

**Marek Jakoubek
and Lenka J. Budilová**

**An interview
with Prof. Judith M. Okely**

I seem to provoke controversy...

It is an honour to interview one of Britain's most prominent contemporary anthropologists...

You flatter me in your description. I acknowledge that I am known for my work among those who value social anthropological studies in Europe and especially those interested in Roma and Gypsies.

Give us some insights into the formative influences in your early life that led to your choosing a career in anthropology.

How I chose anthropology has a complex history. I always told my students in Introductory lectures that I guessed that many of them had been drawn to the subject because they had been brought up in more than one culture or country, and perhaps they had parents of different nationalities. I asserted they are lucky because they had learned very early that one culture/group or country is not superior to another.

Although my parents were English, Christian born, they both had interests in other places. My father studied German and French at Oxford. My mother also learned German when an *au pair* for some of the leading Jewish families in pre-war Germany. My parents met in Berlin.

I was born in Malta and travelled as a child to Egypt then to Africa. I have explored some implications in 'Hybridity, Birthplace, and Naming' (2003a). Even naming leaves its mark on identity. My second name is Melita, after Malta. I was brought up on my mother's verbal accounts of my parents' traumatic war journeys. More importantly



for cross-cultural curiosity, I recall my father sitting me down from an early age and re-reading children's French illustrated books to me – all the time translating it into English. Thus I experienced the magic of translation through the loving care of my father. His very name was Francis.

He became a teacher of German and French at the elite Royal Air Force College, Cranwell, Lincolnshire. But tragically, he contracted polio and was paralysed from the neck down and placed in an iron lung. My sister and I were merely told he had influenza. We were kept in confusion and never allowed to visit him, although I heard later he begged to see us. Suddenly I, aged nine and my sister, seven, were sent to an all girls' boarding school on the Isle of Wight. The headmistress offered this retreat, as my mother was also dangerously ill with shock. My mother had been at that school for only one and a half years when aged 16 and found it paradise compared to her previous isolation with a home governess. She only understood, years later, what a horror regime this place had become.

The answer to when I became an anthropologist can probably date back to the day I was told that my father had died. That evening, I sat on my dormitory bed, gently weeping. The matron came up and told me to stop crying immediately. She said she already knew of my father's death but any crying would keep the other girls awake. Making any noise at bedtime was the worst 'crime' in that institution. It must have been then, that I came to hate that alien, controlling culture of the British 'stiff upper lip'. No compassion was shown towards a child's suffering. Seemingly, it was a crime to grieve the loss of the person who had been central to my being. Thus the inner rebel was born (Okely 2008). The absurdity was made more apparent a couple of years later when we were all expected to cry in group hysteria when our class teacher announced that the King had died.

Tell us about your experience of boarding school...

The school's function was to reproduce both biologically and socially the privilege of the upper classes via uncontaminated females. The British class system is usually incomprehensible in Central or Eastern Europe and in the USA. Today, it is acceptable for the upper middle class women to be educated and proceed to university. Wives can now be part of a lucrative double income family. In those days, the upper class woman was to be lobotomised as companion in the Empire. I have several articles on that uniquely 'privileged' culture (republished in Okely 1996 Chs 7 and 8 and Okely 2003b). Ch 8 was selected for an undergraduate psychology course at Harvard this year.

To convince you of these strange gendered and class traditions, here are examples: the Queen's education was entirely entrusted to someone only trained for two years as a children's nanny. Princess Anne, Princess Diana, the Duchess of Cornwall: the future king's sister or wives, never went to university and never acquired even minimum qualifications for entry. But these upper class women acquired 'cultural distinction'. They convey their 'birth right' through unique habitus, including speech or accent, posture, table

manners and polite chatter. These are crucial signifiers of social class. Bourdieu has explored these notions as cultural capital and habitus (1984). But all this is very different in relation to France where intellectuals hold enormous respect. In the UK, intellectuals are regarded with suspicion. The ruling class may own books and even libraries in their huge houses, but they don't read them. As Gramsci (1971) suggested, the French destroyed their aristocracy so the bourgeoisie, as reading intellectuals, gained power. The British ultimately retained their aristocracy who did not require intelligence to retain power.

At this school, I proved to be talented in French and other subjects, but my headmistress summoned me to her study declaring I would be 'selfish' to go to university. I would be 'depriving a more worthy person of a place'. Perhaps she sensed my inner rebellion and, more importantly, she knew I hated sports like hockey and netball which we had to play every day. Sport, a crucial aspect of British culture, was exported to the colonies. The French, by contrast, exported their high culture. Meanwhile, the French teacher encouraged me to think of applying to university but told me this should remain a 'secret' between us. The pedagogical irony is breathtaking.

You seem to have relatively positive views of France?

My love of France was also because it was an 'OTHER' place - the 'ELSEWHERE': an escape from a British anti-culture. Aged 18, I left that nine years imprisonment and escaped to Paris. It was relatively cheap to study for a foreign students' course - La Civilisation Française at La Sorbonne. Paris and the Sorbonne's intellectual stimulation proved to be paradise. I was allowed to READ and STUDY at will. I was allowed to walk alone and free from sadistic games mistresses. There were inspiring lectures by leading professors, but, as yet no sign of anthropology. I even attended a lecture by Sartre.

It was there, eventually and independently, that I came across Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (de Beauvoir 1949, Okely 1986). My feminism was confirmed and fully grounded. My mother who had by then studied for a degree in Sociology at night school, while a social worker, was a feminist and career role model. I do recall her discussing Margaret Mead.

Thanks to La Sorbonne, I determined to take the entrance exam to Oxford. It does not need a psychoanalyst to see the motivations. I was following in my father's lost footsteps. I have a distant recollection of my father once saying that I should go to Oxford. I took the entrance exam independently, despite my headmistress' words. In those days, for every nine men, there was only one place for a woman, because of the segregated and mainly male colleges.

I was accepted at St Hilda's College to study French. There were no undergraduate degrees in anthropology, even if I knew what the subject was.

Tell us about your student days at Oxford.

I was politically active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and became the First Woman Member of the famous Oxford Union Debating Society. I attended a rally addressed by Bertrand Russell, was arrested in Trafalgar Square and found myself

sharing a cell with the actress Vanessa Redgrave. I had the good fortune to meet Malcolm X at a coffee morning at the Union. He liked my radical comments and arranged to meet me the next afternoon. When I watch the extract on the web of his charismatic speech at the Union that evening I think, 'My goodness I spent the afternoon with him'. He was to be assassinated less than three months later.

At the same time, I became disillusioned with the degree course. The lecturers deliberately spoke French with an English accent. The critical texts rarely included any written by French scholars. It was an Anglo-centric view of French culture. We wrote all our essays in English, except in language exams. So I switched to Politics, Philosophy and Economics. We could do two optional courses. I chose Sociological Theory with Bryan Wilson. I was fortunate to have Stephen Lukes for Political Theory. He was the one person who really encouraged me as an intellectual. I thanked him years later in the preface to *The Traveller Gypsies* (1983).

How did you get to Anthropology from Politics, Philosophy and Political Theory?

It was only AFTER graduating and, with my partner Hugh Brody who was enrolled for a Sociology doctorate, that I became entranced with fieldwork as potentially anthropology. I went with Hugh for periods in the West of Ireland (Okely 2009). My curiosity was thus aroused in a subject which involved face to face communication and shared living with people, drawing on all one's resources; intellectual, imaginative and embodied, not just library or armchair anthropology. Unfortunately, I had gained only a mediocre undergraduate degree which precluded any postgraduate grant. I am hopeless at unseen exams where speed and slick answers are the priority. Three years work was in those days compressed into a week's exams. Here there are gender implications. Hugh's college recruited a special tutor to cram the students for the finals. Male academics controlled the inner circle for exam questions. My politics woman tutor (of extreme right wing views) demanded that we St Hilda's students write essays which had NO link to the syllabus. She was out of touch.

With neither patron nor funding, I saved money from teaching at a Further Education college, took out a loan and used the small sum I inherited from my father. Thus I enrolled for a postgraduate one year 'conversion' course in **social anthropology** at Cambridge.

There is no long tradition of anthropology in the Czech Republic. Can you outline, for the Czech reader, what the approach to social anthropology was like when you were a student?

I was initiated into a 'Cambridge' perspective which I later discovered was different from the postgraduate conversion course in Oxford. When much later, I was admitted to register for a doctorate at Oxford, the academic difference became apparent. For example, Edwin Ardener expressed puzzlement as to why Cambridge had devoted so much time to Malinowski

Cambridge had a long and distinguished tradition of teaching at undergraduate level. At Oxford, anthropology was reserved for postgraduates. My **Cambridge** course was only partially adjusted for graduates. All the courses, except one, we postgraduates undertook were simultaneously studied by younger undergraduates. The latter would build on three years. We had only nine months. But we had some marvellous courses.

Your teachers and fellow students were names familiar to us today as authors of classic anthropology texts. Tell us about some of the key figures you encountered.

Stanley Tambiah lectured both on a course on Religion and one on Economics and Politics. He was brilliant, clear and organised. I realise retrospectively that a 'specialist' could be both inspirational and informed about several perspectives which might, for some, have seemed mutually contradictory, i.e. religion was more than 'the opium of the people', as Marx argued. However, I remained convinced that the political-economy was the basis for the wider context.

The main Professor and head of department, Meyer Fortes, lectured on Kinship. Although he was a passionate and committed scholar, and indeed was the person who sympathetically interviewed me, he was a very disorganised lecturer. But his passion was conveyed best in the third year seminars which we postgraduates also attended. There were two favourite students who always sat either side of Fortes. No one else dared take *their* chairs. These third year students, who seemed to know everything, were Tim Ingold and Chris Fuller.

On one occasion we postgraduates and the third years were invited to farewell drinks in Fortes' college rooms. Suddenly, Fortes tapped his glass, calling for silence. He pointed to me, 'See that young lady, Judith Okely. She is determined to continue with anthropology. Nothing will stop her. That is all I want to say'. The talk resumed. But these lines, still recalled, as with key moments in individual biography, countered those spoken years ago by my head mistress.

Being so inspired by Tambiah, I also attended his special course on South Asia, although I would not be examined on this. Jack Goody was teaching at Cambridge and would subsequently succeed Fortes. Despite his subsequent very ordered and original publications, he was a chaotic lecturer. I would compare his random scribbles on the blackboard at the end, to a Jackson Pollock painting. I am grateful that sometime later his then wife, Esther Goody who invited me to travel from Durham to give a lecture to undergraduates, suggested my thesis be included in the Cambridge series 'Changing Cultures', convened by Jack Goody.

I am proud and amused at my self-confidence at refusing, unlike the others in the series, to end the book title with the word *Today*. I argued that my monograph would stand the test of time. So to call it *The Traveller Gypsies Today* would soon be dated.

By chance, while I was completing the conversion course, I encountered someone who had been a fellow undergraduate at Oxford, Malcolm McCleod. He was Assistant Curator at the Cambridge Anthropology museum and had already completed his

doctorate in anthropology under Evans Pritchard at Oxford. He became my personal tutor towards the end of the year. He gave me wonderful encouragement and insisted I continue. He later acted as an enthusiastic referee.

Finally, I owe most to Edmund Leach. There were only five of us enrolled for this conversion course. For us, the unique privilege would be a year long course with Leach, meeting for two hours every week. It was devoted entirely to Malinowski, Leach's mentor. Our reading list consisted entirely of Malinowski's work, except his *Diary*, which Leach said should never have been published. I later wrote an article on this (Okely 1975, republished in Okely 1996 Ch. 2).

How did all of this apply when you finally undertook fieldwork of your own?

I realise, years later, that the Malinowski course, was experienced by me, the novice, as *the core* of anthropology. We learned that it was essential for Malinowski that every aspect of a society be studied in an holistic approach. We were introduced to the Economy, Politics, Kinship, Religion and Ritual of the Trobriands, by means of the vital method of 'pitching one's tent in the village' i.e. participant observation, rather than relying solely on secondary and distanced, quantitative material. It was this holistic perspective which I carried with me when, by good fortune, within five months of graduating at Cambridge, I was to find myself living in a caravan on a Gypsy camp. I presumed I should research every such aspect, even though my research centre had dismissed pollution beliefs as bizarre 'superstitions'. Unlike Malinowski, I also examined the wider context.

I carried his scepticism of explaining beliefs and practices solely in terms of distant origin. Instead I looked at *current* meaning, although Malinowski would call it function. This explains my emphasis on the current meaning of Gypsy beliefs and practices rather than reducing them to long ago leftovers from Indian origins (Okely 1983 pp 8–19) and what Malinowski labelled a 'mythical past'. By this, neither he nor I meant it was 'made up', merely that the past is so distant that it takes on the status of myth. I have been grossly misinterpreted on this by some linguists and caused massive controversy.

Rodney Needham was also a supportive academic. He invited me to give a paper at his postgraduate seminar. It was there in 1974 that I gave the first version of what would be chapter six of *The Traveller Gypsies* (1983). The very week of the seminar an article appeared in the local *Oxford Journal* describing the alleged squalor of Gypsy camps. I pointed to the cultural conflicts and retained it in my later publication (ibid. page 79). Needham was fascinated and amazed at an account of something existing just a few miles from Oxford. He also became a great support and future referee.

I was fortunate to have Godfrey Leinhardt, selected as my doctoral supervisor by Edwin Ardener. The latter realised my dilemma in that in 1971 I was initially working as salaried employee for a London Research Centre. I had fought to do fieldwork, living on Gypsy campsites. But technically the Institute at Oxford required that the first year be spent as resident postgraduate in the university before fieldwork. The new pro-

fessor was a stickler for rules and procedures. Friedman had fled the apparently rioting students of 1968 at the London School of Economics and treated us like potential mad revolutionaries. He banned even the Christmas party because he said that there would be drugs. In fact it was a very genteel occasion for sipping sherry in the basement where the walls were decorated by photos of the 'ancestors' like Radcliffe Brown and Evans-Pritchard. Friedman did not comprehend that we were ALL committed postgraduates, not undergraduates who had just left home.

Edwin Ardener advised that, in order to keep up the illusion that I was full time resident in Oxford, I should appear once a fortnight at the Friday seminars where all staff were assembled for visiting speakers. I should sit conspicuously in the front and ideally ask a question. Then we would convene to the pub. So I drove from my Gypsy camp and in a roadside lay-bye, changed from my deliberately modest clothing to what was considered fashionably hippy, with long frilly skirt. Some would mistakenly say I dressed like a Gypsy. The next day, after perhaps writing up field notes, I would return to the camp.

Godfrey Lienhardt understood all this. As you see, he was not selected for his expertise on Europe, let alone Gypsies. But I appreciated his full support. Again, like Needham, he was mesmerised by my findings. When he read my field notes, he exclaimed 'They are more violent than the Dinka'. Another time, when reading about the conditions on the temporary camp with neither water nor flush toilets, he vomited! Once he gained confidence in me, he trusted my independent research. I gradually realised that I was fortunate to have him for other reasons. There was a terrible rivalry and conflict between two academics. Their students felt pressurised to avoid all influences from the rival academic. Moreover, each student felt obliged to follow the theories of their supervisor. Some became quite bitter. Lienhardt was confident enough never to make such demands. To my regret, I never once cited him in my text. Godfrey was an utterly reliable referee, especially for a later Social Science postgraduate grant to finish what I had commenced as employee for the London Centre.

You mention male critics. Have you experienced gender bias in academia?

I never realised, until I attended a London Womens' Anthropology Conference in 1974 how male biased anthropology had been. Speakers there included, Pat Caplan and Caroline Ifeka-Moller. I had of course considered myself a feminist but I had been brainwashed into thinking it was a sufficient feminist act merely to go to university, defying my schooling. Then returning to Oxford, some of us women would meet in a seminar room in Queen Elizabeth House to present papers. At first men were discouraged from attending as we had found that even when only one man was present, he tended to act as if he represented the majority. Alternatively, two men together would treat seminars as a cockfight performance. I have explored this in an article in honour of Shirley Ardener (Okely 2007). Women in that seminar included Helen Callaway, Sue Wright, Lidia Sciana,

Marion McDonald and Charlotte Hardman, all of whom went on to become distinguished anthropologists. My article (Okely 1996 Ch 4 originally published in Ardener 1975) emerged from this seminar.

This weekly seminar continues today and is linked to the International Gender Studies Centre. The history of its link is informative. When some women initially asked the then Professor Maurice Friedman (who had succeeded Evans Pritchard at Oxford), if they could use a seminar room once a week for women postgraduates, he refused, saying that this would be sex discrimination. So Shirley and Edwin Ardener, linked also to Queen Elizabeth House, suggested that venue. Maurice Friedman saw NO contradiction in being a member of the fabulously wealthy All Souls College, which excluded all women.

My male undergraduate contemporaries could sit exams for fellowships after graduation. They would then have five years or more with neither teaching nor administrative duties. We women had no such rights until the first woman was admitted, to national publicity, in the mid 1980s.

You mention controversy around your work...

I seem to provoke controversy even when I think I am an earnest scholar. I had obtained the competitive postgraduate grant to write up my doctorate and indeed on the basis of my fieldwork and publications in press. But a postdoctoral researcher at Nuffield College informed me that he had recently met my former St Hilda's politics tutor. He casually mentioned having met one of her former tutees. But he told me that the mention of my name had shortened her life by at least five years. She said it was 'a disgrace to the university' that I was registered for a doctorate. I had wasted my time at the Oxford Union. When I repeated this in bewilderment to Stephen Lukes, he reassured me that SHE was a disgrace to the university.

My Malinowski influenced scepticism on reducing all current beliefs and practices to alleged and distant origins centuries earlier, has caused outrage among linguists who have no engagement with the social sciences, let alone anthropology. I had read so many folklore articles and books including some early ones in the JGLS which repeatedly explained ALL Roma/Gypsy practices as Indian. They also systematically ignored the fact that this special type of nomad could never be economically and politically self-sufficient. There could have been alliances among potential travellers. I therefore suggested that not ALL such nomads necessarily travelled from India. It seemed no coincidence that their 'appearance' throughout Europe coincided with the collapse of feudalism when many serfs and others were thrown out by feudal land lords. But some still speculated that they had moved from India to follow the sun. Others said they might be genetically mixed because the women were all raped on the way. My own evidence on kinship showed marriage in by non-Gypsies but in small numbers, not through rape.

The Israeli professor, Matras is out of touch with the social scientists' practice of labelling. I referred to the specialists and *aficionados* as 'Gypsiologists'. This is NOT a term of contempt. Ironically, on my first research post I had to take time out of my limited annual leave to read the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* in the Kensington library. My citations show massive respect for T. W. Thompson who had read considerable anthropology. Despite citing my exact paragraph questioning whether ALL 'real' Gypsies or Travellers are the descendants of specific groups in India a thousand years ago (Okely 1983:13), Matras claimed that I dismissed **any** immigration and **any** Romany language as 'a Romanticist fantasy' (2004: 65). He even declared that I, (baptised when just an innocent baby), have waged a '**self-righteous crusade**' (ibid.) against those who discussed any Gypsy history. It is extraordinary, in the post 9/11 era, that a linguist should be so sloppy in the choice of the word Crusade; namely a murderous campaign of killing Muslims in the Holy Land; now designated Israel.

It should be clear that my original problematising of a mono origin for ALL Roma and Gypsies can be traced back to Malinowski. Some time after fieldwork, I was privileged to share a platform at a Cambridge conference with Edmund Leach and Eric Hobsbawm. Here I publicly tried out my ideas and was delighted to be supported by Leach as discussant. I cited his comments later in my monograph (1983 p. 8). I was overawed to be invited to submit my paper to a distinguished history journal by Hobsbawm. Being female and naïve in career strategies, I refused, as I thought I could not publish this in advance of my Cambridge monograph, in preparation. If I had seized the chance, I might have been less open to the mischievous misrepresentations by subsequent male critics. I should however, say that I feel vindicated. I had no idea when first publishing the suggestions that it would evoke such hatred among non-anthropologists.

To what degree were you shaped by your peers and colleagues, teachers and tutors, and those you know only through their written work?

I have already addressed these questions especially emphasising Malinowski. Anthropologists I met, like Leach and Tambiah were especially influential. I was to be inspired later by their publications on animal categories as very useful for making sense of the Gypsies' categories. But there were others whose texts inspired me, for example, Levi Strauss *Tristes Tropiques* and *The Savage Mind*. The latter was so intriguing that I kept giggling at the complexity. I never met him.

Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966) was dramatically influential when I read it at Cambridge and used it later in my analysis of Gypsy pollution beliefs. Some time later, I found myself sitting opposite her on a train from Oxford to London. I was so overawed that I left several of my possessions on my seat when I left the train! She heard me give a presentation in Delhi conference, in the late 1970s, on my boarding school and came up to congratulate me. She proved to be a wonderful mentor to Suzanne Heald.

Shirley Ardener was innovative and suggestive (see Okely 2007). I also met Phyllis Kaberry a few times when she visited Oxford. She was utterly attuned to the challenges of fieldwork among Gypsies. Kaberry had supervised the masters dissertation by Theresa San Roman on Spanish Gypsies. It was my honour to give the Kaberry Commemorative Lecture in Oxford in 1989. (Okely 1996 Ch 10).

It was wonderful meeting Rehfish at Hull university. Little did I know that one day I would be professor there. Rehfish was utterly reassuring about the way to do fieldwork. He agreed that, despite pressure from some anthropologists, the very act of questioning was usually inappropriate.

Hortense Powdermaker, another student of Malinowski, wrote her brilliant and undercited *Stranger and Friend* in 1967. I found it by chance in the Durham anthropology library. It set my agenda for recording and analysing the experience of fieldwork. When desperately trying to convince my research director of the relevance of participant observation, the appendices of Whyte's *Street Corner society* (Whyte 1993 [1943]) and Ulf Hannerz' *Exploring the City* (Hannerz 1980) were crucial. Both described urban fieldwork in the USA proving the value of fieldwork in the West.

The other joy was my peer group. At one stage, we would meet in each others' rooms and lodgings for our own weekly seminars. Members included Kirsten Hastrup, Malcolm Chapman, Malcolm Crick, Tim Jenkins and Jan Oveson. Later, I got to know Signe Howell, Tamara Kohn and Sharon MacDonald.

One of your best known works is The Traveller-Gypsies (Okely 1983). How did you get interested in this topic?

After graduating that year at Cambridge, I was again disappointed in that any postgraduate grants were allotted to those who had done the three year degrees. Again all depended on the unseen exams. Any essays like course work through the year did not count. By this time, my mother had progressed to a university lectureship. She subscribed to a weekly journal called *New Society* which popularised the social sciences and social work. I was in my mother's study saying, 'I have to go on with anthropology. This IS my subject. It brings together everything, including art and literature'. All my education seemed to be relevant. I idly flipped through the back pages of the weekly and I spotted an advertisement for a researcher on Gypsies. I applied. Over 200 applied. I had taken the trouble to go to a public library and read the published Report and *Census Gypsies and Other Travellers* compiled by Barbara Adams. She was the initiative behind the project. As a civil servant, she had felt morally and politically obliged to find out more about the Gypsies' wishes. Her Report had resulted in some seemingly positive legislation but she felt that the local authorities had had much greater influence in punitive powers of eviction. She seconded herself to do an independent study at the Centre for Environmental Studies in Regents Park, London.

I was awarded the position and my fate was sealed for decades to come.

How did British social anthropology view fieldwork "at home", in Europe, among Gypsies, at the time?

I was still shocked that there was uproar among the younger 'radical' (non anthropological) researchers (they were traffic and housing experts) that 'their' money might be devoted to the study of Gypsies. One now very famous supposedly radical geographer told me, 'After all they are ONLY a minority'.

In the UK especially, there has been a prejudice against such a choice of terrain. There were some departments where I always knew it would be impossible to get a job because I had done fieldwork in the UK. Anthropologists like Maurice Bloch claimed that anthropology in Europe is 'easy' because it is 'known'. Departments would advertise for anthropologists who are experts in any region except Europe! But I am delighted how that dictat has been ignored by so many in younger generations. Anthropology should be for the study of ALL societies and cultures around the world. It is arrogant to presume the West is known. In any case there are anthropologists from around the world who find Europe exotic and worthy of research.

As I have said above, it was considered strange to do fieldwork in the UK. But Ronnie Frankenberg was a pioneer. Fifty years after the publication of his *Village on the Border* (1957), an ethnographic study of a Welsh village, a special edition of *The Sociological Review* was brought out in celebration, to which I contributed (J. Edwards et al. 2005). It emerged that Frankenberg only studied in the UK because he was seen as some dangerous radical and was permitted to do a doctorate on condition his field site was a day's trip from Manchester University, rather than in some 'exotic' place abroad.

Many of us did indeed face down grading because of our field site 'at Home'. Anthony Jackson convened an inspiring conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists at Keele University. The volume (Jackson 1987) confronts such issues. My article 'Fieldwork up the M1' has continued to receive wonderful responses from generations of students faced with similar dilemmas of fieldwork in Europe. I am grateful to Jackson for insisting on including it in his volume. He revealed that the 'anonymous' reader wanted to exclude my article. 'He's no friend of yours' he said. I have to face the fact that being original and critical may produce controversy and anger, especially among some male academics. Yes, sometimes, it bewilders me and it hurts.

As we know, the "Roma issue" is very often accompanied by problems with the reception of one's results. Many renowned authors, for example Fredrick Barth and Farnham Rehfish, encountered this kind of problems with their PhD dissertations. How was your book about the Traveller-Gypsies received?

I only just discovered that Frederick Barth submitted his research on Gypsies in Norway as a PhD which was failed. Yet I found his work an inspiration. The key article was republished in Rehfish's 1975 volume (Barth 1975; Rehfish 1975). Similarly, Rehfish's unpublished thesis was an inspiration. But I was fortunate. I did not have to change a comma in my text which was examined by Michael Banton and Peter Riviere who had previously supervised Anne Sutherland's PhD which was published as *Gypsies: The Hidden Americans* (1975).

My book was sold out and reprinted within a year. Then it was translated into Japanese. At first I received positive reviews, partly because it was read mainly by anthropologists. I found it appeared on university reading lists, first because, contrary to the exoticists, it appealed to students interested in anthropology in the UK. It was also used as an example of fieldwork method discussions. I have long regretted **the absence of systematic discussion of fieldwork in the discipline**. This was a major omission in my Cambridge course. Since I had already been drawn to anthropology through prior fieldwork in Ireland, I was expecting some relevant discussions. Also I had been encouraged to include a chapter on this (Okely 1983 Ch 3) because so many people were incredulous in hearing of my 'life with the Gypsies' that I had repeatedly to describe the basics (Okely 2008). Later, in 1989 Helen Callaway and I convened an ASA conference on Anthropology and Autobiography (Okely and Callaway 1992) which I am amused to be told is now a 'classic'. At the time of proposing it, some said it was 'navel gazing, narcissistic, California speak or a feminist plot'. But at the open vote in 1987, I was thrilled that Edmund Leach and Raymond Firth voted in favour of our proposal.

It was after 1989 and the collapse of communism, and the new interest in Gypsies or Roma as a 'problem' that the book took off again. It has been repeatedly republished and is now available in digital form. I am delighted there are so many committed younger anthropologists concerned with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers who have become the most stigmatised and persecuted minority throughout Europe.

But it was then that it came to the attention of linguists and all hell broke loose. Previously anthropologists thought my problematising of the mono Indian origin hypothesis was a standard argument in anthropology. They took it for granted and of course did not realise the political controversy. But I have since been attacked by academics beyond the social sciences. One linguist, with a PhD from London University, declared 'Every time I read your book I want to burn it' (Okely 1997a, p. 240).

I found it terrifying how my name has been put on web sites as the 'enemy'. Here is something I recently wrote concerning Ian Hancock. His caricatures of my work and embarrassment that I actually deferred to his article (1970) cited in Okely (1983 p. 9) suggesting that Romany could be a Creole has lit a fire of hatred in Hancock (1997/8)

He claims that I argued that Gypsies are a 'motley band'. I never used that pejorative term. I see in his review of my book that when I use the label Traveller, which is what the Gypsies THEMSELVES use (the term was interchangeable), this was, according to Hancock, my assertion that they were not 'true Indian blooded'. He reflected local authority racist labelling by arguing that half the people I lived with were 'not real'. 'not true blooded' Gypsies because sometimes they called themselves Travellers. Who am I to dictate to the Gypsies how they should call themselves? Hancock's misrepresentations contributed to the claims on the internet and Romnet that I was 'the enemy of the Roma'.

I recall a Russian student at the CEU Budapest where I was teaching on the summer course, being utterly amazed that I called Gypsies an ethnic group. He had been led to believe otherwise by the Internet. I had to explain that I was one of the FIRST

to use that term ethnic group. The Russian said he had been influenced also by what Hancock wrote about me. He thought I insisted that indeed there was no such thing as Gypsies... It is absurd that people who should be allies against persecution and genocide then devote energy hating each other.

I should recall the inspiration of meeting Will Guy doing a study of Roma in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s (Guy 1975; Guy 1977). He introduced me to Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). Then I met up with Marek Kaminski in 1975. He, a recent refugee in Sweden from Poland, had done pioneering fieldwork among Gypsies in Poland, Slovakia and Sweden (Kaminski 1980). It was fantastic comparing experiences and finding commonalities. Years later in 1992, in Amsterdam, I met Kaminski's previous Polish anthropology professor. After hearing a seminar paper of mine, she had the courage to confess that she had previously discouraged Kaminski in any study of Polish Gypsies because she then believed that neither they nor any Gypsies 'had a culture'. She was brave enough to acknowledge her past error.

Now I am delighted that my monograph is one of the recommended texts for the forthcoming school Advanced Level course in social anthropology. The Royal Anthropological Institute has worked for some years for this launch in autumn 2010. However, it seems that my work is still controversial. One anthropologist, based at Kent University, sent a group email, with several exclamation marks, deploring that the course should even consider including such people as *Gypsies*. He had specialized on fieldwork in South East Asia. I made no comment at the next meeting. The eminent committee held their ground in their choices.

When you started to give lectures at a university, it was uncommon to find women in this role. How did your being a woman impact on your work as lecturer, and vice versa?

I have described some aspects of this in my article 'Gendered Lessons in Ivory Towers' (2007). Many of my female contemporaries who were married were asked why their husbands were not in the same town. One was asked what the department would do if she became pregnant. Then women were only entitled to a few weeks maternity leave at the time. One woman, after several such failed interviews, claimed she was barren, to the interviewers' embarrassment. She got the job, and 'the Holy Spirit' descended the following year and she had a daughter. Another woman had naively revealed not only was she married, but Roman Catholic. At the all male interview panel, she was outrageously asked how they could cope since birth control was a sin and she could get pregnant at any time.

I knew that my chances of being given a job if I were to marry would be much reduced. I had to commute between London and Durham for weekends with my boyfriend. When the permanent job came up, I was advised by a sympathetic male colleague that if I wanted to be considered for the post, I should pretend that I had broken up with my boyfriend in London, thus apparently confirming my 'commitment' to Durham. Thus I was appointed.

When I left eventually for a lectureship at Essex University, a distinguished anthropologist, a married woman living in mainland Europe, applied for my job. I heard later that she was contemplating divorce, which was hardly something she would put on her CV. But the committee refused to shortlist her. They said since her husband was abroad, it would 'impose a burden of commuting', as had been the case with Okely. A man was duly appointed, thus reducing even further the gender balance in the department. No one questioned the fact that his partner did not live in Durham at the time of the interview. Predictably, any man could exploit the fact that he was married. I recall an applicant for a post at Edinburgh University, being described as 'reliable because he has a wife and children to support'. He got that post.

I have also outlined my treatment (in Okely 2007) where I was refused membership of a college at Durham and any details of lodgings to rent because I was 'not married'. I was accused of fraud when asking for my library card. I was in my 30s, but the librarian could not believe I a woman was a lecturer. Confronted by the all male interview panel, I had naively and proudly noted in my CV that I was the first woman member of the Oxford Union and a contributor to the first feminist anthropology collection *Perceiving Women* (Ardenner 1975), I learned that this was seen as threatening— not something to be celebrated. I was asked if I would 'still be interested' in this initially nine month job, if I 'could not teach anything on women'. The sexist, arrogant implication was that anthropology was ONLY about men!

After achieving the permanent lectureship two years later, I worked to introduce a course on gender. My lovely colleague David Brookes warned me that the professor would be embarrassed if the title contained the word 'Women', if it were to be passed by a mainly male Senate. I got round this by labelling the course 'Race and Gender', and found the majority of students who signed up for it were male. One, perhaps the most brilliant, was Roger Goodman, an anthropologist, who is now Professor of Japanese studies and Dean of the Social Sciences at Oxford.

I have, like a number of women of my generation, had to sacrifice having children in order to become an academic. Things have changed since. It is now illegal to ask about childcare and private relationships at interviews. There is generous maternity and even some paternity leave. But, as I explained on a BBC Radio programme recently, I have a maternal pride in the achievement of so many of my former students, scattered around the world. Many keep in touch or suddenly contact me, years after graduating. One, whom I taught in the early 1980s, is professor in the States and has recruited me to join the panel she is convening at the Annual conference of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans, November 2010.

Another, the first in his family to go to university is Andrew Dawson whom I 'converted' from sociology to anthropology at Essex University. I supervised his PhD on retired coal miners in County Durham, where he had been brought up. Now he is Professor of Social Anthropology at Melbourne University, Australia.

In addition to your Gypsy-related texts you are known, for example, as the author of a monograph on Simone de Beauvoir (Okely 1986). What drew you to her, and what is her relevance to today's reader?

There was a workshop in 1979 celebrating the 30th anniversary of the publication of *The Second Sex*. I was invited to contribute a short presentation. The publishers, Virago, were impressed and invited me to produce a volume for a new series. This was to challenge a series of 'great thinkers' convened by Frank Kermode which celebrated almost entirely 'Great Men'. I was made an offer I could not refuse, although it was a diversion from a linear anthropological career. It was published, by strange chance, the very week that de Beauvoir died, and was for some weeks, top of the best seller list of Oxford book shops.

My autobiographical interjections were seen as controversial. But it was a means of giving historical context, alongside any examples from other women of my generation. De Beauvoir's *Second Sex* had already caused huge controversy. She was slated by male reviewers and colleagues. But she said her faith in the text was revived by the hundreds of letters she received from ordinary young women over the years. That was my purpose in reproducing such enthusiasm.

I kept in regular contact with Virago during the writing, to check if that innovative approach was acceptable. Ursula Owen at Virago supported me. But when the text was sent to Pantheon Press in the US, their editor insisted I rewrite it, excising all personal and individual comments. She argued they were of no value because I was 'not a celebrity'. I refused and Virago warned me that I would lose a lot of royalties. It was published by them, but not publicised in the US, perhaps to prove their point. A year later, they offered me about 25 copies at discount, before pulping. I accepted, but they casually sent them to another author and all were lost. That is why it is a delight that the book has been on the syllabus of many French departments in the UK. Moreover, despite Pantheon's judgement, I receive wonderful comments on the internet, including from the USA (cf. Corbett 2003).

De Beauvoir and other classic texts are likely to be revived, along with a renewal of feminism. Despite the recognition of gender equality, there are new debates and controversies. Women are still 'The Other' as de Beauvoir argued. The greater freedom of sexual mores has had the effect of increasing the treatment of women as sexual object and enhanced by commercialisation. All this is disguised as 'freedom of choice' and some distorted 'empowerment'. Women are trafficked from East to West and South to North.

For two years running, I have been asked to give a lecture on de Beauvoir for the postgraduate Masters in Womens' Studies at Oxford University. Last November, I was asked by the Convenor for advance handouts and bullet points. I said I did not work that way. Unbeknown to me, she came *incognito* to the lecture. When I finished, the 30 to 40 students spontaneously applauded. The Convenor revealed herself and exclaimed that this had never happened before. Why had the students applauded? What was my secret?

That week I received an email from the students inviting me to out to dinner. They would pay for me. They were all in their 20s. A few were male. They thanked me saying said they had met a 'real feminist' at last.

This incident answers your question as to continuing relevance of classic feminist texts for new and younger readers.

Your second stint of fieldwork was carried out in Normandy (e.g. Okely 2002). Why Normandy? Why Europe, again? What were the differences between this second fieldwork and that among English Gypsies?

I was contacted by Peter Riviere who was the anthropologist co-convening an ESRC multi-disciplinary initiative on Ageing. He was looking for anthropologists. It was clear that this project was a response to government pressure to prove research was 'useful' for a 'problem'. I asked if it was OK if I could do fieldwork in France. I said 'If I can go to France, I'll do anything'. There were anthropological studies in Brittany and in Southern France. I chose Normandy, a relatively under researched region except for the study of witchcraft. Normandy is the 'bread and dairy basket' for Paris. It is not simplistically isolated from the capital. I was also unashamedly attracted to the place through the eyes of painters such as Millet, Pissarro and Monet.

My research, as with so many other anthropologists, took unpredictable forms, thanks to what concerned the people themselves. Jacqueline Gregoire was a major influence (Okely 1996 Ch 10). My experience in Normandy was entirely different from that among Gypsies in that I was welcomed from the start. I was not seen as a suspect intruder. My launch into the field occurred by chance at an Armistice Day ceremony where there were still survivor veterans of the 1st World War. I was swept into the procession to the Town hall and glasses were raised by the mayor in a toast to the English woman, an ally.

Taking my lessons from the West of Ireland, I took participant observation seriously and to people's astonishment asked to learn how to hand milk cows. This, like my joining in scrap dealing among the Gypsies, was crucial for acceptance and new embodied knowledge.

Unfortunately the research board, in order to prove the 'relevance' of this research to the UK, insisted that I spend half the time doing a comparison with a locality in England. Thus I had also to do fieldwork in East Anglia, and never had sufficient time to immerse myself for a full year's fieldwork in France. That is why I did not have sufficient time and material to do an entire monograph, especially with the increasing demands of teaching and administration in UK Universities. Instead I have several articles, including some on East Anglia. (e.g. Okely 1997b).

Can you tell us something about your last book, which is concerned with "doing fieldwork"? How has the academic public reacted to it?

I have co-edited two recent books *Identity and Networks* 2007 (Faye Bryceson, Okely and Webber) and *Knowing how to Know* 2008 (Halstead, Hirsch and Okely). But reviewers are

often wary of edited collections. If you really mean my forthcoming book, *Anthropological Practice*, on which I have been working for a decade I hope it will be submitted in a few weeks to Berg. It is my answer to formulaic methods textbooks. I have recorded and analysed dialogues with over 20 anthropologists of 16 nationalities. They have proved so articulate and inventive that it has taken years to cut and paste key quotes.

I will be so happy to have it finally in print. I will be free. But I have lived with the experiences of these anthropologists who have done fieldwork around the world from the early 1970s to the present. The format is still original in that it does not consist of each interview as one more edited chapter. Instead, I have made contrasts and comparisons between the multiple examples throughout. There are so many fascinating commonalities that one could suggest that I can point to an underlying system. I am dedicating it to Edmund Leach.

I have lectured on aspects of this book many times at conferences around Europe and in the USA. I have always received enthusiastic responses.

What are you working on at present and what are your plans for the future?

After this book, I will attempt to edit the film footage of my six hour filmed return to my former boarding school in the late 1990s just weeks before key buildings were to be demolished. The school had closed: the girls had voted with their feet and numbers had plummeted. The name of the school and the remaining inmates were merged with a boys' school. Thus gender segregation ceased.

There will be several articles emerging still from my dialogues with anthropologists – I had to cut three draft chapters from my forthcoming book. Finally I may work on an idea brewing for years, which is a 'campus' novel from the perspective of a woman academic. Hitherto this genre has invariably been written from the point of view of a male, never a female academic. I have years of ethnographic detail, indeed scandal, corruption and drama to draw upon. It should be fun!



1. '.... I am a ,rebel' in a subtle way second from right middle row. I had NOT put my hands in my lap like a proper lady'.



2. Judith Okely on the right. Godfrey Lienhardt, on seeing it said ,Which one is the Gypsy?'



3. '... my caravan is in the centre, near the tree'.



5. Free of boarding school, on Boulevard St Michel, Paris (Judith Okely on the left).



4. Wearing veils in the Anglican Chapel.



6. Judith Okely in the national press as activist to get women accepted in the Oxford Union Debating Society.



7. '... assisting with apple cider crushing in Normandy.'



8. 'The headmistress has the dog on her lap. I'm behind her left shoulder. To the left of the chaplain is the teacher who secretly told me to try for university, despite the headmistress '.



9. 'Another site, the first one I lived on'



11. Judith Okely with Bulgarian Roma graduating in Masters in Womens Studies at Oxford. Her father is on the left. The English Pentecostal preacher and wife in the picture. paid for the parents to come from Bulgaria to the event. They had never been on a plane before.



10. 'The photo of my first camp'.

REFERENCES

- Ardener, S. (ed.), (1975), *Perceiving Women*. London: Malaby Press.
- Barth, F. (1969) (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- Barth, F. (1975) 'The Social Organization of a Pariah Group in Norway', in: Rehfsch, F., ed. *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers*, pp. 285–299; (originally published in *Norweg 5/1955*, pp. 125–44); [česky: Fredrick (2009) *Sociální organizace párijské skupiny v Norsku*, in: Jakoubek, Marek & Budilová, Lenka (eds.) *Cikánské skupiny a jejich sociální organizace*, Brno: CDK, str. 47–62; z angličtiny přeložil Marek Jakoubek].
- Bourdieu, P. (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the judgement of Taste*, (trans R. Nice) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1949), *Le Deuxieme Sexe*, 'Paris: Gallimard; [česky: de Beauvoir. S. (1966) *Druhé pohlaví*, Praha: Orbis; z francouzštiny přeložili Josef Kostohryz a Hana Uhlířová].
- Corbett B. (2003), '*Simone de Beauvoir* by Judith Okely. 176 pages, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986'; <http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/personal/reading/okely-beauvoir.html>
- Douglas, M. (1966), *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Edwards, J., S. Macdonald, S. and M. Savage, M (2005) (eds) 'Community, continuity and change in the study of Britain, *The Sociological Review*, vol. 53, No 4.
- Frankenberg, R. (1957), *Village on the Border*, London: Cohen and West.
- Gramsci, A. (1971), *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart; [česky srov.: Gramsci, A. (1959) *Sešity z vězení*, Praha: Československý spisovatel; uspořádali J. Pokorný a M. Cervi; přeložil J. Pokorný].
- Guy, W. (1975), 'Ways of looking at Roma: the case of Czechoslovakia', in F. Rehfsch (ed.) *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers*, London: Academic Press, pp. 201–230.
- Guy, W. (1977) *The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia to Assimilate its Gypsy Population*, unpublished PhD thesis, Bristol: University of Bristol; [česky (část) Guy, W. (2009) *Význam rodinných vazeb pro migraci českých a slovenských Romů*, in: Jakoubek, Marek & Budilová, Lenka (eds.) *Cikánské skupiny a jejich sociální organizace*, Brno: CDK, str. 267–285; z angličtiny přeložila Lucie Plavjaniková].
- Hancock, I. (1970), 'Is Anglo-Romanes a Creole?' *J. G. L. S.* 3rd series, vol XLIX (1–2). 41–4.
- Ian Hancock (1997/8), 'The Struggle for the Control of Identity'; <http://www.osi.hu/rpp/perspectives1a.htm>
- Hannerz, U. (1980) *Exploring the city: inquiries toward an urban anthropology*, Columbia University Press.
- Jackson, A. (1987), (ed.), *Anthropology at Home*, London Tavistock.
- Kaminski, I.M. (1980) *The state of ambiguity: Studies of Gypsy refugees*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenbur
- Levi Strauss, C. (1973) *Tristes Tropiques*, (transl. J. And D. Weightman) New York: Harper Torchbooks; [česky: Lévi Strauss, C. (1966) *Smutné tropy*, Praha: Odeon; z francouzštiny přeložil Jiří Pechar].
- (1966), *The Savage Mind* (transl.) London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- [česky: Lévi-Strauss, C. (1971) *Myšlení přírodních národů*, Praha: Československý spisovatel; z francouzštiny přeložil Jiří Pechar].
- Matras, Y. (2004), 'The Role of Language in Mystifying and Demystifying Gypsy Identity' in *The Role of the Romani*, N. Saul and S. Tebbutt (eds), Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. pp. 53–78.
- Okely, J. (1975) 'The Self and Scientism' in *Journal of the Anthropology Society of Oxford*, Trinity Term.
- (1983), *The Traveller Gypsies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1986), *Simone de Beauvoir: a Re-Reading*. London: Virago
- (1987), 'Fieldwork up the M.1.' in A. Jackson (ed.) above, pp 55–73.
- (1996), *Own or Other Culture*, London: Routledge.
- (1997a) 'Some Political consequences of Theories of Gypsy Identity: the Place of the Intellectual, in *After Writing Culture*, (eds), A. James, J. Hockey and A. Dawson, London: Routledge. pp. 224–243; [česky: Okely, Judith (2008) *Některé politické důsledky teorií o cikánské etnicitě: role intelektuála*, in: Jakoubek, Marek (ed.), *Cikáni a etnicita*, Praha/Kroměříž: Triton, str. 104–133; z angličtiny přeložili Marek Jakoubek a Monika Metyková].
- (1997b) 'Picturing and Placing Constable Country' in K. Fog Olwig and K. Hastrup (eds) *Siting Culture*, London: Routledge .pp 193–222.
- (2001), 'Visualism and Landscape: Looking and seeing in Normandy' *Ethos* 66 (1), pp. 99–120.
- (2003a), 'Hybridity, Birthplace, and Naming' *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol 13, No 1, pp. 1–20.
- (2003b), 'The Filmed return of the Natives to a colonizing Territory of Terror', *Journal of Media Practice* Vol 3, No 2 pp.65–74.
- (2005), 'Gypsy Justice versus Gorgio Law: Interrelations of Difference, *The Sociological Review*, vol. 53, No 4. pp. 691–709.
- (2007), 'Gendered Lessons in Ivory Towers' in *Identity and Networks* eds D. Faye Bryceson, J. Okely and J. Webber, Oxford: Berghahn.
- (2008), 'Knowing without Notes' in *Knowing How to Know*, eds N. Halstead, E. Hirsch and J. Okely Oxford: Berghahn, pp.55–74.
- (2009). 'Written out and Written in: *Inishkillane* Remembered, *Journal of Irish Anthropology*, Vol.12 (2) pp. 50–55.
- Okely, J. and Callaway, H. (eds,) (1992), *Anthropology and Autobiography*, London: Routledge.
- Powdermaker, H. (1967) *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist*, New York: Norton and Co.
- Rehfsch, F., ed. (1975) *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers*, London: Academic Press.
- Sutherland, A. (1975) *Gypsies: The Hidden Americans*, London: Tavistock.
- Whyte, W.F. (1993 [1943]) *Street Corner society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*, The University of Chicago Press.