

**SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT**

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 2015-0038

Project manager: Madeleine Hurd

Project title: A Common Front against the “Gypsy Plague”? Experts, Networks and Registration of Romani peoples in the Baltic Sea Region

The purpose of this project has been to examine the evolution of knowledge-production on rural itinerants within the Baltic Sea area (1800-1950), with special attention to the inter-war period. Our focus has been on tracing the different discourse communities, often state-sponsored, that defined the nature of (and social problems caused by) not only “Gypsies”, but their supposed heirs and distant relations - *fanter*, *tattare* and *natmænd*. A strong comparative focus was to show similarities and deviations within the transnational discourse fields within which these experts worked. The project was initially constructed to research knowledge-production in Latvia, Denmark and Sweden; it was subsequently revised to cover political expertise on itinerants in North Germany and Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark, as well as include work on the Ukraine.

The main focus has been on the 1930s and 1940s, but the study expanded to trace historical roots to later knowledge tropes in, e.g., German cameralism and Danish national romanticism. Our method has been to delineate transnational discourse fields, and complement our understanding of these fields of knowledge-production with several close examinations of individual experts working within those fields – e.g., Alan Etzler, Eilert Sundt, Arthur Thesleff and Johan Miskow.

Our approach has been based on the idea that it is important to understand processes of expert knowledge-production. It is highly creative, on the one hand; but, on the other, it often also involves negotiations with local or parish knowledge, and thus often confirming and legitimising existing prejudices. It can weaponise these prejudices. As Leo Kuper and Jacques Semelin have pointed out, mass discrimination and violence are not triggered by conditions existing “already” within a society. Rather, they occur when powerful groups - e.g., scientific experts, politicians, media opinion-makers – decide first to define, then count, register, and finally isolate a specific group of people. Ethnic discrimination as part of a dynamic state structure with, at its matrix, a social “imaginary” that responds to social fears by suggesting the need to identify and, possibly, eliminate internal, enemy



“parasites”. This approach has encouraged us, as researchers, to learn more about the knowledge-production methods and strategies which underlay the academic discussions subsequently used to justify political action.

Theories of discourse fields have helped us further. We have treated our experts as embedded in both transnational, national and local discourse networks. Thus, for instance, our book and articles open with discuss different international research paradigms – including (in our study) cameralist universalism, Inner Mission assimilationism, national romanticism, folklore and Gypsy Lore, criminology and, of course, the eugenicist paradigms of the inter-war period. But we have also seen our knowledge-producers as embedded in the biopolitics of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century state expansion, often legitimised by international networks but also depending on national governments and media for careers and publicity.

Finally, and importantly, we see our experts as participating in a (so to speak) vertical field of knowledge-collection. One cannot understand their results without looking at *how* they acquired the information upon which they based their knowledge. To be sure, much was derived from the publications of international networks; but there also had to be on-the-ground sources of information, which would allow state experts to chart the “problem” populations, provide details of, e.g., their secret languages, general character and various occupations (including those continually fascinating means of making a living, sooth-saying, healing, lifting or laying curses, and other means of – as experts saw it – defrauding the credulous rural resident).

This reflects a major point in knowledge-production on rural itinerants: the fact that the experts, themselves members of urban elites, needed to extend state surveillance into the countryside. This would be especially crucial to eugenicists, who sought to create reliable lists of the families of “problem” itinerant populations. Charting the development of expert knowledge on itinerants is, thus, also to chart the ways in which the state gathered knowledge of a rural hinterland – ranging from information provided by directors of work-houses, prisons and mental hospitals, to assessments sent in by local police, teachers, parsons and social workers and, finally, to the expert himself essaying out into the countryside to chase down and study itinerant populations. Each of these sources of knowledge was differently framed, using its own (soon standardised) methods and approaches; this, also, influenced the production of knowledge on itinerants.



Local knowledge, we believe, was extremely important. To be sure, knowledge-producers could and did study prison, school and hospital populations designated as “Gypsy” or “tramp”. But experts seeking more extended knowledge, in the field, often depended on locals to point out and identify the individuals they wished to study. This was especially true of amorphous populations of *tattare* or *fanter*, whom many experts held to be a mixture of asocials and “Gypsies”. Because of this, and because local-national relations are necessarily two-way, expert knowledge came often to outright depend on the prejudices found among local populations.

We write, thus, of a multi-tiered knowledge production: international, national, and local. This Foucauldian approach to the production of problem populations, combined with our stringently comparative focus, was meant to advance understanding of the role of Baltic-region anti-itinerant biopolitics and its strong connections to antiziganism, with particular attention to the inter-war and war-time years.

The results of our study have shown three things. First, the fruitfulness of this three-tiered approach to the study of state biopolitics. We have tried to show how different-level discursive fields combined in knowledge-production: the international (to be traced in European-wide discursive trends) and the national-local (to be traced in the experts’ reliance on local knowledge, their tendency to confirm local prejudices). Elite knowledge – especially when translated into state policies – affected local knowledge concerning itinerants: while local knowledge about itinerants was often tapped (complete with prejudices) by inquiring elites. The process as thus horizontal (international), on the one hand; and vertical, top-down and down-up, on the other.

Further, we have shown the usefulness of comparative investigations into regions – looking at how shared institutional and ideological developments lead to similar or different results, depending on national and geopolitical factors, within neighbouring countries. Scandinavian countries shared the eugenicist state policies and networks, as well as state censuses, social-welfare institutions, state police records and pre-existing sedenatarist prejudices that went into forming the racist focus of the Nazi state. During the inter-war period and during World War Two, in seeming oblivion of or even sympathy with Nazi policies towards itinerants, both Sweden and Denmark used these biopolitical resources to sponsor investigations (including skull-measurement) into and compiling central state listings of *tattare* and *zigenare*, meant to provide the basis for policy recommendations (such as sterilisation). In both cases, however, the investigations led to



no policy recommendations – if for very different reasons; even indicating, some might argue, a Danish *Sonderweg*.

Finally, we have, we hope, shown the usefulness of considering rural itinerants as a large category of problem populations. It is productive, for instance, to link knowledge-production concerning *Gauner*, *tattare* and *fanter* with the more specialised field of Roma studies. Just as folklore and Gypsy Lore were “sisters”, so also were social scientific and anthropological studies of “Gypsies” important to contemporary constructions of other rural itinerants. Experts, particularly, overlapped: discussions of *tattare* or *fanter* were often introduced by long descriptions of “Gypsies”; Roma scholars were tapped as authorities on the other, supposedly Roma-derived rural itinerants. This approach has, further, allowed us to link attitudes towards Roma to more general urban elite and police attitudes towards the countryside population – a tendency encouraged, of course, by the bottom-up, local parish prejudices upon which experts often co-depended.

Research on rural itinerants in general, with special focus on the Roma, has burgeoned during the past decades. Our work provides information from a part of the world relatively unfamiliar to an English-speaking and international audience, that of Scandinavia. We help bring Scandinavia back into Europe, so to speak, by charting the ways Scandinavian experts and scholars partook in – and re-interpreted – international biopolitical trends, including (for instance) cameralist concern with countryside productivity, Inner Mission assimilation of Travellers, the travelogues of the Romani-speaking “Gypsy’s friends”, and the racist investigations of eugenics.

Our approach indicates interesting lines of future investigation. The role of and relationship between scientific expertise and the legitimacy of political policies, on the one hand, and police powers, on the other, bears further comparative investigation. The treatment of rural itineracy, further, throws a good deal of light on urban-rural relations. How did state biopolitics, as formulated by urban elites, construct rural inhabitants – both the desirable other and the despised rural itinerant? Elite discussions of rural itinerants return repeatedly to issues of rural morality and rural knowledge. Rural itineracy was held corrupt an individual’s self-respect, his feeling of being part of a community, and, hence, lead to the moral unrest that destroys the work ethic – a social ill that can contaminate others. Many of our knowledge-producers were, thus, amateur social-moral psychologists, contributing to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century moral ideologies. Knowledge was also at stake. Many itinerants, it was repeatedly noted, depended on “magic” (sooth-saying, finding treasure,



healing, expelling witches, laying or lift curses) for their living. The ignorance (and greed) of farmers was to blame for their success. This, too, had to be corrected; and so the battle against itineracy was also a battle over who was to dictate correct knowledge to the populace.

Finally, our study could, in the future, be usefully extended to the Baltic Sea states, in a wider investigation of the region. What kinds of expert knowledge and top-bottom knowledge-production collaboration presaged the often horrifying treatment of rural itinerants, and particularly “Gypsies”, before and during the Nazi occupation of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania? Are the productions of local experts, narrowly examined, essentially different from those of Scandinavia? An expansion of our study to the eastern side of the Baltic Sea would be truly illuminating.

**Conferences attended include:**

- Andrej Kotljarchuk: ”Roma and Travellers of Scandinavia during World War II: registration and racial cleansing policy-making in transnational context”. 2016 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies. 14–15 September 2016 Södertörn University.
- Matthew Kott: Workshop, “Consultation on Current Issues and Future Directions for Holocaust Studies in the Baltic States”, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC. 30 January–2 February 2017.
- Panel (with Ida Ohlsson Al Fakir and Håkan Blomquist): "Vetenskapen i politiken eller politiken i vetenskapen? Experterna och kunskapsproduktionen kring romer och resande ca 1940-1965". Svenska Historikermötet, Sundsvall 10-12 May.
- Steffen Werther: “Complete assimilation will occur in the near future.’ Science, Welfare State and Gypsies in Denmark (1934-1944)”; Annual Conference on Romani Studies: University Cyprus, 29 Aug. - 1 Sep. 2017
- Andrej Kotljarchuk, “The Holocaust of the European Roma and the Nordic periphery. Terminology and preliminary state of research”, International research conference on Holocaust remembrance and representation, The government of Sweden. Stockholm, February 12-13, 2020.

**Outreach to public includes:**

- Madeleine Hurd, "Registrering, övervakning och utstötning av romer och resande", 24 April 2018, Fyriskällan Library evening lectures, Uppsala.



- Andrej Kotljarchuk & Forum för levande historia, "Varför vet viså lite om folkmordet på romer under Förintelsen?", 25-minute long program available on Swedish Educational Radion (UR-Samtiden), August 2021. Available at <https://www.levandehistoria.se/fakta-fordjupning/forintelsen/minnesdagen-folkmordet-pa-romer-forelasningar-och-samtal>
- Andrej Kotljarchuk & Thomas Siurkus, "Q&A: Ukraine's Roma Community". Interview with *Moment Magazine* on historical Roma pogroms and past and current antiziganism in Ukraine, 3 October 2016. Available at <https://momentmag.com/qa-ukraines-roma-community/>
- Hurd/Kott/Kotljarchuk/Werther: Open Seminar "Experter, romer och rasistisk kunskapsproduktion i Sverige, Danmark och Lettland, 1940–1945". 12 April 2017, Södertörn University.

### Articles published

- Kotljarchuk, A. (2021). Babi Yar and the Nazi Genocide of Roma. Memory narratives and memory practices in Ukraine, *Nationalities Papers*, 2021:2. Available on-line: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/nationalities-papers/article/babi-yar-and-the-nazi-genocide-of-roma-memory-narratives-and-memory-practices-in-ukraine/DF98FCF821384B0FDCE6A437D70F2ACA>
- Kotljarchuk, A. (2020). State, Experts, And Roma: Historian Allan Etzler and pseudo-scientific racism in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 45:5, 615–639. Available on-line: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1366721/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Kotljarchuk, A. (2020). The Holocaust of the European Roma and the Nordic periphery. Terminology and preliminary state of research, in: *Holocaust Remembrance and Representation: Documentation from a Research Conference*, eds. K. Geverts, Stockholm: Kulturdepartementet, 93-108. Available on-line: <https://www.regeringen.se/4979a1/contentassets/03161ab08baa4461bb64b7ba1b25fd63/holocaust-remembrance-and-representation---documentation-from-a-research-conference-sou-202021.pdf>
- Kotljarchuk, A. (2017). World War II and the Registration of Roma in Sweden: The Role of Experts and Census-Takers. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 31(3), 457-479. Available on-line: <https://academic.oup.com/hgs/article/31/3/457/4750695>
- Werther, S., Ein Sonderweg zwischen Romantik und Rassismus: Dänemarks Nachtmänner, Reisende und Roma im Spiegel der Wissenschaft (1800-1950). (A *Sonderweg* between Romaticism and Racism: Denmark's Nightmen, Travellers and Roma in Science and Literature.) *NORDEUROPAforum - Zeitschrift für Kulturstudien* (under review), circa 20 pages.



- Hurd, M. & S. Werther, The Gypsy Friends of Scandinavia, *Scandinavian Journal of History* (under review), circa 20 pages.
- Madeleine Hurd & Steffen Werther, *Gauner, fanter, zigenare, tattare: Paradigms of Nordic knowledge-production, 1800-1950*. Södertörn University Academic Studies (under review). Circa 150 pages. Includes:

Introduction. Knowledge-Production and Rural Itinerants: Examining Discourse Fields (Hurd)

Chapter One. German *Polizeiwissenschaft*, Gypsies and *Gauner* (Hurd)

Chapter Two. The Missionary and the Travellers: Eilert Sundt in Norway (Hurd)

Chapter Three. Scandinavian Romany Rye: Finland's Arthur Thesleff (Hurd)

Chapter Four. Sweden's and Denmark's Racial Biologists (Hurd & Werther)

- A. Kotjarchuk, "Polis och kategorisering av resandefolket och romer i Sverige under andra världskriget". To be submitted to *Historisk Tidskrift*, 2022. Circa 20 pages.
- In progress: S. Werther, Ein Leben auf Bewährung - Die Geschichte(n) einer adoptierten dänischen Romni (A Life on Probation - Story(s) of an Adopted Roma Girl in Denmark)