

The 'Gypsy Question' and the Gypsy expert in Sweden

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The study of the history of the Gypsies in Sweden shows a marked continuity over time in regard both to content and starting point. It deals with two themes: the particular 'nature' of the Gypsies and their relations vis-à-vis the authorities. The point of departure is that the Gypsies are a foreign, 'secretive' and 'inaccessible' people, whose 'otherness' can not be accepted. Consequently they must be transformed into 'useful citizens'. It takes very special measures to achieve and these can only be 'discovered' by the 'Gypsy experts'. The Gypsy expert himself is an integrated part of the discourse about Gypsies, which has taken shape during the last century, and he has to be studied within the context of this discourse. I will discuss the work of Arthur Thesleff, the first Gypsy expert in Sweden. I will also describe the Gypsy Question and the heritage of Heinrich Grellmann in the work of the Norwegian Eilert Sundt. My focus will be on Arthur Thesleff; but I will also say a few words on the experts that followed in his steps until the 1970s. My purpose is not to stigmatise Thesleff or any other of the experts. I intend to point out the risks that always emerge whenever one tries to change the lives of others in favour of what one defines to be 'their own good'.

Introduction

The German researcher Heinrich Grellmann published a book about Gypsies in 1783. This book became well known in Scandinavia through

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the writings of Norwegian priest Eilert Sundt in the 1850s. It was from Grellmann that Sundt gathered his facts about Gypsy history and Gypsy customs and traditions. Grellmann also inspired him to believe that society must take measures in order to allow the Gypsies to adapt. Drawing on Grellmann's book Sundt describes the Gypsies as primitive people, incapable of taking care of themselves. It is implied between the lines that it takes experts to provide the necessary knowledge behind the undertaking to turn the Gypsies into civilised and useful citizens. Later generations of experts have repeated these basic dogmas, without questioning the actual facts that they are based upon and also not stating the sources of these 'facts'. On the contrary, they have been conducive to the creation of an image of the Gypsy experts as original thinkers in search of truth. Their research has always had 'the Gypsy question' as starting point.

The Gypsy question

'The Gypsy question' is a notion which is based upon a number of explicit and implicit conceptions. This way of thinking has less to do with the Gypsies than with society's image of itself. In this image Western society is seen as the model for organising social life. The beliefs in its own superiority and in a gradual change towards a better future form the basis for this way of thinking. In this view, change is propelled by modern science, which is able to manipulate the present situation with positive effects, leading to a desired future situation.

The Gypsy question is a typical product of the Enlightenment, and consists of a number of arguments, which since then have formed the basis for the relation between Gypsies and authorities in Sweden (and other European countries):

- The position of the Gypsies as outsiders is unacceptable.
- The Gypsies should be transformed into useful citizens.
- This transformation demands special measures since the Gypsies do not understand their own good.
- The children should be the principal objects of these measures.
- The process of transformation would be gradual and slow (it would take several generations).
- The school is an important instrument in this process.

These arguments are closely linked to a certain attitude towards the object of study, the Gypsies. This attitude is built upon the acceptance of the arguments presented above, that there is a question/problem, namely the Gypsies and their status as outsiders. This attitude automatically leads to a limitation in both the search for, and the production of, knowledge. For instance, any problems that occur in the process of implementation of the integration measures are always seen as caused by the Gypsies themselves. From this follows that the Gypsies are always seen, and treated, as objects. The Gypsy question also implies that the present time is seen in the perspective of a vision of the future. With this way of looking at things, the Gypsy question has a beginning (the arrival of the Gypsies) and an ending (the implemented transformation of the Gypsies into useful citizens) to be arrived at through the proposed measures.

The Gypsy question in Sweden has been used as a term in academic writings, public debate and in the language of the authorities since the latter part of the nineteenth century (see S O U 1923, S O U 1956, Etzler 1944, Tillhagen 1965). Nowadays the term is not used in official contexts, but the attitude, as well as the limitations on knowledge implied by the term, has survived the abandonment of the term itself. This continuity is easily observed when one studies the Gypsy experts and their roles and relations towards their object of study.

Historical background

There is a lack of documents about Gypsies in Sweden before the second part of the nineteenth century. The first attempt to make a census of Gypsies and related groups was not made until 1921 when their number was estimated at 1,072. Of these 1,072 only about 230 were recognised as 'real Gypsies' while Travellers (*tattare* was the popular and pejorative name in Swedish) made up the rest of the group (S O U 1923: 338). The relations between the Swedish authorities and the Gypsies are primarily reflected in the laws and regulations and other types of official documents and reports which were produced in increasing quantity from the 1900. On the other hand, nothing is known about the aspirations and views of the Gypsies themselves until the 1930s, and it was not until the 1960s that Gypsies participated in the public debate about their own situation. The opinions and visions of the Gypsies have largely been disregarded by the authorities, if they were not mediated by the Gypsy experts.

Pre-nineteenth-century documentation

The first account of Gypsies in Sweden dates from 1520, and is a short note describing the arrival in Stockholm by a group of Gypsies (Petri 1529: 272). They were well received as pilgrims according to the rules of the time reception of strangers, but only a few decades later the authorities ordered the first expulsion of Gypsies (Ahlqvist 1876: 222). During the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries Gypsies are mentioned in relation to the first attempts to implement poverty laws, but only as the target of expulsion. During the seventeenth century poor people without employment could be drafted into the army. According to Etzler (1942) this allowed quite a few Gypsies to serve as soldiers in the Swedish army of that time. Changes in the poverty laws and a growing interest in population politics during the eighteenth century produced a changing attitude from the central authorities towards the Gypsies. A law from 1772 states that Gypsies should be included in the resident working population (Etzler 1944). However, there are no documents showing that local authorities actually allowed Gypsies to take up permanent residence.

1800–1954

Gypsies were now considered as vagabonds, and a law from 1804 states that they should be sent to the same public workplaces as other vagabonds (Hammarskjöld 1866: 64). After this specific legislation, the Gypsies were not subject to specific legal considerations until the end of the century (Etzler 1944: 126).

A vagabond act was passed by the Parliament in 1885 after extensive discussions. The act did not give any special consideration to the Gypsies. A new wave of Gypsies and other immigrants during the end of the century did create, however, demands for a specific law for foreigners (Hammar 1964: 133).

The debate focused on the problem of controlling the Gypsies because of their high mobility. The existing regulations were considered to be insufficient and there was a lack of knowledge about the number of the Gypsies and their way of earning their living. Thus, there was a demand for gaining control through specific measures (SOU 1923: 327). Parliament decided to include the Gypsy problem in the task of an already established committee, the poverty committee (*Fattigsvårdskommittén*).

The final committee report was not published until 1923. They supported the Aliens' Act of 1914, which prohibited the Gypsies to enter the country.

The only Gypsies who managed to enter and stay in the country between 1885 and 1914 were the small Kalderash groups that arrived from Russia at the turn of the century (SOU 1923). The prohibition lasted until 1954 when new legislation made it possible for Finnish Gypsies to enter Sweden (Nordström-Holm and Lind 1982: 46).

From the 1930s there are accounts, so far not documented, of an attempt to a dialogue between the Gypsies and the Swedish authorities initiated by Johan Dimitri Taikon (SOU 1956: 43). According to the same sources, Mr Taikon tried to get the authorities to allow Gypsy children to go to school, and supposedly it was this initiative that resulted in the setting-up of several schools for Gypsy children in Stockholm.

During the 1940s and 1950s there was growing concern about the situation of the Gypsies on the part of various educational, social, and Church authorities. A statistical survey of the social situation of the Gypsies revealed the appalling socio-economic situation of the Gypsies. The study showed, for example, that the majority of the Gypsies did not have a permanent home, and described the Gypsies as vagabonds without stable incomes. The need for schooling of Gypsy children had already been made clear by the studies carried out by the Gypsy Mission Foundation during the 1940s (Gunnarsson 1966). As a result of a government initiative to improve the situation of the Gypsies, the Gypsy Question was again raised in the Swedish parliament in 1954 (sou 1956: 43). Parliament decided to appoint a committee with the goal of determining the status and situation of the Gypsy people.

Post-1954 development

In 1956 the Swedish government decided to address the Gypsy Question in three main areas: housing, education, and labour (SOU 1956: 43). The housing conditions for the Gypsies of that time were considered miserable, one reason being the tough regulations of the camping sites. During the following twenty years, the housing issue was considered to be the key to success in the other two areas. The authorities acted in a mechanical fashion, believing that permanent housing was the sole requisite to solve the problems of schooling and adult employment. Housing conditions were improved but the results in the other areas were at best limited (Iverstam 1988).

It was Katarina Taikon (1932–95) who made known the Gypsies' views and aspirations on these and other issues (Taikon 1963), when during the 1960s she became the first Gypsy to participate in the public debate. Mrs.

Taikon criticised the patronizing attitude of the authorities towards the Gypsies and the ways the authorities tried to solve their social problems. She particularly criticised the view that the Gypsies are a helpless group and that the authorities have the solution for their future. Her critique did not impress the authorities, but by giving voice to her people she became an important symbol for both Gypsies and non-Gypsies.

In the beginning of the 1970s, Sweden had a Gypsy population which, apart from the Swedish Gypsies—descendants of the Gypsies who immigrated at the end of the nineteenth century—and a group of Finnish Gypsies, consisted of a growing group of Central- and East-European Gypsies. The expanding and more diverse Gypsy population made the failure of the old policies obvious even to the authorities. As a result, measures were introduced to make the children go to school and to persuade adults to work. The new policy introduced the so-called ‘Gypsy projects’, that is, various kinds of temporary local activities directly or indirectly aimed at improving the school results of Gypsy children, and to stimulate employment of adult Gypsies. With few exceptions these projects have not been more successful than earlier policies (Montesino 1993).

However, the new social and political climate during the 1970s improved both the conditions for dialogue between the authorities and the Gypsies, and the possibilities for the Gypsies to form their own organisations. The first institutional result of Gypsy activism was the founding of the Nordic Gypsy Council in 1973, representing Swedish–Finnish Gypsies as well as recent immigrant Gypsies from Central Europe and the Balkans. Today it has been transformed into The Roma National Federation (*Romernas Riksförbund*). However, it was not until the end of the 1980s that a real dialog started between the Gypsies and the Swedish authorities. Representatives for the Roma National Federation were then invited to participate in a discussion about the present and future situation of their people.

A positive result of this development is that the terms ‘Gypsy’ in the official documents and contexts has been replaced with ‘Rom’. This is positive because the term Gypsy in Swedish (*zigenare*) is pejorative in the same way that the term ‘traveller’ (*tattare*, now *resande* in Swedish) was in the first half of the last century.

The Roma people were declared a national ethnic minority by the Swedish parliament in 1999 and Romani was declared a minority language. But it is difficult to anticipate the consequences of these changes for the group. At the local level, authorities are generally very reluctant or slow to change

attitudes, incorporate new knowledge, or even to put existing policies into practice. As a result the Rom population in Sweden, with its mixed historical and social background and conditions, is still to a large extent treated and discussed in much the same way as over a hundred years ago. The remainder of this text discusses the role of the experts in this process.

The Gypsy expert

The Gypsy experts form a part of the history of Gypsies in Scandinavia. As mentioned initially, until recently only two aspects of this history have attracted the attention of researchers: the State–Gypsies relationship and the perceived specific character of the Gypsies; in other words, studies that have established the Gypsies as different in the negative sense of the word. Included in this body of work are studies, based on new or old criteria, that attempt to pin-point the various groups that are to be included under the overall label ‘Gypsies’. To understand mainstream society’s attitude towards the Gypsies it is important to consider the role of the Gypsy expert. He has always been positioned between the State and the Gypsies, and it has been he himself that has defined and interpreted the nature of this relationship. Since the beginning of the twentieth century and until the end of the 1960s, the intellectual debate about Gypsies in Sweden was dominated by four persons: Arthur Thesleff (1871–1920), Allan Etzler (1902–80), Ivar Lo Johansson (1910–90) and Carl-Herman Tillhagen (1906–).

These experts on Gypsy issues have been practically the only source of information about Gypsies for the Swedish authorities including the social services (social workers, schoolteachers, etc.). These men played a key role in designing Swedish public policy towards the Gypsies. If we take Thesleff as an example: he was a member of the commission that examined the so-called Gypsy Question in Finland. The study, produced in 1900, was later used as a basic manual for an official report that was published in Sweden in 1923 (SOU 1923: 2). This work was a part of a larger study of vagrancy, which in turn was part of a comprehensive report on the so-called Poverty Question. Carl-Herman Tillhagen, who collaborated in the 1956 official Swedish report on Gypsies as an expert (SOU 1956: 43), used the appendix on Gypsies in the report of 1923 as a ‘reliable’ source. Tillhagen, in turn, became a ‘reliable’ source in later studies.

Thus, the study of the role of Gypsy experts would be a useful device to understand both policy contents and changes of policies. The validity of

the image of the Gypsy people presented by the Gypsy experts remained unquestioned until the last couple of decades, and in practice their sources of information, their basic ideas and the problems they formulated have not yet been questioned. Moreover, these old images still condition both the non-Gypsy image of Gypsies and research of the situation of Gypsies in Sweden.

The public image of the Gypsy expert has always been that of the self-sacrificing intellectual in search of knowledge, regardless of obstacles encountered along the way. One important characteristic of the Gypsy expert is that he lives 'close to' or 'with' the Gypsies. Almost automatically this proximity to the object of study, i.e. to have access to a world into which no one else can enter, gives him credibility and expert status. At the same time it gives the experts a nimbus of sacrificing themselves for the noble cause of science and/or for the Gypsies.

This makes it important to expose the type of knowledge these experts have been reproducing and what kind of positions they have been advocating. In a society where the interaction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies is limited or non-existent, the experts have contributed to legitimate this distance. The inaccessibility of the Gypsy world has been one important feature in their writings that have further reinforced their positions as experts in the eyes of both authorities and public, and has also contributed to strengthen the stereotyped images of Gypsies.

The Swedish Gypsy experts have much in common with Gypsy experts of other nationalities, but their close collaboration with and dependency on the authorities have resulted in a strong identification with the public objectives of adaptation or assimilation of the Gypsy. In this context I also want to include the work of Eilert Sundt in Norway. While it was Grellmann who formulated the theoretical arguments behind the intervention of the State in the Gypsy question, it was Eilert Sundt who translated these proposals into a practical political reality in the Scandinavian context.

Eilert Sundt (1817–75) was a Norwegian priest who has been described as a pioneer in sociology and social anthropology (Mildböe 1968). His works on the poor and on Norwegian ethnology are well known, but his writings about the *Fantefolket* are known mainly within Gypsy research circles. *Fanter* was a social category made up of various impoverished and often migratory groups that were considered a problem by the authorities. Eilert Sundt conducted his research on behalf of the Norwegian State.

The earliest appearance of 'the Gypsy Question' as social phenomena had little to do with findings made by, or acts carried out by, specific individuals.

Neither Grellmann nor Sundt can be singled out as pioneers in this field, but the Gypsy Question was on the agenda during their respective times (Willems 1997; Mildbøe 1968). Both of them became important, through their influences on subsequent developments, but this importance stemmed mainly from the fact that they happened to say the 'right' things at the right moment and in the right circumstances.

The embryo of the 'Gypsy Question' had long before Grellmann's days been formulated as a category within the framework of the extensive legal system, which since the sixteenth century had been used against the destitute and itinerant parts of the population. There is an extensive body of work on this subject, e.g. Geremek (1986), Himmelfarb (1985). For special reference to the Gypsies, see Lucassen, Willems and Cottaar (1998).

During the nineteenth century the multitude of problems which arose from the more general problem of poverty were bundled together under the term 'Social Question'. In this diversifying of the poor mass of the population the Gypsies were placed under the category of vagrants. Vagrancy was made a criminal act by law during this period, while at the same time new ideas about the possibilities to turn these groups into 'useful citizens' began to gain a foothold. It was in this context that the notion of the 'Gypsy Question' was formulated and established.

When Grellmann's book was published it met an existing demand for knowledge about Gypsies among authorities in all European countries. This demand explains the prompt translation of the book into a number of languages. Adding to its popularity was the fact that it adhered to the existing view regarding the treatment of Gypsies, albeit in scientific language. In similar fashion, the Norwegian State paid much attention to Eilert Sundt and his proposals for a solution of the 'vagrancy question'.

The Fant question of Eilert Sundt and his followers

In 1850 Sundt proposed special state measures to 'solve' this 'question'. These measures would be financed by the state within the realm of the general poverty care. Sundt's proposal included the creation of workhouses where adults would be 'educated' to work. In accordance with the dominating opinion at the time, Sundt considered compulsion to be an adequate educational method as part of a longer treatment. Regarding the children, Sundt alternated between the proposal of placing them in special institutions or in families where they would be raised to law-abiding citizens.

Between 1855 and 1869, the Norwegian state set up a fund for the 'vagrancy question'. During this period adults were forced to live in permanent settlement in different municipalities and 256 children were placed in foster homes (1855–63). The *Fante-fund* was abolished in 1869 because of the lack of concrete results. Sundt's proposal was put into practice once again in 1897 under the leadership of the priest Oskar Wallnum. Wallnum emphasised the significance of a state effort aimed at the children. Until 1914 five children's homes for *fante* children had been set up and family placement established. According to Schlüter (1993), by 1970, 1,500 children had been transferred by force by what since 1935 was called the 'Norwegian mission among the homeless'.

The followers of Grellmann and Sundt went about their work in exactly the same way as their predecessors. They based their writings on earlier and contemporary research and adjusted the data they selected from these sources to dovetail with the historical discourses and social debates of their times. *Die Zigeuner. Ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksale dieses Volks in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprung* (1783) was to be the only published work written by Grellmann. Eilert Sundt's *Beretning om Fante-eller Landstrygerfolket i Norge* ('A story of the tramp or vagabond people in Norway') was published for the first time in 1850, later to be followed by four new editions, each one of them with additions contributed by the author.

Regarding Heinrich Grellmann, it has been known for a long time that the material and the conclusions contained in his works had already been presented in the works of writers who preceded him (Willems 1997). The same can be said about Eilert Sundt's works in Norway. Sundt (also) based his work on the writings of the authorities on the Gypsies at that time, Heinrich Grellmann and George Borrow. Their respective works and personal images were combined in Sundt's work and role as well as in the works and (self-appointed) roles of the subsequent Swedish experts: the expert who seeks a solution to the 'Gypsy Question' and the 'initiated' pioneer within his chosen field of research.

Arthur Thesleff

Arthur Thesleff (1871–1920), a typical exponent of the Gypsy Expert, was born into a Finnish–Swedish noble family of Viborg, Finland which then, and for another 47 years, was part of the Russian Empire. He studied botany

and his first academic publication in 1893 was on edible mushrooms in Finland. According to him, it was the study of mushrooms in the woods that brought him into contact with Gypsies. At first it was Romany, the language of the Gypsies, which attracted his interest, and this was also to be the subject of one of his published studies (1901a). In 1896 Thesleff was appointed as expert to a committee set up by the Finnish government with the openly declared intention to come up with proposals for measures against 'the infestations of the Gypsies'. As a part of this assignment he was, at the age of 27, awarded a special grant to study the 'Gypsy Question' in Hungary and the Balkans. Thesleff travelled with Gypsy groups in Finland and Sweden, and for shorter periods also in Russia, Hungary and Poland.

The first results of these field studies were presented to the Finnish Geographical Society in 1898 and the committee produced its report two years later. In this report Thesleff for the first time summed up his knowledge about Gypsies and his opinions on the Gypsy Question, and he also, as was intended from the outset, presented concrete proposals for a comprehensive official policy towards the Gypsies.

In 1904 Thesleff settled in Stockholm. During his first year in the Swedish capital he gave public lectures on the Gypsies Question and also published a short study on Gypsies. During these first years in Sweden he was also interviewed by the press on several occasions, thereby gaining a public reputation as the expert on the Gypsy Question.

After the participation in an aborted attempt to establish a Finnish colony in Argentina, Thesleff returned to Sweden in 1910. He had already in 1909 (while he was still living in Argentina) been described in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* as 'A most reliable authority upon Swedish Gypsies [and] well known to serious students of Gypsy Philology and Lore' (Erhenborg 1909: 118). In the same year Scott Macfie called him 'the greatest living authority on the Gypsy problem' (Borenus 1943: 1). In 1911, two years later, the first article by Thesleff appeared in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*. From 1911–12 he was the President of this Society.

Arthur Thesleff had much in common with the first European experts on Gypsies. Like many of them he lived with Gypsies for certain periods. Thesleff's descriptions and opinions were thus based on extensive 'field work'. Part of this fieldwork was a commission from the authorities with a clear purpose: to formulate 'solutions' to the 'Gypsy Question'.

In the eyes of the authorities and the general public it was primarily this direct contact with the Gypsies that established him as an expert. With

the other early Gypsy Experts he also shared the saint-like image of the self-sacrificing scientist who devotes himself to the noble cause of science and/or to help the Gypsies.

This very picture of the self-sacrificing expert is implicit in the knowledge that is produced by these experts. Connected to this picture, the Gypsies are portrayed as a people that live in a secretive society into which non-Gypsies cannot gain access. It is ascribed to the extraordinary qualities of the Gypsy expert that he has been able to gain entrance into this world. What exactly these qualities consist of is never made clear to the general public.

Thesleff's friend Borenus was one of those that bore responsibility for the image of the Gypsy expert as partaker of secrets which are withheld from the uninitiated, as can be seen from the following text:

I remember Arthur telling me that as a special and probably unique privilege, he was permitted to watch the utterly secret dancing performances of the Finnish Gypsies, performances which he described as being singularly impressive in their solemnity and almost ritual simplicity. (Borenus 1943: 6)

As late as in 1993 he was described as an intellectual who had abandoned name and fortune in the search of knowledge:

He made sensational findings as an expert on mushrooms. He uncovered the secret language of the Gypsies and the slang of the underworld of Stockholm and he founded a Finnish colony in Argentina. 'The Gypsy Baron' Arthur Thesleff was an upper-class man who degraded himself socially in the name of science. (Numelin 1993: 42; my own translation)

This story was repeated again in the year 2000:

He travelled not as a privileged scholar, but on foot, often seemingly without any plan. He ate, drank and slept with the people he met. His clothes were often shabby to the point of raggedness, and he gained another nickname: 'the blond bandit'. (Lundgren 2000: 129)

In the life and writings of Thesleff we find the first example of what was later to become the rule among the Swedish Gypsy experts, the dependence on and symbiosis with the authorities. From this time also stems the contradiction from, on the one hand, their often genuine interest in Gypsies, and on the other hand, their very tangible power position as representatives of the authorities. This latent power could always be evoked when the situation called for it. Thesleff himself give us an example of this phenom-

enon (Thesleff 1899: 26) when he cites an occasion when the Gypsies had confronted him in a rather hostile fashion and he, in retaliation, told the police where the Gypsies were heading with the instructions to 'teach them a lesson'. In the article Thesleff describes his joy when the police actually complied with his request.

The work of Arthur Thesleff

Today, Thesleff's name seldom appears in Swedish writings on Gypsies. His ideas about the Gypsies and the Gypsy Question are, however, very much alive, even to the degree that they still condition the treatment of the Gypsies by the authorities.

Arthur Thesleff himself did not present many original ideas about Gypsies. Like his German predecessor Heinrich Grellmann a century earlier, he was more of a compiler or synthesiser of existing knowledge. What distinguished him from Grellmann and from most other European predecessors, was the first-hand knowledge of Gypsies, which he obtained by travelling with groups of Gypsies. It is difficult to decide today how deep and comprehensive these contacts were. However, his own texts as well as later biographies makes us think that his contacts with Gypsies were more limited than rumours claimed during his lifetime (see, for example, Thesleff 1901b, Lagerborg 1921 and Borenus 1943).

Thesleff's arguments are based on a definition of Gypsies as a people who live as outsiders and that this situation cannot in the long run be tolerated. He notes that neither changes in their surroundings nor prosecution has been able to induce the Gypsies to change their way of living:

Neither time nor climate, politics or set examples have led to any change in the customs or habits of this people, nor in their religious or moral outlook, not even their language has been eradicated over time. (Thesleff 1899: 1; my own translation).

It is in this alleged resilience that he also finds the explanation for an otherwise unfathomable ability for survival. Thesleff sees cruel persecution as a thing of the past, his own time is seen as much more humane in the treatment of the Gypsies. He maintains that this less harsh treatment from the side of authorities has not induced the Gypsies to change their ways more than did the earlier, more brutal forms.

Thesleff's description of the nineteenth century as a more tolerant period than earlier times has been uncritically accepted by all subsequent accounts

of the history of the Gypsies. This description is, however, one that bears little resemblance with reality if one takes into consideration the new vagrancy laws, aimed at all migratory groups or individuals, which were introduced during this period. According to this law Travellers *and* Gypsies were categories of vagrants against whom especially harsh measures were to be taken. Travellers found guilty of vagrancy were sentenced to forced labour and Gypsies were expelled when found guilty of the same crime.

Inability to change was one of the most obvious characteristics of the Gypsies, according to Thesleff. Their life situation had always been that of impoverished outcasts. In a more humane and tolerant society, special measures to make the Gypsies change their way of living could be established. The search for these measures has been summarised under the term the 'Gypsy Question'. Thesleff, as first formulated by Grellmann at the end of eighteenth century and later reproduced by Sundt in Norway, thus also reproduced the Gypsy Question. He described the persecution and the ill-treatment which the Gypsies had been the victims of throughout the centuries:

There is one people in this world, with its own language and customs, who, homeless and without a native land, wander the roads poor and miserable. This people is called the Gypsies, and everywhere these Gypsies have been feared; but they have also been the object of a persecution which impossibly could have been more cruel. (Thesleff 1904: 3; my own translation)

He criticised this persecution not only for its barbarity, but also for its inefficiency to solve the Gypsy Question. In his 1900 report to the Finnish government he proposed different measures in this respect. He proposed coercive measures against both children and adults, and recommended a long-term official policy embracing several generations of Gypsies.

The inclination for vagrancy is not something that can be extinguished in one generation. Just as it has developed through many generations, it will also take generations to make it disappear. It is in the nature of the vagabond that runs in their veins, they do not know anything else. They are born with this disposition. (Wallnum quoted in Thesleff 1901b: 28; my own translation)

Thus, to Thesleff, the children were the key to the solution of the Gypsy Question and he proposed that they should be put in public children's homes from the age of 7. The objective for doing so, according to Thesleff, was:

. . . to separate them from the negative influence of their kinfolk, to break with traditions and as far as possible transform their minds. Thus making it possible for them, after having completed schooling, to enter their adult life without the prejudices and bonds that have tormented their ancestors generation after generation . . . (Thesleff 1901b: 122; my own translation)

The details of Thesleff's proposals were never put into practice, but his view of the Gypsies as incapable of taking care of themselves and their own destiny was not publicly questioned until the 1960s by Katarina Taikon. A different fate affected the group which was excluded by Thesleff's definition of Gypsy, namely the Travellers. They too had been the target of official measures until the 1960s (Broberg and Tydén 1991).

With Thesleff, the Gypsy Question remained well within the frame of socio-political thinking formulated as early as in the nineteenth century. He synthesised it in all its totality, and each and every one of his policy proposals are based on the same implicit preconceived assumptions: the belief in the superiority of his own culture and the gradual change towards a better future. Like his predecessors, Thesleff also maintained that the road to progress lies in education and that the children are the natural instruments of change.

Thesleff considered the task of changing the Gypsies a long-term job. He did not believe in the possibility of changing the adults, he wanted instead that the state should concentrate on the children. For adults he proposed compulsory settlement and the same laws that were valid for the poor in Finland. Thesleff's specific measures for the assimilation of Gypsy children had already been implemented in Norway.

The first measure proposed was an immediate change of legislation in order to stop all further Gypsy immigration to Finland. The other measures (compulsory settlement, institutional care for Gypsy children, etc.) would affect only Finland's 'own' Gypsies. (Observe the separation between 'our Gypsies' and 'the others'.) The proposal also suggested the creation of a state commission that would co-ordinate all efforts to the assimilation of the Gypsies, both by philanthropic and public organisations and institutions.

The commission would organise and carry out the registration of all Gypsies in the country. It was to register literacy, employment, criminality (including vagrancy), accommodation, etc. The Gypsies that were placed in institutional care would be registered with anthropometric descriptions and the old and sick would be placed in institutions. A Gypsy boarding school would be set up for children between 7 and 16 years old, where

they would be taught practical work. The children's contact with the Gypsy adults would be prevented by the school and the school would see that they came into contact with the non-Gypsy population. A proposal to sterilise the Finnish Gypsies was, however, vigorously opposed by Thesleff on the grounds that the 'improvement' of the Gypsies was a real possibility (Nordström-Holm and Lind 1982: 44).

Ivar Lo Johansson

Arthur Thesleff was the first Gypsy Expert in Sweden. After him came Ivar Lo Johansson. He was a writer and his interest in Gypsies had nothing to do with their adaptation. Like Borrow earlier, he saw the Gypsies as the last survivors of an idealised natural state. Ivar Lo Johansson was an exception in Swedish Gypsology because he opposed the kind of intervention that was advocated by the authorities. He participated in the debate and raised objections to these interventions. In 1929 he proposed the creation of a reservation so that these 'children of nature' could survive in spite of changes in their surroundings. In the 1950s and 1960s he again participated in the debate about Gypsies, this time more self-critical.

My opinion was that the Swedish Welfare State should be able to afford to have Gypsies as Gypsies. With more favourable conditions for them, they could constitute a resource. At least, the disturbance they made would be insignificant. This disturbance did not justify or allow the extermination of a minority. Society should be able to afford an anomaly such as the one Gypsies constituted. It was not romantic opinions one had to adopt in the Gypsy Question, only human ones. (Lo Johansson 1955: 227; my own translation)

In the 1950s he turned to the Secretary General of the UN so that he would bring pressure on the Swedish government to abolish the prohibition against Gypsy immigration (Lo Johansson 1955). Ivar Lo Johansson saw in this prohibition one of the causes of the social problems of the Gypsies. But like many of his opponents, he was stuck in the racist notions at the time of 'Gypsy of pure breed' or 'real Gypsy'. The Swedish Gypsies correspond to his notion of pure breed, but not the Travellers.

. . . the Swedish Gypsy-race has become a closed unity The Gypsies in Sweden may hence also racially clearly differentiate from the Travellers, with which they are popularly too often confused. (Lo Johansson 1955: 7; my own translation)

Allan Etzler

During the 1940s Allan Etzler was the main figure in the Swedish debate about the Gypsy Question. Etzler wrote a doctoral dissertation in history about the Gypsies, which included a dictionary of the Travellers Romani (Sandström 2000: 24). In this study he presents the theory that the Swedish Travellers had a Gypsy origin, being descendants of Swedish Gypsies from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Etzler made a survey of the early Swedish legislation to try to prove his thesis. His ideas about the Travellers coincided with the authority's conceptions since they claimed that the prohibition against Gypsy immigration was a way to prevent a rise in the numbers of Travellers.

His thesis caused considerable debate and inspired Adam Heymowski's (1969) study on Swedish Travellers and their ancestry. Heymowski tried to prove that the Travellers were a 'Swedish' social group. His sources were registers of the police and social authorities. He tried to make a sharp distinction between the Travellers and the Gypsies. However, he never reviewed the legislation to examine the arguments that legitimated that division by the end of the eighteenth century. In 1993 a new thesis was published which assumes that this distinction between Travellers and Gypsies to be proved evidence (Svensson 1993).

Carl-Herman Tillhagen

In the post-war period, the most important name among the Swedish Gypsy experts was Carl-Hermann Tillhagen, an ethnologist who worked closely with the authorities on official reports dealing with the 'Gypsy Question' (see for example SOU 1956: 43; Tillhagen 1955, 1957, 1962). At the beginning of the 1940s Tillhagen was employed at the Nordic Ethnological Museum in Stockholm where he got to know Johan Dimitri Taikon (see page 5), who introduced him to the Gypsy culture. Tillhagen can be described as the ideal type of Gypsy Expert; he got in touch with Gypsies through his work and when the 'Gypsy Question' received attention again in the fifties the authorities employ him as expert. Like earlier experts, he represents the spirit of the time. Gypsies, like other groups, were defined as socially handicapped and in need of special measures. His texts and his role in the Swedish Gypsy policy deserve more attention than is possible to grant here in the present discussion.

Tillhagen was engaged as adviser in the investigation of the Gypsy Ques-

tion in 1956. He was also commissioned to conduct a study interviewing Swedish Gypsies. During the sixties he continued to be engaged as a Gypsy expert. Between 1962 and 1963 he carried out an investigation about the social situation of Gypsies (Tillhagen 1965). In 1965 he participated in the follow-up of the different measures that the social services carried out among Gypsies. He wrote articles and reports in the press. Between 1962 and 1965 he participated in the socio-medical study that was carried out in parts of the country. He also wrote essays and articles about the Gypsy culture. He published his articles in Sweden and in *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (Tillhagen 1958, for instance).

Tillhagen started out from the earlier formulated 'Gypsy Question'. His studies focused on the group of Kalderash Gypsies that had lived in Sweden since the end of the eighteenth century. He made a selection of certain statements about Gypsies that pictured them as helpless and poor. The selection included the romantic image of Gypsy life created at the end of the eighteenth century. According to these ideas, Gypsies lived a nomadic life and could manage on their own without having to change their way of life. Tillhagen shared this view but also argued that the Gypsies had been victims of social development. Their knowledge was obsolete; they needed help from the state to get along, and an intermediary was necessary in this process:

The Commission considers it an absolute necessity for an effective solution of the Gypsy problem that a person interested in the Gypsies and with insight into their needs and wishes should have the power to help them solve their difficulties.' (SOU 1956: 104; my own translation)

Like Thesleff earlier, Tillhagen asserted that Gypsies were doomed to disappear as a group. The question was how to accelerate this process and make it less painful. It was the state's moral responsibility to see that Gypsies were helped in this process.

State measures can both mitigate and in some areas neutralise for the Gypsies the harmful effects of the uprooting of their old traditions and give them a better starting position in the difficult adaptation problems that development have caused them. (Tillhagen 1965: 22; my own translation)

When the state started to finance different projects at a local level, the phenomenon of 'expert' started to appear locally as well. Within the different institutions (the social welfare service, the school, etc.) there is today always

an expert to whom these assertions do not even have to be put into words: they are part of their unconscious 'facts'.

After Tillhagen and during the 1960s the traditional experts met with competition from a small number of left-leaning academics, like John Takman (1966) and Arne Trankell (1975), who took active interest in the Gypsy Question on the grounds that the Gypsies were a disadvantaged group that needed protection. They were engaged in different studies about the situation of Gypsies (housing conditions, health, education, etc.). They often criticised the authorities' passivity in solving the practical problems that affected the Gypsy population, but seldom questioned the basic ideas of the authorities about the future of the Gypsies.

Tilhagen saw the Gypsies as socially handicapped and in need of rehabilitation. The experts that came after him have worked in much the same way, especially those experts who worked for the social authorities at local level. During the 1960s the Swedish authorities included the Gypsies in the various political programs that were established with the aim of adjusting marginal groups into mainstream society. These special programs were divided into different subprograms, which were defined to be strategic for the 'solution of the Gypsy Question'; they included in the first place housing and education. Providing a permanent domicile for the Gypsy families would, according to the expert's prognoses, lead to a solution of the school issue for the children and the employment problem for the adults.

These programs were formulated at the state level and were first meant for the Gypsy group that had lived in Sweden since the end of the eighteenth century. During the 1970s the newly immigrated Gypsies were also included in the same kind of measures. Literacy teaching for the adults supports measures for school children, projects for Gypsy youth administered by the National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare, family guidance activities etc. (see, for example, Iverstam, Johansson, and Wall 1978; Iverstam 1988; Marta 1979; Nordström-Holm and Lind 1982; the Swedish Immigration Board, SoS, 1981.)

In these projects the 'Gypsy Question' was again invoked: there is a problem which demands a solution, the solution demands special measures, and these measures cannot be formulated without specialised knowledge. Consequently, at local level a new generation of experts appeared; experts who within their field of expertise (most often within the school system and/or within social service) kept alive the myth of the unique expert access to the world of the Gypsies. The Gypsy Question became their catechism.

Regardless of the event and the situation, in the civil servant world, the Gypsies constitute a problem to be solved through the implementation of specific measures.

Most of the social projects—school support to Gypsy children, labour-market measures for Gypsies of working age, school activity for adults—show very poor results. These failures are explained by making reference to the enormous difficulties involved in working with Gypsies: the children's 'deviant behaviour', the parents' 'inability to help their children', the youth's lack of work discipline, the Gypsies' 'cultural resistance', etc. (Gustafsson 1970). Other project participants (those responsible for the project, project workers, and institutions involved) appear as to be beyond reproach. That these opinions are still very much alive is demonstrated in a recently published monograph (Arnstberg 1998).

Conclusions

The Swedish post-Thesleff Gypsy experts have taken on Thesleff's views of the Gypsy Question as the starting point of their own studies, and this is a stance which has imposed serious limitations on the results of their investigations and writings. Independently of their more or less friendly attitude towards the Gypsies, their premises were the premises of the authorities, conceptualised in the notion of the 'Gypsy Question'.

The Gypsy Question is closely related to a certain way of thinking and a model or paradigm of investigation. The Gypsy Question constitutes a problem that demands a solution, and to this end the Expert is indispensable. One may ask, however, if the Gypsy Expert is not an integrated part of the very problem that he formulates. The Gypsy Question presumes the existence of a problem and the necessity for a solution, and here the Experts assume the role of protagonists. The problem lies in the existence of a people that is different. The study of this group has concentrated on the analysis of those features that accentuate the differences and this has transformed the Expert into someone who is initiated into a sphere of knowledge into which non-Experts have no access. The Swedish Gypsy Experts have assumed the Gypsy Question as a reality and have claimed an exclusive right of the search for solutions to this problem.

Despite the fact that Gypsies today are represented in the debate, it is doubtful if their participation can reduce the influence of the conception of the 'Gypsy Question'. The problem is no longer the official language at

state level but the distance between the correctness of this language and the practical work of the civil servants.

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