the very important questions about identity that are being asked. While Gypsiologists have perhaps not gone as far as Webber in abandoning the 'one people' idea, there have been changes and the balance is perhaps shifting between the primordialists and the social constructionists. While it is too early to say that the former of these perspectives is in terminal decline, it is the case that many of its assumptions and arguments are now questioned and challenged rather than simply accepted. The movement towards the revised perspective which allows for complexity and the shifting nature of Gypsy identity can now be found both in recent studies and in the works of those whose earlier writings were more in tune with the primordial outlook.

With so much at stake, the debates, arguments and bitter disagreements about Gypsy ethnicity are emotionally charged and highly sensitive. But this should not mean that the problems with the concept and its application to Gypsies should



be avoided. Issues relating to the nature of identity, identity formation and its development and evolution, counter-identities, change over generations, national differences, varied experiences and the elusiveness of self-identity are problems which cannot, indeed must not, be simply ignored or swept away in pursuit or defence of some mythical or mystical essential whole.

## Notes

1 T. Acton, 'True Gypsies – myth and reality', *New Society*, 6 June 1974, p. 563.
2 Jean-Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies*, translated by Charles Duff (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 17. This book was first published under the title *Les Tziganes* in 1961. Clébert's book, although strongly criticised by Gypsiologists, is also seen as having an influence in shaping popular understanding of Gypsies.
3 Donald Kenrick, 'Gypsies and Jews', *Jewish Socialist*, Vol. 5, Spring 1986, p. 11.
4 D. Kenrick and S. Bakewell, *On the Verge. The Gypsies of England* (London, 1990), p. 8.
5 I. Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing. The Gypsies and their Journey* (New York, 1995), pp. 85, 103. See also, for further examples, I. Hancock, 'American Roma: the hidden Gypsy world', *Interface*, No. 28, November 1997, p. 19; chapter 1 of Ian Hancock's *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1987) is entitled 'Out of India', and he states, on p. 7, that the Rom are of northern Indian origin. See also K.W. Lee and W.G. Warren, 'Alternative education: lessons from Gypsy thought and practice', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. xxxix, No. 3, August 1991, p. 313. In the opening pages of J.-P. Liégeois, *Gypsies and Travellers: Socio-cultural Data, Socio-political Data* (Strasbourg, 1987, p. 14), it is stated that Gypsies come from the East, that linguistic evidence reveals Romani to be an Indian language derived from Sanskrit, and that migrations occurred from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries.
6 Marek Kohn, *The Race Gallery: The Return of Racial Science* (London, 1995), p. 195.
7 The dates usually given for their appearance in Europe are: Crete 1322; Corfu 1346; Yugoslavia 1348; Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary 1415–1417; Paris 1427; Poland 1428; Wales 1430 or 1440; Spain 1447; Scotland 1492 or 1505; Sweden 1512; England 1514. See Eric Sunderland, 'The population structure of the Romany Gypsies', in Michael H. Crawford and James H. Mielke (eds), *Current Developments in Anthropological Genetics, Vol. 2, Ecology and Population Structure* (London, 1982), p. 126. As noted by Sunderland, this indicates a movement from southeast Europe to the Balkans, central Europe, and then to northern and northwest Europe. See also Clébert (1967), pp. 54–55. Dates are usually based on the first mention of Gypsies in official documents.
8 See, for example, the new Routledge series on global diasporas under the general editorship of Robin Cohen. In particular, see Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London, 1997). See also W. Willems and L. Lucassen, 'Gypsies in the diaspora? The pitfalls of a biblical concept and the muddy backwater of science', unpublished typescript. I am grateful to the authors for providing me with a copy of this item.
9 For an excellent fictional representation of this journey back to Romanestan, see M. Farhi, *Children of the Rainbow* (London, 1999).
10 See, for example, I. Hancock, 'Foreword', in W. Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hatfield, 2001), p. viii.
11 For a good discussion of legends relating to origins and an account of the migratory pattern, see Liégeois (1986), pp. 33ff.
12 See N. Gheorghe and T. Acton, 'Political factors affecting the presentation of Romani identity', paper presented to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Seminar on Romani Studies, University of Greenwich, 29 March 1993.

13 D. Kenrick, *Gypsies from India to the Mediterranean* (Toulouse, 1993), chapter 1; D. Kenrick, 'Foreign Gypsies and British immigration law after 1945', in T. Acton (ed.), *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity* (Hatfield, 1997), p. 100.
14 I. Hancock (1987), p. 7; A. Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford, 1992), chapters 1 and 2; M. Brearley, 'The Roma/Gypsies of Europe: a persecuted people', *Institute for Jewish Policy Research/Policy Paper*, No. 3, December 1996, p. 5; I. Hancock, 'The Romani diaspora', *The World and I*, Part 1, March 1989, p. 613.
15 D. Kenrick, 'Romanies without a road', *Contemporary Politics*, No. 232, March 1978, pp. 153–156.
16 Kenrick (1993), pp. 9, 53.
17 For example, part of the evidence depends on references in ancient texts to '*atsingani*' or '*athingani*', a term allegedly applied both to Gypsies in Byzantium and East Europe and also to heretics. Similarly, references to nomadic peoples are also taken to refer to Gypsies even though other migrant groups existed at the time.
18 I. Hancock, 'Roma origins and Roma identity: a reassessment of the arguments', typescript. I am grateful to Ian Hancock for providing me with a copy of this paper.
19 I. Hancock, 'Introduction', in I. Hancock, S. Dowd and D. Rajko (eds), *The Roads of the Roma* (Hatfield, 1998), p. 18; also I. Hancock, 'American Roma', p. 20. Hancock states that this theory is supported by a 'growing number of specialists', though names/sources are not provided.
20 This theory has been seen as an attempt to give historical stature to the Gypsies by giving them a proud warrior past, contrasting with earlier theories which located their origins among the poorest and most feeble caste of pariahs or Suders. Willems and Lucassen state that the Rajput theory stems more from political ambition than from scholarly evidence. See Willems and Lucassen, 'Gypsies in diaspora'. Hancock discounts this accusation as the work of those who, unable to escape their prejudices, refuse to accept that Gypsies could have such respectable ancestry.
21 D. Kenrick, 'Gypsies and Jews', p. 9.
22 I. Hancock, 'The East European roots of Romani nationalism', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. xix, No. 3, Winter 1991, pp. 251–252.
23 Hancock, 'Roma origins', p. 6.
24 H. Asseo, 'Introduction', in Kenrick (1993). This is to draw on the work of such eighteenth-century scholars as the Englishman William Marsden. Kenrick stated that '[p]eople who speak Hindi, Punjabi or Gujerati will recognise most of the Romani words. Bengali or Sylheti speakers may know some.' See Kenrick (1993), p. 54.
25 I. Hancock, 'Introduction', in Hancock, Dowd and Rajko (1998), p. 18.
26 Fraser (1992), p. 10.
27 'Historical linguistics cannot determine the racial and ethnic origin of the early Romani speakers. There is no inherent or necessary link between language and race.' Fraser (1992), p. 22.
28 Kenrick (1993), p. 10.
29 For a useful description of the process, see Richard Askwith, 'Bound by a silken thread', *Independent on Sunday Magazine*, 16 May 1999, p. 10.
30 Eric Sunderland, 'The population structure', pp. 125–137.
31 Ian Hancock, 'Roma origins', p. 5.
32 Sunderland, 'The population structure', p. 127.
33 *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 131; see also Sarabjit S. Mastana and Surindel S. Papiha, 'Origin of the Romany Gypsies – genetic evidence', *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie*, Vol. 79, No. 1, 1992, pp. 43–51.
34 T. Acton, 'Authenticity, expertise, scholarship and politics: conflicting goals in Romani studies', typescript of professorial lecture, University of Greenwich, 1998, p. 7. I am grateful to Professor Acton for providing me with a copy of his talk.
35 Fraser (1992), p. 32.
36 Hancock, 'Roma origins'.



37 T. Acton, 'Categorising Irish Travellers', typescript, 1992, p. 5. Acton also criticises Okely for her lack of familiarity with Romani dialects and for the source of her funding. Similar points were also made by Acton in the paper delivered at Leiden. See T. Acton, 'The social construction and consequences of accusations of false claims to ethnicity and cultural rights', paper presented at the Leiden University Foundation Centennial Conference, 'The Social Construction of Minorities and Their Cultural Rights in Western Europe', held on 12–14 September 1990, University of Leiden, the Netherlands. See also T. Acton, 'Review of Judith Okely, *The Traveller Gypsies*', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1983, pp. 385–386. Elsewhere, Acton, in an article which specifically addresses the notion of the ethnic Gypsy, defines ethnicity as the 'possession of a distinct language, with its own literature or oral tradition, distinct organisation, relative endogamy, and so forth'. See T. Acton, 'The ethnic composition of British Romani populations', *Roma. Journal of the Indian Institute of Romani Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1979, p. 50. While this picks out key cultural aspects, the 'and so forth' leaves the definition unsatisfactorily vague and imprecise.
38 Okely makes it clear that her doubts about the single Indian origin of Gypsies should not be used to discredit the idea that they form an ethnic group. See J. Okely, 'Ethnic identity and place of origin: the Traveller Gypsies in England', in H. Vermeulen and J. Boissevain (eds), *Ethnic Challenge: The Politics of Ethnicity in Europe* (Göttingen, 1984), p. 52. Rather, Okely wishes to construct ethnicity according to a different set of criteria. See also M. Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder, Colorado, 1997), for support of Okely's position. He states: 'Often this search for origins has been rather haphazard – any Indian, or, more particularly, northern Indian, custom that reminds people of Gypsy behaviour is seen as ancestral. Sadly, this kind of explanation is widely seen as acceptable' (p. 236).
39 She also suggests that political objectives have guided and compromised intellectual integrity in the writing on the group. See J. Okely, 'The invention and inventiveness of Gypsy culture', paper presented at the Leiden University Foundation Centennial Conference, 'The Social Construction of Minorities and Their Cultural Rights in Western Europe', held on 12–14 September 1990, University of Leiden, the Netherlands. See also the discussion section at the end of Nicolae Gheorghe's paper in T. Acton and G. Mundy (eds), *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity* (Hatfield, 1997), pp. 168–169.
40 The 'place of origin has not seemed significant to Gypsies themselves, although their current country of residence and that with which they choose to associate is significant in specific contexts'. See J. Okely, 'The invention and inventiveness of Gypsy culture', p. 51. It should be noted that in playing down the importance of origins, the denial of the Indian dimension forming a central part of her own definition of Gypsy identity, Okely seeks to give weight to her argument by recruiting the views of Gypsies themselves.
41 Okely (1984), p. 54.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
44 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
45 Fraser (1992), p. 7. See J.-P. Liégeois (1986), p. 45; T. Acton, 'True Gypsies', p. 563.
46 Acton refers to the emergence of small national populations of Gypsies 'travelling largely within national boundaries, mixing culturally, genetically and linguistically with the local host populations'. See T. Acton, 'The ethnic composition of British Romani populations', pp. 44, 50.
47 Okely (1984), pp. 58–59.
48 Liégeois (1986), p. 45.
49 [J. Okely], 'Gypsy identity', in B. Adams, J. Okely, D. Morgan and D. Smith, *Gypsies and Government Policy in England: A Study of the Travellers' Way of Life in Relation to the Policies and Practices of Central and Local Government* (London, 1975), p. 28.

50 Hancock, 'Romani diaspora', p. 616.
51 See [Okely], 'Gypsy identity', pp. 36, 42, 61. See also Kohn (1995), p. 203.
52 'Many customs among the Roma would seem to claim an Indian ancestry, not just in Eastern Europe but wherever they live in diaspora, from Australia to Argentina.' See Fonseca (1995), p. 106. In one sentence Fonseca has introduced various components of Gypsy ethnicity: customs, labels, origins, diaspora and a transnational identity.
53 See I.Hancock, 'The Gypsies/Roma', *Shmate. A Journal of Progressive Jewish Thought*, Issue 17, Winter 1987, pp. 6–7.
54 See Liégeois (1987).
55 See, for example, Hancock, 'The Gypsies/Roma'; T. Acton, S. Caffrey, S. Dunn and P. Vinson, 'Gender issues in accounts of Gypsy health and hygiene as discourses of social control', in T. Acton and G. Mundy (eds), *Romani Culture and Gypsy Identity* (Hatfield, 1997), pp. 164–179; Liégeois (1986). The literature on this topic is extensive.
56 Stewart (1997), p. 205. He also states that the notion of pollution/purity serves to divide the Gypsy world into 'polluted gazos' and 'pure' Rom and of the Gypsy body into 'pure' upper and 'impure' lower.
57 J. Okely, 'Why Gypsies hate cats but love horses', *New Society*, 17 February 1983, p. 251.
58 Fonseca (1995), pp. 12–13.
59 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49. However, she later concedes that the codes are 'not always vigorously upheld in every district and dialect' (p. 80).
60 Okely states quite explicitly that these beliefs and practices, which for the most part remain largely invisible to the 'outsider', act 'as a symbolic boundary which has to be won every day by a vulnerable minority in a struggle against the dominant majority' (Okely, 'Why Gypsies hate cats but love horses', p. 253).
61 Anecdotally, in the course of my research I was told the story of a Gypsy, who came from a long line of horse-dealers and who still lives a Gypsy life, who was shown the section in Judith Okely's book concerning *moxadi* regulations, especially those passages relating to women's periods, and this person had never come across such practices in her experience.
62 Acton *et al.* also point to a further purpose, in that they provide the outside researcher with a 'mark of authenticity' as the obtaining of information on such internal, not to say secretive, practices and beliefs is taken as an indication of the diligence of the researcher and of his or her ability to penetrate to the core of the people. See Acton, Caffrey, Dunn and Vinson, 'Gender issues', p. 3.
63 For example, see Michael Stewart (1997), whose work is based on groups of Gypsies living in settlements. Also see Marcel Courthiade, in *Interface*, Issue 8, p. 8: 'nomadism is not an absolute criterion in Romani identity, and...sustained migration is more a result of other factors – notably economic – than an innate characteristic'.
64 Liégeois (1987), p. 53; see also Liégeois (1986), p. 54, for a similarly worded expression of the same idea.
65 'Even when sedentary a Gypsy remains a nomad in values and spirit.' See Kenrick and Bakewell (1990), p. 13.
66 Liégeois (1987), p. 75.
67 Marcel Courthiade, *Interface*, Issue 8, p. 8.
68 See Anthony P. Grant, 'Aspects of the linguistic interface between German and Romani', in S. Tebbutt, *Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-speaking Society and Literature* (New York and Oxford, 1998), pp. 65–80.
69 Hancock, 'Romani diaspora', pp. 650–651. This view is also expressed in the work of Liégeois (1987).
70 Liégeois (1986), p. 64.
71 Fonseca (1995), p. 58.



72 *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 24–25.
73 Stewart, in Acton (1997), pp. 86–87. Note that Stewart's conclusions are based on a study of the North Hungarian Vlach community in the mid-1980s.
74 Stewart (1997), pp. 12–13.
75 Clébert (1967), p. 20.
76 See Hancock (1987). See also Ronald Lee, 'Review of Hancock's *The Pariah Syndrome*', *Roma*, No. 28, January 1988, pp. 43–45.
77 The history of persecution has been well documented. In particular, see Hancock (1987); D. Mayall, *English Gypsies and State Policies* (Cambridge, 1988); D. Crowe and J. Kolsti (eds), *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (London, 1991); Kenrick and Bakewell (1990), chapter 2; Liégeois (1987); Liégeois (1986), chapter 3; J.-P. Liégeois and N. Gheorghe, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority* (Minority Rights Group International Report, London, 1995), updated in March 1998. For a much fuller list of relevant texts, see the excellent bibliographies by G. Tyrnauer, *Gypsies and the Holocaust. A Bibliography and Introductory Essay* (Montreal, 1991), and D. Tong, *Gypsies: A Multidisciplinary Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London, 1995).
78 T. Acton, 'Categorising Irish Travellers', typescript.
79 In one rather unusual expression of this, it seems that enslavement becomes the sole criterion for membership of the Gypsy group even though other more usual criteria were absent:

> the Rudari, like other bondsmen, were called Gypsies. But they spoke no Romanies, and apparently they never had. They shared no customs with the Roma, such as traditional dress or pollution codes. So *were* [original emphasis] the Rudari Gypsies? Are their descendants? Absolutely: they were slaves.
> (Fonseca,1995, p. 180)

80 Hancock, 'Romani diaspora', p. 616.
81 N. Gheorghe, 'The social construction of Romani identity', in T. Acton (ed.), *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity* (Hatfield, 1997), p. 161. This point has also been made in the work of Zoltan Barany.
82 Interestingly, there is a further parallel here with Jewish history, and the Holocaust in particular. It has long been accepted that the Shoah has been and remains a major component of Jewish identity worldwide, and yet in recent years questions have been asked about whether this has been taken too far.
83 Daniel Strauss, 'Anti-Gypsyism in German society and literature', in Tebbutt (1998), pp. 81–90. See also Brearley, 'The Roma/Gypsies'; Clébert (1967), pp. 32ff; Wilhelm Solms, 'On the demonising of Jews and Gypsies', in Tebbutt (1998), pp. 91–106.
84 B. Lauwagie, 'Ethnic boundaries in modern states: *Romano Lavo-Lil* revisited', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 2, 1979, p. 325. Hancock states: 'it is truly remarkable that, a thousand years later and thousands of miles away from the homeland, Gypsies have retained so much of their original character'. See I. Hancock, 'American Roma', p. 19. Similarly, Angus Fraser, though also mentioning their 'remarkable powers of adaptation', also talks of the Gypsies managing to '*preserve* [my emphasis] a distinct identity'. See Fraser (1992), p. 1.
85 For example, Fonseca (1995) suggests late in her book (p. 239), that in order to survive the Gypsies have had to adapt and that this has involved a 'rejigging' of ethnic identity. Not only does this seemingly contradict earlier positions in her book on constant and fixed identity, but it is also an area which remains wholly unexplored.
86 Liégeois (1986), p. 85.
87 Hancock, 'American Roma', p. 19.
88 See J. Webber, 'Jews and Judaism in contemporary Europe: religious or ethnic group?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, April 1997, p. 271.
89 *Ibid.*, p. 270.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
91 J. Okely, 'Cultural ingenuity and travelling autonomy: not copying, just choosing', in Acton and Mundy (eds) (1997), p. 190; see also K. Lee, 'Australia – sanctuary or cemetery for Romanies?', in Acton and Mundy (1997), pp. 67–81; Okely (1975), p. 161; Stewart (1997), p. 28.
92 Liégeois (1987), p. 46.
93 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
94 Stewart (1997), p. 5.
95 One example of the attempt to hold on to the notion of a supra-national and common identity for all Gypsies can be found in the claims made about a group of Albanian Gypsies who were settled and living in a quarter, shared with non-Gypsies, known as Kinostudio, on the outskirts of Tirana: 'Still, the Roma of Kinostudio had more in common with those far-flung Gypsies than with their fellow Albanians, among whom they have lived for nearly six hundred years.' See Fonseca (1995), p. 22. In other words, despite Albanian ancestry dating back 600 years and a long tradition of settlement and living with and among non-Gypsies in the same quarters, Fonseca still believes it credible to maintain that there existed among the group a sense of a larger Gypsy identity. It is not made clear whether this common Gypsy identity was something felt by the Albanian Gypsies or whether it was Fonseca's own views on Gypsy identity which were then imposed on the group. The absence of evidence to support this claim would suggest the latter. Fonseca is not alone in the desire to present a picture of a group bound together by a common identity and ethnicity, often referred to as both strong and cohesive. See also Lee and Warren, 'Alternative education: lessons from Gypsy thought and practice', p. 315.
96 Hancock, 'American Roma', p. 21. See also Fraser (1992), p. 1; Acton, 'Review of Judith Okely'; Acton, 'True Gypsies', pp. 563–564.
97 Hancock, 'Romani diaspora', p. 616.
98 Kenrick and Bakewell (1990), pp. 7–8; Liégeois (1986), p. 13.
99 N. Gheorghe and T. Acton, 'Citizens of the world and nowhere: minority, ethnic and human rights for Roma during the last hurrah of the nation-state', in Guy (2001), pp. 54–70.
100 Clébert (1967), pp. 19–20.
101 See Stewart (1997), pp. 10–11. Stewart also notes that even this classification oversimplifies things, as there were also differences of language, history, recent origins, family organisation and culture within each of the groups. Elsewhere Kertész-Wilkinson identifies the three Gypsy groups in Hungary as the Vlach Gypsies or Rom, the Beash, who speak Romanian and Hungarian, and the Romungri, who are the longer-established Gypsy group. See I. Kertész-Wilkinson, 'Song performance: a model for social interaction among Vlach Gypsies in South-eastern Hungary', in Acton and Mundy (1997), p. 97.
102 See I. Iliev, 'Somebody like you: the images of Gypsies and Yoroks among some Bulgarian Moslems', in Acton (1997), p. 56; D. Kenrick, 'Foreign Gypsies and British immigration law after 1945', in Acton (1997), pp. 100–110. The term Vlach Rom is sometimes used to group together the four tribes of Kalderari, Lovari, Churari and Macharaya, and the term Vlax is used for all descendants of Roma, loosely described as a group who lived in slavery for five centuries. Acton, Caffrey and Mundy state that 'Vlach is a convenient label attached by non-Gypsy experts referring to the Romanian influence common to the dialect of these four groups'. See T. Acton, S. Caffrey and G. Mundy, 'The theory of Gypsy law', in Acton (1997), p. 151. See also Z. Barany, *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality and Ethnopolitics* (Cambridge, 2002).
103 'Europe's Gypsies: are they a nation?', *Economist*, 25 November 2000, pp. 47–48. See also Guy (2001).



104 '[M]embers of the so-called Gypsy society find it hard to think of themselves in terms of the totality' (Liégeois (1986), p. 57.
105 'Despite the diversity, the feeling of belonging to the same category of individuals is stronger than the sense of difference that divides them' (Liégeois (1986), pp. 83–84). Liégeois also writes that it is a diversity 'which forms an entity'. See Liégeois (1987), p. 46. Elsewhere, however, Liégeois writes that collective memory, which would seem analogous to collective awareness, is described as 'more mythical than historical'. Liégeois (1987), p. 13. Despite being told by one writer that Gypsies do not form a monolithic whole, we are also informed by the same writer that the world can be divided into Roma and '*gadze*'. See Hancock, 'The East European roots of Romani nationalism', p. 254.
106 Stewart (1997), p. 12.
107 S. Tebbutt, 'Sinti and Roma: from scapegoats and stereotypes to self assertion', in Tebbutt (1998), pp. ix–xiii.
108 See Kenrick (1993), p. 38.
109 See Lauwagie, 'Ethnic boundaries', p. 318; Fraser (1992), chapter 9; Liégeois (1986), pp. 13, 16; Acton, 'Foreword', to Hancock (1987), p. ix; Acton, 'The social construction', note 3, p. 17. Liégeois states:

> Gypsies or Travellers form a mosaic of small groups of different kinds, a shifting mosaic, the pattern of which is constantly changing, a kaleidoscope in which each element retains its distinctive features. There can be no generalisation, then, when it comes to origin, history, language, habit or occupation.
>
> (Liégeois, 1987, p. 7.)

The last sentence is most revealing as it is precisely generalisations about these features which commentators use to construct the transnational identity and ethnicity of Gypsies. See also Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, 'Historical and ethnographic background: Gypsies, Roma, Sinti', in Guy (2001), pp. 33–53.
110 Webber, 'Jews and Judaism', p. 260.
111 *Ibid.*
112 *Ibid.*
113 *Ibid.*, p. 259.