

Writing Anthropology in Europe: an Example from Gypsy Research

Judith Okely

Attention has been paid to the poetics of a monograph (Clifford and Marcus 1986), less to the political context. This paper draws on the author's research experience among Gypsies as an example of the political context of writing within and about Europe. Traditionally anthropologists have studied peoples far from the researcher's academic location. In contrast, when the researcher is academically placed within the same territory as the ethnography and future readers, there are added consequences, especially if identifying recognisable individuals and official documents. Writing years later, the anthropologist has greater freedom for detail and exposure. Risks are subsequently diminished when publishing the contentious. Individuals will have grown up, moved on or passed on, and government agendas changed. However, more recently, the ease of communication via the internet may make past hazards of geographical proximity irrelevant. Like their exoticist counterparts, Europeanist anthropologists, have also had to establish credibility in writing style. They had to write against the equivalent of traders, missionaries and adventurers on local territory, for example, policy makers and welfare reformists. Today, the literary turn has freed up future monographs from the search for scientific credibility for both Europeanists and exoticists.

The poetics of writing anthropology are entangled with politics, although the latter may have been less recognised. Doing anthropological fieldwork in Europe and subsequently writing a monograph have been subject to considerable controversy. The anti-Europeanist ethos in favour of an exoticised elsewhere has shadowed, at least in the UK, the doing and writing of anthropology.¹

There are other ghosts at the writing desk. The politico-geographical proximity of potential readers, including members or associates of the people studied, makes the anthropologist much more careful about "othering" or breaking confidences and exposing individuals. There are also great legal risks. Whereas Western anthropologists in post-colonial and emergent nationalist times may find legal visa access beyond the West increasingly troublesome, anthropologists writing within and about their Western territory face less the problems of geographical entry than later problems at the publication stage. Even when the peoples studied may be largely non-literate, as the Gypsies in my

case, there are literate hangers on who may communicate or caricature the contents to the non-reading people. The anthropologist does not want to be represented as exposing and betraying the relatively powerless. The legal implications are even more serious for the writer who dares to publish official documents of the powerful which have been deemed confidential and concealed from 'the public domain'.

In this paper I shall explore specifically the consequences of doing fieldwork in Europe and England in the 1970s and 1980s in relation to my fieldwork on Gypsies. The political and intellectual context affected what could be written in and what was written out. The very passing of time has made individual and political exposure less problematic. Changes in the intellectual anthropological climate have opened different possibilities and stylistic forms.

There are many aspects of my fieldwork among Gypsies in England which could not previously have appeared in published form. The reasons are varied. The most obvious is that there are questions of confidentiality in writing about Gypsies, Travellers and the Roma, as the different groups are variously named. It is mistaken to rely on the standard social science practice of anonymous names. To change a Traveller's name is still to identify him or her as a Traveller (Gypsy). The groups as a whole are vulnerable to mass stigma and stereotyping. But also the very detail of ethnographic fieldwork inevitably brings great intimacy and very recognisable individuals. Much may have to be lost in the publication not necessarily because of any need for scientific generalisations, but because the persons studied live in the same country as writer and readers.

Now, 25 years since I lived for nearly two years alongside Gypsies and remained in contact for years after, there are different ways of thinking and writing about that experience. I have many hundreds of pages of fieldnotes written as a continuous narrative and typed from hand written pages. These I shall bequeath to an appropriate archive and I would be delighted if Gypsies were the earliest readers and historical researchers. Meanwhile, I hope in the future to make new sense of that material.

I hasten to add that yellowing notes are not the sole source for thinking and writing anthropologically. This is why historical written records have their limitations. The participant observer brings memory of embodied experience to the scribbled notes. So while my time-filtered memory remains, I can add a grounded experiential knowledge which would be absent among any gorgio (non-Gypsy) researchers. However, it would be intriguing to see how Gypsy readers might use their own grounded experience to interpret and comment on my jottings.

The volume *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) famously drew attention to the literary constructed character of many anthropological monographs, despite the anthropologists' claim to be neutral social scientists far

from literary tropes. Anthropologists had intended to distance anthropology not only from literary traditions, but also from the accounts by missionaries, explorers and traders in non-Western cultures. Anthropologists who first did intensive fieldwork, wanted to demonstrate their credibility by the rhetoric of science which was considered to help make the details of non-Western cultures worthy of respect and to establish the anthropologist's credibility. In fact the writers resorted to literary traditions, while at the same time being accused of writing 'boring' books (Pratt 1986).

In the case of my monograph *The Traveller-Gypsies*, first published in 1983, there are also inevitable stylistic constructions. Unlike Clifford and Marcus, I shall draw more attention to the historical and political context of writing texts. Like early anthropologists, I recognised the necessity for a certain credibility with a specific readership. This was even more the case with the earlier publication with which I was associated: *Gypsies and Government Policy in England* (Adams, O'Keely et al. 1975). That volume was addressed to policy makers and activists. It was a long term reassessment of the 1968 Caravan Sites Act which for the first time made it a duty for local authorities in select localities to provide sites for Gypsies. There were at the same time to be many restrictions on Gypsies' movements and an ethnocentric, sedentarist assumption that the travelling group would soon be assimilated into the dominant housedwelling, wage labour and schooled population (MHLG 1967).

I did not have control over the entire content of that first joint authored book and, having been discouraged in pursuing certain themes, I regretted the absence of key themes such as the Gypsies' cleanliness beliefs and gender divisions. Unfortunately, to the non-anthropological researchers on the project, such matters were seen as exotic and archaic without policy and political relevance. Yet the Travellers' ideas about pollution and spatial layout should have been understood as crucial for the architecture of sites as well as for the understanding of chosen ethnic difference. The active economic role of women beyond the domestic sphere was also highly significant, but non-Gypsy policy makers presumed that Gypsy women would be easily seduced into housing by the lure of elaborate domestic facilities. They seemed entirely ignorant of the crucial external economic role of Gypsy women and their commitment to the social reproduction of the ethnic group.

Geographical proximity between the field and future readers had consequences also for the labelling of the authors. At an early stage most of us involved in the research were mischievously labelled 'the establishment' by some gorgio political intermediaries who seemed threatened by others moving onto what they considered their personal territory. In contrast to the usual experience of anthropologists who as outsiders are mistaken for spies in the field, I found myself being branded a spy by fellow academics; a linguist and a sociologist of Gypsies. The latter at the same time asked, without success, to

borrow my fieldnotes! Contrary to the rumours which they helped to spread, the research was not financed by the government nor was it done with its collusion. Indeed, senior civil servants from a Ministry tried to stop the research by making unsettling threats to the governors of the research centre which, despite receiving some of its funding from the state along with the Ford Foundation, was supposed to be academically independent. It was rightly feared that the research would be too sympathetic to the Gypsies. I wish I had photocopied for subsequent publication that ministerial letter addressed to the governors and which reminded them of the state source of some of their funding. Fortunately the research could proceed without anxiety as it was independently financed by a charitable trust.

Ironically in the end, the book played a part in influencing official policy through a report commissioned by the then Labour government (Cripps 1976). Our detailed ethnographic evidence helped back up the representations by Travellers to the enquiry. Soon after, the Labour government reversed years of ill-informed policy by rejecting any assumption that all Gypsies necessarily wanted assimilation. It recognised the Gypsies' preferences for living in trailers, their viable and geographically flexible economy and their rights to self-determination. The non-lyrical, but ethnographic style, without intellectual compromise, gave the book credibility with policy decision-makers.

Writing for and against

I had greater authorial control over my subsequent monograph *The Traveller Gypsies* (1983). Here I cannot think of much I would have wanted to write in any other way, given that the political and academic context was not dominated by the specific need to address policy makers. The text had broader intellectual ambitions, but was written in a deliberately accessible style for a heterogeneous readership, especially undergraduates. It was of its time and, for its time and, to my pleasure and surprise, has continuously had readers, given the fact that it has been reprinted some seven times.

The style reflects some of the dilemmas comparable to earlier anthropologists; namely the need for the anthropologist to distance herself from the equivalent of missionaries, traders, colonisers and adventurers. There had been plenty of attention paid by non-Gypsies to Gypsies as objects for social welfare and rescue reports. These texts depicted Gypsies as deprived and without cultural dignity, ripe for assimilation and conversion. It was not very hard to want to be disassociated from such often abysmal texts. More challenging was the need to avoid narrative fantasy adventures and the legacy of George Borrow, the celebrated Gypsiologist, or subsequent wildly romanticised imitations. Gypsies have, as is well recognised, been the object of both positive and negative projections. It was precisely this that I, as one of the group of earliest anthropologists to produce an anthropological monograph

about Gypsies in Europe, wanted to avoid (see also Gromfors 1977; Kaminski 1980; Williams 1984; Plasere 1985).

It may seem curious now that anthropological fieldwork in Europe was downgraded and often demigrated among the most powerful anthropologists in Britain in the 1970s and in the 1980s (Bloch 1988), if not the 1990s. For some of us the welcome and encouraging exceptions included Edmund Leach, Godfrey Lienhardt (my doctoral supervisor) and Edwin Ardener. Students at the London School of Economics were discouraged from doing fieldwork in Europe.² There had been some innovative monographs based on southern Europe. But these risked being interpreted as the search by northern anthropologists for the hot, exotic Mediterranean.

Even those European anthropology schools which had focussed largely on Europe, namely Polish anthropologists, did not consider Gypsies worthy of study, in contrast to the Polish peasant who became the equivalent of the noble savage. Marek Kaminski was an exception, although he had to complete his doctorate in exile in Sweden (1980). As recent as 1993 at an Amsterdam conference on Europeanist anthropology, I encountered a leading Polish anthropologist who expressed astonishment that Gypsies, allegedly without a culture, could be a plausible topic for anthropological research. To her credit, she was open to a change of mind.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, I wanted to demonstrate that Northern Europe was worthy of the same attention as any exotica. As far as possible, I tried to include chapter themes which followed some of the classical monographs. The Gypsies deserved recognition as a people with a meaningful culture, viable economy and a self chosen way of life, resisting persecution and policies of assimilation. I followed a standard holistic format with a chapter on the economy, two on religion or ritual and another on family and kinship. A chapter on travelling challenged the classical typologies of nomads which had hitherto ignored Gypsies. In accord with the series editor, I included an historical overview of some of the existing literature on Gypsies. Whereas most classical anthropological monographs barely discussed the colonial context and local relations with the authorities, history and political context should, I considered, also include detailed discussion of local political relations and the implications of non-Gypsy policy. Accordingly, an entire chapter was devoted to local gorgio policy and plans for the Travellers.

Other relative innovations included a chapter on fieldwork practice and my relations as participant observer with the Gypsies. Such a chapter is now considered *de rigueur* among doctoral students and the Economic and Social Research Council insists on a year's methods training. Yet in the late 1970s, my supervisor, Godfrey Lienhardt, considered this unnecessary and suggested I put any such discussion in the appendix of my doctorate. He tolerated my disagreement. It is in the subsequent published chapter three, 'Methods of

Approach' (1983) that I felt free to use the autobiographical 'I' which scarcely appears in the rest of the text, except in the manner to which Clifford and Marcus draw attention as a signal of authority. In part the chapter was a response to the repeated questions by people I met beyond fieldwork but in my own country. They were intrigued as to how I could have had such a bizarre experience as living with the Gypsies, a people about whom everyone was compelled to volunteer stereotypes and fantasies and whose caravans they saw by motorways. Fieldwork of this kind in Europe was indeed seen as exotic by non-anthropologists, although not by the traditionalists of the discipline.

Writing Culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986) traces how the 'I' of the anthropologist only appeared at key junctures and was rarely if ever the prelude to reflexive autobiography. Similarly in my 1983 monograph, the 'I' disappears. Given the political context, I do not regret this. The reflexive 'I' was less appropriate for the full range of readers to which the text was addressed. Even today there are still vestiges in the social sciences and relics from positivism and the physical sciences that the researcher undermines objectivity and credibility by inserting the first person singular. In those early days of writing an anthropological text on Gypsies, I still feared the phantom Adventurer Gypsyologist or Gentleman Scholar lurking in the wings. Thus the monograph was constructed in such a way as to show that key aspects of a classical monograph were equally appropriate within Europe and for Gypsies. It was not an adventure light and easy as exoticist anthropologists (Bloch 1988) would have their students believe. However, I could not resist a frontespiece quotation from Borrow who aptly warned the reader he would not be taking them to foreign parts, but that there were many strange things happening on home territory. Similarly, I ended with a select passage from Matthew Arnold's *Scholar Gypsy* drawing parallels with the anthropologist seen hanging around the margins of Oxford. The Europeanist anthropologist was also tired of 'knocking at preferment's door'.³

Compared to the 1980s and since management speak has seeped into governance, policy oriented texts have become thoroughly bureaucratized. There are 'executive summaries' and obligatory bullet points, born of the simplistic line by line delivery with the aid of overhead projectors. No matter that the font is invariably unreadable in these public performances. Discursive prose is censured. So the need to write an extended book with policy and politics in mind has changed. Ethnography is eradicated from these texts.

At the same time, other futures await ethnography. With the more recent postmodern turn, anthropological texts are read across disciplines. Thanks to the literary turn, the loosening up of anthropological texts frees the writer anthropologist into narrative and descriptive passages. Scientific rhetoric is exposed as less relevant for credibility. Evocation is another priority. There is a greater attention to individuals, in contrast to generalisations without character.

Anthropology has more recently recognised the provisional, less bounded and sometime fragmented form of culture. I have always argued that 'Gypsy culture' can never be seen as separate and self-contained (Okely 1997a). Perhaps the very obvious spatial overlapping between different groups and peoples in Western industrialised societies may have been the reason why the traditionalists favoured distant exotica where peoples were carefully constructed as 'isolated'. Yet many of the arguments with which Europeanists have had to grapple over decades are to be found anywhere around the globe. The exoticists are suddenly discovering the problematic of cultural boundaries in imagined remote places. They are rarely linked with earlier and existing debates familiar to Europeanist or other Western anthropology. And still we find that exotica, maybe just one island in the Indian Ocean, is contrasted with an entire homogenised West or one imagined entity labelled Europe.

The position of Gypsies placed alongside gorgios in contrasting or overlapping cultural contexts has given considerable scope to concepts of hybridity and the shifting locations of cultural encounters. There is potentially greater openness to understanding difference through incidents and anecdotes. This is what awaits the re-presentation of my fieldnotes, as well as the remembering, recollection of the long term experience which is greater than the sum of past words on paper. I have all this material which is unused which I could not have published before, whatever the dominant genre at the time.

The discipline of anthropology has been transformed in theoretical and ethnographic priorities as well as style. The political and intellectual context has changed and there are other ways of writing. So when I have time and space in the new millennium, I want to produce a different text.

Individual Persons

I should like to re-insert individuals in the round. Again, they will not be named but, so many years later, they will not be easily identified thus risking some unpredictable vulnerability. Those persons I knew so well in the past have grown up, grown old, moved on or passed away. Even so there will be no exposure of anything which could knowingly add to some negative stereotype. In fact this is hardly a problem, since there is very little basis if any, for some of the popular prejudices.

One instance of unpredictable reading of a text out of place and time remains sobering. Since her monograph was not addressed to policy makers, Anne Sutherland (1975), working among Gypsies in the United States, may have felt less inhibited about exposing the Gypsies' brilliant use of welfare. Unfortunately, this has been used against Gypsies. In June 1999, I was informed by a Swedish ethnologist that a social worker cites Sutherland as evidence for Swedish Gypsies' alleged misuse of welfare. This confirms my wariness about the risks to Gypsies as a group if any material is published

which can be used to discredit them wholesale. In the American case, despite the fact that names were changed, the locality disguised, different Gypsies on another continent, decades later, were attributed similar behaviour and practices.

The proposal for a stronger focus on individuals as agents and characters has received new attention in recent years in anthropology. It has been more fully realised that people are not merely robots of some monolithic culture. Anthropologists have begun to question a favoured tendency to talk always about the people X or Y (Campbell 1995) as if there might not be individual variation and indeed resistance.

In a recent ethnobiography of the Greek writer, Andreas Nenedakis, Michael Herzfeld pursues the contrasts and comparisons between the work of a novelist and an anthropologist in writing about the same locations and peoples (1997). He argues for the strength of the specificity of individuals portrayed by the novelist. At the same time, he implicitly demonstrates the strength of the anthropologist in conveying the patterns and context of cultures.

I would maintain the need to look at the wider social and cultural constraints. Individuals are brought up within specific cultural milieu and constraints. What is interesting are the specific ways in which individuals act within those constraints and put individual interpretations on them. It could still be argued that the detailed portrayal of one individual may convey the cultural context even more vividly than a set of impersonalised generalisations.

In *The Traveller-Gypsies* I hesitated to give too graphic a portrait of specific and identifiable individuals because I could not predict the possible problems of such exposure. Malinowski (1929) gives many named examples of individuals whose marital and sexual relations could be traced and put together with just a little detective work. This was all very well when writing about the distant Trobriand Islanders for a Western readership. It is very different in a European context when the readers are in the same territory. A single life history which requires the individual's continuing collaboration in a shared enterprise has been another approach (Gmelch 1986).

In contrast to the early classical anthropologists, in *Gypsies and Government Policy* I did give three detailed examples of families from my fieldwork where all the ethnographic facts were totally accurate. They were buried in an appendix. This was to show each as examples of three different economic strata. Even so, there was little room if any given to personalities and character. In *The Traveller-Gypsies* I deliberately split the attribution of quotes by Gypsies. Sometimes quotations from one person were attributed to more than one. Statements by different individuals were attributed to just one individual. It was a deliberate strategy of leaving no easy traces. I did not want local social workers or others who knew the Travellers to point to such easy markers and relay this in a confusing manner to any non-literate Travellers. Now I

would like nothing better than to restore the full power of those individuals. They are profound and admirable persons who have lived on in my memory over the years and assumed heroic proportions. In the light of the interest in multiple identities and hybridity, there are nuances which may be recognised as of even greater significance now. One such individual I recorded as follows in my fieldnotes. Now still with changed names, I can safely reproduce those nuances:

Molly talked of her own family. Said her mother was Yugoslav but born in France. Her mother's parents went to America and her grandfather (mother's father) worked in trenches and woodcutting in America. Then they moved to Ireland. Then they went to Bosnia 'where they came from the first place'. Then they went to Wales. Her mother's sister married a Welshman. Their children included Jimmie (near Bedford), whom I met and a daughter who married a US airman. She is now living in Alabama. Her husband is about to finish his service in Vietnam. She reiterated that her father was the son of an Irish woman and Spanish man.

Molly: "People never think I'm English. I tell them I come from Luton. In one cafe I went in, the woman spoke to me in Spanish. I didn't understand. She thought I was Spanish". Her own second marriage is to a gorgio Englishman. (See the account of the christening of their child below).

Two of Molly's sisters have married black US airmen whom they met when the latter were posted in airbases in East Anglia. One of these brothers in law took to the travelling life in a trailer with his wife. (Field notes 1972).

Narrative

There is a certain irony in that as literary studies have become more and more theoretically abstract, with minimal attention to the flow of narratives and extended quotations from classical texts, so anthropology has reawakened an interest in just those things. Some have gone so far as to call it the 'Blue Lagoon' style, namely the reinvention of coral strands and exotic, soporific landscape.

My fieldnotes were written as a continuous narrative which was broken in the writing up. Future texts could elaborate incidents and narrative of which there is abundant potential in my notes. This will give the flow of life and day to day as well as dramatic events. Still the basic structure of the stories remain in my memory for the recounting, whether or not they were written down. In many cases the narrative of events is intimately bound up with the identity of specific individuals. In fact the French anthropologist Patrick Williams (1984) already used an experimental style in the 1980s. He may have been less worried about individual exposure because he was writing within, being married to a Rom.

I have recently drawn on an extended description of a fortune-telling session to convey the significance and workings of the entire practice (Okely 1996a). I have a lengthy unpublished account of a wedding which both conveys the drama of the occasion but also the interweaving of known individuals in this huge special gathering which cemented political ties.

Let me give a glimpse of one individual sitting on the sidelines of this wedding. He is long since deceased. 'Freddie' fought in the Second World War. He was a powerful political figure in his time. But he was not a member of the powerful extended kinship group celebrating the wedding. Few of Freddie's kin were invited. Indeed some deliberately moved away from the locality when certain families arrived there for the event. As with many nomadic traditions, the potential for conflict was preempted or resolved by movement and avoidance. It appeared that Freddie had been invited precisely because he was now aged, frail and powerless. After a long term war injury, he developed gangrene and had a leg amputated. He now sat at the edge of the community hall, and as liminal guest was an excellent commentator to the anthropologist who had also been invited.

Freddie came in. I seized the opportunity to sit next to him. He was beaming. He told me that the groom's father bought the couple a trailer 'worth £5000' which was in the field. I think the figure is an exaggerated cliché. Apparently it's a less expensive one. Freddie was really trying to convey the extent of the family's wealth. I asked if the bride's father bought the trailer. He said no. The bride's parents bought 'other things'. I can't remember the details. I have the impression he said 'the things that go inside'. There was no sign of gift giving during the wedding celebration.

Bill (the bride's father) walked past. Freddie called out, tapped him on the arm. Freddie said some complimentary things; he was in an emotional state. Said how good it was of Bill to invite him. Bill and he clasped hands. Bill said he was glad Freddie could come. Bill walked away. Did not converse further. Freddie to me: 'The 'Smiths', they're alright *as long as you leave them alone* ... coo I wouldn't like to be up against them...of course none of them fought in the war'.⁴ Freddie paused, was obviously thinking about his amputated leg with gangrene from shrapnel. This fact has changed his life. He cannot fight and no one can fight him. He is vulnerable, he once had the reputation for violence. Now he has to adjust to this loss of power. *Freddie*: "Margie (his wife), she was invited, she wouldn't come down, ooh no, she's frightened, she wouldn't dare". Neither would Lilly, (his daughter) dare. (Fieldnotes 1972)

Recalling the many incidents which I could elaborate or merely reproduce from the hundreds of pages of fieldnote narrative, there is the arrival of the police to search each trailer for a stolen child. Even the policeman was embarrassed because he also knew that his superiors were merely following a celebrated nursery rhyme and non-Gypsy myth that Gypsies steal children. Predictably, it was confirmed later, that the baby had been stolen by a lone gorgio woman, far from any Gypsy collusion. There are incidents outside the camp when I went calling for scrap with Gypsies at gorgio houses. These incidents were not necessarily excluded for ethical, political reasons but because there was less space and priority for extended narrative, especially when the intention was more to convey the underlying structure and social system of a minority within the wider society.

There are also scenes of conflict which reveal the manner of disputes. Here

I was nervous about exposure of internal conflict to a possible readership hungry for drama rather than seeing internal social process. For instance, I have an accumulating description of a conflict between a gorgio woman and a Gypsy woman where I alone was privy to both sides' complaints and where it nearly ended in violent assault. But it is not the potentially sensational occurrences on which I should like to dwell. There are plenty of peaceable and delightful ones.

The Christening

The church was empty when we arrived...we waited. The priest arrived, motioned all to move forward. Everyone did move a bit but Liz, Mona and I remained in the background (as is fitting for non-relations at a Traveller ritual). The priest handed out printed cards with the wording for the ceremony. A few prayers were mumbled. Then there was a set of statements and responses which parents, then godparents had to make. George looked embarrassed. Aunt Liz (literate) whispered: 'He can't read. He can't read'. I don't think the priest understood this but thought George had lost his place so he stated first what George and Mary each had to say.

The priest gabbled most of the prayers with indifferent monotony. He asked the parents and godparents each their names and then called upon the blessings of saints with those names. Tony said 'Anthony'. Molly said 'Ellen'. I think George said 'Michael' and Mary said 'Maria'.

Despite the indifference of the priest I was moved by this ceremony: the offspring of a Yugoslav Gypsy, born in England (with Spanish and Irish links as well) and an English gorgio orphan being christened and blessed. This was in the Catholic church nearest the camp where the Gypsies had lived for a few months before moving on. The parents of Molly and George and Mary had travelled through many countries, all of their children being born eventually in the UK after the Second World War. They and most of their children were non literate. Yet they came to have their children christened. And in a funny little English town. I am sure that Tony, brought up in an orphanage with no family background, must attach special significance to his own little family. (Fieldnotes 1971)

In the 1990s there has been a burst of more narrative styled ethnographies on Gypsies, including greater interest in performative arts (Piasere 1995; Kertesz-Wilkinson 1997; Pasquinino 1998; Stewart 1998; Van de Port 1998).

Inter-relations between fieldworker and people

Part of those narratives would include descriptions of the inter-relations between the gorgio outsider anthropologist and significant individuals. Some were crucial as intermediaries and experts on their own and often other cultures (Okely 1998). One had been brought up in a house with a gorgio mother, another had served in the army, a third had seen a spell in prison. These individuals were especially articulate in highlighting the differences and contrasts between several ways of life. I have also acknowledged that in some cases the relationship could never be described as one with an 'informant'. The friendship could only be described as one based on love, although not of a sexual

nature (Okely 1996b). I hope that it would be liberating and enlightening for a reader if the nuances of these friendships could be more fully recounted.

Narrative can be recovered from the journal notes with its minutiae of description, dialogue and events. But again the lived memory of the anthropologist adds continuity and coherence to the range of disparate jottings. The inevitable gaps or exaggerations in memories are compensated by the power of evocation which rests in the person who experienced those days.

Anthropologists in appropriate texts have begun to insert themselves also as object, risking their own vulnerability as specific and named individuals. In *Anthropology and Autobiography* (1992), Helen Callaway and I argued for the necessity of confronting the implications of the gender, race, nationality and age of the researcher-fieldworker. It would be good to explore this in a new narrative of my encounter with the Gypsies. The gorgio is in a relationship, a dialogue.

I have alluded to the ghost of the Gypsistologist. In the earlier publications, I did not want to be associated with a hint of any tradition which treated the Gypsies as an object of projection. This might be resolved. In any future text which draws more explicitly on the narratives of my journal and experience, the I of the anthropologist cannot be erased.

The anthropologist or the 'Gypsistologist', by not hiding behind the text, is shown to be part of the encounter of shared humanity and difference. The 'I' of the fieldworker would be there in the text without coyness. The writer would no longer be troubled by past fears that the text would be dismissed as just another sensational 'My life with the Gypsies'. The readers from academia would, decades later, have less credibility in describing reflexive accounts as mere egoism or as the undermining of social science. Who knows, but some policy maker might seek welcome respite from bullet points and focus group facts. He or she could learn again from experimental anthropological prose.

Sexuality

In the early 1970s, regrettably the subject of sex and reproduction was not taken seriously enough for a feminist anthropological perspective. Malinowski may have written *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929), but it had predictably been popularly read as a sensationalist foray into the tabooed other (Okely 1996a). I am still not in a position to write anything more detailed about sexuality. I simply do not have the material. Acton et al. (1997) curiously rebuked me for not having written more about the topic of sexuality in the 1970s and early 1980s. Again the context of writing should be considered. One of the wardens, unknown to me, told a group of Irish Travellers that I would be writing down everything about their sex habits and reporting it to the local newspaper. It took months for me to understand why these Travellers avoided me for so long.

But there are special reasons which arise in part because I was an unmarried, 'honorary' virgin when in the field. I dared not ask too many informed questions as I needed to present myself as an a-sexual being. I had to respect the gender divisions by avoiding all communication with any male unless in the company of women. As a single woman, I could not risk being seen to be too sexually curious. There was one awful moment when a very fearsome fighting woman suggested she and the other women with her inspect me to check for virginity. 'There's only one way to find out. Up on that bed'. Another Gypsy ally of mine subtly diverted them.

In addition, I was resisting the sensationalist phantom of the Gentleman Scholar as voyeur. When Gypsies had been so strongly the object of gorgio sexual fantasies, it would be a cliché to appear to write about such topics. In my article on Gypsy women I concentrated more on the contrast between gorgio fantasies and the Gypsy women's own constrained public mores (Okely 1975). Even then I was nervous before publication. When the proofs arrived, I changed the word 'penis' in a quotation to p... When a Gypsy woman who had moved out of the community and returned for a day's visit to the camp I had written that she had had an abortion. In the proofs I changed this to 'operation'.

A recent anthropological study of Spanish Gypsies is relatively and daringly detailed in the notions of female virginity and bodily sexuality (Gay Y Blasco 1999). But I wonder if the author would have published the same in Spanish with a Spanish publisher, i.e. on the Gypsies' home territory rather than in Northern Europe and in English.

Legal Anthropology

Years later, there is now the possibility of a contribution to the anthropology of law and the ingenious resistance of a persecuted minority in the face of the dominant system. The field experience included an account and analysis of a major feud between two Traveller groups. This has never been published primarily because the Travellers needed to be protected from the Gorgio legal gaze. In my doctoral thesis there is a heavily disguised account which is why the thesis was banned from public access for 30 years. I thought it important to record this very ingenious response to Gorgio intervention. There is conflict between Gorgio law and Gypsy justice.

A feud broke out after a major betrayal. Kin groups aligned with their own. It ended in the death of one man. Gorgio law concentrated on who had committed the final act of violence as if that person was solely responsible. In fact the two Traveller groups, earlier ready to murder each other, came together to present a consistent account, blaming another individual because he had first precipitated the conflict and betrayed a Gypsy to the police about another matter. The Travellers' selected perpetrator was sent to prison and the individual whom the law wanted to finger in its terms of guilt remained free (Okely 1999).

Official Secrets

I feel freer now to publish documents from local authority files which reveal the proposal for a secret working party of dubious legality which was initiated by the supposedly most liberal county council towards Gypsies in England. The aim was to get rid of "foreign" Gypsies at speed especially when the appropriate legal officials, e.g. the Clerk to the Justices refused to cooperate and the appropriate legal procedures proved ineffective. Publicly it has always been argued that the police should only act as bystanders in evictions. Only the actual landowners were entitled to enforce evictions unless there had been external orders, using very specific criteria through the courts. (One such criterion is where both landlord and tenant lack the requisite planning permission for permitting an inhabited caravan on a piece of land.) Yet the most senior official in the county council, the Clerk, wrote to the Chief Constable of the police, with copies to Health and Welfare, the County Planning Officer and County surveyor suggesting a special working party.

Both the Clerk's and the Chief Constable's reply reveal the covert and ruthless practices of dealing with travelling, nomadic peoples. In theory the police are supposed to take a detached stance during evictions. They certainly were not supposed to be collaborating. In the texts can be found the sedentarist (McVeigh 1997) distinctions between 'local', acceptable travelling Gypsies who allegedly stay within the boundaries of the single county and 'foreigners' who could be Irish or merely persons unfamiliar to or objectionable to the authorities. The police document reaffirms the continuing and useful myth that Gypsies should remain in rural enclaves, far from urban escapes where in fact they are most likely to find the work for which housedwellers willingly pay. There are also revelations of the police practice in dealing with nomads on their own terms without getting involved with civic authorities.

I have sat on this document for many years, thus confirming my argument that to publish material from and in one's own country carries special risks. Anthropologists who write about the elsewhere and publish for a Western readership, far from the field sites are better protected. I accept that they may also be read by persons linked to the original location and may for example jeopardise future visas if the text is brought to the attention of the powerful from the original location.

In my case, I was seriously intimidated because my then research director, a seconded civil servant, had obtained my access to county files on the assurance that confidentiality would be respected. I unwisely followed up my discovery of these disturbing documents by questioning the local official concerned with Gypsies. My questions betrayed my concern and, shortly after, excuses were found as to why I could no longer look at the files. I kept my photocopy of the memos along with as many photocopies of other official documents as possible.⁵

Later in the 1980s, a civil servant was sentenced to a spell in prison for photocopying and posting anonymously some government documents to a national newspaper. It is always harder to study up (Nader 1969) not only because of barriers to access but also because of the fearsome legal retribution or 'dirty tricks' which can be wrought by the powerful against whistle blowers. No matter that these documents reveal illegal official strategies. It is no coincidence that I should publish this document, seemingly innocuous, out of context, outside the Britain, albeit in Europe. It is sad that the nature of the content will be seen as less dramatic within Britain than the fact of publicising it:

Memorandum to the Chief Constable from the Clerk of the County Council

24th April 1970

Moving on of Gypsies

I refer to the discussions in Mr ... 's room on 23rd April which was particularly occasioned by an accumulation of some 16 Irish Gypsy families on the road verge near the ... Street roundabout on 21st April. I understand that this group has now broken up and that the individual families have moved off in different direction. However, it seemed advisable to consider the procedure which should be followed in similar cases in the future.

There is an initial difficulty in identifying families which the County Council would normally be prepared to see remain in the county provided they can be accommodated in reasonably unobtrusive and unobjectionable places. In general terms these are families which regularly resort to X..shire and are therefore ones for whom we, if no one else have certain responsibility. Where particular families are thought to belong to this particular section of the travelling population it is desirable, although one appreciates not always practicable, for the county Medical Officer, Mr. X to be consulted before any proceedings are taken. It may be that it can either be agreed that the families remain where they are, or can be guided, if necessary by threat of proceedings, to other acceptable spots. I hope that it may be possible for some system such as this to be operated by the Police.

There remain other individual families or, more importantly, groups who have no X..shire affiliations and whom we all feel should be kept on the move and directed out of the county. (my emphasis) In these cases speed is very often the vital ingredient to success as demonstrated by the action taken in regard to the families near the X Street roundabout. The action taken there, as I understand it, involved making arrangement with the local Clerk to the Justices for a special court which together with warrants served on the families ensured their early voluntary (sic) movement.

This seems to be the most effective action to take initially. If however such action does not work, either because of an inability to secure the cooperation of the local Clerk to the Justices or because the Gypsies sit tight (my emphasis), it is I think desirable that we should have in existence a recognised working party made up of representatives from the departments concerned which can be called together at very short notice to plan action which should be taken. It is suggested that this should consist of more than one representative from each department so that if any are absent it can still function effectively. It will not always be necessary for more than one representative to attend. The following are put forward from the County Council's departments:

Clerks Mr Mr
 Surveyors Mr Mr
 Health and Welfare Mr Mr