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Narratives of Otherness.

Debates on the Origins of Romani Peoples in the Fifteenth Century[1]

Contents

Introduction

"The eternal outsiders" is the headline of an article by Wolfgang Wippermann, professor at the *Freie Universität Berlin*, which was published in the current issue of the popular scientific magazine *Zeit Geschichte* which deals with German migration history.[2] The article explains how in the 15th century, Romanies[3] sought "asylum" in Western European cities showing "residence permits" from their lords. As Wippermann states, they had been fully integrated in the late medieval Christian-feudal society, until 1498, when they were suddenly expelled by the *Reichstag* for "grotesque" reasons. Persecutions continued, leading up to the destruction of approximately half a million Romanies in the Holocaust. The article sums up with a warning not to underestimate sudden swings, but also with the reminder of the 15th century as a positive example of "successful integration."

Themes like flight, asylum, or migration are highly topical today, thus attracting scholarly as well as popular interest in the assumed moment of first contact between Western European societies and the newly arriving foreigners in front of the town gates. Implicitly, these narratives of a teleological history of persecution, for which Wippermann's article only stands *pars pro toto*, comment on the complex causality of the Holocaust[4] and seek strategies for a more sustainable integration of Romanies in non-Romani societies.[5] The romanticizing of the 15th century as a "golden age"[6] for Romanies, as the first monograph written on this topic by Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann stated, has afterwards been put into perspective but still

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[2] Wolfgang Wippermann: Die ewigen Außenseiter, online available: *Zeit online*, <http://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2015/04/sinti-und-roma-zigeuner-migration-gewalt-fremdenhass> (11.12.15).

[3] Romani (plural Romanies) will be used in the following as an umbrella term for a worldwide scattered population that is referred to by many different exonyms, such as 'gypsies,' 'Zigeuner,' 'gitanos,' 'Heiden,' or 'cigani.' As many of these terms have misleading etymologies, for instance 'gypsy' is derived from Egyptian, or have been and are used in a derogatory way, Romanies have coined different endonyms, such as 'Rom,' or 'Rrom' (plural 'Roma' or 'Rroma'), which actually denotes a masculine noun in the Romani language. In addition, while Romani signifies a collective group, there are many different subdivisions, such as 'Sinti,' 'Jenische,' 'Travellers,' 'Manouche,' or 'Ashkali.' Yet in this context, the term Romani is chosen in accordance with Ian Hancock to de-emphasize other misleading and possibly harmful names, and to refer to a *constructed* collective of Romani peoples. Cf. Ian Hancock: *We are the Romani people. Ames am e Rromane džene*, Hatfield 2002 (reprint 2012), pp. xvii-xxi. To be more explicit, 'Romanies' is not a term meant to substitute a charged term like 'Zigeuner' one-to-one. On the contrary, this logical fallacy is meant to be pointed out in this paper. See especially p. 7-8 of this paper.

[4] Respectively known by Romani name *Porajmos* or *Porrajmos*.

[5] Non-Romanies are often referred to as g*adže* (one possible spelling used in the Romanichal [English Romani] dialect). However, such a construction draws a line between the minority and the majority society, a concept which I intend to problematize in this paper. In the following 'non-Romani' will be used deliberately as an analytical term not as a description of realities.

[6] Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann: *Historischer Versuch über die Zigeuner. Betreffend die Lebensart und Verfassung* […], Göttingen ²1787, p. 223.

has not lost all of its explanatory power.[7] When and why did this change of attitude occur and what constituted the assumed earlier period of successful integration? For Grellmann and many of the succeeding historians, a determining factor was the way in which Romanies presented themselves as a group and where they came from, as well as the non-Romani reactions to those accounts.

One of the most prevalent stories portrays the arriving Romanies as devout Christian pilgrims from their homeland Egypt that atone for their sins – either for an intermittent period where they turned apostate during a Muslim invasion, or alternatively, for refusing the Holy Family shelter during their biblical flight from Herod. The 'golden age'-theory says that due to their ability to 'pass' as pilgrims and penitents, Romanies enjoyed more privileges than ordinary nomadic beggars and could secure letters of safe conduct by powerful lords, such as Sigismund of Hungary. A few decades later, however, the story suffered a loss of authenticity and in the late 15th and early 16th century, expulsions and a century-long history of persecution began, according to Wippermann.[8]

In research, there are two dominant evaluations of this popular account. One already appears in a number of sources of the 16th and 17th century and was enforced by Grellmann, namely that pretending to be pilgrims was a blunt lie of the Romanies, who unjustly wanted to profit from benefits reserved for genuine pilgrims and penitents.[9] The second interpretation is more recent and was titled most pointedly by Angus Fraser, the "Great Trick."[10] In Fraser's view, Romanies simply invented a clever strategy that would allow them to survive in an otherwise hostile environment. Rather than a lie to scrounge benefits, it was a necessary trick, "brilliant in concept,"[11] by a self-determined people executing their agency.

Either way, both appellations, lie or trick, are based on various problematic premises. First of all, they both uncritically assume that Romanies acted in an organized, unified, and purposeful manner.[12] My first chapter will therefore briefly outline some theoretical thoughts and approaches to answer the question whether the 15th century foreign traveling bands could have been perceived as a people. Secondly, despite the fact that there are no Romani ego-documents from this period, scientific consensus assesses the pilgrim-narrative almost unani-

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[7] Cf. Ulrich Friedrich Opfermann: „Zu Teutschland lang gezogen und geporen." Zur frühneuzeitlichen Geschichte der Sinti in Mitteleuropa, in: *Sinti und Roma. Eine deutsche Minderheit zwischen Diskriminierung und Emanzipation* (BpB Schriftenreihe, vol. 1573), ed. by Oliver von Mengersen, Bonn and Munich 2015, p. 23.
[8] Wippermann: *Außenseiter*; Grellmann, *Historischer Versuch*, p. 223; Opfermann: *Zu Deutschland*, p. 23; Angus Fraser: *The Gypsies* (The peoples of Europe), Oxford / Cambridge 1992, p. 187.
[9] Cf. Grellmann: *Historischer Versuch*, pp. 200-215.
[10] Fraser: *Gypsies*, chap. 4 "The Great Trick," pp. 60-84. See also Hancock, *Romani people*, pp. 31-33.
[11] Fraser, *Gypsies*, p. 128.
[12] Ibid, p. 62: „They [Romanies] are no uncoordinted rabble, but move in an apparently purposeful way under leaders with impressive titles." Grellmann, *Historischer Versuch*, p. 213: "Dieser Irrthum [Egyptian origin] gründete sich auf die eigene, ziemlich einmüthige Aussage der Zigeuner selbst."

mously as a statement by Romanies themselves.[13] My second chapter will thus revisit the source material to problematize this premise of a Romani self-statement. Thirdly, if we assumed that any lie or trick was not imposed on them by non-Romani society, any prevalent and recorded origin story would have at least needed the out-group's validation.[14] Hence, in my third chapter, I will take into account those late medieval efforts that tried to allocate the Romanies' arrival in contemporary conceptions of man and the world in order to reconstruct familiar options of assignment and comparison. While late medieval migrations have only been an ephemeral concern to the traditional field of early medieval ethnicity studies, various possibilities of contextualizing and relating Romani discourses to other ethnicity discourses have been overlooked as a consequence. Thus in my last chapter, I wish to develop new questions currently disregarded by the dominant narrative of Romani studies of the lost 'golden age' when "the greatest trick of all was played on western Europe in the early fifteenth century."[15]

"Romanies are from India, right?" – Competing ethnicity discourses in Romani studies

Ethnicity studies offer applicable tools to analyze ethnicity discourses, for example, working out the inner logic or "grammar,"[16] as Pohl puts it, according to which origin narratives, for instance, or more generally speaking, strategies of identification are structured. However, there have been reservations within both ethnicity studies and Romani studies to cooperate more interdisciplinarily with each other. On the one hand, late medieval migrations and ethnicity discourses have only been ephemeral phenomena to the more established fields of late Antiquity, respectively early Middle Ages or modern nationalism studies. Key dissertations to close this chronological, under-theorized gap were written in 1991 on Mongols in the judgement of the Western world by Felicitas Schmieder[17] and similarly 2013 on European-

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[13] There is one exception that came to my attention: Ines Köhler-Zülich: Die verweigerte Herberge. Die Heilige Familie in Ägypten und andere Geschichten von "Zigeunern" – Selbstäußerungen oder Außenbilder?, in: *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion des Zigeuners. Zur Genese eines Vorurteils* (Wissenschaftliche Reihe des Fritz Bauer Instituts, vol. 2), Frankfurt / New York 1996, pp. 46-86, especially 51.

[14] Cf. Walter Pohl: Introduction – Strategies of Identification: A methodological profile, in: *Strategies of identification. Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, Turnhout 2013, p. 10.

[15] Fraser: *Gypsies*, p. 62.

[16] Pohl: *Identification*, p. 31. See also page 17 of this paper.

[17] Felicitas Schmieder: *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert* (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters, vol. 16), diss. 1991, Sigmaringen 1994.

Mongol Relations by Colleen Chi-Wei Ho[18], as well as in 2001 on Europe's fear of the Ottoman Turks from 1450 to 1600 by Almut Höfert[19] – but not on Romani migration, European-Romani interactions, cultural exchange or perceptions. On the other hand, at several annual meetings of the Gypsy Lore Society, a central platform for research and collecting source material, ethnogenesis has been made the subject of highly controversial discussions on the grounds that it has "the particular characteristic of concerning relatively diverse groups, engaged in the production of a new form of collective identification, and in the process of the unification of a 'Roma' category, based on the possession of a common culture and identity."[20]

Yet since when can Romanies be seen as a people – if at all? Did they move out from northern India as a distinctive group identifiable by an ethnonym, which was perceived as being constituted by an ingrained common nature, a 'deep structure,' unaffected by personal choice or the passage of time during their migrations to Europe?[21] Historical sources on this migration period are scarce, temporally and geographically scattered, not unambiguous concerning terminology, and often the first indication that a given source deals with Romanies at all is the problematic assumption that any reference to a migrant group pursuing a stereotypical occupation can for that reason be equated with them.[22] For instance, one of the most often quoted sources for this period between the 8th and 12th century is an Arabic account from today's Iran written around 950 by Hamzah al-Isfahāni, copied by Firdūsi, describing how half a century earlier the Sassanid king Varhān V. Gor (420-438) persuaded the king of India to send him 12,000 musicians, who then were distributed to the various parts of the Persian kingdom.[23] According to Grattan Puxon this source proved that Arabic writers knew long before the European linguists of the Romanies' Indian origin.[24] Such inferences, equating today's Romanies with those musicians carrying Romani-like names, supports the idea of a quasi-ahistoric common nature, i.e. an ethnic identity. After they had reached the Byzantine

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[18] Colleen Chi-Wei Ho: A Sign of the Apocalypse or Christendom's Ally? European-Mongol Relations in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, diss. 2013, University of California, online available: ProQuest Dissertations <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1468678519?accountid=11359> (18.12.15).

[19] Almut Höfert: *Den Feind beschreiben. »Türkengefahr« und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich 1450-1600* (Campus Historische Studien, vol. 35), diss. 2001, Frankfurt/New York 2003.

[20] Marion Lievre: What does it mean to be « Roma »? : The discourses of the Roma national and ethnical movement and "everyday ethnicity" of Roma people in Romania, online available: The Gypsy Lore Society's annual meetings <http://www.gypsyloresociety.org/annual-meeting/abstracts> (18.12.15).

[21] For further information on the definitions and terminology of ethnicity compare Pohl, *Identification*, 2-3.

[22] Cf. Fraser: *Gypsies*, 35.

[23] Reimar Gilsenbach (Ed.): *Weltchronik der Zigeuner. 2000 Ereignisse aus der Geschichte der Roma und Sinti, der Gypsies und Gitanos und aller anderen Minderheiten, die „Zigeuner" genannt werden*, part 1: Von den Anfängen bis 1599 (Studien zur Tsiganologie und Folkloristik, vol. 10), Frankfurt et al. ²1997, p. 17.

[24] Gratten Puxon: Zur Geschichte der Zigeuner, in: *Die Zigeuner. Verkannt – Verachtet – Verfolgt*, ed. by Donald Kenrick, Grattan Puxon, and Tilman Zülich, Alfeld 1980, p. 10.

Empire approximately in the 10th century, the number of records increases, the new ethnonym Ἀθίγγανος (plural Ἀθίγγανοι)[25] appears, and the spectrum of alleged Romani occupations is expanded by fortunetelling, soothsaying, and sorcery.[26] In other words, the names given and the occupations described can be seen as symbolic markers or performances of ethnicity according to which Romanies are routinely identified and thus a discourse is produced that organizes the social world and gives meaning to it.[27]

Ethnicity discourses are thus generally characterized by perceptions of immutability. From the perspective of *longue durée* social identities might be transformed over time or the composition of a group might change drastically during migration periods, wars, divisions, or intermarriage. Yet, an interpersonal and quasi natural structure that is not within an individual's power to reverse remains static. According to this interpretation of Romanies as a people, all the kindred groups that had left India centuries ago performed their shared ethnicity in various ways and in different places while remaining connected through their overarching kinship at all times. Some of them remained in Persia, others settled around the Levantine Sea, and still others might have joined the Ottoman advance into the Balkans where they eventually fell into slavery until they were released in the mid-nineteenth century and migrated into western Europe, where they became known as 'Roma.' According to this view, those small cohesive bands that explored western European cities in the 15th century, followed by larger immigration waves in the subsequent centuries, were part of a larger ethnic unit. They were identified by new ethnonyms and attributions, but at large their 'ingrained nature' remained the same.

Casting Romanies as a people has an important advantage, i.e. it reduces complexity and allows the deduction of concrete political directives. Generally speaking, it simplifies classification and allocation in a specific world view, for instance in a chronicle or cosmography. It can also be used to recommend or justify persecutions, for instance in Grellmann's study.[28] Likewise, apparent ethnic unity can be an important argument for human rights activists, such as Jean-Pierre Liégeois[29], Thomas Acton[30], Donald Kenrick[31], or Ian Hancock[32], to

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[25] The Greek name (read *Athinganos* / pl. *Athinganoi*) roughly translates into the 'Untouchables' and seems to be derived from an older heretical sect attributed with similar occupations. The name is believed to be the etymological root of the Italian *Cingari*, the French *Tsiganes*, and the German *Zigeuner*. However, this conclusion is not undisputed, cf. Jean-Pierre Liégeois: *Sinti, Roma, Fahrende* (Interface series), Berlin 2002, p. 28.

[26] Cf. George Christos Soulis: The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961), pp. 143-165.

[27] Cf. Pohl: *Identification*, p. 2.

[28] For example Grellmann: *Historischer Versuch*, p. 4: "Volk des Orients;" p. 24: "wie Heuschrecken mehrere Länder von Europa überzogen;" p. 200: "orientalische Fremdlinge."

[29] Jean-Pierre Liégeois: School Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Children. Orientation Document for Reflection and for Action, in: *Roma, Gypsies: Texts issued by international institutions*, ed. by Marielle Danbakli and

name only a few. All of them stress that Romanies are a transnational ethnic minority of common origin, although more in the sense of an overarching kinship than a diasporic people waiting to return to a certain homeland. Individual subdivisions might be very different from each other, yet a language of kinship solidarity is used to proclaim a unity that is believed to be primary.[33]

In contrast, opponents of this view that Romanies can be described as a people criticize exactly idem reduction of complexity and rather emphasize the constructed character of ethnographic terms like 'gypsy,' 'gitano,' or 'cingari.' Instead, Klaus-Michael Bogdal, for instance, ostentatiously uses the plural form 'Romani peoples' (*Romvölker*).[34] He argues that conceived and constantly reiterated collective features have been attributed to a plurality of groups by an out-group, thus "inventing an ethnicity."[35] Fifteenth century chroniclers were not interested in those peoples' "real existence"[36] but had their own reasons to use them as a discursive canvas. He concludes: "In this way, Europe invents the gypsies in the 15th century."[37] Similarly, Wulf Dietmar Hund[38], Wim Willens[39], and Ulrich Friedrich Opfermann[40] describe this process as a 'quotation community' (*Zitategemeinschaft*). The same sources and phrases are continuously repeated – aloof from empirical evidence about a variety of Romani

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Rachel Morris, Hatfield 2001, p. 120-121; Jean-Pierre Liégeois: *School Provision for Ethnic Minorities: The Gypsy Paradigm*, Hatfield 1998.

[30] Thomas Acton: Romani Politics, Scholarship and the Discourse of Nation-Building, in: *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities. Contextual, Constructed and Contested* (Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions, vol. 17), ed. by Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand, Istanbul 2006, pp. 27-38; Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton: Citizens of the World and Nowhere. Minority, Ethnic and Human Rights for Roma, in*: Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Will Guy, Hatfield 2001, pp. 54-70.

[31] Not only as an author, but also as a polyglot acting as an official interpreter at many international meetings, Kenrick translated from over sixty languages and spoke about thirty of them fluently. See the obituaries of the Institute of Race Relations, online available: <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/donald-kenrick-1929-2015/> (13.12.15).

[32] Hanock is probably one of the most active international ambassador of Romani human rights. His involvements includes, but is not limited to being a representative of the UN, UNICEF, EU, the International Romani Union, the International Roma Parliament, as well as the president of the International Roma Federation.

[33] Cf. Walter Pohl: Introduction. Ethnicity, Religion and Empire, in: *Visions of community in the post-Roman world. The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*, ed. by Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard Payne, Farnham et al. 2012, p. 10.

[34] Klaus-Michael Bogdal: Unerwünschte Nachbarn. "Zigeuner" und die Angst vor den Völkern Osteuropas, in: *Sinti und Roma. Eine deutsche Minderheit zwischen Diskriminierung und Emanzipation* (BpB Schriftenreihe, vol. 1573), ed. by Oliver von Mengersen, Bonn /Munich 2015, pp. 87-100, especially pp. 89-90 where he even rejects the term 'Antiziganismus' as a poor neologism inspired by the term antisemitism which restores the discriminatory root 'zigan' through the backdoor of uncritical science.

[35] Klaus-Michael Bogdal: *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner. Eine Geschichte von Faszination und Verachtung*, Berlin [5]2013, p. 15.

[36] Ibid., p. 25.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Wulf Dietmar Hund: Das Zigeuner-Gen. Rassistische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, in: *Zigeuner. Geschichte und Struktur einer rassistischen Konstruktion*, ed. by Wulf Dietmar Hund, Duisburg 1996, p. 13.

[39] Wim Willens: Außenbilder von Sinti und Roma in der frühen Zigeunerforschung, in: *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion des Zigeuners. Zur Genese eines Vorurteils* (Wissenschaftliche Reihe des Fritz Bauer Instituts, vol. 2), ed. by Jacqueline Giere, Frankfurt / New York 1996, p. 87.

[40] Cf. Opfermann: *Zu Teutschland*, p. 25.

speaking peoples– by a non-Romani elite to uphold the idea of a distinct group of outsiders, a homogeneous ethnicity. Grellmann was an important member of this elite and according to Willens even the creator of this ethnic construction that had not existed before.[41] In other words, "gypsies are not from India, but ideologically cooked up by the rising bourgeois socie-ty,"[42] as Hund phrases it.

As a last point, one might also argue that it was neither in the 15th nor 18th century that a Romani ethnic identity was invented, but as recently as the 20th century in the course of National Socialist race ideology. The Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg, for example, begins their permanent exhibition – worldwide the first of this kind when it was opened in 1997 – with idem chapter of systematic racial data acquisition during the Third Reich. Pictures show the measuring of craniums and determination tables of eye colors and so forth. The depiction of these pseudo-scientific and in the end futile efforts to find and define common racial features at the beginning of the exhibition conveys a clear message: This is where Romani history starts; this is where an ethnicity was generated arbi-trarily. There is no history before that. There could not be any because there was no under-standing of ethnic unity up until this point in history. Hence, according to this view, Romani identity was produced by a social discourse, a racist science, and a non-Romani society.

This being said, the constructed character of an ethnographic term does not mean it can-not turn into an actual self-description. Germans, Slavs, Franks, or Arabs are all terms that did not originally correspond to any stable, widespread self-identification but were impositions by an out-group. Yet, through movements like nationalism (Germans) or pan-ethnic movements (Pan-Slavism, Pan-Arabism) such designations have been successfully reclaimed due to the success of the corresponding political unit.[43] However, it seems comparatively more difficult for marginalized and victimized groups to reclaim generic terms that have historically been used against them.

Who then were the bands of foreign people that begin to appear in 15th century chroni-cles and municipal account books? Did they feel connected through a quasi-natural bond that can be described as ethnicity? Did they have any memory of a common Indian origin, which they purposefully and in accordance with each other concealed and replaced with an origin story more beneficial to them in a Christian-feudal society? In other words, were ethnogenic

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[41] Willens: *Außenbilder*, p. 87.
[42] Wulf Dietmar Hund: Vorwort, in: *Zigeuner. Geschichte und Struktur einer rassistischen Konstruktion*, ed. by Wulf Dietmar Hund, Duisburg 1996, p. 8: "Spätestens hieran [discusses prejudices against Romanies] wird deut-lich, daß Zigeuner nicht aus Indien stammen, sondern aus den ideologischen Garküchen der sich entwickelnden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft."
[43] Pohl: Identification, p. 15.

processes essentially completed and self-determined when the groups arrived in western Europe or did they only begin and were largely determined by an out-group? Research discussions in Romani studies thus focus heavily on the question of Romani agency. The strongly negative interpretation of a Romani 'lie' has been semantically replaced by a 'Great Trick'-variant but the premises of ethnic cohesion and organized actions have only recently been called into question by constructivist approaches.[44]

Who said what in the fifteenth century?

After having pointed out the controversial research discussions on ethnogenic processes and agency, it becomes apparent that the early sources need to be revisited in order to find clues on either a self-proclaimed lie, respectively trick, or an externally ascribed identity. The strongest argument for the latter is the fact that Romani history in the 15th century is only accessible through external sources.[45] In order to argue either for a trick or a lie it is necessary to assume that Romanies were well informed and acted in a self-determined, purposeful, and organized way.

According to Fraser, Romanies learned about Western European culture and internal affairs, as well as the privileged status of pilgrims and the means how to adopt and adapt their stories while living near Modon, a Romani settlement in today's northern Greece where many pilgrims, crusaders and other transients passed through on their way to the Holy Land in the east.[46] Until 1417 Romani migrations to the West had been brief, rare and on such a small scale that evidence remains scanty. In 1417 however, a major turning point occurred:

> "Suddenly, we find Gypsies behaving in an unprecedented manner. They are no longer unobtrusive, but almost *court attention*. They are no uncoordinated rabble, but move in an apparently *purposeful* way under leaders with impressive titles. And at first they are not hounded or harried, but treated with a measure of *consideration*. It was as if some unsung *genius*, stimulated perhaps by all the pressures in the Balkans, had realized the potential advantages to be drawn from the religious environment of the time and had devised a *strategy* for exploiting it and enhancing the prospects of *survival*."[47]

A survey of the early 15th century sources will sound out whether Fraser's hypothesis of a masterplan by a charismatic leader has an empirical foundation. To operationalize the analy-

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[44] It can only incidentally be noted here that more radical constructionist approaches also have the potential to call the semantic replacing of negatively connoted terms like 'gypsy' with 'Romani' or the under-theorization of reclaiming processes into question.

[45] This is a circumstance unlikely to change with the discovery of new source material as the strong oral tradition of Romani groups did not encourage written ego-documentation.

[46] Cf. Soulis: *Byzantium Empire*, p. 154; Fraser: *Gypsies*, pp.52-53.

[47] Fraser: *Gypsies*, p. 62. Emphases added.

sis the main focus will be on coherence, indication for self-statements or external assumptions, coordination, and repeating motifs within and between the texts.

The earliest[48] written chronicle that mentions a "certain larger crowd of vagabonding people from oriental parts of the world"[49] was written until 1430 by Hermann Kornerus, town clerk of Lübeck. According to Kornerus "they called themselves Secanos."[50]

> "It was told that the reason for this vagabonding and travelling in a foreign place was their estrangement from faith and their relapse after conversion to paganism. To continue this peregrinating abroad for seven years was inflicted upon them by their penance imposed by their bishops."[51]

The alleged endonym "Secanos" could be read as a hybrid term standing chronologically between the Byzantine Ἀθίγγανος and the Hungarian *cigány*, respectively the Latinized *Cinganos*. While the Greek term certainly was an exonym[52], it is possible that this Romani group had turned it into a self-description.[53] The reason for their appearance in Lübeck, though, is given in the passive voice (*dicebatur*), not specifying who provided this piece of information. However, as it described a wholly internal affair – a penance imposed by their own bishops – there is no reason to question that this explanation was provided by the group itself. The people described were good Christians on a holy mission, who would soon be gone back to their faraway homeland. The narrative follows familiar Christian patterns, which could have partly been made up by the Dominican monk Kornerus, or entirely told by the

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[48] Of course there have been earlier eastern European records of Romani presence, but they are comparatively scattered and are most often recognized linguistically by means of identifying Romani names, instead of a more elaborate ethnicity discourse. It was only when individual Romani bands advanced to western European countries during the time of the Council of Constance (1414-1418) that their presence is more frequently noted in account books and chronicles first but later in almost all sorts of written texts.
Often an entry in the account book of Hildesheim from 1407 is quoted as the first Western record. Cf. Gilsenbach: *Weltchronik*, p. 45. "Tateren" are mentioned here that are served wine while their papers were being checked. However, I decided not to include this source as for this early period it cannot be excluded that the bookkeeper indeed referred to actual Tatars not Romanies, as it was more likely in later texts of the 16th century. Tatars were well-known visitors in the 13th to 15th century.
Generally speaking the selection of sources reflects my subjective evaluation of validity and authenticity concerning my research questions.
[49] Hermann Kornerus: Chronicon, in: *Zigeuner im Spiegel früher Chroniken und Abhandlungen. Quellen vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Reimer Gronemeyer, Giessen 1987, p .15: "Quaedem extranea et praecie visa vagabundaque multitudo hominum de orientalibus partibus venit in Alemannia."
[50] Ibid: "Secanos se nuncupantes."
[51] Ibid. p. 16: "Causa autem hujus divagationis eorum et peregrinationis dicebatur fuisse aversion a fide et recidivatio post conversionem suam [of their leader; generalized above] ad Paganismum. Quam quidem peregrinationem continuare tenebantur ex injuncta eis paenitentia ab Episcopis suis ad sepentennium."
[52] Cf. Benedikt Wolf: Helfer des Feindes. Von der Häresie der Athinganoi zum „Stamm" der Atsinganoi, in: *Antiziganismus. Soziale und historische Dimensionen von "Zigeuner"-Stereotypen*, ed. by Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Heidelberg 2015, p. 21; See also fn. 23 on page 4 of this paper.
[53] The question whether or not, any forms derived from the Greek '*Athinganos*' were exonyms or endonyms depends – amongst other factors – on whether the Byzantine appellation was known in western Europe. In the early sources no reference indicating such is made. The earliest one that I found was from 1553 by Caspar Peucer: cf. page 15 of this paper, especially fn. 78. However, in a later source from 1608/1614 the Greek root of the name seems unknown and a different derivation is presumed: cf. page 15, fn. 77.

Romani group already accustomed with Western conventions and Christian mores. Lastly, the explanation cannot be ruled out that the travelers did in fact consider themselves as sincere Christian penitents from the East.

The next earliest record was written sometime between 1436 and 1449 by an anonymous "bourgeois of Paris,"[54] as he called himself. He gives a detailed account of the arrival of "twelve penitents" from Lower Egypt, as they ostensibly identify, in 1427.[55] The period under review is a decade later than Kornerus' account. In the meantime, one group has been seen in several Hanseatic cities, the same or another group was seen in Swabia on their way south to the Council of Constance where they received a letter of safe conduct from King Sigismund from Hungary, later to become emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Before long, numerous letters of safe conduct were circulating – some of which might have been forged. Afterwards a group came through several Swiss cities before heading to Italy, where they were recorded in Bologna and Forli, but not in Rome, where they were supposedly headed to. When they came to Paris, they already had some more experience how to introduce and present themselves to a Western audience. Likewise, the citizens of Paris might have already heard stories about the foreign people travelling through Europe. The story shows a number of striking similarities with the one Kornerus recounts. In Lower Egypt they were once baptized by Christian invaders. After some time, Saracens (*Sarrasins*) conquered the region and while some died as martyrs, others finally converted to Islam (*devinrent Sarrasins*).[56] When the king of Poland heard of this, he liberated the subjugated Christians but delegated them to the Pope in Rome to beg his forgiveness for giving up so easily against the Saracens. They did so but were sent on a seven year pilgrimage before they could return to their homes. It was already their fifth year when they arrived in Paris. The author claims that they told him all of this when he was visiting them three or four times himself.[57]

Despite the similarities to the Lübeck group that had already mentioned a seven year pilgrimage to atone for they interim unfaithfulness, this group seems to be a different one since they mention the king of Poland, Władysław II. Jagiełło, an enemy of King Sigismund and the Teutonic Order. Władysław had never been on crusade to the East, but they could have met him on their route through Poland-Lithuania. The group passing through Italy, how-

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[54] Colette Beaune (Ed.): *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris. De 1405 à 1449* (Lettres Gothiques), Paris 1990. He considered his work a diary, giving his daily thoughts about Paris in the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). Yet, most likely, he was neither a bourgeois, but a clerk, nor was this his diary, but a compilation of his retrospectively revised notes positioning his anonymous persona against Richemont and Charles VII.

[55] Ibid. p. 234: "An 1427, vinrent à Paris douze pénanciers, comme ils disaient, […] et lesquels se disaient très bons chrétiens, et étaient de la Basse Égypte."

[56] Ibid. p. 235.

[57] Ibid. p. 238.

ever, had letters of safe conduct from Sigismund with them, which seems unlikely if they had formerly been protected by Władysław. Also, they do not show the author any papal letter proving their story, although they supposedly claimed to have met him.

Hence, there are multiple communication and exchange networks to be considered operating here. On the one hand, the Romani groups travelling through Europe could have been in contact with each other, exchanging best practice knowledge as well as individuals moving between the various groups. On the other hand, the information exchange networks between the different narrators should not be underestimated. For example, the author remarked that never in those three or four occasions when he met those people something was stolen from him or he saw someone stealing something – "contrary to what the people were saying everywhere."[58] These popular beliefs illustrate that there must have been multiple narratives running parallel. Aside from Romani beliefs and strategies, scholarly discourses provided motifs influenced by public opinions. Even so-called Romani self-statements could have been formalized wordings for the purpose of credibility while in truth being a more or less consolidated composition of various sources of information.

Similarly, in the next source to be discussed the formation of a public opinion predetermines the author's wording as well. Andreas, a Presbyterian monk from Regensburg, compiled his journal-like, nonetheless revised observations some time before 1442 in his opus "Diarium Sexennale." As a contemporary witness he describes how "the gypsy people" (*gens Ciganorum*) have emigrated from Hungary (*Ungarie*) "as a sign or in remembrance of the Lord's flight to Egypt" (*in signum sive memoriam fuge domini in Egyptum*) and their arrival in Regensburg (*Ratispona*) in 1424.[59] Grellmann's misinterpretation of this passage is well known. In his translation, the pious migrants from Hungary are refugees from Egypt, expelled by God for refusing to host the Holy Family.[60] This version of the story, however, appears only in later sources. What Andreas describes is a simple *imitatio Christi*, a common motif of the time. Since the 13th century folksy apocryphal writings on the popular theme of Jesus' childhood increased the interest in tales about the Holy Family in Egypt.[61] Again, within the sources there is no clear evidence, whether this biblical motif was added by the Romani group itself or by the narrator. In case it was indeed a strategy employed by the in-group, today's mental image of a group of travelers kept outside the city walls and being denied integration

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[58] Beaune, *Journal*, p. 238: "Et vraimen, j'y fus trois ou quatre fois pour parler à eux, mais oncques ne m'aperçus d'un denier de perte, ni ne les vis regarder en main, mais ainsi le disait le peuple partout."

[59] Andreas von Regensburg: Diarium Sexennale, in: *Andreas von Regenburg. Sämtliche Werke* (Quellen und Erörterungen zur Bayerischen und Deutschen Geschichte, Bd. 1), ed. by Georg Leidinger, Munich 1903, pp. 318-319.

[60] Grellmann: *Historischer Versuch*, p. 214, fn. 35; cf. Köhler-Zülich: *Verweigerte Herberge*, p. 49.

[61] Cf. Köhler-Zülich: *Verweigerte Herberge*, p. 52.

must be transformed. The accomplishment of recognizing and adopting current trends and narratives requires a lot more interaction between Romani and non-Romani society than becomes apparent from the few surviving sources. Interestingly, until 1522 there is no mentioning of any language or communication barriers which means that in Lübeck the Romanies must have been able to speak Low German, in Berne Alemannic, in Paris French, and in Bologna and Forli Italian.[62] This is not unlikely but it would indicate a higher level of interaction and integration than formerly observed in research.

Alternatively, it could have also been Andreas or rumors in the streets and town markets that had invented and interposed this element in the story. There are two even more explicit references to popular opinions. First, Andreas mentions a folk name by which the foreigners are popularly known besides *gens Ciganorum*, namely *Cigäwnär*, an early form of *Zigeuner*.[63] As this name was not specific to the region of Regensburg but spread all across the German-speaking lands, it is likely that it was not coined to designate this specific group of people alone, but that it came close to a common ethnonym for Romanies in general. At the latest in 1442, when the *Diarium Sexennale* was completed, Romanies were described in ethnic terms.

This example also indicates that there was probably more than one competing ethnic discourse: within Romani groups, internal discourses which are the most difficult to grasp, a scholarly discourse centering around the Latin term *gens Ciganorum*, and a popular one using a folk name such as *Cigäwnär* or similar. The second reference Andreas makes on popular opinions is mentioned after the story of the Romanies' emigration from Hungary as a biblical commemoration pilgrimage: "Amongst the people it is said, however, that they are secret land scouts."[64] Public opinions thus seem more skeptical of the newcomers than Andreas and the academic opinion.

As if in response to this skepticism, Andreas reproduced the entire letter of safe conduct by King Sigismund that the Romanies had shown him. In it no other reason why they (*Ciganos*) deserve his royal protection is given than the address with "our stalwarts" (*fideles nostri*).[65] This letter shows another dimension to the ethnicity discourse, namely the political one. Policy makers can be influenced by popular and academic opinions but may place their focus less on the Romanies' placement in salvation history than on the group's loyalties. At this point King Sigismund does not seem to listen to those who call Romanies spies, but by the end of the century the often quoted imperial recesses from 1498 onward in which Romani

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[62] Cf. Bogdal: *Europa erfindet*, p. 41.
[63] Andreas: *Diarium*, p. 318: "volgariter Cigäwnär voctata."
[64] Ibid. p. 319: "In vulgo vero dicebatur, quod essent occulti terre exploratores."
[65] Ibid.

groups can legally be expelled when suspected of espionage[66] indicate a "turn of the tide,"[67] as Fraser put it. Hence 1498 is generally regarded as the end of the 'golden age.' Hund even draws a direct line from these imperial recesses to the Holocaust: "In Germany, [a path is marked] leading from the Freiburg imperial recess from 1498 in which the gypsies are outlawed into the fascist death camps."[68] More than half a century earlier, however, suspicions had already been raised and one could argue reversely that it took relatively long until these popular rumors entailed legal consequences. Was it because Romanies were such good liars or tricksters, or because external factors caused a shift in focus?

In the following source at least, the chronicle of Berne, the Romanies do not seem to be very good liars. It is an important source for Fraser's argument that "the Gypsy tale of a seven-year pilgrimage, perpetually renewed, brilliant in concept though it had been, inevitably lost its magic with the passage of time."[69] "Baptized pagans"[70] the chronicler skeptically calls the people arriving at Berne. While Fraser quoted Conrad Justinger as "the one chronicler who was contemporary with the events," he must have overlooked the fact that Justinger only wrote until 1416, whereas the last five years of the chronicle were continued by Benedicht Tschachtlan some time before 1466 and Diebold Schilling before 1484. These chroniclers did most likely not meet the Romanies in person and even mistakenly recorded the event under the entry of 1419 instead of 1418. Their sources of information rather seem to belong to the realm of hearsay and skeptical popular opinions about the "uncreated" (*ungeschaffen*), "black" (*swart*), pretentious Christians that "steal everything they like" (*si stalen waz inen werden mocht*) a few decades later.[71] Their place of origin, Egypt (*egyptenland*), was presented as an objective fact, a part of common knowledge.[72]

But there was no consistent basis of 'facts' throughout the 15th century whatsoever. What was their country of origin? Kornerus speaks of an oriental origin, the Parisian clerk of Lower Egypt, Andreas mentions Hungary, the Bernese chroniclers Egypt. Egypt, respectively Little Egypt, soon became the most often named localization of Romani origins and became eponymous for many regional ethnonyms, like 'gypsy' or 'gitanos.' Little Egypt most likely refers to the Romani settlement near Modon that many travelers, pilgrims, and crusaders had

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[66] "Aller des Heiligen Römischen Reichs gehaltener Reichstage Ordnung / Satzung und Abschied […], years 1497 [constitution] /1498 [bill has passed], 1500, 1530, 1544, 1548, and 1551, in: Gronemeyer: *Chroniken und Abhandlungen*, pp. 88-89.

[67] Fraser: *Gypsies*, chap. 5 "The Turn of the Tide," pp. 85-129.

[68] Hund: *Zigeuner-Gen*, p. 16: "In Deutschland [ist ein Weg markiert], der vom Freiburger Reichsabschied von 1498, in dem die Zigeuner für vogelfrei erklärt werden, bis in die Vernichtungslager des Faschismus führt."

[69] Fraser: *Gypsies*, p. 128.

[70] Gottlieb Studer (Ed.): *Die Berner-Chronik des Conrad Justinger*, Bern 1871, p. 286: „getouft[e] heiden."

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid: "Warent von egyptenland."

described.[73] However, at the same time there never was a consensus on the Egypt theory. Brother Hieronymus from Forli said they came from India[74], Aegidius Tschudi named a town called Igritz in northern Hungary[75], by his own studies Polydor Vergil was brought to the conclusion they were Assyrians[76], the anonymous author edited by Bonaventura Vulcanius thought they were Nubians, and in Tournai, Belgium, the author was sure that they were not from Egypt, as they said, but from a town in Germany, *Epipolensis*[77], which could refer to Würzburg, *Herbipolis*. Scholarly interest seemed incessant, and new theories emerged constantly. For once this could be due to changing or incoherent details that the various Romani groups provided. Another source of doubt could have been the consolidating narrative of the seven year pilgrimage itself. In Paris there were said to be already in their fifth year. The validity of the story expired increasingly when those seven years were stretched too far. This lapse of time became the main argument for critical evaluation of the Egypt theory:

> "If the end of their [the Romanies'] penance has come already, why then do they use the penance as an excuse until now? It is also a wrong truth then that they originate from Egypt. For the people questioned do not even know what Egypt is, neither the smaller nor the bigger one. From whence, therefore, did they emerge?"[78]

Such wrote Martin Antoine Del Rio in his investigations into magic (*disquisitionum magicarum*) in his paragraph on chirology (*Chiromantia*). Del Rio's argumentation continues with two hypotheses: Either the Romanies cannot return to their homes and thus need to be "ascribed to any of the nations and live according to those laws" (*certæ alicui nationi ascribe, & legib. ibi receptis viuere*), i.e. be integrated into non-Romani society, or even after they have returned they cannot stay for long but have to continue wandering or else "calamity and infertility" (*calamitatem & sterilitatem*) would strike them; the fear of which keeps them from

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[73] Cf. Soulis: *Byzantium Empire*, p. 154; and page 8 of this paper.

[74] Fratris Hieronymi de Forlivio: *Chronicon. Ab anno MCCCXCVII usque ad annum MCCCCXXXIII*, ed. by Adamo Pasini (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, tome XIX, parte V), Bologna n.y., p. 34. Despite being actually quite close to the truth, in mental maps of the time, India was a very vaguely localizable place in the very east of the world.

[75] Aegidius Tschudi: *Chronicon Helvetiam oder Gründliche Beschreibung der sowohl in dem Heiligen Römischen Reich […]. Zweyter Theil: Von Anno MCCCCXV biß MCCCCLXX*, Basel 1736, 10th book, p. 116.

[76] Polydor Vergil: De rerum inventoribus, in: Gronemeyer: *Chroniken und Abhandlungen*, pp. 74-75.

[77] Joseph-Jean Smet (Ed.): *Recueil des Chroniques de Flandre. Tome III* (Collection de Chroniques Belges Inédites), Brussels 1856, p. 372: "Et j'asoit ce que ces gens se deissent estre de Egipte, se ne estoient-ilz, comme depuis fut sceu, que de une ville de Alemaigne nommée en latin Epipolensis."

[78] Martin Antoine Del Rio: *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex. Quibus Continentur Accurata […]*, ed. by Peter Henning, Mainz ²1617 [original 1608], chap. III, quaestio V, p. 587: "Cur si pœnitentiæ terminus effluxit, pœnitentiam adhue prætexũt? Verum falsum etiam, quod de Aegypto iactant. Nam interrogati nec sciunt quidem quid Aegyptus, aut ubi minor vel maior. Unde ergo emerserũt?"

settling down.[79] Although written long after the period under examination, the old question where the Romanies' 'real' home was and why they would not return there, still seems to be gnawing at scholars.

Studies of magic are a valuable source in the sense that they are more elaborate on the topic, but also because they sometimes present more unconventional ideas. Del Rio, for example, traced back the name *Cingalos* to *cinclus*, a genus in bird classifications to which dippers belong.[80] One of Del Rio's colleagues, Caspar Peucer, who writes his "commentary on the most important forms of divination" (*Commentarius de Praecipuis Divinationum Generibus*) in the citadel of German Reformation, Wittenberg, attributed 'heterodoxy' to the devil who is aided by sorcerers (*incantatores*) from mainly Egypt and neighboring regions in Africa (*ex Ægypto primum & uivinis Aphricæ partibus*), who are called *Attinganos* by the Greeks and *Zigeunos* in the German lands.[81] Of particular interest in this context is the process of communication. In a publication written against religious adversaries, Romanies appear as soothsayers, an association apparently already naturalized in scholarly discourses, and assistants of the devil. The author shows no actual interest in their real existence but uses them for rhetorical purposes only. Egypt is recognized as the land of the magicians and with this expectation or mental map in mind the arriving Romanies are confronted. Since their perceived habitus seemed to fulfill the non-Romani anticipations, or at least not contradict and challenge them, "they confirm with certainty and finality" (*pro certo compertoq; affirmant*) that they are from Alexandria, Alkairi, i.e. Memphis, and the vicinity.[82] In other words, preconceived notions defined the questionnaire and thus the range of possible answers. This case raises the important but ultimately not answerable question what was there first, the question or the answer, the narrative or the reality, finally the stereotype or a certain habitus.

Looking back on the sources discussed so far, it becomes clear that there are multiple narrative lines along different networks of communication. Firstly, there are scholars, their networks, and their access to previously written works. They act as interpreters of the other, as an interface between societies, and as organizers of knowledge into larger contexts like salvific history or cosmographies. Repetitions in wording, biblical motifs, as well as external perspectives on outward appearance and behavior may be read as those elements that the scholars have provided to the narratives they record. Secondly, there are political and popular opinions that can vary and change significantly in relation to external factors, like wars, rival-

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[79] Ibid. pp. 587-588.
[80] Del Rio: *Disquisitionum,* p. 587.
[81] Caspar Peucer: *Commentarius de Praecipuis Divinationum Generibus: in quo a Prophetiis Autoritate Divina Traditis* […], Wittenberg ²1572 [original 1553], p. 160.
[82] Ibid. p. 160.

ries, epidemics, collective fears, and more. Those components often seem to be overwhelmingly negative. However, the available sources cannot aptly represent the quantity and variety of interactions, and might favor negative publicity as more newsworthy. Finally, there are the narratives proposed by the various Romani groups themselves. Assuming that they would provide information that would be beneficial to themselves, elements, like their far away homeland to which they will return eventually, their Christian faith and mission, themes of penance or expulsion etc. might be elements that can be attributed to the story they told about themselves. However, the strategies employed or the degree of self-determination seems to be different not only in a chronological order, as the 'golden age'-then-persecution-narrative suggests, but synchronously. The different narrative lines run parallel, intertwine, and influence each other. Patterns of interaction are versatile and while there are some functional differences between academia, politics, populace, and Romanies, there seem to be equally as many differences within these categories.

The grammar of a discourse: Perception and imagination of Romani ethnicity

Using concepts of ethnicity to structure Romani history has important advantages, most important of which is the reduction of complexity. In order to write a history of Romani agency like the 'Great Trick' it is necessary to presume that Romanies were well informed and acted in a self-determined, purposeful, and organized way. The empirical survey, however, did not reveal sufficient evidence of ethnic cohesion or planned actions. In order to better understand this variety of perceptions, descriptions, and the narrators' efforts to conceive and comprehend 'the other' seems to demand a less teleological and deductive approach but a closer look at the contexts in which these discourses were formed and transformed.

In order to identify such contexts of Romani discourses, a few theoretical thoughts on how ethnicities can be described seem indispensable. Even the unfamiliar and strange can only be articulated through an already pre-existing, familiar language. Although neologisms can be created additionally, they need to be explained through linking or comparing it to something familiar, otherwise they will not hold significance to a sufficiently large group of people in order to enter into common vocabulary. However, language does not simply reflect the world as it is, it is a medium of its construction.[83] The performative aspect of an utterance

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[83] Cf. John Longshaw Austin: *How to do things with words* (The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955), Cambridge / MA ²1975, esp. lecture 1, p. 6 on a "performative sentence." Jacques Derrida: Des Tours de Babel, in: *Difference in Translation*, ed. and trans. by Joseph Francis Graham, Ithaca / London

and its reflection of power imbalances should not be underestimated when reading 15th centu-ry external sources on Romani migrations. To be precise, in every statement about 'the other' a statement about oneself is included. The narrator is a central subject in every story. He ex-erts his authority by the mere fact of selecting a certain topic, using his own culturally specific language, or creating new ethnonyms thus setting the parameters of a certain discourse on identities.

As events like the arrival of a group of foreign people need to be explained by framing it in a narrative that will be understood by a larger group of people, it is usually structured according to familiar patterns. Pohl calls this structure the "grammar"[84] of a discourse. The 'grammar' does not define the contents of a narrative, as they are bound to change over time, but it determines the ways in which knowledge is organized or which questions are important to ask. As it is perceived as 'normal' or 'natural' to describe one's ethnicity according to cer-tain 'grammatical' rules, this process usually occurs unconscious. Changes occur only very slowly and it is not within an individual's power to reverse those rules.[85]

The study so far has shown that there could be various different 'grammars' structuring one overarching, intercultural discourse on Romani identities. Several authorities compete and negotiate their power to set the rules of this discourse. As demonstrated, it is not only the in-group versus the out-group, because firstly, both depend on and impact each other by validat-ing or disregarding certain pieces of information, and secondly, performances of ethnicity do not only exert one's authority towards the out-group but towards the in-group as well. While before text-immanent congruence and intertextual coherence was the focus of this analysis, the negotiation processes within the out-group are now to be more closely elucidated. Two possible approaches are suggested for this purpose: firstly, the comparison with other medie-val migrants from the East, and secondly, the contextualization within a late medieval lower class.

First of all the comparison with other vaguely known Asian peoples stands to reason as in the discussed sources, Romanies have been related to Assyrians, Indians, Nubians, etc.[86] Even the common reference to Egypt can be read as an orientalizing cipher.[87] While Roma-nies might have referred to their settlement in the region called "Little Egypt"[88] when being

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1985, pp. 165-207, esp. p. 180 on "the performative dimension of utterances." Michel Foucault: *Archeology of Knowledge* (Routledge Classics), London / New York 2002, esp. p. 228 on "verbal performance."

[84] Pohl: *Identification*, p. 31.

[85] Pohl: *Identification*, pp. 11-12. Pohl heavily based his theories on Foucault's discourse theory.

[86] Cf. page 14 of this paper.

[87] For further information on the process of Orientalization, compare Edward William Said: *Orientalism*, New York 1979, esp. p. 50 on the medieval period and the invention of the Orient by Western academe.

[88] Cf. page 13 of this paper.

asked where they came from, the out-group validated this information because an oriental origin from the "land of the magicians"[89] seemed plausible. More interesting than the actual list of alleged countries of origin, is the fact that the early sources only mention Eastern origins. Only later emerged the idea that the Romanies were in fact Europeans that pretended to be Eastern pilgrims.[90] On contemporary 'mental maps' or imaginative geography the East belonged to the clearly marked-off sphere of 'them' in contrast to the familiar 'us.'[91] The East was laden with mythical associations and framed by a distinct crusade rhetoric and legends about Tamerlane. The encounter with Mongols in the 13th to 15th centuries had a great impact on contemporary geographical knowledge about Asia, as can be seen in the transformation and expansion of maps of the world.[92] Depictions of Egypt and other North African regions, however, seem to be less in a state of flux. An early 15th century description of the world regions by the bourgeois Ulrich von Richental protocolling the debates at the Council of Constance from 1414 to 1418 comprises an excursus about mythical places and their political organization. In it the Kingdom of Egypt (*Egipten*) adjoins to the Kingdom of *Ethiopia*, the Kingdom of *Ydemnea*, "where the Negros live" (*do moren in sind*), and the Kingdom of *Ninife*, "all the land which the Great Chan owns, as well as the Soldan of Babylon and all of India" (*alles land, das der groß Chan in hat und der Soldan von Babilony und gantz India*).[93] Similarly, a textbook for young students from 1475 Lübeck includes a world map that shows Egypt (*Egiptius*) close to Ethiopia on the north-east coast of Africa.[94] The African lands are vaster and less crowed than Europe in the depiction; they seem like islands protruding from the oceans, but have similar castle-like buildings and towers. The map demonstrates a striving for order, symmetry, and balance between the four continents. The proximity of Egypt to mythical places like *Ethiopia* and *Ninife* shows how vague geographical knowledge of this part of the world was. At the same time it is an important reminder that geographical accuracy might not have been the primary function of a world map. Europe was illustrated in a very stylized way as well. More important seemed to be a balanced and universal world view. Even politically these regions were said to be organized similarly to Europe, as Richental's enumeration of kingdoms shows. This context indicates that it was not only the Romanies' status

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[89] Cf. page 15 of this paper.

[90] Cf. Gronemeyer: *Chroniken und Abhandlungen*, p. 160 on Stumpf, Aventinus, Krantz, Muenster etc.

[91] For a short summary of the rich research tradition in this field of identité-alterité compare Höfert, *Türkengefahr*, pp. 22-23.

[92] Cf. Schmieder, *Mongolen*, p. 322.

[93] Wilhelm Matthiessen: Ulrich Richentals Chronik des Konstanzer Konzils. Studien zur Behandlung eines bürgerlichen Großereignisses durch die bürgerliche Chronistik, Zweiter Teil, in: *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* 17 (1985), p. 367.

[94] Rudimentum noviciorum epitome sive systema historiae universalis auctore incerto confecta et in sex aetates divisa ab 1473, 2 vols., Lübeck 1475, UB Ffm. Inc.fol. 118, in: Schmieder, *Mongols*, ill. 23.

as pilgrims, but that they were believed to have their own power base in a faraway country to which they will return. Their Christian leaders carry recognized noble titles – duke (*dux*) and counts (*comes*) are named frequently – and thus according to medieval social order they are entitled to letters of safe conduct independently from any tricks or lies about a penance.

As it was mentioned before, another migrating Asian people, the Mongols, impacted the classification schemes of late medieval narrators. Very successfully Tatars had invaded Europe in the 13th to 15th century and the stories about Tamerlane had become legendary. Especially after the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410 when Tatar contingents had supported the victorious Polish-Lithuanian army, the Teutonic Order instigated an enormous propaganda war against the Tatars.[95] They were therefore known well enough in Europe by the time the Romanies had arrived. A good example of this is the fact that Kornerus uses the Tatars as a benchmark to explain Romani characteristics: They were "black like Tatars" (*nigri ut Tatari*).[96] The word like (*ut*) seems important in this context. The Romanies were not confounded with Tatars but compared to them. The latter were already sufficiently known and located on the maps in Central Asia whereas Romanies were still unknown, located in most cases in Africa or around the Levantine Sea, and most importantly perceived as clearly distinct from Tatars. Only later, in the late 16th and early 17th century, when they entered northern European countries, 'Tatars' could indeed mean Romanies. One important difference was the fact that Romanies were Christians while most of the Tatars were considered pagans. For example, the indignation by many of the lords assembled at the Council of Constance against the Polish king for having hired Tatars, respectively pagans against Christians, i.e. the Teutonic Order, indicates that still in the late Middle Ages religious differences might be starker than ethnic ones.[97] This does not render the ethnic category meaningless but can be instructive for understanding contemporary perceptions.

Another noteworthy difference was that Romanies came unarmed and were not organized as war bands. This could have been part of their strategy to pass as pilgrims but even before they came to western Europe, in the eastern European, Byzantine, or even earlier sources, they do not appear as warriors. Although the sources remain silent about their reasons not to wear armor, it can still be noticed that it sets them apart from Tatars and the second group to be discussed in this context, the Ottoman Turks, as well.

The Turks need a special notice here because the Romanies have, as was mentioned above, been on several occasions associated with them. For instance, the right for municipali-

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[95] Schmieder: *Mongols*, p. 188-192.
[96] Kornerus: *Chronicon*, p. 15.
[97] Schmieder, *Mongols*, p. 103.

ties to expel them granted by imperial recesses was based on the accusation they could be scouts for the Turks. This accusation was dependent on their religious status and their credibility as Christians. If they were beyond any doubts recognized as genuine Christians, any insinuations of them maintaining loyalties to the Turks would have been ineffective. Yet some evidence found in the sources resonate certain misgivings. The complex and to some extent elaborate narratives tell how Romanies were being conquered first by Christians, who forcefully baptized them, then by Saracens, who again forced conversion on them, and finally by a Christian lord that 'liberated' and re-baptized them but ultimately had his concerns about them being genuine in their pleaded beliefs and sent them on a pilgrimage.[98] Pressure from the rapid Ottoman advance on the Balkans inspired the imagination of fearful minds asking how anyone could know if the Romanies really returned to Christianity and were not feeding the Turks intelligence.

Aggravated religious tensions on the eve and at the peak of the Reformation added pressure on everyone to prove their religious loyalties. Romanies in particular attracted attention, firstly, because of their apparently never-ending pilgrimage, and secondly, because of the association with sorcery, soothsaying, and other sorts of magic. In 1510, a thin pamphlet called *Liber Vagatorum* was circulated. It was meant to uncover and warn people about the tricks and strategies of vagabonds. In it there is a chapter on "*Christiane[r] & Calmiere[r]*" which describes Christian imposters stocked with purchasable pilgrim symbols like scallop shells.[99] The fact that there were already names coined for this particular kind of fraud and that Romanies were *not* mentioned in particular seems to indicate that suspicions were not unjustified, but rather that such strategies to fake a pilgrim status were widespread, even commercialized. This is an important point, not only regarding Fraser's thesis of a grand plan by an "unsung genius,"[100] but also more generally speaking regarding discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity.

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[98] For instance, Beaunne, *Journal*, p. 235 and page 10 of this paper. Or Albano Sorbelli (Ed.): *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensum*, Parte 1, vol. 3 (Rerum Italicarium Scriptores, vol. 18), Città di Castello 1910-1938, p. 568: "Lo quale ducha [duke Andreas, one of the Romani leaders that came to Bologna in 1424] si havea renegade la fede christiana, et lo re d'Ungaria prese la soa terra et lui, et si li disse lo dicto ducha ch'ello voleva retornare a la fede christiana, et si se batezò cum tucto quello puovolo, salvo che quilli, che non volseno retornare a la fede funo morti; et quilli che tornono a la fede funo da quattrocento o più. Et poi che 'l re d'Ungaria gli avé prisi e rebatezadi, volseno ch'egli andasseno per lo mondo sette anni et ch'elli dovesseno andare a Roma al papa et poi retornasseno in suo paese."

[99] Liber vagatorum, [1510], p. [6], online available: <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00009344/image_1> (19.12.15).

[100] Cf. page 8 of this paper.

In 1528, when a new edition of the *Liber Vagatorum* was published in Wittenberg by a well-known man named Martin Luther, it was already widely read.[101] In his preface Luther explained that he wanted to shed light upon those "false beggar boys" (*falsche Bettler Buben*)[102] that abused the civil and ecclesial care for the poor. This is only one example of how Protestant reformers began to religiously charge the vocabulary of condemning non-integrated social outcasts to which many Romanies – amongst others – belonged.

However, Luther also attacked Romanies (*Thattern odder Zygeuner*) openly. They appear in the contexts of "black magic" and "soothsaying,"[103] theft, remarriage and re-christening.[104] Above all, like Jews, they are "in misery and trapped."[105] In all these passages, it is important to note that Luther never seems to care to speak about Romanies directly, but rather he uses them as objects of comparison to criticize adulterers, bad Christians, and Jews. Their sinful *modus vivendi* was beyond dispute for Luther and apparently even beyond variability. Whether *Thattern odder Zygeuner* were ethnic, religious, social, or moral categories for Luther remains questionable. Were all members of the Romani ethnicity living in sin, or could all sinners be called *Thattern odder Zygeuner*? Was the described sinful way of life a performance of ethnicity or are Luther and other external narrators constructing an ethnicity by the performance of their utterances?

A broader analysis of lower classes in late medieval society might reveal some communality between Romanies and other social, ethnic, or religious minorities. One of those were the Jews, a comparison already suggested by Luther but also by modern historians like Donald Kenrick, son of Jewish emigrants from Poland, who highlights the shared but different destiny of Jews and Romanies.[106] However, the post-Holocaust perspective can be particularly problematic in terms of teleology and competing cultures of remembrance. Often comparative historical research can end up playing off victimized groups against each other. Yet there are a few similarities and differences worth sounding out without writing a prehistory to the Holocaust of century-long persecutions. For example, when reading the chronicle of Forli, an

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[101] Martin Luther: Vorrede zu Von der falschen Bettler Büberei, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 26, without ed., Weimar 1909, p. 634.

[102] Luther: *Vorrede*, p. 638.

[103] Martin Luther: Kirchenpostille 1522, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 10/1, without ed., Weimar 1909, p. 559. Luther distinguished here between predictions by prophets and by demons. The Romanies' (*Thattern odder Zygeuner*) black magic (*schwartze Kunst*) belongs to the latter category.

[104] Martin Luther: Von Ehesachen 1530, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 30/3, without ed., Weimar 1909, p. 225-226. Luther said that Romanies (*Thattern odder Zygeuner*) steal and run away, let women remarry ten times and children baptize ten times.

[105] Martin Luther: Von den Juden und ihren Lügen 1543, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 53, without ed., Weimar 1909, p. 523: „Dafur mag man sie [die Juden] etwa unter ein Dach oder Stal thun, wie die Zigeuner, auff das sie in wissen, sie seien nicht Herrn in unserem Lande, wie sie rühmen, sondern im Elend und gefangen, wie sie on unterlas fur Gott uber uns zeter schreien und klagen."

[106] Cf. Donald Kenrick / Grattan Puxon: *Gypsies under the Swastika*, Hatfield 2009, p. 4.

interesting detail comes to mind. In August 1422, a Romani group arrived in Forli and stayed for two days on their journey from Bologna to Rome.[107] They were not described in very positive terms but as "animal-like and raging" (*quasi bruta Animalia et furentes*). In the next paragraph, however, it is described how two months later, the plague came to Forli and killed more than 2,000 people. Remarkably, in the chronicle, the two events have not been related in any way. Neither did any other late medieval source come to my attention that linked the presence of Romanies to the loom of the plaque as it has been recorded manifold in similar situations with the Jews.[108] As the vocabulary generally employed to describe the plague was heavily charged with religious overtones, religion rather than ethnicity could have once more played a decisive role.

Another minority group, the Sorbs, respectively the Wends had a similar disadvantaged status in the urban lower classes.[109] They were denied access to the guilds and other prestigious positions or privileges. However, their religious integrity or social habitus were not extensively scrutinized. First and foremost, they were perceived as flawed because they did not speak German.[110] The promotion of regional languages and vernaculars within the context of the Reformation, as well as the transformation of the late medieval polities based on unequal distribution of privileges into a premodern territorial state protecting urban minorities to demonstrate state power, thus benefited Sorbs or Wends but disadvantaged Romanies. Hence macrostructural changes of the social order cast a new light on the end of the so-called 'golden age.'

Explaining something new and unknown requires the construction of mental bridges to something already familiar and by relating the two objects to each other, i.e. interpreting and interposing elements into the object to be explained. The two types of comparable groups chosen exemplarily in this chapter, other migrating peoples and members of late medieval lower classes, have shown new perspectives but also limits of an ethnicity-centered approach. For instance, it would be conceivable to relate the appearance of Romani groups to the broader context of other medieval and premodern migrations from the East, thus filling a void in

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[107] Fratris Hieronymi de Forlivio: *Chronicon*, p. 34.

[108] As far as I can tell, the earliest source that links the emergence of the plague to the arrival of the Romanies, was a 17th century meistersinger from Nuermberg who presumed that 'Zigeuner' was a fake identity of Jews emerging from caves where they hid from persecution. Iulia-Karin Patrut: Phantasma Nation: 'Zigeuner' und Juden als Grenzfiguren des 'Deutschen' (1770-1920), habil. 2012, Würzburg 2014, pp. 116-118. For further information on Jewish pogroms in the context of the plague, cf. Klaus Bergdolt: *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa. Die Große Pest und das Ende des Mittelalters*, Munich 1994, pp. 119-145.

[109] Cf. Arno Herzig: Die Fremden im frühmodernen Staat, in: *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion des Zigeuners. Zur Genese eines Vorurteils* (Wissenschaftliche Reihe des Fritz Bauer Instituts, vol. 2), ed. by Jacqueline Giere, Frankfurt / New York 1996, p. 33.

[110] For Romanies on the other hand, language does not appear in the sources as a distinctive factor. They seemed to have spoken the local languages. Cf. page 12 of this paper.

ethnicity studies between early medieval 'peoples' and modern 'nations.' Likewise, it is possible to frame Romani discourse analysis within the context of 'Orientalism.' The second category suggested here for further research is late medieval or early modern lower classes. A century after the Romanies' arrival, it seems that comparisons with Romanies (*ut Cingari*) carried certain consolidated associations detached from empirical observations. Hence it can be asked to what extent terms like *Zigeuner* meant a set of religiously condemned or socially ostracized behaviors independent from ethnic affiliation.

Conclusion

When in 1992, Sir Angus Fraser formulated his theory of the 'Great Trick' he shifted the paradigms through which Romani history was perceived. Rather than being the victimized objects in a long history of persecution after the destruction of the fifteenth century 'golden age,' the Romanies in Fraser's historical understanding were the subjects that shaped history by means of their own agency. While previous historians like Gronemeyer in 1987 tried to eliminate or relativize Grellmann's 'golden age'-thesis for the purpose of emphasizing heteronomy and systematic discrimination from the Romanies' first arrival in western Europe onward[111], Fraser needed the idea of a favorable situation in the beginning to prove and legitimize the existence of Romani agency before it was contained and tragically undermined by an intimidated non-Romani society, the "gullible dupe."[112] This renaissance of the 'golden age'-theory was a decisive blow for the emerging constructivist approaches that reacted against notions to re-brand old and discriminatory ethnographic exonyms with newly polished, yet still 'ethnicizing' umbrella terms for the sake of reducing complexity, declaring unity, and thus legitimizing transnational political activism.[113] Fraser's idea of putting agency back into an one-sided historiography of Romani persecution was popularized by the international political activist Ian Hancock who provocatively named two of his chapters "How Westerners learnt the Romanies' true origin" and "What the Europeans thought."[114] Most recently, Wolfgang Wippermann framed the 15th century as an instructive example of "successful integration" of migrants into medieval German society – not without adding a warning of rapid mood swings.[115]

While the political advantages of writing a history of a self-determined and self-conscious people that is held together by more than a shared experience of persecution and

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[111] Gronemeyer: *Chroniken und Abhandlungen*, pp. 159-161.
[112] Fraser: *Gypsies*, p. 62.
[113] Cf. Bogdal: *Unerwünschte Nachbarn*, pp. 87-88; Hund: *Vorwort*, pp. 7-10.
[114] Hancock: *Romani people*, pp. 2 and 31.
[115] Wippermann, *Außenseiter*.

discrimination seem obvious, this brief study has pointed out some empirical difficulties to find sufficient conclusive evidence for this theory, yet has also suggested some new, more interdisciplinary research questions. To begin with, for a period without Romani ego-documents any statements on the in-group's perceptions or feelings of a quasi-natural, immutable ingrained common nature must be highly speculative. Fortunately, early medievalists have proposed certain evasions for this problem: Firstly, since ethnicity is more than a statement of identity but also a performance of it, evidence of ethnicity performances might still be comprehensible. Secondly, discursive analytical approaches can deconstruct the meanings attached to ethnographic terms – which can eventually turn into self-descriptions. Finally, since any self-statements need to be validated by an out-group, the historical contexts and possible contemporary points of reference can be analyzed to narrow down the spectrum of possibilities that the out-group would accept as plausible. The first idea has been bracketed since the example of the Arabic source in which the musicians have been identified as Romanies has demonstrated methodological difficulties of ex post assumptions of ahistorical behaviors. Later references to black magic, soothsaying, vagabonding, stealing and so on can thus not be equated with performances of ethnicity but can also be read as meanings attached to a historical discourse. The analysis of such a discourse, on the other hand, or more precisely its 'grammar,' has revealed further theoretical weaknesses. First of all, the survey of the early 15th century sources has pointed out that there are multiple synchronously and interdependently developing narratives to be considered. The most graspable insight we have of the communication network of scholars. They organize knowledge in relation to salvific history, geopolitical world views, and other contexts of knowledge. Academe informs and is informed by political discourses, as well as by popular opinions. Scholarly and political opinions are strongly dependent on individual identity concepts and personal networks, while the populace is generally perceived as an anonymous collective. For example, letters of safe conduct and imperial recesses are evidences of political decisions, whereas popular opinions only become evident when referenced explicitly, i.e. when considered newsworthy or when the author wants to conceal own stereotypical opinions.

With regard to Romani agency and self-determination in a period of successful integration, these findings lead to ambiguous conclusions. On the one hand, Fraser's hypothesis of an "unsung genius"[116] who singlehandedly came up with a brilliant idea to fool all Westerners and lead a deliberately coordinated venture from Modon into Europe, seems highly unlikely. While there are certain repeating elements in the records, the narrative where the Romanies

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[116] Fraser: *Gypsies*, p. 62; cf. page 8 of this paper.

originated from and why they came to the West are far from congruent or always entirely positive. Various sources of information and interpretations need to be considered. On the other hand, these results do not deny either Romani tactics and contributions to the discourses or a certain degree of integration and interactions. They seemed to have known the local languages and Christian customs. Perhaps they learned from other vagabonds and beggars some strategies and exchanged best practice knowledge among each other. For the most part, however, both the in-group and the out-group were exceedingly diverse communities, while the sources only show a very small percentage of all forms of interactions and networks.

This complexity blurs the stark line drawn between the 15th and 16th century marked by the first imperial recess on Romanies in 1498. Rather than a sudden mood swing, gradual macrostructural changes at the transition phase between the two epochs influence a number of discourses and attitudes while others remain the same. One of the rather significant changes concerns the ethnographic terms that were used to describe Romanies. The rather event-oriented types of sources like chronicles, annals, or account books indeed tend to use terms like *Zigeuner* or *cingari* to describe a specific group of foreigners that arrived at the town gates. However, as soon as they appear in non-event-based essays and treatises of theology, magic, cosmology etc., these terms seem increasingly detached from ethnic affiliations but describe a more or less consolidated set of associations with these terms. Once these associations could have corresponded to actual observations, but were exaggerated and developed further aloof from empirical reassurance. They could stand for a certain *modus vivendi* whether or not the majority of Romanies in fact fulfilled any of those stereotypical behaviors. Likewise, it seems like it almost did not matter anymore whether the person called or compared to a *Zigeuner* ethnically belonged to the Romani community or not. It would have been conceivable that those terms disappeared again after a while, just like the names *Christianer* and *Calmierer* from the first *Liber Vagatorum*. But they remained, not only because the ethnic group of Romanies stayed in Europe, but because the terms describing them were constantly reproduced and recharged with meanings.

Statements about bilateral relations therefore have to be complex in nature, consider different narrative lines and historically transformable ethnonyms. Not always is it advisable to think of Romanies in strictly ethnic terms. It can be useful, for example, when integrating Romani studies in a broader context of comparative ethnicity studies. Alternatively, Romanies can be understood in social terms as part of a multiethnic and multireligious lower class, or in discursive terms to reveal communication networks, means of knowledge transfer, or scientific practice and exchange. Studying social outcasts can extend our understanding of systems

of power and social order, as well as their integrative power or rigidity. The romanticizing effects of a 'golden age,' a 'Great Trick,' or a 'successful integration' might suffer a loss, but more light is shed on the complexity of ethnic and social realities of this epoch.

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