
Book Review

Yaron Matras & Daniele Viktor Leggio (2018) *Open borders, unlocked cultures. Romanian Roma Migrants in Western Europe*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.

The Romanian Roma migration towards Western European countries has attracted considerable public and scientific interest in the last decade. The role of social networks in migration process of Romanian Roma (e.g. Pantea 2012), the integration into the host society (e.g. Vrăbiescu-Kalir 2017), their experiences, strategies and opportunities in the host country (e.g. Moroşanu-Fox 2013; Manzoni 2016; Humphris 2017), the identity construction (e.g. Nacu 2011), and the attitudes of the host society (e.g. Roman 2014) have been studied as well.

This book seeks to contribute to the literature by providing the ethnography of Roma migration, its aim is to understand the push and pull factors of their migration, the internal social organisation of the migrating communities, and the development of transnational networks that facilitate it. Furthermore, it investigates the social and political reactions to the settlement of Roma migrants at a local level.

The studies of the book were born within the framework of the MigRom project ('The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagements strategies'), which was supported by European Commission's Seventh Framework research programme for four years (2013-2017). The project was coordinated by the University of Manchester, the project's partners were the University of Manchester (UK), the Fondation Maison des Sciences Hommes (France), the University of Granada (Spain), the University of Verona (Italy), and the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities. The non-academic participants were the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the Manchester City Council.

The project applied a cross-disciplinary approach combining history, anthropology, sociology and linguistics as well. All the main destination countries (the UK, Spain, France, and Italy) of Roma migration were covered by the research. This multi-sited nature of the research allowed it to employ a transnational comparative perspective in the analysis of conditions and circumstances of the Roma migrants in different host countries. The inclusion of the sender country into the investigation enriched the research by providing information on the motivations to migrate and on the effects of migration on the home communities.

The project employed a wide array of research methods: it relied on surveys, participant observations, different types of interviews, archive research, document analysis and in some sites additional methods were used as well.

The Migrom project proposes an innovative research model that emphasises the involvement of Roma community members in the research design, analysis and the dissemination of the results, thus contributing to the capacity building and

empowerment of Roma migrants. Another original feature of the research is the involvement of a local authority (the Manchester City Council) in the project, which allowed them to draft, examine, implement and evaluate the measures affecting the Roma migrants, and to influence the reports and meetings of the City Council. Additionally, the project has put a great emphasis on public engagement and on the dissemination of the project's recommendations among policy makers.

After the introductory chapter, the structure of the book follows a historical sequence, beginning with a chapter on the history of Romanian Roma from the 19th century onwards, continuing with chapters on the process of migration and the role of networks in it, and ending with chapters which are connected to the life of Roma migrants in the host society.

In the introductory chapter (Chapter 1) Matras and Leggio provide the definition of the term 'Roma', present the approaches and research areas in the study of Roma migration, highlight the role of Roma involvement in research, and describe the MigRom project. The term 'Roma' is applied by the authors "... to refer to those populations that employ that label as their community-based self-ascription, irrespective of lifestyle, social status or occupational patterns, or who otherwise self-identify explicitly as belonging to communities whose members self-ascribe as Roma." (p5).

Asséo et al. (Chapter 2) introduce the history of Romanian Roma in the 19th to 20th century and highlight how the integration of Roma into Romanian society relates to their migration in each era. The chapter highlights that the Roma participated in seasonal agrarian labour, because they were able to organise large mobile work brigades around their family networks. The preservation of their internal community organisation and a distinct ethnic identity was due to this work organisation mode. After the regime change, when the job opportunities in the agrarian sector narrowed, the pioneers of the migration relied on those broad family ties, which resulted from the formation of work brigades.

Toma et al. (Chapter 3) examine the different migration patterns of the Roma at five Romanian sites and the effect of migration on home communities. They found that some of the local Roma migrated after the regime change, however their migration emerged with the accession of Romania to the European Union in 2007. The pioneers of Roma migration relied on close kinship networks, while the later migrants engaged in the migration of the majority population. That is, the migration of the local Roma was not based on ethnic networks, but on narrower or broader networks. Despite the different migration patterns, the consequences of migration were identical in the cases of the five settlements. The migration resulted in status increase for both migrants and non-movers, which was often accompanied with residential and ethnical desegregation. The most typical status investment, the construction of houses contributed to the flourishing of the local informal job market and to the development of informal economic activities in some settlements, which eased local unemployment.

Gamella et al. (Chapter 4) study the role of kinship networks in the migration of a Roma family (Jonesci) to the West. The first adults of Jonesci family started to move abroad after the death of Ceauşescu, today more than 1,000 family members live in Western Europe and in the United States. In the absence of human capital, the strong

and dense kinship network enabled their successful transnational migration. However, the reliance solely on social capital has negative consequences as well, for example it can limit the relation with outsiders, it can restrict individual freedom or it can impose downward levelling norms.

Pontrandolfo (Chapter 5) investigates how local policies influence the capacity to aspire of two Roma family networks in Italy by determining the terms of their recognition. According to the results allowing and supporting stable living conditions by local authorities has a positive effect on the future plans of the Roma migrants. Those Roma, who live in frequently evacuated unauthorised settlements, plan for the short term, while those interlocutors, who have access to a permanent home and experience some forms of political participation as citizenships, can afford to have long-term future plans. Furthermore, Pontrandolfo found that the recognition of Roma migrants by local policies contributes another way to the capacity to aspire: it enables them to give a voice to their discontent and thus they can influence the status quo. The conclusion of the study is that local authorities should encourage recognising Roma since it facilitates their well-being – through the development of their capacity to aspire.

Cousin (Chapter 6) shows the establishment and the eradication of a Roma shantytown in France. On the one hand, it was examined what legitimised the power of the founder and leader of the settlement. Cousin identified that his power was based on neither the family prestige nor the monopoly of domination, but on the necessity to maintain internal order in the shantytown, that is, it was a form of territorial power. On the other hand, the study investigated the factors that have led to the destruction of the settlement. According to the author, the fact that local institutions regarded the shantytown as illegal means that the negotiation with its representation – with the headman – was denied. In other words, the lack of formal recognition of the community caused the destruction of the shantytown.

Matras and Leggio (Chapter 7) show in their study how some young members of a Roma migrant community in Manchester reacted when the issue of ‘safeguarding and early marriage’ appeared in the discourse of local institutions and voluntary sector organisations. First the group initiated a consultation with the Manchester City Council on that the ethnicisation of these issues is harmful and problematic for their community, but the authority refused it. Therefore the group established the ‘Roma Voices of Manchester’ and started to organise public statements and events and to consult with local officials about policies that relate to them. The aim of their collective action was the re-privatisation of discourses on Romani identity and to emphasise the similarities – rather than the differences – between them and their non-Roma neighbours. Their mobilisation activities were successful: the City Council recognised Roma Voices of Manchester as a representative of the Roma community and admitted that some of their previous reports contained false information. According to the authors, the focus on inclusion and mainstream participation instead of a demand for public recognition of cultural rights suggests a new perspective on the questions of identity politics and ethnic mobilisation.

A major advantage of the book is that it provides a comprehensive picture on the transnational migration of Romanian Roma. On the one hand, the research covers all the main destination countries of Romanian Roma migrants, as well as different

sites in the home country, which allows the project to apply a comparative perspective. On the other hand, the project uses numerous research methods of several disciplines, which allows it to create multifaceted and thorough analyses.

However, the book is a great contribution to the field of migration studies, it has some shortcomings. Firstly, the individual chapters provide readers with little theoretical background and a common theoretical platform cannot be discovered. This may be related to the fact that the research question in some studies is not well-defined or is not presented, hence some of the chapters are highly descriptive. Secondly, Chapter 2 on the history of Romanian Roma considerably contributes to the understanding of the context of migration, but the presentation of the socioeconomic status of the Roma population in Romania is lacking from the book. Thirdly, the introductory chapter describes that several research methods of different disciplines were used by the project and it obtained very rich empirical material, however, it would have been useful to explain in more detail the methodology of each chapter. Finally, the title of the book and Chapter 1 suggest that open borders can unlock cultures, however, some studies (see e.g. Chapter 6) support just the opposite and therefore the title could be a bit misleading.

As I see it the main message of the book is that it emphasises the dilemmas on identity politics and ethnic mobilisation: while some studies of the book highlight the importance of the recognition of cultural rights, another chapter underlines the significance of inclusion into mainstream society and equal opportunities.

Due to its multi-disciplinary approach, the book is of interest to researchers from several fields such as history, anthropology, sociology and linguistics, as well as of policy makers in the field of migration.

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Authors' Biographies

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