Chapter 2

Conceptual and Methodological Considerations in Researching “Roma Migration”

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This chapter provides a critical overview of research trends on “Roma migration” as they developed over the last decade, contextualizing the issue and setting the stage for the following chapters. Due to the alleged increase in the number of Roma individuals exercising their mobility rights from Eastern European countries to Western Europe –mainly after the 2004 and 2007 EU accession – researchers’ interest has shifted towards this new topic. Many scholars have started focusing in the past decade on the causes and consequences of Roma’s migration patterns, their life in the new countries, and the legal, citizenship and policy questions posed by the appearance of non-Western Roma in Western Europe. Although Romani studies have long been in the constructivist paradigm, “Roma migration” has spurred new tendencies to essentialise Roma groups, at least in political and public debates. This chapter reflects on the conceptual and methodological aspects of researching “Roma migration”. This main question will be addressed through the following sub-questions: What kind of analytical and conceptual tools do researchers employ in order to understand the current migration trends of Roma citizens? What approaches do we adopt, and how do we use ‘old’ concepts, such as “Roma” or “migrant”? In this chapter I also raise the issue of research ethics and of the responsibility of researchers during the processes of knowledge-production on “Roma migration”.

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2.1 The Multiple Faces of the Concept of “the Roma” and “the Migrant”

The aim of this chapter is to deconstruct the key concept of this book, the “Roma migrant”, and to present the dilemmas that as researchers in the field we need to reflect upon. There is a large pool of literature explaining the varieties of the concept of migration. Not only the concept (migration as a category of analysis), but the actual phenomenon that it describes (migration as a category of practice) is extremely complex, and this complexity is embedded in various discursive fields related to migration: the statistical, the legal and the academic, but also the political and public policy discourses. Definitions of “the migrant” are all but self-evident; they vary across different data sources and datasets as well as documents. However, policy makers and politicians are in dire need of reliable and comparable data about migration as it is a basic condition to manage migration, design policies and monitor their outcomes. Similarly, the academic and policy literature on the Roma is diverse in terms of how researchers conceptualize the group. The historically developed terminology is deeply rooted in the way majority societies or political elites have related to this community in a homogenizing, generalizing and often stigmatizing manner. The terminology itself has political, policy and social meanings and consequences (Surdu 2016), as does the conceptualization of this category in research and data collection (Messing 2014).

In the past decade “Roma migration”, or, rather, the migration of Roma people, reached the forefront of political and media discourses and raised heightened emotions and tensions within the European public sphere (Fox et al. 2012; Yildiz and Genova 2017; van Baar 2011). In order to provide a fair and critical approach to this phenomenon, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge and address the conceptual and methodological dilemmas of researching “Roma migration”, and to provide a framework that can allow us to hold an academic discussion of this phenomenon.

In the next section I will discuss the inherent ambiguities present in the conceptualization and in the methodological decisions that stem from the concepts of the two categories this volume aims at exploring: the “Roma” and the “migrant”. In the third section I will offer a concise overview of the existing data sources and emerging literature on “Roma migration”. The fourth part will consider the consequences of the conceptual and methodological choices supporting the main argument I put forward in this chapter: namely, that the interjection of the concept of migration into the complex and vague category of Roma has spurred a new essentialisation of the Roma. Such reflections will be summarized in the conclusions, where I argue that such essentialization is, to a large extent at least, the product of a political demand to measure, to control and to manage the mobility of Roma on behalf of the European Union. Policing and legislating “Roma migration” as separate from the mobility of non-Roma citizens is therefore inherently controversial; yet studying why such differentiation between “Roma migration” and “EU mobility” is produced and reproduced is necessary.

2.2 Roma and Migrant: Two Similarly Complex and Contested Concepts

A wide range of academic and policy literature describes the ways in which different data, by adopting various definitions of the “Roma”, can result in the “Roma” constituting an utterly different population in terms of size and compositions (Rughinis 2010; Messing 2014; Surdu 2016). Against this background, I would like to address three issues with regard to the conceptualization of the category of Roma in research: the heterogeneity of the Roma (is it at all possible to speak of a unified ethnicity – “the Roma”?); the multiple nature of identity and their consequences for policy making and research; and the possible variations depending on the agent that makes the identification.

When trying to circumscribe a population in a discussion, the actual ethnic heterogeneity of the Roma population is often omitted or glossed over. Although ethnic majorities imagine the Roma as a homogenized and unified group, the demographics of those who self-identify as Roma vary significantly according to various factors of identity-construction such as language, tradition, visibility of racialized features and level of social inclusion. It is questionable whether we can regard groups that are so diverse in cultural, linguistical and ethnic terms – for example, the Gabor Roma in Romania, Romungo Gypsies and Vlah in Hungary, Gitano in Andalucia, Gens du voyage in France and Travellers in the UK – as one homogeneous ethnic group. Therefore, many scholars, as well as the working definition adopted by the EU, argue that Roma/Gypsy may rather be understood as an umbrella term denominating population groups with very different ethnic identities even within the same country, and definitely across Europe (Csepeli and Simon 2004; Ladányi-Szelényi 2001; Fleck and Rughinis 2008; EC 2011).

Another issue to consider here is that individual ethnic identity and Roma identity in particular can be seen as fluid, situational and multi-layered: it may include different meanings in various contexts, may change over time or depending on the situation (Surdu 2016). In practice, this may result in the same people identifying themselves as Roma at one point of time in a certain situation, while at another point of time, or situation, they may identify themselves as belonging to the ethnic majority. Simonovits and Kézdi (2016: 4) in their panel study of Roma youth documented “high levels of instability in ethnic identification both within families and for the same individual” and found that ethnic identification strongly correlates with social status: “increased economic hardship is associated with an increase in the likelihood of Roma identification” (ibid).

Also, a large share of Roma possesses multiple identities and gives account of multiple belongingness (Neményi 2007; Dupcsik 2009). This is not a fundamental scientific dilemma but rather a consequence of centuries’ long turbulent waves of assimilation, integration and racial exclusion. Roma who assimilated or who were born in mixed-marriage families, or those who have national and ethnic identities simultaneously are likely to be unable to answer identity questions in terms of exclusive categories. The latest Hungarian census (2011) provides an eloquent

example of this phenomenon. Following the modification in the question on ethnic identity, which introduced multiple identification of ethnic belonging, the number of Roma as measured by the census increased by 53% from one census (in 2001) to the other (2011) (KSH 2014). Even though most authors are aware of the complex nature of Roma identification, academic work very often objectifies “the Roma”, and does not reflect upon its complexities and the diversities that come along with these complexities.

The third – and in my view the most important – issue with the definition of the concept of “Roma” relates to the agent doing the identification: Who defines who is a Roma/Gypsy? (See Tremlett and McGarry 2013; Surdu 2016). There are basically two approaches to identifying Roma ethnicity, resulting in only partially comparable “realities”. In one interpretation, the Roma minority is composed of those who identify themselves as Gypsies/Roma (“self-identified Roma”), while the other concept embraces all those who are regarded as such by their environment (“ascription-Roma”) as they are the ones who are victims of anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination. There is a rather wide consensus among researchers, that ethically only the first option – self-identification – is valid. No one can be regarded to belong to any ethnic group, unless they declare to the same effect. However, there is also a consensus that due to the above described factors, such as situational, fluid and multiple ethnic identities for most Roma in addition to historically accumulated fear of being stigmatized and prosecuted, self-identification excludes many of those who in one way or another have Roma/Gypsy identities or roots. Hence, for instance, census data that uses self-identification significantly under-measures the size of the ethnic group compared to sociological research data, which often uses a combination of various approaches.

The most important question that precedes and underpins all stated above is: What is the purpose of identifying Roma in research or policy? (See Tremlett 2009; Tremlett and McGarry 2013; Surdu 2016). This question is fundamental as the answer leads to diverging conceptual and thus methodological decisions. Applying a definition based on the perception of ethnicity by the direct environment might be useful if the research intends to identify mechanisms and consequences of stigmatization, the working of majority-minority relations, or the functioning of discrimination. The purpose in this case might be to investigate or to intervene in majority societies’ or institutions’ treatment of those whom they presume to belong to Roma communities, or to explore interethnic relations. Thus, it is legitimate to target such research or policy to the population segment that is identified as Roma/Gypsy by the (direct) environment. Research and policies regarding Roma cultural identity, opinions and attitudes, living circumstances and opportunities, empowerment and political participation, require instead adopting an approach based on self-identification. Measurements that conceptualize Roma differently obviously will produce significantly different outcomes regarding the most essential data and indicators such as the size of the Roma population, educational levels, employment rates, household size and composition, and living circumstances (Messing 2014; Rughinis 2010).

Migration is an even more complex phenomenon and its conceptualization differs significantly across data sources depending on the purpose of the producer of

data: whether it is the management of migration flows, designing inclusion policies for migrants or considering experiences and consequences of discrimination. The data that refers to the category of migrant may refer to a static situation reflecting a certain point in time and in a specific geographical locality (stock) or to the dynamic process of mobility (flow). Either way, the category may comprise a quite different and only partially intersecting population depending on the definition adopted. Looking at various key data sources of migration in the European sphere we find rather different approaches: some classify migrants based on foreign citizenship, others based on foreign ancestry, and a few others on place of birth or language. In public discourse it is even racialized or ethnic groups, which are used as synonyms to migrant background. There is a significant literature on how political and public discourses in European countries seem to mislabel legal citizens of colour as migrants, or as “second- third generation migrants”, while identifying whites as migrants in political and policy discourses is quite rare (Fox et al. 2012; Mukkamala and Suyemoto 2018). The differences in the sizes of migrant populations stemming from using these diverging approaches to conceptualize the category of migrant also applies to large variations concerning the composition of the population in terms of their socio-economic status, basic demographic characteristics, language skills or level of inclusion.

A further important element (or discursive frame) of the conceptualization of “migrants” and of “migration” is the way in which regulations target various groups of migrants in terms of control and legislation. This is particularly important with respect to the type of migration and of integration policies and practices that this book aims to analyse and to discuss: namely the migration of Roma citizens of EU Member-States within the European Union, and the initiatives aimed at them. In this context – the free movement of EU citizens within the boundary of the EU – the movements of Roma within the EU borders should not even be considered as migration but as mobility, because the principle of free labour mobility enables citizens of an EU Member State (obviously including citizens from the Roma ethnic background) to enter the territory and the labour market of other Member-States.

This section separated the two terms that lay at the core of this book and investigated their respective conceptual ambiguities. Because of merging these two concepts, the category “the Roma migrant” appears to be too opaque to enable its use in an academically sound way. This is not to say that migration of Romani individuals or families does not exist; instead it is to say, that when talking about “Roma migration”, or of migrants of Roma ethnic background, various parties may consider completely different population groups. Injecting migration into the already problematically simplified category of Roma results in a notion that essentializes an overly complex and diverse phenomenon. It therefore becomes necessary to analyse the reasons why politicians, opinion leaders or scholars single out the mobility of Roma from the general intra-EU mobility and discuss it as an autonomous phenomenon.

2.3 Literature and Statistics on Roma Migration

Having established that both key concepts of this book are highly complex and contested and that, based on the choice in definitions they may represent completely different populations in terms of size and composition, it is relevant to raise the following questions: What definitions and methods do studies and statistics use when discussing the phenomenon referred to as “Roma migration”? And do researchers reflect critically on the consequences of their conceptualization?

2.3.1 *Statistics on “Roma Migration”*

Looking at the statistics available about “Roma migration” it is hardly surprising that there is very little data on the phenomenon, despite it having been extensively discussed in the past decade in European politics and media (Kroon et al. 2016). At a European level, the European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) collects data on Europe’s Roma population with the aim “to measure the progress of integration policies, and work with Member States to develop monitoring methods able to compare the situation of Roma across Europe” (FRA homepage).¹ None of the surveys includes data on Roma migrants; only data about the migration potential² of Roma and of Roma living in the proximity of Roma across Europe are collected. The FRA’s survey was titled “Marginalized Roma survey”, which is a fair description of its mission: to investigate Roma who live in marginalization, a phenomenon in strong correlation with residential segregation. The methodological strategy was to sample settlements and/or settlement parts where the share of Roma population exceeds the national average according to the census. They identified Roma through “implicit validation” while the situative/fluid nature of Roma identity was not addressed in the data collection.³

The results [of the FRA/UNDP data collection] are therefore representative for the areas where the research was undertaken, while also serving as a proxy for Roma at risk of exclusion. (UNDP/FRA 2012: 29)

Such surveys are thus more likely to over-represent Roma individuals and families who live in social and geographical exclusion and marginalization, while they underrepresent Roma that are integrated in the society. The FRA data tells us that less than one sixth of Roma in Europe considered the idea of moving to another

¹ Surveys were conducted in 2008, 2012, and 2015.

² Migration potential is measured through questions investigating whether the respondent considered migrating in the future and how serious this consideration was.

³ The essence of this technique is that the interviewer approaches a potential respondent, who is presumed to belong to Roma community, and introduces the research telling that the survey was conducted with the aim to investigate living circumstances and opinion of Roma. Acceptance of participation in the interview was interpreted to mean that the respondent was Roma.

country. This share however is not significantly different from those of non-Roma living in the vicinity of Roma (12%). There are substantial differences in potential for migrations across countries, however. There are only four countries, where over a fifth of interviewed Roma considered the possibility of moving abroad: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

At the same time, academic literature reveals that the gap between desired migration and actual migration is huge, and especially so for low skilled sectors of the population. Docquier and colleagues (2014), based on a 30-country sample, found that individuals without secondary-level education are ten times less likely to fulfil their migration plans than those who have secondary or tertiary level education. Thus, the numbers showing the share of Roma considering migration are not a good reflection of those who actually migrate; the latter being those who have the financial, networks and human capital to move and settle in another country. Although the FRA conducted research “about the situation of Roma citizens moving and settling in other EU Member States” in 2009, this research did not aim at estimating the size of Roma’s migration but rather to uncover the experiences of Roma mobility through interviews with Roma migrants, local authorities and NGOs in five EU Member State destination countries. The study investigated the push and pull factors and the local policy responses to this phenomenon (FRA 2009).

Another estimation about the extent of the phenomenon referred to by politicians and by the media as “Roma migration” was provided by OSCE (Cahn and Guild 2010). The conclusion of its report was that the phenomenon is of negligible scale: mass migration of Roma as narrated or presumed by some politicians and by the media has never occurred, as most Roma are too powerless and lack the funds to be mobile. The report provided some estimates on the number of migrants of Roma ethnic background based on EU member countries’ inflow migration data. It analysed the migration and ethnic statistics of the main destination countries –Austria, Germany and Italy– and established that only a share of the anyways small numbers of Roma populations refer to Roma born outside of the country. In the UK, where fear of “Roma migration” provoked both extensive and racist press coverage as well as explicitly discriminatory measures by the government, the estimates are vague (ibid.: 39).

Other statistics or estimations about the number of “Roma migrants” are rare. In view of the challenges of identification of the target population and of the lack of sampling frames, statistical agencies and research hubs have abstained from such data collection. Even in countries that possess traditionally well-developed, extensive and refined infrastructures of regular surveying of their populations (i.e. Germany’s household panels, France’s household budget survey, General Household Survey in the UK), to my best knowledge there are no datasets that include both migration background and ethnic identity variables.

One exception is a research carried out at the University of Salford, Manchester, which provided an informed estimation about the number of Roma migrants in the UK. The study built on a questionnaire that was distributed to local authorities across the UK asking for their estimates of the size of the migrant Roma population. However, a total of 151 questionnaires were returned out of 406 issued, thus

estimations based on these surveys may be considered as vague and non-representative. They “estimated that as of 2012 there are at least 197,705 migrant Roma living in the UK” (Brown et al. 2013: 7). In addition to the low response rate (two thirds of the municipalities did not respond and there is incomplete information about how non-response was managed), there is no information about the methods used by local authorities in estimating the number of Roma in their municipality, particularly with respect to the question of determining a person’s identity as Roma.⁴ It is therefore no surprise that findings provided by the study were fiercely criticized by the academic community (for example, see Matras 2015), even though such criticism did not stop politicians from using it as a reference point in their narratives and claims that restricting migration from A2 countries was necessary (see Leggio in this volume). The study is an example of how an academic actor attempted to generate data where it was obviously lacking but missed to carefully consider the implications that such data—collected with several methodological question marks—might be used as “objective evidence” in a highly hystericized political environment. The question is therefore whether it is worth to produce such vague and methodologically uncertain data about a population that is often in the spotlight in a stigmatizing and stereotypical way. This is particularly consequential when researchers are not certain as to whether the users of the data they produce will reflect upon the vagueness of the data itself, even if the results’ shortcomings and ambiguities are described fairly in the study. To put it simply: is bad data better than no data?

2.3.2 *Academic Literature on “Roma Migration”*

Compared to the small size of the “Roma migrant” population, there is a prolific academic literature on this subject. Over the past decade, numerous journal articles have discussed Roma migration. A Google scholar search on the term “Roma migration” and “Europe” produced 138 hits between 2016 and 2018 alone. Some influential journals dedicated special issues to the topic: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; *Social Identities*; *Population, Race and Space*; *Migration Letters*; *Local Economy*. Similarly, entire books addressed the same issue (for example Matras and Leggio 2017; Bigo et al. 2013; Guy et al. 2004; Vidra 2014). We may conclude that “Roma migration” has become a part of the mainstream scholarly discourse.

While survey and statistical data, by their nature, essentialize the categories of population they focus on, qualitative research is suitable to overcome such an approach. A look to recent academic publications shows us that most studies use an in-depth qualitative methodology or a case study approach to explore the experiences of individuals or of families who have experienced migration and who identify themselves as Roma. There is a wide pool of knowledge collected about the

⁴The question on the base of which estimation were made is the following: “We understand that it may be difficult for you to provide accurate data; however, we would be grateful if you could provide responses to these questions even if it is based on anecdotal information”.

motivations that lead Roma citizens to migrate (Vidra 2013; Kovats 2002; Grill 2012; Manzoni 2017; Pantea 2012), showing that in most cases we are talking about circular migration that is induced by employment opportunities, housing conditions and children’s schooling options. Many studies analyse the pull and push factors of circular migration, as well as the precarious situation that Roma find themselves in, in both the sending and receiving countries. Studies such as the EU funded project MIGROM have investigated the impact of migration of Roma families and individuals on both the communities of origin and on the communities of destination, while also paying attention to the policy responses to the phenomenon (Matras and Leggio 2017).

An important part of the scholarly literature discusses conceptual challenges related to the essentialization and objectification of the phenomenon that is referred to as “Roma migration”, including those that have discussed the representations and perceptions of the phenomenon. Magazzini (2018) in her study on causes and consequences of labelling and thus constructing Roma in Italian and Spanish inclusion policies analysed four waves of the framework convention for the protection of national minorities and arrived at the conclusion that the two countries framed Roma in completely different ways. This in turn has critical consequences on policy actions towards the Roma. Spanish inclusion policies framed Roma in terms of socio-economic disadvantages, while Italian policy documents framed it in terms of cultural otherness.

However, the differences go beyond the economic-cultural dichotomy and two additional aspects that emerge as prominent in the reports are those of the migrant or foreign status and the “complexity” or “exceptionality” character attributed to the Roma minority. (Magazzini 2018:10)

Fox and colleagues’ (2012) study of the policy and tabloid media’s discourse on East European migration, including Roma’s migration to the UK, revealed the significance of perceived race and colour in the treatment of migrants by policy and the media. They concluded:

Whiteness thus comes in shades, as it is reflected by the changing imperatives of British immigration policy. [...] The Roma frame is particularly effective because it taps into and fleshes out long history of both local and imported anti-Roma prejudice. (Fox et al. 2012: 685, 688)

Van Baar (2011, 2017) discusses the historical roots, the present processes and the consequences of irregularisation of Roma migration in the setting of the European Union. This approach to studying Roma migration exposes a very important aspect of the phenomenon, which might explain the reasons for such a relatively minor social phenomenon (at least in terms of numbers) receiving a significant scholarly, as well as political and mediatic, attention. The interest may lie not in “Roma migrants” or “Roma migration” per se, but in how European citizens, governments, and local authorities and institutions treat it and find legitimations to differentiate “Roma migrants” from other EU citizens:

Processes of irregularisation have become an integral part of the current movement to legitimize treating Roma differently to other EU citizens; to relegate them to substandard,

segregated or provisional housing, education, health care and, in the most extreme, increasingly normalized cases, to evict them from their houses or sites and expel them from countries. (van Baar 2017: 9)

Yildiz and De Genova put forward a similar point of view in the introduction to their 2017 special issue on (un)free Roma mobility in the EU:

Furthermore, this volume shifts the focus conventionally directed at the academic objectification of “the Roma” as such, and instead seeks to foreground and underscore questions about “Europe”, ‘European’-ness, and EU-ropean citizenship that come into sharper focus through the critical lens of Roma racialisation, marginalisation, securitisation, and criminalisation, and the dynamics of Roma mobility within and across the space of “Europe”. (Yildiz and De Genova 2017)

Kóczé (2017) has argued that debates on the migration of Central and East European Roma that have created a rhetorical – and material – distinction between Roma and non-Roma EU citizens may be understood in the framework of neoliberal Europe. She argues that migration studies “tend to focus on either on the irregularisation and securitization or on the impact of right-wing exclusionary discourse” (Kóczé 2017: 2). Taking this thought one step further we may understand why the merging of the two categories – “Roma” and “migration” – has resulted in a primarily securitizing approach of the political and policy discourses.

2.4 Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

Research, policy, and media give shape to problems. Whether we like it or not, they are agenda setting fields. By framing research on “Roma migrants” we create a group that – regardless of our intentions– will be treated as an objective construct. Although Brubaker in his work “Ethnicity without groups” (2004) put forward that ethnicity can and should be studied without groups, what we see in the arena of public policies is that Roma are mainly treated as a group. Brubaker suggested doing away with “groupism” when studying ethnicity, arguing that it is inaccurate to portray ethnicity in terms of “discrete, bounded groups as constituents of social life” thus treating “ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which substance and agency can be attributed” (Brubaker 2004: 8). A concise overview of the scholarly literature on “Roma migration” shows that while public policies still refer to Roma in often essentializing terms, Brubaker’s basic idea has found good grounds in the research community. Even quantitative empirical research (surveys), which use pre-constructed categories, consider the complex nature of Roma identity at least to some extent. However, empirical sociology (as well as public policies) by its very nature needs to think in terms of groups. While anthropology can study people without assigning them into groups, sociology and public policy, which aim to provide explanations for social phenomena in more general terms, rely on group categories. Against this backdrop, it is legitimate to study ethnicity in terms of groups as long as we as researchers reflect on the problems that might stem from our conceptual and methodological choices. Given that “Roma migrants” and “Roma migration” are especially opaque categories, it is crucial to carefully consider the

consequences of the definitions and research methods employed. We otherwise run the risk of objectifying “Roma migrants” a group that is even more vague and inconsistent than the two separated concepts of “Roma” and “migrant”.

An alternative way to studying “Roma migration” is to approach the field in terms of intersectionalities (Krizsán and Zentai 2012). The “Roma migrant” represents an intersection of various vulnerabilities and of two overlapping targets of stigmatization. Based on the European Social Survey data it is evident that “Roma” is the most rejected minority in the European public opinion, while the label “migrant” also carries stigmatized connotations in many countries. Additionally, both “groups” suffer from a wide range of social inequalities, vulnerabilities and a lack of empowerment. Despite reflecting a situation characterized by complex inequality, an intersectionality approach can however result in empowering and emancipatory debates and experiences, as the flourishing discourse on Roma gender studies and Romani women’s struggles stand to testify (Kóczé et al. 2018; Kóczé 2009; Vincze 2014). The question for further potential research is whether treating the mobility of Roma individuals within the framework of migration studies – rather than, as most research currently does, within the framework of Romani Studies – could contribute to the de-essentialization of Roma identity. The fact that this volume is part of a research series on migration, aims at advancing an approach that regards Roma as one group among many others that engage in mobility for a variety of reasons. This chapter’s proposal is that employing an intersectionality lens to the mobility of Roma individuals might drive the entire field towards a fairer, more critical and less essentializing discourse.

2.5 Conclusion

As shown in this chapter the conceptualization of the category of “Roma migrant” is extremely vague and fraught with ambiguities. The few existing estimates on “Roma migration” suggest that the mere size of the phenomenon is insignificant and cannot account for the extensive political discourse and media coverage it has attracted. What is it about “Roma migration” that might therefore explain the vast academic and policy literature on this topic, and the extensive and hostile media attention it has received? I argue that it is exactly the vagueness of “Roma migration” that lends it to be used as a symbol for society’s deep, historic fears of the ‘other’ rooted in racialized prejudice. In short, the heightened interest towards “Roma migrants” has little to do with the actual migrant population of Roma origin, while it has much more to do with the public perception of what Roma migration represents to the European politics and public. “Roma migrants” are a racialized minority in a highly precarious position who have been constructed as a threat to the public, to culture, to wealth, and to the safety of the country (van Baar 2017). In this sense, “Roma migrants” serve as a perfect subject to represent the “ultimate other”: they are difficult to circumscribe in objective terms but are easy to demonize using deeply rooted stereotypes. This might explain why hostile political and media discourse spreads so efficiently. Albeit with different objectives and approaches, this

might also be the reason why social science has taken such an interest in this phenomenon: The study of the conceptualizations, of the constructions and of the discussions around “Roma migration” are an apt lens to explain the (dis)functions of our own societies, rather than about the migrant population of Roma origin.

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