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Judith Okely
Frontmatter
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The Traveller-Gypsies

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For Francis Theodore Okely
28 January 1912 – 9 October 1950

And to celebrate his grandchildren Daniel born 1977
and Patrick born 1978.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to describe a dream, partly of study, partly of adventure, in which will be found copious notices of books, and many descriptions of life and manners, some in a very unusual form.

The scenes of action lie in the British Islands; – pray be not displeased, gentle reader, if perchance thou hast imagined that I was about to conduct thee to distant lands, and didst promise thyself much instruction and entertainment from what I might tell thee of them. I do assure thee that thou hast no reason to be displeased, inasmuch as there are no countries in the world less known by the British than these selfsame British Islands, or where more strange things are every day occurring, whether in road or street, house or dingle.

George Borrow 1851. Preface to *Lavengro* (vii–viii)

Preface

While a postgraduate student of social anthropology, I learned of a people who believed that you could only go to heaven if your ears were pierced. Accordingly I had my ears pierced on New Year's Day 1970. It was a fortunate opening to the decade, for by the end of the year I was living with the Traveller-Gypsies who also pierce their ears, some say in order to improve their vision. But it was the Travellers who gave me a new vision and 'heaven sent moments'.

My research for this study began as a project financed by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust at the Centre for Environmental Studies between 1970 and 1973. It was directed by Barbara Adams. I am grateful for her initiative, advice and collaboration. I also benefited from the collaboration with my colleagues the late David Morgan, David Smith, Cathy Dean and Marie Welch. My main period of fieldwork, living on Traveller camps, was between 1971 and 1973. Follow-up fieldwork was carried out through the rest of the 1970s. From 1973 to 1976 I was supported by a studentship for a D.Phil. from the Social Science Research Council at the Institute of Social Anthropology, Oxford. Drafts of this publication were revised and finalised while I was a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Durham where I was inspired by the many discussions with my colleague and friend, David Brooks.

A number of individuals have given me advice and assistance at various stages of my research: Malcolm McLeod, Edwin Ardener, Hood Saleh, Rodney Needham, Filomena Steady, Wendy James, Esther Goody, Helen Callaway, Shirley Ardener, Michael Banton, Peter Rivière, Alan Campbell, Marie Johnson, Jane Szurek and the members of the Oxford Women's Anthropology Group. Steven Lukes once threw me an intellectual lifeline. I have benefited a great deal from discussions with social anthropologists and sociologists who have done long-term field research with Gypsies or Travellers in Europe and elsewhere: Thomas Acton, Jacqueline Charlemagne, Jean Claude Guiraud, Sharon Gmelch, George Gmelch, Martti Grönfors, Willy Guy, Nabil Hanna, Marek Kaminski, Jean-Pierre Liégeois and Anne Sutherland. There were those who gave me hospitality, insights and assistance during fieldwork: Diana Allen, the late Don Byrne, Eadie Connelly, José Corrocher, Marie Lafranque, Norbett McCabe, Graham Rock and Penny Vinson.

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Preface

I owe a great debt to my supervisor Godfrey Lienhardt for his guidance, brilliance and good humour. He gave me the confidence to pursue my own ideas and trusted me when I disappeared up the M1. James Hopkins has given me quiet encouragement and listened to my stories over the years. Bridget Okely, my mother, helped me through various stages of writing up. Her perspective as a sociologist and her rampant feminism have always influenced me.

I am indebted to Daphne Bartrum and Rita Hart for their enthusiasm and patient, meticulous typing of the preliminary and final drafts. Heinemann Educational Books and the Centre for Environmental Studies have kindly allowed me to amend and reprint parts of two of my chapters, 'Gypsy Identity' and 'Work and Travel', from Adams *et al.*, *Gypsies and Government Policy in England* (1975: chs. 2 and 5). Individual authorship was erased from the proofs, in accord with the wishes of some of my colleagues. Malaby and Dent have kindly permitted me to amend and reprint part of my article 'Gypsy Women' from Ardener, *Perceiving Women* (1975).

I am grateful especially to Homer Sykes and to Harold Turner and a number of newspapers, including *The Times* and the *Echo and Post*, for permission to use their photographs. In order to protect the identity of the Travellers, I have excluded photographs which I took of individuals during my fieldwork. Only the photograph on p. 55 comes into that category.

Then there are the Travellers – who gave me friendship, protection, laughter, wisdom and another life. I cannot name them since the majority would prefer anonymity. For some years now I have pondered their words and deeds and am still learning from them. I can name my favourite Traveller children who at the time were still regarded as innocent by the dominant society, since they were not yet adults: Jane, Marina, Caroline, Elvie, Minny, Billy-boy, Jeanie, Lias, Billy, John-boy, Mathais, Toey, Creamy, Dave, Vicky and Leena. They were also my teachers. In so far as they can choose to continue to be Traveller-Gypsies their future fills me with optimism.

November 1981
May Street,
Durham

Judith Melita Okely