

Imagining the ‘Gypsy’ and the Jew in Japanese Animation: The Case of Aikawa Shō and Mizushima Seiji

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Abstract This paper presents a comparative case study of the portrayal of ‘gypsy’ and Jewish characters in East Asian animation, particularly in Japanese anime. While researchers have not yet considered these motifs in this medium, this study aims to shed light on the unique factors which shape antigypsyist and antisemitic stigmas in anime. For this purpose, I analyze the 2005 Japanese animated film *Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa* by Aikawa Shō and Mizushima Seiji, embedding it in the discourse of East Asian animated films. It becomes evident that several factors can shape the portrayal of ‘gypsy’ and Jewish characters in the medium. These factors include collectivist social values, exoticization of the West, non-ethnocentric visualization, and the use of conventions from gaming culture. I conclude that these factors need to be considered in order to properly understand the issues and potentials in the portrayal of ‘gypsy’ and Jewish characters in East Asian animated films. Accordingly, the case study illustrates the importance of transmedial and transcultural studies in research on antigypsyism and antisemitism.

Zusammenfassung Dieser Beitrag ist eine vergleichende Fallstudie zur Darstellung von „Zigeuner“-Figuren und jüdischen Charakteren im ostasiatischen Zeichentrickfilm, insbesondere im japanischen Anime. Während diese Motive in diesem Medium bisher von Forschenden nicht berücksichtigt wurden, zielt diese Studie darauf ab, die Faktoren zu beleuchten, die antiziganistische und antisemitische Stigmata im Anime beeinflussen. Hierzu analysiere ich den japanischen Zeichentrickfilm *Fullmetal Alchemist – Der Film: Der Eroberer von Shamballa* von Aikawa Shō und Mizushima Seiji, kontextualisiert durch den Diskurs ostasiatischen Zeichentrickfilme. Es zeigt sich, dass einige Faktoren die Darstellung von „Zigeuner“-Figuren und jüdischen Charakteren in dem Medium beeinflussen können. Zu diesen Faktoren gehören, kollektivistische Wertvorstellungen, Exotisierung des Westens, nicht-ethnozentrische

Visualisierung und die Nutzung von Konventionen aus der Gaming-Kultur. Ich komme zu dem Schluss, dass diese Faktoren berücksichtigt werden müssen, zwecks eines angemessenen Verständnisses von Problemen und Potentialen in Darstellungen von „Zigeuner“-Figuren und jüdischen Charakteren in ostasiatischen Zeichentrickfilmen. Folglich verdeutlicht die Fallstudie die Bedeutung transmedialer und -kultureller Erforschung von Antiziganismus und Antisemitismus.

Not only live-action films but also animated films make use of anti-gypsyist and antisemitic narratives. All media creators participate in discourses. According to Foucault, not only can we define discourses as “groups of signs” but we can also treat them “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (54), assuming that reality is constructed through the signs that compose discourses. Signs can be images or verbal language. Media products, for example, might reflect and shape the thinking of the recipients and their resulting behavior towards Romani people and Jews. But before we can explain the consequences of a discourse, it must be clear which signs make up the discourse. This involves examining various media and their specific presentations.

Antigypsyism researchers have so far neglected animated films, although this medium has specific tools of presentation.¹ For example, the characters can be more uniform in appearance than human actors, as animators do not have to take individual looks into account. This facilitates the use of visual contrast between different groups, achieved through elements such as skin color or facial features. This means that in this medium, groups can visually be more clearly indicated than in life-action films. Other than this, no further statement can be made about how a group of people is represented in animated films, since

1 One notable exception is the case study by Peter Bell on the Disney adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The visual language of animated films is similar to that of comics, and we find multiple relevant case studies in this medium (see Mihok). Dirk Suckow's case study examines the use of exaggeration as well as minimization of visual contrast in comics. Dolle-Weinkauff identifies two categories of 'gypsy' portrayal in this medium: the realist and the (semi-)funny style. The latter can evoke humor but also express a naive style of storytelling. Additionally, Hertrampf and von Hagen provide a historical approach to the subject. However, there is still much research to be done on the unique 'gypsy' portrayal in animated films and comics. Furthermore, there is currently no study investigating antigypsyism within the broader culture of these media. Except for Korff's work (*Manga*), the 'gypsy' motif in East Asian animated films remains largely unexplored.

the different styles of these films make them unique. Japanese animated films (anime) and their style have dominated Western markets for years. Along with games and comics (manga), anime is the most widely consumed media from Japan and has a larger audience than live-action films from that country. Therefore, they are also of great relevance within popular culture and its discourses. Anime often uses European history and motifs as central themes. Western imagery is imported to the East Asian world, modified according to local narrative as well as aesthetic conventions, and then re-exported worldwide. The imaginary images of 'gypsies'² and Jews will be examined here in order to gain a better understanding of how these characters are depicted in animation in the East Asian context.

Following this epistemological interest, the paper presents a case study of a Japanese anime film: *Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa* from 2005. The director is Mizushima Seiji, known for anime series like *Shaman King* (2001–2002) and *Mobile Suit Gundam 00* (2007–2009). Aikawa Shō is the author of the script. The film is a historical fantasy that blends a historical scenario with fantastical elements. It has won several awards at the Tokyo Anime Fair, the Animation Grand Award at the Mainichi Film Awards, and multiple international prizes. In addition, *Fullmetal Alchemist* is one of the most famous franchises in Japanese manga and anime culture. The film critically deals with the themes of antigypsyism and antisemitism, which will be discussed in detail in the following pages. Still, there are aspects regarding the plot and character design that we can consider problematic.

In my paper, I conduct a comparative character analysis to demonstrate clichéd notions of the 'gypsy' and the Jew in the film *Conqueror of Shamballa*. I argue that the story and character should be examined within the context of anime discourse. First of all, I analyze a selection of scenes to illustrate how stereotypes are used to construct the 'gypsy' and the Jew in the film. This is followed by an analysis that focuses on the motivation and personal fate of the characters. Additionally, I take a closer look at their role in the narrative pattern, which falls within the genre of scientific romance—a precursor to science fiction.³

2 I use this term to refer to a fictional category within a constructed, fictional world. This category is distinct and separate from the diverse real-life situations of Romani people.

3 According to Chatman, there “seems no self-evident reason to argue the primacy of action as source of traits” (110). Rather than attempting to define character traits solely based on the plot, my approach focuses on how the narrative pattern of

Finally, I discuss how the findings are interrelated to the discourse of East Asian animated films.

The film serves as a sequel to the anime series *Fullmetal Alchemist* from 2003/2004, which is also directed and written by Mizushima and Aikawa.⁴ Here is a brief synopsis of the film: Edward Elric, the protagonist, is a citizen of the fictional country of Amestris, a quasi-magical, fantastic place ruled by alchemy rather than modern science. Similar to our world, it is plagued by war, racism, and social inequality. Unintentionally, Edward finds himself transported from his parallel universe to our world, specifically to the city of Munich in 1923. There, he encounters Noah, a show-woman and fortune-teller who is referred to as a 'gypsy.' Noah, accompanied by fellow 'gypsy' women, is en route to work at a carnival when her co-workers betray her by selling her to a man of the Thule Society.⁵ The fascist Thule Society pursues Noah, convinced that her supernatural abilities can aid them in opening a gateway to a mythical kingdom known as Shamballa. Once this is accomplished, they want to conquer this other world and use its legendary powers for the political rise of the German Empire. However, Edward saves Noah from the Thule Society. Meanwhile, as a 'gypsy,' she is repeatedly confronted with everyday racism in the course of the story, seen by others as a drifter, thief, and seductress of Edward. By chance, he also meets the Jewish filmmaker Mabuse, who later reveals his true identity as Fritz Lang. Fearing the national socialists, he tells Edward about the issue of antisemitism and his plans to emigrate to the USA. Eventually, Noah, the 'gypsy' girl, decides to assist members of the Thule Society in their efforts to create a gateway to Shamballa. She has a strong desire to find a true home, a place where there is no hatred towards people like her, 'gypsies.' The opening of the gateway is successful, but Edward manages to destroy it.

scientific romance matches the characters' motivation and personal fate. In this perspective, plot and characters are seen as complementary elements, working in tandem with each other.

- 4 Approximately two thirds of this anime series is based on the Japanese comic (manga) of the same name by Arakawa Hiromu.
- 5 As Mizushima explains in an interview for the *Making of*, the man is Erik Jan Hanussen. Originally intended to play a more important role, his storyline was ultimately edited out of the film. The historical Hanussen was an occultist national socialist, despite being Jewish. His Jewish identity was omitted in the final version of the film, making it irrelevant to the context discussed here.



Fig. 1. Screenshot from the animated film *Fullmetal Alchemist: Der Eroberer von Shamballa* (2005. KSM, 2015). Edward and Heiderich blush because of the 'gypsy' women's beauty.

Introducing the Characters

Some of the traits of the 'gypsy' and the Jew in the film are based on centuries-old motifs drawn from Western imagination, as will be outlined here. To begin with, I examine the scene that introduces Noah. On their way to a carnival, Edward and his friend Heiderich hitch a ride on a truck bed. "These Gypsies, too, are going to open a shop at the carnival"⁶ (8:08–8:13), the driver explains to the two boys, referring to the other passengers. All are young women in colorful garments and have a much darker complexion than Edward and Heiderich, who are fair-skinned and blond. After getting into the car, the boys blush because of the 'gypsy' women's beauty (**Fig. 1**). During the ride, they get to know Noah. The other women explain her special abilities: "It is fortune-telling" and "She has the reputation to be right" (8:33–8:36). Without asking permission, Noah touches Edward briefly, then backs away and says: "You are ... the same as us ... No ... home" (8:57–9:01). Shortly thereafter, the women begin to sing in Romani; some of them

6 Translations by the author. The Japanese term "jipushi" ("ジブシー") is a transcription of the English word "gypsy"; both terms carry the same meaning.

have drums and start playing.⁷ After this scene, they arrive at the carnival, where Noah is sold by her co-workers and gets into trouble because of her ‘gypsy’ background.

Noah’s introductory scene bears striking resemblances to the initial scenes in Tony Gatlif’s film *Gadjo Dilo* (1997). There, a young, non-‘gypsy’ man manages to hitch a ride on a truck bed (3:03–3:20). In the next scene, he is already out of the car and walking behind a wagon. The wagon is full of female ‘gypsy’ passengers, marked by their colorful robes, who start singing in their language while looking back at him (3:20–5:09). These similarities do not prove that the producers of *Conqueror of Shamballa* knew Gatlif’s film. Rather, the similarity exemplifies the recurrence of motifs in the global discourse of ‘gypsy’ characters in fictional works.

Compared to the initial scenes in *Gadjo Dilo*, the motifs in *Conqueror of Shamballa*, which are used to construct the ‘gypsy’ character, are much denser. Fortune-telling, showmanship, colorful garments, and the young, beautiful, and glowing ‘gypsy’ girl with her passionate musical skills: all these appear simultaneously in Noah’s introductory scene. They are centuries-old *topoi* of Western entertainment culture.⁸ This also applies to the idea of a nomadic lifestyle that is implied in Noah’s statement of having no home.⁹ This implication is also described by Brittnacher: “As correlate of the nomadic lifestyle, homelessness is a central element of the Gypsy image”¹⁰ (155). The historical context of the plot in

7 The song they are singing is titled “Kelas” (Let’s Dance). It was exclusively composed for this film by the Romani musician Ferenc Snétberger from Hungary and performed by the German Afro-Sintezza Tayo Awosusi (the term “Afro-Sintezza” is self-referential, as Awosusi mentions in one of her articles from 2014). You can find more information about the original soundtrack audio cd in its attached materials (Michiru). “Kelas” is about a girl and a boy who met one night, danced together, and enjoyed themselves. As Mizushima states, the production initially wanted a song about carnival, but Snétberger rejected the idea and realized his own concept (Audio Commentary with the Crew). This represents a significant example of Romani participation in the film project.

8 Moreover, the antigypsyist motif of criminality is reproduced: Noah is betrayed and sold by her co-workers, becoming a victim of human trafficking. This narrative reinforces the stereotype of ‘gypsies’ being involved in criminal activities, with Noah being the exception that proves the rule of criminal ‘gypsies.’ The idea of human trafficking by ‘gypsies’ is closely tied to the centuries-old narrative of child theft by this group (Brittnacher 171–180; Mladenova *Patterns*).

9 For a detailed overview of antigypsyist attributes, their origin, and tradition, see Bogdal and Brittnacher.

10 “Als Korrelat der nomadischen Lebensweise ist die Heimatlosigkeit ein zentrales Element der Zigeunerimago” [my translation, J.K.].

Conqueror of Shamballa and its theme of antigypsyism identify these fantastic 'gypsy' characters with Sinti and Roma. However, Noah and her co-workers are not representative of the reality of Romani people in Weimar Germany. The majority of Sinti and Roma had led sedentary lives for many centuries, having regular jobs in the midst of society.¹¹ One might object: do the characters have to be representative of a minority group? Certainly not, but such images have dominated the discourse in entertainment culture for centuries. There are not enough alternative depictions. Not only hateful depiction but also idealizing stereotyping (philogypsyism) and othering contribute to the idea of a homogeneous group of people. In *Conqueror of Shamballa*, the characters are designed as exotic members of an alien, peripheral, and isolated culture.

Similar to Noah's initial appearance, the introduction of the character Fritz Lang is connected to a car journey. As Edward has his lunch in the city of Munich, he spots Lang in a car accompanied by a chauffeur. Struck by Lang's resemblance to the dictator from his homeland of Amestris (important detail: many characters in the Munich of 1923 resemble those from the parallel universe of Amestris), Edward decides to follow them. After the sun sets, Edward sets up a trap further down the road, forcing the car to come to a halt. He overpowers the chauffeur and claims the seat beside Lang. Lang, sharing Edward's fair complexion, is dressed in a black suit adorned with a red bow tie, and he even sports a monocle (**Fig. 2**). Despite the assault, Lang remains remarkably composed. It dawns on Edward that he has mistaken this man for someone else. Filled with regret, he apologizes to which Lang responds: "I am Jewish. If you look at it as a rich Jew, you are used to it, because there are many patriots who attack you. By the way, can you drive?" (25:20–25:38), gesturing towards his unconscious chauffeur. He introduces himself as Mabuse and reveals his destination—a castle where he seeks inspiration for his ongoing film project.

In contrast to Noah, the character of Fritz Lang is based on a historical figure, the world-famous film director Fritz Lang (1890–1976).¹² During

11 This has been examined in several local studies in the German-speaking world. An example is one of Sandner's case studies, where he considers the situation of Sinti and Roma after but also before 1933 in the city of Frankfurt (25–48). Additionally, Pientka briefly touches upon the life circumstances of the minority in Berlin (24–25).

12 The plot of the *Fullmetal Alchemist* franchise is likely to be inspired by Lang's films in certain aspects. A tribute might be the reason for his appearance in *Conqueror of Shamballa*. In both the manga and the television series, the future scientist Edward sacrifices his right arm and left leg in an attempt to revive his deceased mother. He



Fig. 2. Screenshot from the animated film *Fullmetal Alchemist: Der Eroberer von Shamballa* (2005. KSM, 2015). Lang is seen seated in the car, while Edward gazes at him from the right.

the year 1923, Lang resided in Berlin, having just finished his two-part film *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922). In the following year, he directed *Die Nibelungen*. Lang was highly accomplished and very wealthy (Grob 93–162). Furthermore, he wore a monocle, possibly due to an injury to his left eye during the First World War (Grob 54–55). While Lang’s upbringing was Catholic, he likely considered himself to be an atheist.¹³ As his mother was Jewish before she converted to Christianity (Ott 10), he later must have been seen by the Nazis as non-‘Arian.’ Concerned about the rise of National Socialism, Lang first migrated to France in 1933 before eventually relocating to the USA in 1934 (Grob 193–230). In the film *Conqueror of Shamballa*, he is depicted as identifying himself as Jewish.

The first impression of the fictional Lang suggests a cliché that connects Jews with wealth. This is the portrayal of Lang wearing an eye-catching and classy outfit, accompanied by his chauffeur and his explicit statement that “rich Jews” (orig.: “kanemochi no yudayajin,” “金持ちのユダヤ人”) like him would be frequently attacked. This motif

replaces his lost limbs with metal prosthetics. This pivotal moment in the series bears striking similarities to an original scene from Lang’s film *Metropolis* (1927), where the scientist Rotwang sacrifices one of his hands to create a mechanical replica of his lost love. He, too, compensates for his missing body part with a metal prosthesis.

13 Both Lang and his wife, Latte, have made statements supporting this claim (McGilligan 477; Gunning 7).

is old and linked to a notion of power (Geiger 16–24), further manifested in the film by Lang's similar look to the dictator of Amestris and his pseudonym Mabuse. Mabuse is the name of a criminal genius in the novel and Lang's film adaptation.¹⁴ According to Geiger, "in many depictions the 'material motif' fulfils [...] the function [...] to identify the apparently 'true reasons' for the anti-Jewish hate"¹⁵ (21). The "material motif," meaning the motif of the rich and influential Jew, also applies here. Without offering further context, the film presents antisemitism as social envy that erupts in violence against a Jewish elite: the wealthy and influential Jew as an antisemitic cliché.

The film *Conqueror of Shamballa* addresses the issues of antigypsyism and antisemitism, but it also reproduces centuries-old clichés. Noah is attributed with stereotypical 'gypsy' traits, drawing from familiar portrayals in Western audiovisual fiction, reminiscent of the aforementioned film *Gadjo Dilo*. Similarly, the character Lang embodies the cliché of a rich and influential Jew, disregarding the historical figure upon which the character is based. While these two designs share certain similarities, they also exhibit notable differences. These will prove relevant in the subsequent stages of the analysis. To further explore the characters, their motivations and fates within the narrative will be assessed. Thereafter, the findings will be examined in relation to the discourse of East Asian animated films.

No Exile in Utopia

It has been demonstrated that the film *Conqueror of Shamballa* portrays the characters Noah and Lang as deviating from societal norms: Noah as the fantastic 'gypsy' show-woman and Lang as the rich Jew. What are the practical implications of their shared characteristic of being 'different' within the film's narrative? This will be explored here by elaborating on the characters' motivation and personal fate.

14 The pseudonym Mabuse, in combination with the character's occupation as a filmmaker, might serve as a clue for the audience to identify the character as Fritz Lang before his true identity is revealed. Furthermore, the choice to depict Lang and the dictator from Edward's world with a similar appearance can lead to the conclusion that looks can be deceiving.

15 "In vielen Darstellungen erfüllt das 'materielle Motiv' [...] die Funktion [...] die scheinbar "wahren Gründe" für den Judenhass [...] zu identifizieren" [my translation, J.K.].



Fig. 3. Screenshot from the animated film *Fullmetal Alchemist: Der Eroberer von Shamballa* (2005. KSM, 2015). Fritz Lang drinks a cup of tea with the backdrop of the Drachenfels. Siegfried, the protagonist of *Die Nibelungen*, fights against the dragon at the Drachenfels.

One theme that stands out in the film is the concept of journeys between parallel universes, particularly between a rational and a fantastical world. Through the characters Noah and Lang, social exclusion and exile emerge as central elements of the story. Noah's personal goal is obvious: she supports the Thule Society because she wants to escape into the fantastic and mythical realm of Shamballa in search of a place she can call home. In contrast, Lang's motivation requires closer examination, as it is not as clear. A pivotal scene sheds light on Lang's position within the duality of the rational and the fantastical. He invites Edward to the UFA film studio in Berlin, where he reveals his true identity as Fritz Lang. Edward witnesses the production of scenes for the film *Die Nibelungen* (1924), a mixed adaptation of two fantastical works of Nordic and German saga: the *Poetic Edda* and the *Nibelungenlied*. During this scene, Lang states, "I am thinking about going to America. I read novels from there to learn English" (54:16–54:21), and he explains, "There are a lot of literary works with scientific themes called Scientific Romance ... Recently, there was an interesting one among them. In this novel, it is said that there are several worlds parallel to ours and the same as ours, except for a few details. Shall we call them parallel worlds?" (54:26–54:45). Eventually, they have tea on the set, in front of the backdrop of the *Drachenfels* (Fig. 3). The scenery symbolically

draws attention to the immersion into another world. Lang says, "I am a Jew they [the Nazis] want to expel" (58:04–58:09). Still, even if he could agitate against the Nazis, he lacks the inclination to do so. Lang prefers to devote himself to creating his fantastic worlds, expressing, "If one wants to make war, let him. Work with me instead" (57:46–57:51). Outraged, Edward concludes their conversation with the words: "You're pretending to live inside a dream, but really, you're scared. Reality will encroach upon that dream" (58:15–58:21).

This dialog highlights not only Lang's ignorance regarding the national socialists he fears but also Edward's discovery of Lang's escapism through his fantastical film projects. This revelation uncovers that not only Noah but also Fritz Lang desires to escape from a hostile environment into fantastical worlds. Consequently, the film implies that antigypsyism and antisemitism are two phenomena that yield similar results, as Noah and Lang have the same motivation.

The characters' tragic pursuit of personal peace and fulfilment in an alternative, improved reality follows a narrative pattern that is closely tied to the genre of scientific romance, a precursor to modern science fiction. This connection is explicitly referenced by one of the characters, Lang, in the previously mentioned scene, where he alludes to an unnamed work of scientific romance. Within this genre, Herbert G. Wells (1866–1946), as one of the fathers of science fiction, must be highlighted (cf. Bould/Vint 13–16). In 1923, the same year depicted in the film, Well's book *Men like Gods* was published, wherein the protagonist accidentally travels to a parallel universe that reveals itself to be a utopia. Upon his return to his own world, he is determined to transform it into a similar utopia. While the story of the film *Conqueror of Shamballa* aligns with Wells' concept of utopian parallel worlds, it offers a different, tragic interpretation. On the one hand, Shamballa is not only desired by the Thule Society as a source of enormous power but is also idealized by Noah as her own utopia, despite being plagued by war and racism, much like the rational world on Earth in 1923. On the other hand, Lang's fantastic worlds represent a completely human-made experience, subject to his will. He determines them as utopian or dystopian, pleasant or tragic, naturalist or fantastical. However, these worlds fail to save him from the threats of the rational world. As a result, the film refutes Wells' concept of utopia, depicting it as an unattainable illusion. While the film may seem to have a happy ending due to the people being saved from the Thule Society, neither Noah nor Lang find a way out of their misery. Thus, they also share the same fate.

The Discourse of Anime

Building upon the findings derived from the analysis of the film's narrative, character traits, and motivations, it becomes evident that the film can be situated within a specific discourse of anime. The discourse encompasses the distinctive characteristics of the medium in portraying Jewish and 'gypsy' characters. In order to illustrate this, relevant elements within the discourse will be exemplified here.

Firstly, we can interpret the characters' common fate, the failure of Noah's and Lang's personal goals, as their own fault, aligning with the values of collectivist thought. According to the psychologist Yamaguchi Susumu, collectivism "is defined as a tendency to weigh group goals more heavily than personal goals when the two are in conflict" (187). This tendency can be observed in the anime *Conqueror of Shamballa*. Throughout the story, Edward's personal goal of returning to his home, Amestris, is being superseded by his motivation to prevent the Thule Society from opening the gate to Shamballa. It becomes the hero's morally superior interest to save the people of both worlds from evil machinations. In contrast, the personal goals of Noah and Lang are portrayed negatively. Noah supports the antagonists, the Thule Society, while Lang chooses to ignore the issue and plans to leave the country, figuratively speaking, to run away. Consequently, the hero confronts Lang in the scene in the UFA studio.¹⁶ Ultimately, Edward's success in stopping the Thule Society disregards anyone's personal goals. In short, it is implied that Noah and Lang fail due to their selfishness or ignorance. This narrative matches a collectivist ideal that appears to be more often dealt with in anime than in Western animation (Whitehurst 523–524; Somers 170; cf. Yamaguchi 175–176).

Secondly, *Conqueror of Shamballa* portrays interwar Germany in an exoticizing manner. Rather than focusing on the imagination of the Other, the story emphasizes the individual's otherness as a factor that leads to social exclusion. While the film does depict evident symptoms of violence and persecution, it fails to challenge the underlying notion of 'gypsies' and Jews as 'strange' minorities and instead presents it as a truth. This aligns with a common tendency in East Asian popular culture, where Western themes are often exoticized (cf. Korff, *Manga*).

Thirdly, Noah's ethnic depiction stands out due to visual language in anime being usually much less ethnocentric than in Western animated

16 Ultimately, Lang comes to support Edward, but not before being convinced by him.

films. The visual difference between Noah and Lang is apparent: Noah and the other 'gypsy' characters have dark skin, contrasting with the otherwise fair-skinned environment. Mladenova demonstrates how skin color, clothing, and lighting contrast 'gypsy' characters with non-'gypsies' in Western media, considering it essential to the 'gypsy' mask in live-action films (*Patterns* 129–136; *'Zigeuner'-Filme*). Mladenova remarks that “Hardly ever have Roma individuals been represented in the modus of whiteness and, in that sense, visually privileged” within Western media (*Patterns* 35). However, ethnic contrasting is unconventional in the East Asian context. Characters' ethnicities in East Asian animated films often remain unclear and unmarked. While non-Japanese characters may not be identified visually as such, Japanese characters with blond hair are not uncommon. Consequently, 'gypsy' characters with fair skin and blond hair are also not unusual in East Asian animated films (Korff, *Manga* 263–267, 278–287). Nonetheless, anime sometimes does incorporate visual contrast between 'gypsies' and non-'gypsies,' as exemplified by the character Noah. Noah's visual design, particularly her skin color, identifies her as a 'gypsy' throughout the film, even if she does not wear colorful dress or undertake distinguishable actions (dancing, fortune-telling, etc.).¹⁷ This identification is significant in evoking the theme of racism that the film addresses. Due to their usually non-ethnocentric visualization, East Asian animated films possess a remarkable potential to utilize ethnic picturing for exploring themes of ethnicity, including racism, while in Western animated films, it is the standard mode of visual language (Korff, *Manga* 266).

Lastly, anime draws inspiration from video game conventions, specifically the portrayal of 'gypsies' in historical fantasy settings. For centuries, fantastical 'gypsy' characters have represented the intrusion of the supernatural into the rational world.¹⁸ This convention is often seen in literature, theater, opera, and live-action film and is reinterpreted in international video games. On the one hand, 'gypsy' characters are uncommon in the literary genre of historical fantasy. On the other hand, in the same genre, they have been a convention in role-playing games since the 1980s and continue to be present in video games today (Korff, *"Zigeuner"-Motivik* 11–60). Many role-playing games present worlds where magic is commonplace and 'gypsy' characters are not out of

17 After Edward and Heiderich give shelter to Noah, she receives new clothes.

18 For an overview of the milestones in the motif of 'gypsy' fortune-telling, see Bogdal 71, Solms 48–50, and Brittnacher 245–250.

place due to their magical abilities. Anime often incorporates conventions of gaming culture, as the target audiences overlap (Steinberg viii). A prime example is the film *Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa*, where the world is magical even without the presence of Noah. The protagonist originates from a parallel universe, and the occultist Thule Society is aware of the existence of this other world. Many of the viewers who have seen the prequel, the fantasy anime series *Fullmetal Alchemist*, are familiar with the fantastical setting. The design of Noah represents the typical role of ‘gypsy’ characters in the genre of historical fantasy of video games, serving as a bridge between history and fantasy (Korff, “Zigeuner”-Motivik 19–20). Thus, the ‘gypsy’ character becomes further detached from the rational world that the audience inhabits. The film’s portrayal of ‘gypsy’ characters remains disconnected from the real-life Sinti and Roma in Weimar Germany, who are rendered invisible. In contrast, the fictional Lang, who plans to emigrate to the USA, embodies the cliché of the influential Jewish immigrant in the 1920s American entertainment industry.¹⁹

Conclusion

‘Gypsy’ and Jewish characters in fiction are not solely a Western phenomenon. In this case study, I examine the 2005 Japanese animated film (anime) *Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa* by Aikawa Shō and Mizushima Seiji, which deals with the themes of antigypsyism and antisemitism. While the film critically addresses these issues, certain aspects of it can be seen as problematic. The examination reveals that the film’s narrative and character designs interrelate with the discourse of anime.

In my analysis, I compare the traits and motivations of the fictional characters Noah and Fritz Lang. The film perpetuates clichés of the exotic ‘gypsy’ girl and the rich Jew, both of whom deviate from societal norms. These portrayals align with images often seen in Western media and do not connect to the diverse historical reality of the people they supposedly represent. Stereotypes are perceived as representative of these minorities if the audience is exposed solely to such images. However, *Conqueror of Shamballa* also draws upon central ideas found in scientific romance literature from the beginning of the twentieth

19 Carr provides an extensive overview of this cliché (1–96).

century to critically address the issues of antigypsyism and antisemitism. Its narrative revolves around the tragic pursuit of personal peace and fulfilment in an alternative, better reality. The 'gypsy' and the Jewish characters assume the roles of victims seeking to escape a hostile society. Despite their efforts, they fail due to being selfish or ignorant.

To fully understand the narrative, character traits, and fates depicted in *Conqueror of Shamballa*, it is necessary to consider them within the context of anime discourse. This discourse includes distinct features: collectivist social values, exoticization of the West, non-ethnocentric visualization, and the use of conventions from gaming culture.

Collectivist social values, frequently explored in anime, can pose challenges in portraying individuals who strive to empower in the face of being discriminated and socially excluded. Collectivist ideals may overshadow the needs of minority groups.

The exoticization of the West within anime can render antigypsyism and antisemitism invisible. By focusing on the spectacle of the Other, exploring discriminatory practices may take a backseat.

Non-ethnocentric visualization is prevalent in anime and results in the invisibility of ethnicity. Exceptions to this rule, such as the ethnic portrayals in *Conqueror of Shamballa*, emphasize the use of ethnic visualization for storytelling purposes in the anime context.

The use of conventions from gaming culture in anime, such as 'gypsy' characters in historical fantasy settings reminiscent of role-playing games, creates a fantastic portrayal by embedding them in a world that combines fantasy with history. This approach avoids othering 'gypsy' characters as supernatural intruders in an otherwise rational world. However, this departure from the actual world through a fantastical world may also hinder the understanding of real-life antigypsyism.

The findings discussed above offer an addition to previous case studies by considering East Asian animated films. Concrete examples were provided to enable us to classify narratives and character designs within the anime context. Through comparison, we gain an understanding of stigma in different media within different cultural contexts.

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Image Credits

Figs. 1–3 *Fullmetal Alchemist: Der Eroberer von Shamballa* (2005. KSM, 2015).

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