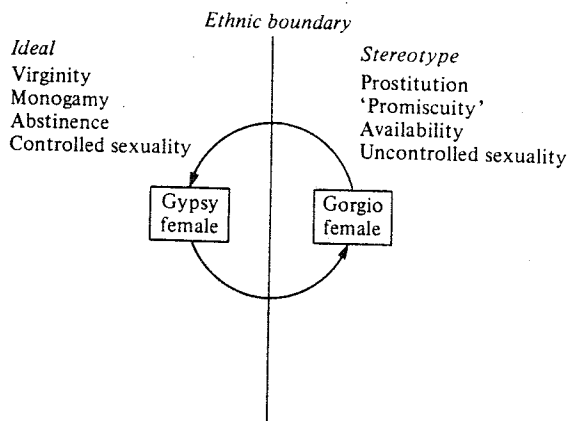


these tendencies, oversimplified, on to an alien people or on to strangers. Thus (as in figure 9) virginity, monogamy, and sexual abstinence, the ideals, are placed on ego's side of the ethnic boundary, while prostitution, promiscuity, or passive availability are placed on the other. Controlled sexuality is separated off from uncontrolled sexuality. Such a splitting process between 'good' and 'bad' is recognised in psychoanalysis as a fundamental way of organising a world view. In the case of Gypsies, sexuality, gender and ethnic divisions are all exploited in the splitting process, and by both groups.



9 The stereotyped and the idealised female.

This chapter has also indicated how the ideal of Gypsy women held by Gypsies, and the pollution taboos associated with women, are interdependent with the relationship between Gypsies and Gorgios, and also with the stereotype which Gorgios have of Gypsy women.⁷

J. Okely: "The Traveller-Gypsies"
1983

Náboženství

12 Ghosts and Gorgios

Different explanations

Compared to other *rites de passage* there is an elaboration of ceremony in the Travellers' response to the death of one of their members. As with birth, death is associated with pollution. The Gypsies' funeral rites and their inordinate and continuing fear of ghosts or the *mulo* have attracted the attention of Gypsiologists. Leland compared the Gypsies with the positivists who 'seem to correct their irreligion through the influence of love' and whose 'real religion ... consists ... in devotion to the dead' (1893:48-9). Like others he saw the Gypsies' attitude as admirable piety. Thompson can provide no satisfactory explanation of 'origins or motives' (1924:8) for the Gypsies' death rites, which include the destruction of the deceased's property. Recently, Trigg has presumed a merely chronological explanation: 'The ancient origin of such a complete rite of disposal by destruction may very well have its origins in the funeral practices which many Indian Gypsies and Hindus have in common' (1975:129). In his unpublished doctoral thesis (1967), and in an article in the *J.G.L.S.*, Trigg deplores the evangelists' lack of interest in the Gypsies' beliefs which he considers could be exploited for Christian conversion: 'Magical beliefs, for instance, strongly based on the idea of death and ghost life might possibly, with proper application, be replaced with the religion based on death and resurrection' (1968:100). Elaboration of ceremonial and intense fear of the dead have been recorded among Gypsies elsewhere, for example in the U.S.A., France and Austria (Otter 1931:114-16). Sutherland notes the elaboration of ceremonial at the funerals of Californian Gypsies and fear of the *mulo* (1975:274, 283-5). Death, she concludes, is seen as a loss to the whole group (1975:98). Dollé asserts that for Gypsies in Alsace, elaborate funeral rites followed by the ban on mentioning the dead person's name are a form of psychological repression - 'scotomisation'. Death is a trauma with which the Judeo-Christian civilisation copes by an elaborate philosophy of death, whereas, the Gypsies' different response, Dollé patronisingly suggests, is because of their lack of such an elaborate philosophy (1970:15).

I hope to offer an alternative and more satisfactory explanation in this chapter. Although arising from information on English Gypsies, it

may be more widely applicable to Gypsies elsewhere. The words of Lévi-Strauss direct us towards an explanation from social anthropology: 'the image a society evolves of the relationship between the living and the dead is, in the final analysis, an attempt, on the level of religious thought, to conceal, embellish or justify the actual relationships which prevail among the living' (1973:246). The 'final analysis' may exist at an unconscious level, to be made explicit by the social anthropologist. The Gypsies' death rites and beliefs must again be understood in terms of the relations between Gypsies and Gorgios, not merely the Gypsies' internal social system. These rites and beliefs are making statements about an ethnic boundary, consistent with the Travellers' eating and washing taboos, their concept of the body, and their animal categories (see chapter 6). Once it is recognised that the Gypsies' beliefs stand fundamentally in opposition to the Gorgio, Trigg's hope for a universalistic religious conversion and perhaps assimilation into the larger society fails completely.

When the Gypsies have explicitly adopted the Gorgio Christian rites and mythology, they have transformed their meaning and put them to their own use. For example, there are many Gypsy versions of the Crucifix story. A Gypsy in England gave me one:

'A Gypsy was asked to make four nails for the cross. After he'd made three, he found out what it was for and refused to make any more. If you look at the two feet on the cross, there's only one nail, 'cos the Gypsy wouldn't make the fourth.'

Thus the very sight or image of the Crucifix tells the Gypsy something about a specific Gypsy identity. Gordon Boswell gives a similar version which also explains Gorgio persecution:

the Gypsy people found what these nails were for, and instead of giving them four nails they only gave them three – one of them managed to escape with one of these nails. And the Gentiles have been looking for that nail ever since. And it has been this search that has led to the persecution of the Gypsy.

(1970:14)

Sutherland's version from California (1975:73) gives the Gypsies the right to steal; a right awarded by God in return for a Gypsy swallowing the nail for Jesus' heart. There are also Gorgio versions of these stories which accuse the Gypsies of unrepentant collaboration in the Crucifixion.

Recently, Gypsies in France and Belgium, for example, have interpreted and made use of Christianity in the form of the Pentecostal movement. It seems that their beliefs and practices, which include the emergence of Gypsy lay preachers, again affirm the Gypsies' separate identity as an oppressed minority, rather than their conversion to Gorgio ways.¹

Having discussed funerals in the context of kinship and political clusters elsewhere (chapter 10), I am concerned in this chapter to examine the Gypsies' mortuary rites and beliefs as part of a total cosmology, including the implications for relations with non-Gypsies. There is historical continuity in the evidence both from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compiled by Thompson (1924 and 1930a) and that from my own fieldwork. It is of primary significance that for the Gypsies or Travellers death is seen as a polluting event.

Thompson has not investigated in depth the Gypsies' preference as to where death should take place, but makes several mentions of a special 'death tent' destroyed after burial (1924:8,10,14). For the Gypsies encountered in my fieldwork, death should occur ideally in a liminal place, outside the camp, and now in a Gorgio hospital, thanks to the National Health Service:

When Billy's cancer was diagnosed, his relatives insisted on bringing him back to his trailer. Billy refused to undergo the operation suggested by the doctor. As symptoms developed and death seemed imminent, he was returned to hospital, but not in any expectation of cure. A new suit accompanied him, since the deceased must be buried in new or best clothing.

Once in hospital, the dying must be visited as often as possible, regardless of hospital rules, and death should be witnessed by kin and spouse. This contrasts with the obligatory privacy and sexual segregation at Gypsy birth (see Okely 1975d and chapter 11). In both cases, Gorgios are given the most polluting tasks in a location formerly not so easily available.

Thompson recorded the Gypsies' aversion to handling the corpse and the general preference for Gorgios to do the laying out (1924:15). The implication is, as it seemed from my fieldwork, that the dead body is polluting. Formerly the corpse was guarded night and day in the 'death tent' and sometimes on the edge of the camp (Thompson 1924:12). Today, according to my fieldwork, the corpse is brought back from hospital to the camp the day before the funeral and subjected to a similar vigil. Already cognates, associates and other Travellers will have assembled in the locality, and those closest to the deceased will sit up night and day around a fire (*yog*) which, like the lights in the deceased's trailer, is to ward off the *mulo*. Thompson noted: 'Afraid of the ghost, they said; that is why they sit in company round the fire' (1924:13). The corpse is today generally displayed in an open coffin and dressed in new clothing. The corpse must not be naked in a shroud (cf. Thompson 1924:16-18). A dead woman must be clothed in a suit of jacket and skirt, not a dress, I was informed. Perhaps this indicates top/bottom symbolism, although not as definite as among

The Traveller-Gypsies

Californian Gypsies (Sutherland 1975:264). More emphatic for English Travellers is the inside/outside symbolism; the clothing should be put on inside-out, I was told. Thompson noted this practice (1924:22-3) but offers no satisfactory explanation. His examples of Gypsies who, when lost at night, turned their clothes inside-out suggests merely that the living dress like a *mulo* to avoid being recognised and harmed.

The open coffin is placed in the deceased's trailer whose walls may be draped with white sheets. This is the last time the deceased, now inside the trailer, is permitted such access to Gypsy society. One Gypsy informed me: 'In the old days they put the person out on the shafts, not in the trailer.' As in the past (Thompson 1924:12), post-menopausal women have key roles as vigilators, with special powers to combat pollution. Several Gypsies informed me that they saw the ghost of the deceased during this period between death and burial.² An older woman declared: 'It's our religion to sit up with the dead.'

Mourners imitate the state of pollution of the deceased by refraining from washing. They abstain from sleep and cooked meals, especially meat (cf. Thompson 1924:11). Everyone should wear dark colours, preferably black, especially at the funeral. Women put on black or dark aprons and black scarves. Some dye their hair black. The Gypsy men wear black ties. At the funeral, handkerchiefs, polluted articles not used at other times, are conspicuous among both men and women.³ Men who sometimes conceal baldness under trilby hats, both inside and outside a trailer, are now hatless.

Before the arrival of the funeral cars, the Travellers pay a last tribute to the dead (cf. Thompson 1924:8-9). One Traveller asserted 'You're not supposed to touch the dead, but you can talk to them.'³ This is consistent with the relegation to Gorgios of the laying out. I am uncertain whether this untouchability extends to the final parting where other Travellers stated that the corpse's face must be touched before the lid is closed: 'You must touch the face all over, otherwise you'll never forget it.' Note that the aim is to dispatch the dead fully from the minds of the living.

There is evidence that the cart used to take the coffin to the burial place was burnt afterwards (Thompson 1924:90). Today the Gypsies hire a hearse for the coffin and funeral cars for the chief mourners, so the pollution associated with these vehicles remains with Gorgios, just as with the marquee and chairs often hired from Gorgios for the vigil. One Gypsy encountered in this study was treated to a funeral with black plumed horses and open carriage.

To the Travellers the most memorable stage of the death rite is the journey to the churchyard (see also chapter 10). Thompson records large processions (1924:29) but does not explore their significance. This procession is the last time that the deceased travels. One Gypsy told me that when the corpse was placed on the shafts 'in the old days,

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The procession to the grave. *Herts Advertiser*

the feet were facing out'. 'Why?' I asked, and was told: 'That's because he's *going out*.'

The floral wreaths take many forms – an imitation cushion, a miniature horse and wagon, a replica lorry, a horseshoe, a miniature chair, even the deceased's own chair swathed in flowers, a floral television set or the motif of 'the gates of heaven'. Some are replicas of the things most liked by the dead person: 'everything he liked to handle', I was told. A young boy, fond of pepsi-cola, had a giant floral pepsi bottle at his funeral. The *J. G. L. S.* notes many funerals with elaborate wreaths. One that took place in Flintshire in 1955 was for a Mrs Fox (her surname may explain the main wreath):

a wreath representing a dog was placed on top of the coffin, and a bird-cage covered with flowers on the hearse. Other reports mention that among the wreaths there was one in the shape of a box of matches and cigarettes (which Mrs Fox always kept at her bedside), and others shaped like a chair, a cooking-tripod, a boar's head and a horse-collar.

(Leach 1956)

Thompson (1924) has ample evidence for the practice of placing the favourite possessions of the deceased inside the coffin. A Gypsy informed him these were 'things what the dead person was more fonder on than others and might find want of' (1924:24). Leland also records this practice (1893:58-9). It ensures that the dead person will



Chair wreaths and mourners. *Herts Advertiser*

not come looking for these possessions among his/her family or former *atchen tans* (stopping places). Thompson (1924) and Leland (1893) both record that coins were placed in the coffin. I found little evidence for this. One case was described to me of a gold sovereign placed in a young girl's coffin. I also learnt that each witness placed a coin in a bag, tied to the hospital bed-post, at the moment of death of one Traveller.

As already indicated in chapter 10, the length of the procession of hearse, funeral cars and lorries, often bringing local traffic to a standstill, and with a police escort, is a measure of the prestige of the deceased. Travellers show their respect by what they call 'following' a person. When the procession arrives at the church, the service is the least significant rite for the Gypsies. It appears to be Gorgio mumbo-jumbo which ensures the Gypsy's right to burial in a churchyard where the body is safest. The majority of Travellers do not attempt to enter the church, but stand outside chatting. The close cognates accompany the coffin, which is sometimes carried by Gypsy men, other times by Gorgio bearers. Inside the church the Travellers sit bolt upright throughout the service ignoring all requests to kneel or stand at the allotted moments. Hymns, in any case, cannot be read from books. No attempt is made to mouth or memorise them. But the Gorgio parson is confronted by the extraordinary and seemingly hysterical displays of sobbing and wailing (see chapter 10). After a funeral I attended, the parson gave his reaction to a journalist: 'It was very sad.' By contrast,

the Gorgio wife of a Gypsy informed me: 'They say people have to cry out of pity for the dead. They've got to put on a show, even if they don't feel it.'⁴

The coffin is carried out of the church followed now by everyone to the graveside. After the coffin is lowered, and the close cognates have left first (some have to be carried out), the others gradually disperse. The wreaths are examined and heaped around the grave. It was at this juncture that I once heard a Gypsy remark: 'There's nothing more we can do for him now.'

In the past, relatives kept watch over the grave, when grave rifling and body snatching were a regular threat. Removal of the whole or parts of the body is dangerous as the *mulo* will not rest. The pre-burial



Children throw earth on the grave of a dead Gypsy. *Herts Advertiser*

vigil also ensures against this. James Crabb records the Gypsies' aversion to medical dissection in the nineteenth century:

A Gypsy man, who was noted for his height and muscular strength, died of consumption. A medical gentleman, who knew not the Gypsy character, applied to them for the corpse; when, astonished and filled with indignation at his request, they would have done him a serious injury had he not speedily galloped from the camp. (1832:28-30)

Today the main threat is not theft for dissection in medical schools, but removal of organs for transplants, before or at death:

A doctor and matron took Terry's father and wife aside. Would they consent to the removal of his kidneys at death? They said it seemed a pity to let these organs from an otherwise healthy young man go to waste and they would save another's life. The Gypsies were horrified and kept returning unexpectedly to examine Terry, hours after he died. They asked a social worker to talk to the hospital authorities.

Formerly, the Gypsies tried where possible to obtain interment not merely in a churchyard, but inside the church. Again it seems that the concern was that the body be safe from theft or tampering. In one case given by Thompson, it was specifically stated that interment in the church was 'not on account of any notion of sanctity of the place, but for its security' (1924:62). 'From the sixteenth century onwards records of Gypsy interments occur in plenty in parish registers' (Thompson 1924:66). (Thompson (1924) noted, incidentally, three Gypsy burials at the end of the eighteenth century within my fieldwork area). Burial on unsanctified ground was apparently very rare. Since the early nineteenth century, interment in churches has been difficult to obtain, but Travellers continue to prefer burial in churchyards. They reject cremation: 'We don't believe in it.' Presumably it would imply that the *mulo* had no proper resting place.

The funeral over, the personal possessions of the deceased must be destroyed as they are both polluted and a magnet for the *mulo*. Clothing, bedding, personal crockery, work tools, are broken up and burned on the perimeters of the camp. Parts may be buried or dropped into deep water. In theory, antique china should be destroyed and jewellery buried with the deceased. Thompson offers many examples of destruction of property (1924:23-4, 76-81). Both his information (1924:87) and mine reveal that money is not destroyed. The pattern of distribution of cash among descendants and spouse is variable. In practice the valuables are not always destroyed. Antique china and jewellery may be quietly sold, usually to Gorgio dealers. The deceased's animals, horses and dogs should also be killed (cf. Thompson 1924:77, 85-6). Alternatively they are sold to Gorgios or given to vets to destroy.

The consequences of retaining a dead person's property were vividly described by a Gypsy to Thompson. The retainer would suffer bad luck, disease, insanity and ostracism by other Gypsies, including close kin who would consider the wrongdoer under a curse (1924:87). The dead person's possessions will, it is feared, attract the *mulo* who will behave in odd ways. This was confirmed by Travellers during my fieldwork:

Eileen described how her dead father-in-law's shaving brush, which was accidentally overlooked after his death, started hopping along a shelf.

As important as the personal effects of the deceased is the destruction of his or her former home, the trailer where the body was laid for the final vigil and to which the *mulo* is most likely to return. Failure to dispose of the trailer will bring bad luck, disease, continuing pollution and possibly a further death. The destruction of the home, formerly the horse-drawn waggon, is recorded also in the nineteenth century (Thompson 1924:77-81). The case study in chapter 10 reveals the problems when the deceased's trailer is not burnt. A Gypsy had retained the trailer after his wife's death. When their daughter died three years later it was said: 'There must have been something in the trailer, in the boards and walls.' The trailer was polluted, but also haunted by the revengeful *mulo*. I was directly involved in another example:

On one encampment, the only available council trailer for me had formerly been rented out to an elderly Gypsy woman. At her death the council reclaimed it. The Travellers were extremely upset, insisting it should be burnt. Curiously no one tried, possibly because they feared to approach it. I was not at first sensitive to the full implications of living in this trailer. It had advantages, as I was guaranteed privacy especially after dark. Whereas Gypsy adults visited me in my previous trailer, virtually no one but children would enter this one. Some adults feared standing talking to me at the door because they had 'known her'. I was asked if I had been visited by the old lady's ghost. One neighbour said she had heard the ghost crying and banging the door. Another told everyone I had seen the ghost. One night a Traveller woman slept in the trailer with me, after being driven out by her sister and brother-in-law who were tired of sheltering her. She was frightened, so her sister lit a fire in the trailer to keep the *mulo* away. It was midsummer. My companion also insisted the light be kept on all night.

When the trailer is destroyed, the metal not consumed by the fire is weighed into the Gorgio scrapyard.⁵ In one case a Gorgio student

making a waggon asked a Traveller couple for the aluminium sides of the trailer they were breaking up after the death of their child. They refused, saying that the material should never be used for another home. This family, to the disapproval of the Gypsy community, did not break up the trailer until a year after the death. The mother confided that she wanted to see her dead child 'just once'. Also, she could not so rapidly part with her memories of his presence in the trailer.

Some families possess extremely valuable trailers which are rarely destroyed after a death. The corpse is laid in a cheaper trailer, later destroyed, or a hired marquee. The main trailer is transported out of the region and sold, usually to Gorgio dealers who may be able to resell them to a Traveller, who will not be publicly confronted by its history and in any case will not have known the dead owner. The *mulo* is most likely to trouble those whom he or she knew in life. 'The buyer wouldn't ask too many questions', I was told. Here again the Gorgio is used to solve the Gypsy problem of pollution and to the Gypsies' financial advantage. There is evidence that at least fifty years ago Gypsies with costly waggons often refrained from burning them and instead sold them to Gorgio dealers (Thompson 1924:82). This may account for the survival in Gorgio hands, for example in the Bristol Museum, of a few ornate and 'traditional' Gypsy waggons. No Gypsy would live in them. Today the wealthy families may lay the body in a cheaper trailer or tent which is later destroyed while the main trailer is sold. Trigg claims that trailers are no longer destroyed or disposed of, allegedly because of their new high cost and the restrictions of living on official sites (1975:132). Clearly my evidence from fieldwork contradicts this. The Gypsies have adapted to new circumstances in a way which ensures the continuity of their attitude to their dead.

After the disposal of the trailer and property of the deceased, ideally all camp members should leave, if only for a while. The surest way to avoid the *mulo* is to travel. The close family are most likely to be haunted, so on an official site they may be the only ones to leave. They may return after some months or maybe never (cf. Thompson 1924:92). It is important whether the death actually occurred on the Gypsy camp or in hospital. If the former, the camp is especially polluted and dangerous:

When Ivy was found dead in her trailer on a permanent site, the older Traveller woman who first discovered her and called the ambulance insisted that Ivy was not fully dead; 'she was still warm'. If it could be shown that Ivy died in the Gorgio ambulance and not on the site, the other tenants would be less threatened.

On another site where a man died *in situ*, the widow left only briefly as she was well placed for welfare benefits and had no close associates on any other site. One Traveller informed me: 'It's bad to stop at a place

where Travellers have died. It don't matter if Gorgios have died there.' Many feared the sight of any ghosts, be they Gypsy or Gorgio, but they were most likely to be haunted by the *mulo* of those with whom they were closely associated in life. I was told sometimes I need not fear the *mulo* of the previous inhabitant of my trailer: 'The dead only come to those that knew them.'

Mourning is obligatory for the widowed spouse and close cognates, for a year or more. The women continue to wear black clothing and dark scarves and the men sombre colours, and occasionally black armbands. The favourite food or hobby of the deceased may be abstained from (cf. Leland 1893:49-55; Thompson 1924:92), again to appease the *mulo*. The name of the deceased must never be uttered as this is equivalent to 'calling up' the *mulo* (cf. Leland 1893:56-8). After death, a person may for example be referred to as 'Jane's mother' or 'that old man that used to stop at Mill Pond Lane'. Someone with the same name will generally be referred to by an alternative name, a derivation or a nickname. This practice may well have psychological implications (see Dollé 1970:15 and his remarks on 'scotomisation' above), but it should also be asked why the group fears the very specific practice of 'calling up' the *mulo*.

Neither the name nor the image of the dead should be given status inside Gypsy society. Photographs should be destroyed, or at least not publicly displayed inside the trailer.

'Betty's got her mother's photos all around her trailer. That's not right. It'd make me *trashed*' (frightened). (The speaker possessed one small photo of her mother which she kept with other family photos in a bag.)

A Gypsy will be known to be telling the truth if he or she takes the following oath:

'May my dead mother [or father etc.] who is lying in the grave rise up and take me or my children if what I say ain't true.'

Leland (1893:55-6) records a similar practice.

The mulo needs a fixed abode

Here I come to the central focus in the Gypsies' response to their dead. The *mulo* is always a potential threat to the living, at least for the generations who knew him or her. The dead must be appeased in every way possible. There seems to be no eventual re-integration nor benign acceptance of the Gypsies' dead. Mythical ancestors of some generations' distance and immediate ancestors may feature in Traveller stories, but do not assume an enviable status as honoured dead in a higher or better realm.

It has been suggested⁶ that the Gypsies use their bodies as the crucial

arena for expressing boundary maintenance because as nomads their bodies are the only things they always take with them. My interpretation of the evidence suggests that the dead must be made to cease travelling and that the *mulo* must become sedentarised. Significantly the dead person's name is written clearly on the grave. In a non-literate community this is the only context when writing (sometimes dismissed as a Gorgio attribute) is freely chosen to mark identity. A Gypsy would not utter to Hindes Groome his father's name, but instead produced a photograph of the grave with the name of the headstone (quoted by Thompson 1924:91). Hindes Groome learnt that Gypsies considered it bad luck to be drawn or sketched because blood was thus stolen from the face, and those portrayed might waste away and die (1880:337-8). Similarly, Travellers of today resent being photographed by Gorgios; there they are captured and frozen in time (and of course more vulnerable to Gorgio control). They are as cautious about giving away their names to Gorgios. By contrast, on the gravestone in Gorgio churchyards the Gypsies' names are finally exposed. In this way, the *mulo* must be laid to rest with the body and with its last image and name. Identification by naming is paralleled by the marking of the wreaths of floral lorries with the correct number plates of the deceased's last vehicle, so identified and brought to a halt. This again contrasts with the measures taken by Travellers to prevent Gorgios photographing their vehicles with number plates in view, and contrasts with their regular turnover of vehicles, chopped and changed through life.

For a sedentary society the place of birth is the primary marker. For Gypsies the grave is the ultimate marker. Among sedentary peoples a frequent question is: 'Where do you come from?' For travelling Gypsies this question offers no answer. It is best to ask where the person will be buried. Irish Travellers in England, with few exceptions, return their dead for burial in Ireland⁷ thus affirming their national allegiance. The English Gypsies encountered in fieldwork chose to bury their dead near the graves of close cognates. Such graveyards, containing a number of Traveller graves, are important features of the Travellers' landscape.

The Travellers' mortuary rites can be seen as attempts to ensure the dispatch of the dead, who are dangerous if without a single, fixed location. The *mulo* needs a fixed abode. Thus great attention is paid to the grave. Costly headstones and vases are selected and jointly purchased by close cognates and associates. Wreaths must be regularly laid. Many of the wreaths laid at the funeral have, alongside the theme of travelling (as in the floral lorry), the theme of sedentarisation; of being rested and seated, as suggested by the floral chairs, cushions, pillows and televisions. Another popular wreath in the form of 'the gates of heaven' marks the final threshold. These gates indicate not necessarily the optimism of 'they've gone before', but that the dead have gone where there must be no return. The gates must stay closed behind them. The dead must be locked away from living Travellers.

In dramatic contrast to the camping ground, the grave must be kept scrupulously tidy. I accompanied a family to the grave of their young son. The father that very day had said: 'I like living in a dust bowl', in defiance of a television programme deploring the 'squalor' of Gypsy camps. In the churchyard I watched him making four separate journeys from the grave to the rubbish bin with last week's withered flowers, leaves and scraps of paper. In addition to weekly visits or more, the parents, like many other Travellers, paid the keeper to tend the grave. For the dead Gypsy's sake, the grave is a focus of cleanliness and order, just like the inside of the trailer, but outside Gypsy society. Graves must be regularly tended and visited lest perhaps their inhabitants return to the Gypsy camp. In addition to anniversaries, wreaths are laid at Christmas time and sometimes before the fairs to appease the *mulo* which might be attracted by the festive gatherings of the living.

Interpretation

In referring to one aspect of the Gypsies' mortuary rites, Thompson suggests: 'Fear, then, would seem to lie at the root of English Gypsy funeral sacrifice' (1924:89). But this is no explanation for the fear in the first place. Such an argument is tautologous. We should ask *why* the fear is so extreme among the Travellers. Although it might be argued by some that it is 'natural' for all peoples to feel frightened by the death of others, this does not explain why the Gypsies' beliefs and actions take these specific public forms. The Travellers' beliefs and actions cannot be explained away as 'common sense'. In some respects, they are markedly different from those of the surrounding Gorgios. Given that the Travellers regard themselves as different from Gorgios, it is also important to understand in what ways and why some of the Travellers' mortuary rites may be similar to those of the Gorgios.

First, at a Gypsy's death, the body is polluting and we see that attempts are made to place the dead in sanctified Gorgio territory. The outward appearance of the grave is kept orderly, although this attention cannot render the corpse clean and unpolluted.⁸ Recalling the vital separation for the Gypsies between the inner and outer body discussed in chapter 6, we see that in death the corpse and the *mulo* are *mochadi*. This is because boundaries have been broken. At a Gypsy's death, I suggest, the separation between inner and outer body is no longer distinct; the inside has come outside. The corpse's clothes placed inside-out are a symbolic expression of this exposure. The bodily boundary is broken, so also is the boundary between Gypsy and Gorgio. It seems that the Travellers' tidying of the graves of their dead is in conformity with the Gorgios' emphasis on outer appearance, and in contrast to their priorities on their camp sites.

Secondly, there are also themes of settlement and appeasement in the Travellers' treatment of their dead. The Gorgio church service is

treated as a *rite de passage* from the living and from the Gypsy group to an identity and place more Gorgio and settled. The grave in Gorgio hallowed ground is the necessary placing of the *mulo*, ideally sedentarised. It must not travel. Neither the polluted corpse nor parts of it must be allowed indecisive location. Hence the measures to prevent body snatching, dissection and transplants. Transplants would be doubly confusing as the organ would live on in another body. The dead body must be pinned down in space, just as Gorgios would pin down Gypsies on their sites.

The threat from the *mulo* is elaborate.⁹ It is not merely that it is polluted, it is also malevolent. What characteristics does the *mulo* possess? Its intentions cannot be known, it is unpredictable, it may hurt out of caprice. It may suddenly appear to the Gypsies and may as suddenly disappear. The *mulo* brings diseases and may try to lure Travellers to their death. It can sometimes be kept away if given its possessions and maybe food. Gypsies can more successfully outrun the *mulo* by travelling and avoiding places liked and frequented by it (cf. Sutherland 1975:285).

I conclude that the *mulo* of a dead Gypsy has become like a Gorgio. Death is equivalent to assimilation. When the Travellers express their fear of the *mulo* they are reaffirming symbolically their fear of the Gorgio. Like the *mulo*, the Gorgio is unpredictable and may suddenly enter a camp site and as quickly disappear. The Gorgio may hurt or prosecute out of caprice. The Gorgio is *mochadi*, brings diseases and lures Gypsies to their death. The Gorgio in a sedentary society has a permanent interest in property. Just as the Travellers must avoid the favourite camp sites of their dead, so the Travellers must avoid land which Gorgios have regularly frequented. To escape Gorgio control, the Gypsies appear to give Gorgios what they want. To appease the *mulo*, the Gypsies give wreaths and attention, and abandon claims to its property. Gorgios must be discouraged from entering the trailer, and as with the *mulo*, elaborate devices are used to keep them out. If the Gorgio, like the *mulo*, cannot be kept at a distance by discouraging intimacy, the Gypsies keep travelling.

In some discussions the Travellers consciously associate banishment or assimilation with death. When a Traveller is banished from the group, the father and family pronounce the Traveller dead. His or her name is never mentioned again and is seen as polluting. This may happen when a Gypsy 'marries out' and to a Gorgio specifically disapproved of by the Gypsies, or when the Gypsy has committed an outrageous act.

When a Gypsy woman ran off with a married Gypsy man she left her children, whom her deserted husband put into a Gorgio home as revenge. The woman's father was informed and, to his humiliation, had to collect them. The father threatened

to 'cry dead' his daughter. 'That'd been a terrible thing. He would never 've talked of her again. He wouldn't have gone to her funeral 'cos she'd be already dead. But he took pity on the grandchildren.'

In these circumstances the Gypsy is obliged to move into Gorgio society, and banishment is equated with death. Other forms of assimilation are associated with death: after the new 'permanent' and Gorgio controlled sites were opened, the Travellers' anxiety was indicated by their comments on the number of deaths which had occurred among tenants. 'There's several Travellers who 'ave died since these sites were opened. Something's wrong.' In fact the more elaborate sites tended to attract the aged and infirm, but this explanation for one or two deaths on sites was not suggested. Instead, the sites were seen as inherently threatening.

In the cases above, assimilation is equated with death, but I am also arguing the inverse: that death is less explicitly equated with assimilation or even sedentarisation, given the Gypsies' ideology of travelling. When the Gypsies destroy a dead person's property they are reminding themselves that complex inheritance laws and accumulated property are associated with sedentarisation. Extra special observances are required of close kin in laying the *mulo* to rest, to show that they do not benefit, through inheritance, by their cognate's death. They also demonstrate to the rest of the community that they have disassociated themselves from the dead.

Funerals, however, are not merely the concern of close cognates, as we saw in chapter 10. Any Travellers acquainted with the deceased gather together to dispatch the dead Gypsy from the living. The unity of Gypsies at funerals, transcending internal rivalry, is both a political and religious statement. All Travellers must combine against the greater threat of death within the group and against the Gorgio, whose likeness Gypsies assume after death. The Gorgio pursues the Gypsies to the grave and at the grave.

I saw how the police provided an escort for a Gypsy funeral procession: not, the Gypsies stated, for traffic control, but to trap a man on the run, who must surely attend. He did, and everyone knew. The Gypsies rejoiced that he came and went free.

Thus there seems no joyful beyond, no Gypsy survival after death, only a blank space; a nothingness to be filled by Gorgios. The ultimate truth is that Gypsies are not separated from Gorgios in death. For Travellers, their children are their regeneration; the continuous thread of existence. Their dead ancestors are not the focus of continuity. As a revengeful and unpredictable *mulo*, the dead individual loses Gypsy or Traveller identity and his or her name is written in a Gorgio medium on

the gravestone. The dead Traveller is no longer classified as a member of the Gypsy group which continues elsewhere, in another place. In the celebrated 'Wind on the Heath' dialogue the Gypsy Jasper Petulengro says: 'When a man dies, he is cast into the earth, and there is an end of the matter.' Petulengro argues with Borrow:

'Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?'

'I would wish to die...'

'You talk like a gorgio – which is the same as talking like a fool – were you a Romany Chal you would talk wiser. Wish to die, indeed!... A Romany Chal would wish to live for ever!'

(Borrow 1851:325-6)

Acceptance of death is thus treated as a Gorgio characteristic.

Thus we see that so-called 'resurrectionism' and the Travellers' use of Gorgio church and graveyards are neither raw material for nor evidence of conversion to the Gorgio brand of Christianity. The Gypsies' mortuary rites are neither merely 'magical beliefs' as has been patronisingly suggested (Trigg 1968:100), nor admirable piety. As in many mortuary rites, the identity, social organisation and ideology of the living are disguised and inverted. That which pleases the Gorgio observer is ironically a rejection of his or her kind. The boundary between life and death is used to make symbolic statements about another ethnic boundary. The loss of a Gypsy through death is not seen merely as a loss of another human being and member of an amorphous society, but the loss of a member of a specific minority group, always vulnerable within the larger society. The Gypsy dead have crossed the ethnic boundary. The mortuary rites affirm the living Gypsies' separation from Gorgios, and their fear of becoming one of them.

Concluding remarks

The ending cannot be a conclusion as if I began with a hypothesis to be tested, in accord with the methods of positivism. Nor has this study been cast as 'problem-oriented'. In so far as there is a problem to be confronted, it is one which has been created largely by the dominant non-Gypsy order. The Gypsies have been classed as problematic because they have refused to be proletarianised, and have instead chosen to exploit self-employment and occupational and geographical flexibility. Within the larger economy they provide a variety of goods and services, many of which other persons or groups cannot or do not wish to provide. Using kinship and descent to restrict entry into the group, Gypsies express and maintain their separateness through ideas of purity and pollution.

The separation between Gypsy and Gorgio is socially constructed and can never be absolute. The Gypsy economy is interdependent with that of the larger economy, and the Travellers have always had to negotiate with Gorgio authorities for intermittent access to land. A 'modernisation' theoretical approach is to be rejected. It is a misrepresentation to suggest that the Gypsies were once self-sufficient and that they have inevitably been threatened by industrialisation and urbanisation. New problems have emerged for them, but these have not necessarily been those of economic redundancy. New occupations have been exploited. The Travellers' main difficulties in Britain have been the increased restrictions placed on their access to camping land. This does not mean that Gypsies were once tolerated in some golden past and in rural settings, as has so often been claimed.

The threat which the Gypsies, as a minority, appear to represent to the larger society is largely ideological. They are seen to defy the dominant system of wage-labour and its demand for a fixed abode. Not surprisingly, from the first appearance of persons called or calling themselves Gypsies in Britain in the sixteenth century, the state has attempted to control, disperse, deport, convert or destroy them. This study has outlined the repressive measures used against Gypsies, and charted some of the ways in which Gypsies have attempted to deal with and survive others' plans for them. History has demonstrated the Gypsies' survival as an ethnic group, despite attempts even at their extermination. The use of force by the dominant order against Gypsies has in the long run proved ineffective and only of expressive worth. The

- following: 'It is an insult to the Gypsy and to the non-Gypsy communities of England and Wales to suggest, as the article appears to suggest, that the totally inadequate site provision contemplated by local authorities ... should be available in the foreseeable future to the hundreds of European Gypsies who hold EEC passports' (*New Society*, 13 December 1973).
- 2 These names are fictitious for the protection of individual Travellers.
 - 3 Territorial proximity appears to have no label equivalent to the Rom category *kumpania* in California (Sutherland 1975:32).
 - 4 The way in which Travellers settle disputes cannot be dealt with in this book. A useful study of this among Gypsies in Finland is provided by Grönfors (1977). Some preliminary observations are in Okely 1977.
 - 5 Unfortunately I was unable to witness these fights, and had to rely on descriptions from several individuals, thus enabling some cross-checking to be done.
 - 6 When I tried to observe horse-dealing at Barnet Fair there was only one older woman standing at a distance. Suddenly the horse was sent charging in my direction, pinning me against a trailer. I do not think this was an accident, but a warning to a female intruder.
 - 7 Thompson does have some detailed evidence of trials, or the equivalent of a *kris* (1930b). Women were often excluded. This may account for my not having found clear confirmation of such an institution. Thompson also discusses the Gypsies' obligations to each other concerning financial loans.

11. Gypsy women

- 1 This chapter is an amended version of Okely 1975d.
- 2 By suggesting that Gypsy women are placed in 'nature' as opposed to Gorgio 'culture' (cf. Ardener 1972), I am in no way suggesting that women are universally seen as part of 'nature', nor that men are always associated with 'culture'.
- 3 The restriction on public exposure of the breasts is in marked contrast to the Gypsies in California (Sutherland 1975), and Gypsies in France (Clébert 1967:218). Sutherland records that a woman could, however, pollute a man by lifting her skirt and exposing the lower part of her body.
- 4 It was said that a husband once had the right to throw his wife on the fire for a transgression.
- 5 Presumably semen is clean because of its fertilising qualities. It is not waste by definition, although it may be wasted.
- 6 In this chapter I have concentrated on views of women. There is also the need to explore Gypsy and Gorgio views of men. I have hinted at this in Okely 1975d:75.
- 7 In Okely 1975d, which this chapter is amended from, as a feminist, I also examined how women experienced and attempted to subvert, consciously or unconsciously, their subordination to men. I included some of the women's responses to the libidinal restrictions placed upon them, and their apparent exploitation of the Gorgio stereotype.

12. Ghosts and Gorgios

- 1 My evidence comes from fieldwork and discussions with those acquainted

- with Gypsies in Belgium and France, especially in Toulouse (Ju September 1980).
- 2 There is some evidence that the deceased must be buried three days after death. I did not check this in the field, but later read of it in the *Blackpool Evening Gazette*. A Gypsy fortune teller was said to have hanged herself after the death of her sister-in-law. Her son stated that: 'She was also upset because the date of his aunt's burial had extended to six days from the date of her death which was contrary to their religious beliefs - it was usually three days among Romany people' (7 April 1977).
 - 3 Hinde Groome quotes an account from *Truth* (28 August 1879) how at the funeral of an unmarried girl her coffin was covered by white pocket-handkerchiefs. Each Gypsy also required one. These were 'borrowed' from Gorgio villagers and returned, washed and bleached, after the funeral (1880:119).
 - 4 Dora Yates, by contrast, notes that Welsh Gypsies 'hold the belief that excessive lamentation is an offence to the dead, and that tears disturb their rest' (1930:26). Loud lamentation at a wake and funeral, however, seems more widespread among Gypsies, e.g. Walter Starkie gives a vivid description of such behaviour at a Gypsy funeral in Hungary (1933:138,142).
 - 5 One Traveller informed me that formerly the eldest son retained the iron frame of the wagon to make a new one. Thompson also records a Gypsy retaining the hub caps and some hooks from his father's trailer (1924:79).
 - 6 Personal communication, A. Sutherland and D. Brooks. Sutherland also states that *mulo* 'finally go to "heaven" or simply disappear' (1975:285).
 - 7 Personal communication, Father Daley, Oxford.
 - 8 Dora Yates who has documented the Gypsies' taboos on washing and eating (1953:32-3) also notes an old Gypsy who 'placed a broken teapot on the grave of his 3-year-old son Horace "so as he'll never be thirsty in Heaven, poor lamb"' (1953:27). She does not record whether the teapot was once used by the son. But it is significant that the vessel is broken and therefore unusable and *mochadi* for the living.
 - 9 For *mulo*, Fred Wood records in his word list: 'ghost of Romany man or woman in possession of a corpse at certain hours of the day and night; the devil in possession of a corpse' (1973:126-7). Further research and enquiry might clarify the full meaning. Perhaps also some ghosts may be benevolent.

Concluding remarks

- 1 See G. Huizer's introduction in Huizer and Mannheim 1979.