



The Role of Relevance in Stereotyping: a Schutzian Approach to Social Categorisation

Daniel Gyollai¹

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Abstract

This article demonstrates that Alfred Schutz's theory of *typification* and *relevance* together have a great potential to conceptually clarify certain aspects of self-categorisation theory. More specifically, it focuses on the motivational bases of stereotyping, one of the core mechanisms underlying the categorisation of people into groups. Social psychologists have found that stereotyping of out-group members is motivated by factors, such as uncertainty reduction, or the enhancement of the self-esteem of in-group members. What categories and corresponding stereotypes are being activated and applied is ultimately a function of the goals and pragmatic interests of the perceiver in any given situation. The article argues that this phenomenon can be explained, and accounted for, by Schutz's tripartite system of relevances. To illustrate the theoretical issues at hand, the last section draws on the case of migrants arriving in Hungary and provides a potential explanation for why the ideal type of the *Gypsy* was triggered and facilitated the way in which migrants have been attended and understood.

Keywords Intersubjective Understanding · Motivated Cognition · Schutz · Self-Categorisation · Stereotype Activation · Typification

Introduction

Zahavi (2019) and Meindl (2021) have recently drawn a comparison between Husserl's account of the *we*-relationship and John Turner's *self-categorisation* theory. In short, according to both Husserl and Turner, identifying with a group, i.e., adopting a first-person plural perspective, entails a certain degree of depersonalisation,

✉ Daniel Gyollai
dgyollai@bournemouth.ac.uk

¹ Department of Social Sciences and Social Work, Bournemouth University, Bournemouth University, Fern Barrow, BH12 5BB Poole, Dorset, UK

where one defines oneself by prototypical instead of idiosyncratic features. As Zahavi underlines, the difference between Husserl's and Turner's approach is that the former is more concerned with questions pertaining to the *face-to-face, I-Thou* relationship than the latter. While all forms of intersubjectivity necessarily stem from the face-to-face encounter, Zahavi argues that it alone is insufficient to adequately address the problem of group identification. Attention needs to be paid to the various institutionalized and sedimented schemes used in intersubjective understanding, and, more importantly, the processes that underly the selection or activation of these different forms of group identities (Zahavi, 2019). In picking up this thread, the article looks into the role of certain motivational factors in prompting and guiding group categorisation. While Zahavi focuses on ingroup identity, this article is predominantly concerned with the outgroup; although, as we shall see, the two are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

It is well-established in the social psychological literature that stereotypes play an important role in social categorisation, i.e., categorising ourselves and others into groups (Tajfel, 1981a, b; Turner, 1984). However, the processes that underlie the activation and application of a particular stereotype in making sense of people, are complex and not yet fully understood. It is situation-specific and depends on various factors, such as the perceiver's motivations during the interaction (Kruglanski, 1989; Ellemers & Van Knippenberg, 1997; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000; Kunda et al., 2002; Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Yzerbyt, 2010; Quadflieg & Macrae, 2011). This article demonstrates that Alfred Schutz's insight of intersubjective understanding is illuminating in this regard. Psathas (2005), and Kim & Berard (2009) have already pointed out the significance of Schutz's concept of *typification* to contemporary social sciences and to understand social categorisation respectively.¹ Barber (2001: ch. 4) and López (2021) have also showed that Schutz's insight of in- and outgroup dynamics, in general, is highly valuable for empirical research on discrimination, xenophobia and racism. This article reiterates these arguments by highlighting that typification, in conjunction with Schutz's theory of *relevance*, has great potential to clarify our understanding of the social psychological processes that underlie stereotyping in outgroup categorisation. More specifically, Schutz's account provides a firm theoretical foundation for the empirical findings that the way in which people are viewed and understood is, in large part, the function of the perceiver's motivation and interest in the given situation.

What prompted the research was the empirical observation that migrants, predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, have often been compared to Roma Gypsies by border police and military personnel I encountered during fieldworks in Hungary for various research projects in 2018 and 2019. This phenomenon has been confirmed by others who also found a significant overlap between public attitudes towards the Roma and migrants (Simonovits, 2020; Thorleifsson, 2017). These findings suggest that the stereotypes associated with Gypsies have been instrumental in making sense of migrants from the Middle East, which subsequently shaped public

¹ It is important to note that Tajfel, in fact, draws from Schutz, as well as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, when developing his framework of social identity (Tajfel, 1981b: 255; see Hogg, 2018: 114).

attitudes towards them. The article does not provide an in-depth exploration of the Hungarian case, which only serves to illustrate the conceptual issues at hand.

Following a brief introduction to social identity and self-categorisation theory, and the role of stereotypes in social categorisation, the first part of the article provides a short summary of the forms of motivations behind stereotyping people as explicated in the social psychological literature. The article then goes on to discuss Schutz's theory of typification, its implications to intersubjective understanding, and how typification as such is conditioned by the tripartite *system of relevances* of the perceiver. Finally, drawing on the Hungarian case, it outlines why the understanding of migrants has arguably been facilitated by the *ideal type* of the "Gypsy," and how then the corresponding stereotypes and attitudes towards Roma Gypsies have become the framework within which migrants have been approached and understood.

Self-categorisation and Stereotyping

In social psychology, *social identity theory* accounts for the psychological processes relating to intergroup dynamics, such as, intergroup biases and discrimination. It analyses the conditions and underlying mechanism of social group formation, and the subsequent forms of intergroup behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981b; see Hogg, 2018; Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Emerging from social identity theory, *self-categorisation theory* is specifically interested in the categorisation aspect of social identity formation, i.e., categorising and identifying both the self and others by group attributes instead of individual personality traits (Turner, 1982; Turner & Reynolds, 2004).² In short, social identity and self-categorization theory look into how the cognitive switch from "I" to "We" impacts on interpersonal understanding between, and interaction with, in- and outgroup members. One of the basic tenets of the theory is that shared identity and shared group attributes become "salient" in the self-perception of group members, which, on its own, already facilitates consensual behaviour (Turner, 1999; Haslam et al., 1996). Not only that, categorisation might also entail intergroup biases or inter-group discrimination in favour of the ingroup. It is precisely because individuals do not only define themselves by group attributes, but they positively evaluate these attributes as opposed to that of outgroups (Turner, 1984). Because the basis of identification is group prototypicality rather than uniqueness and idiosyncrasy (Hogg, 2004: 119f.), self-categorisation necessarily prompts stereotypical perception of in- and outgroup members. Turner avoids attaching a general negative connotation to stereotyping as such; although sometimes oversimplified and biased, it is a fundamental function of group life and social cognition (Turner, 1999: 26–28). Stereotypes help us to make sense of both our physical, and social environment and order our actions accordingly. Due to their shared and consensual nature, on the one hand, they enhance predictable and mutually acceptable behaviour within the group. On the other hand, they provide guidance on the basic patterns of interaction with the outgroup and pre-set the default attitudes towards its members. As a result,

² Hence the depersonalising effect, which should not be confused with *dehumanisation* (for clarification see Hogg, 2018: 120).

some surely have an ideological content that allows for the maintenance of the system of values in the community and for the justification of actions against outgroup members (Allport, 1954: 20–22; see Tajfel, 1981b: 147–161; Turner & Reynolds, 2004: 269–271).

Motivational Bases of Stereotype Activation

According to social psychologists, the primary motive behind categorisation, and hence stereotyping, is “uncertainty reduction” and the facilitation of cognitive closure in our daily encounters (Hogg, 2018: 122; see Kruglanski, 1989: ch. 2–3). This elementary motive of stereotype activation to make sense of the surrounding environment is also known in the literature as “comprehension goals” (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Among the potentially relevant group attributes, those categories being activated provide the best fit to make sense of people in the given social context. In other words, social categorisation is a function of “contextual relevance” or “topical relevance” (Ellemers and Van Knippering, 1997). It is important to note here that categories are already in operation before uncertainty arises in the strict sense. As we shall see in the next section, uncertainty and ambiguity are precisely the sign of types having failed us. That is, when confronted by a novel experience, the types at hand do not solve the puzzle, or there are multiple and mutually exclusive choices available to make sense of an encounter.

In terms of intergroup relations, stereotypes have a pivotal role in facilitating a sense of belonging, group cohesion and collective action. People tend to stigmatise those who pose a threat to ingroup identity, the shared goals, and the functioning of the community (Fiske, 2004: 403f.). As Szanto (2020: 474) notes, “what gives my aversive concern with the target its force is the affective reward that I gain by aligning myself with my fellow-feelers...or by my re-invigorated sense of belonging”. Very importantly, the target of intergroup hatred is “indeterminate” and “fungible” in the sense that it is directed towards a social category or type rather than specific individuals who are, thus, replaceable at one’s convenience (Szanto, 2020: 474). In short, stereotypes are instrumental in controlling intergroup boundaries. It follows that stereotyping can also facilitate *system justification*, i.e., the maintenance of the status quo in terms of intergroup inequalities (Sherman et al., 2013). As already implied, one of the most important aspects of social categorisation is the need for perception of ingroup superiority. Stereotypes serve to promote this positive ingroup distinctiveness and thus increase the self-esteem of ingroup members (Turner, 1982, 1984; see Hogg, 2018: 121). The basic idea here is that people are motivated to maintain a positive self-image. Any event or situation threatening one’s self-esteem automatically triggers categorisation to restore the perceived loss of integrity (Yzerbyt, 2010). Kunda & Spencer (2003) found that categorisation of one and the same person may vary greatly depending on the impact of the encounter on self-perception. For example, non-Black participants praised by a Black doctor inhibited the category of *Black* and foregrounded the category of *doctor*. In a reverse scenario, participants receiving criticism were more likely to activate the category of *Black* as opposed to *doctor*. It has been confirmed that racial categorisation significantly decreases in coalitional contexts, whereas increases in non-coalitional ones, in general (Pietraszewski, 2016).

Now suppose there are more than one category attributable to an interaction partner that fit the above requirements, i.e., ones that would fulfil both the epistemic and the self-enhancement-oriented goals. Based on the above literature, it is yet not entirely clear which one would prevail and why. In other words, the question that has yet to be answered is what the situation-specific criteria are that ultimately determine a particular stereotype being activated, and not others that would equally satisfy both conditions. Eitam, Miele and Higgins (2013) have proposed that “motivational relevance” may significantly affect the activation and accessibility of information stored in memory. In their framework, motivational relevance refers to the perceived relevance of certain information in increasing one’s effectiveness at (1) establishing what is real; (2) having control over a situation; and (3) having the desired outcomes. The motivational relevance of people around us, whether they appear to be threatening, welcoming or otherwise relevant, has an influence on how we attend them (Brosch & Van Bavel, 2012; Dietze & Knowles, 2016). Simply put, according to motivated cognition approaches to perception in general, we tend to view and interpret the environment in accordance with our goals and motivations in the broader sense (Ferguson & Cone, 2013).³ In what follows, I will demonstrate that Schutz’s concept of typification in conjunction with his theory of relevance is highly illuminating in this regard. More specifically, Schutz’s theory has great potential to conceptually account for how the perceiver’s purpose, concerns and pragmatic interests in the given situation may impact on the process of social categorisation, i.e., how categories and the corresponding stereotypes are activated and applied.

Typification and Intersubjective Understanding

For Schutz, our understanding of the world is guided by a basic function which he calls *typification*. While it may appear analogous to that of categorisation, the explicit purpose of typification is by no means to reduce uncertainty. Rather, it is the way in which the environment discloses itself to us. In other words, typification is the default function of the *natural attitude* in which we encounter the world as taken for granted (Schutz, [1951] 1962: 74f.; 1964: 125). We do not first experience unidentifiable objects which we then classify into a specific category. As Schutz points out: “what is newly experienced, is already known in the sense that it recalls similar or equal things formerly perceived” (Schutz, [1950] 1962: 281). Typifying means perceiving and interpreting things *as* something previously known or “the referral of the unknown to the known” (Schutz, 1972: 84). The meaning of an experience is always constituted against the background of past experiences. More precisely, it is determined by the configuration, or meaning-context, of past experiences that are synthesized in our memory and function as *interpretive schemes* or *types* (Schutz, 1972: 74–86). Schutz & Luckmann (1974: 232) point out, no experience is “pretypical”. Whenever I spot

³ Moreover, according to the enactivist approach to cognition, sense-making is a function of coupling between a subject and its environment, which thus only gains significance in terms of the self-organisation of the subject (i.e., its needs). This applies to all aspects of life, from the metabolic self-maintenance of an organism to one’s social interactions (De Jaegher, 2018). As Maturana & Varela (1987: 245) put it: “the world everyone sees is not *the* world but *a* world which we bring forth with others”.

a dog in the distance, I am fairly positive that it is a dog, even if I cannot tell what breed at first sight. We are always already familiar with anything we encounter on the common-sense level because we identify everything by *type* that encompasses the “essence” of our experiences. Schutz borrows the term “passive synthesis of recognition” from Husserl to describe this process of identification, or *self-interpretation* of the experience, whereby the experience is, figuratively speaking, compared to types for a match (Schutz, 1971: 22; 1972: 83–86; 2011: 105). However, only a fraction of types is genuinely constructed through the *sedimentation* and synthesis of our own experiences. In most part, they derive from the prevailing culture and tradition of our community. Types are historical and social constructs passed on from generation to generation and are *internalised* and *institutionalised* through our socialisation. We interpret both the physical and social world against the background of the integrated network of types that constitute our primary source of working knowledge, or the *stock of knowledge*, which determine how we behave and act in everyday life (Schutz, [1953] 1962: 13f.; 1970: 74–76; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974: 247–261; see Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 70–109). Accordingly, we approach and understand others by means of pre-constituted types, or more precisely, *personal ideal types*.⁴ Schutz differentiates between *characterological types* and *habitual types*; the former encompasses the typical characteristics of persons we previously encountered who behave in a certain way, and the latter refers to functions and roles in society.

Schutz calls face-to-face interaction partners in a *We-relationship* our *associates* or *consociates*. In a *we-relationship*, I share the time and space with my interaction partner, and we are both aware of each other’s co-presence. Our experiences coincide and our consciousnesses are interlocked in the sense that we have a reciprocal and immediate access to each other’s flow of consciousness and subjective meaning-making processes. As Schutz phrased it, “we grow older together”. Given this simultaneity of environment, reactions, gestures and so on, we are in the position to understand the other in their uniqueness. We are able to attune our interpretations, not only of the shared experience, but also of one another. That is, in a face-to-face encounter, my initial interpretive schemes pertaining to the situation and the other as a certain type of actor undergo a constant revision and modification. In case of confusion, I can also ask for clarification to verify my own subjective interpretations (Schutz, [1945] 1962: 218–222; 1964: 23–41; 1972: 163–172).

Conversely, those with whom we coexist at the same time but are in a *They-relationship* (not face-to-face) Schutz refers to as our *contemporaries*. While *We-* and *They-relationships* are different with respect to their dynamics, how we understand contemporaries is derivative of how we understand consociates. As opposed to the latter, we have no direct access to the conscious life of our contemporaries. Thus, to understand them, we can only rely on the configuration of our experiences in past face-to-face interactions, i.e., on the synthesized characteristics (types) of consociates we have previously met.⁵ Schutz notes that ideal types of social groups are

⁴ For a concise summary of Schutz’s insight of intersubjective understanding see Zahavi, 2014: 141–146.

⁵ Albert Newen has recently proposed a theory of intersubjective understanding (Person Model Theory), similar to Schutz’s framework. Newen also argues that we understand others based on the configuration of our pre-existing knowledge of individuals, which he calls “person models” (Newen, 2015, 2018).

reducible to that of their members. Personal ideal types become an integrated part of the social stock of knowledge and are accessible to anyone, regardless of whether one has ever had a similar encounter in the past. (Schutz, 1964: 37–56; 1972: 8, 109, 142f., 180–199). Most importantly for the purpose of this paper, not only do we draw on ideal types to understand contemporaries, but also in face-to-face encounters, irrespective of the intimacy and immediacy of the We-relationship. When interacting with people, we inescapably have a mutual preliminary expectation regarding each other's behaviour and actions in any situation, determined by types assigned to our partner. There is no clear-cut difference between the We- and They-relationship in terms of the reliance on pre-established types (Schutz, 1964: 29, 56; 1972: 171f., 185; see Zahavi, 2014: 146; Knoblauch 2013). Consequently, typification makes our encounters *prejudiced*, in a sense, because we may anticipate and attribute certain features to others that are not actually, or necessarily, present. Nevertheless, “prejudices are rationalisations and institutionalisations of the underlying ‘central myth’ upon which the self-interpretation of the group is founded” (Schutz, [1955] 1964: 262; see Taipale, 2017). As Moran (2021) notes, no collective action (or group formation and identification for that matter) is possible without this shared and taken for granted background knowledge. The integrated network of socially approved typifications underlies and controls virtually all patterns of social interaction, roles, statuses and so on. (This is also consistent with Turner's view of the function of stereotyping above.) Typifications necessarily vary in different cultures, which has a significant impact on intergroup relations, with the potential to induce inequality and even discrimination. Traditions, habits, and values at odds with the institutionalised, socially approved system of typifications are barely tolerated by the ingroup (Schutz, [1955] 1964: 226–273).⁶ Until now, we have only addressed the role of typification in sensemaking and interpersonal understanding. The following section will briefly outline the underlying mechanisms of how types fulfil these roles.

The Role of Relevance in Typification

While spontaneous, typification does not occur without organising principles, but it is conditioned by a system of *relevances*, i.e., the perceiver's prevailing interests relating to the object of experience in the given situation (Schutz, 1966: 123–132).

First of all, what types we use in a situation is not set in stone, but types are modulated, revised, split into sub-types, or even replaced if the situation so requires. As Schutz put it, they are “just taken for granted until further notice,” so long as they solve the problem (Schutz, [1953] 1962: 7). As already implied, when types stored in the stock do not adequately establish the meaning of an experience and become questionable, ambiguity arises. To explicate the structure of relevances and its role in sense-making, Schutz draws on Carneades' example of the person hesitating to decide whether the object in his room is a pile of clothes, a rope, or a snake (Schutz, 1971: 20–74; 2011: 103–133; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974: 182–229). Entering the room, he spots something in the corner he does not remember leaving there but cannot exactly tell what it is. Since the colour is not helping, due to the dim light in

⁶For a discussion of the implicit ethical implications inherent in Schutz's analysis, see Gros (2020).

the cabin, he can only rely on the shape and size of the pile to determine what he is looking at. As mentioned above, in the natural attitude, unproblematic objects are automatically recognised, and as such do not catch attention, based on the idealization of the “*and-so-forth-and so-on*” and “*I-can-do-it-again*” (Schutz, 2011: 109, 126). Being singled out as something unfamiliar to the otherwise uninterrupted flow of consciousness the object becomes problematic, as Schutz puts it, *topically* or *thematically relevant*. Problems similar to the one in the example occur out of control, hence this most fundamental form of relevance is called *imposed* topical relevance. However, if, for instance, I managed to identify the object as a snake beyond doubt, but I am not satisfied with the answer and would like to investigate further to establish whether the snake is poisonous or not (dead or alive, sleeping or awake, and so on), I would then voluntarily problematise the issue. Schutz calls this latter form of relevance *intrinsic* topical relevance. As he points out, to every object belongs a “horizon of determinable indeterminacy” (Schutz, 2011: 128). The scale and possible directions of sub-thematizations are essentially infinite and are only determined by my momentary pragmatic interest relating to the object (as the “paramount theme”), i.e., what I am going to do about it. In explicating the specific meaning of an action, Schutz also points out that actions always consist of a plan or goal. The projection or anticipation of this goal is called the “self-interpretation” of an action, i.e., I always do something in order to achieve something. Not only that, *in-order-to* motives do not stand in a vacuum, but also have an antecedent or a *because-of* motive (Schutz, 1972: 57–96; 2011: 118–123). In this case, the person’s most pressing interest would be to remove the snake, if it turned out to be one, in order to avoid getting bitten, because this could prove fatal. In any given situation, one’s prevailing interest is essentially made up of such a system of *in-order-to* and *because-of* motives. Schutz thus refers to the meaning-context which determines specific meaning as *motivational context*. In other words, the anticipated meaning (it might be a snake) is emerging from the meaning-context of past experiences that is relevant in terms of my interest (I do not want to die), hence the name *motivational relevance*. Finally, the rope and snake as types, for sharing the typical characteristics of the experiential object in terms of shape and size, i.e., being alike, similar or the same, have *interpretative relevance* in establishing the meaning of the object (Schutz, 2011: 113–118).

Topical-, motivational- and interpretative relevances are interdependent. In the case concerned, the fear of snakes (of dying), as underlying motive is the very reason for the object becoming topical and for the person fantasizing that it is possibly a snake. Formally put, for the type (*snake*) as interpretive scheme being activated and pulled into the thematic “kernel” of my attention (Schutz, 1966: 129–131; 2011: 108, 123–135, 148–184). Recent empirical research found that this is, in fact, the case. When facing a threatening or otherwise anxiety-producing situation or object, the corresponding interpretative schemes become highly accessible in the memory (Eitam et al., 2013: 468).⁷ As Schutz notes, the three different forms or relevances and the network of types together are also, and necessarily, interconnected. What one perceives as problematic, one’s take on the issue, how it is investigated and the solu-

⁷ It is perhaps worth noting that the authors, to illustrate the problem at stake, also take the example of snakes.

tion one comes up with, all depend on previous experiences (and the lack thereof), i.e., the sum total of types stored in the stock. It follows, conversely, that the structure or chronological layers of experiences in the stock is a function of the relevances jointly present at the time of sedimentation.

Schutz himself linked the above analysis of relevances to issues of social interaction and intergroup relations, most notably in his essays, ‘The Stranger’ [1944], ‘The Well-Informed Citizen’ [1946], and ‘Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World’ [1955]. As he argues, when interacting with people, both as individuals and as members of a social group, we always face a series of problems to solve. The less familiar we find the other, the more chances there are for topical relevances being imposed upon us (Schutz, [1946] 1964: 128–133). However, both the “Stranger” and a member of the in-group can only approach and understand each other in terms of their own patterns of interpretation (Schutz, [1944] 1964: 99f.).⁸ We always bring our respective system of relevances and typifications as background knowledge to bear on the situation ([1955] (1964): 251–255; 1972: 192f.; see Nasu, 2006). Furthermore, given the nature of sedimentation process discussed in the previous section, this taken-for-granted habitual knowledge is rather subjective, and, more importantly, highly culture-specific. Gallagher similarly argues that, when trying to understand others in interaction, there is a necessary (and reciprocal) interplay of pragmatic interests and cultural practices (Gallagher, 2012). That is, most of the time, we interact with others “in ways that generate meaning that is relevant to us or to the situation” (Gallagher, 2017: 225).⁹ The significance of all this for self-categorisation and stereotype activation can be well-illustrated by how migrants arriving in Hungary have lately been viewed by both the police and the public.

Drawing the Threads Together: the Relevance of Gypsy as Ideal Type in Stereotyping Migrants

To briefly outline the case, in 2015, an unprecedented number of irregular migrants arrived in Hungary, mainly asylum seekers from the warzones of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The government sealed the border with a barbed-wire fence and launched a fierce and overwhelming anti-immigrant campaign depicting migrants as invaders, a threat to the community, problematising their cultural and religious differences, and so on (Fekete 2016; AIDA, 2020; Gyollai and Korkut, 2019). As suggested above, shared social identity would already enable consensus on the approval of exclusionary initiatives, such as the fence. To be sure, xenophobic discourses are generally framed with reference to the shared knowledge, typical concerns, and pre-existing relevance structure of the target audience (see Gyollai, 2020). Nevertheless, shared group membership coupled with the government’s “siege mentality” (Bar-Tal, 2000: ch. 5–7; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005: ch. 2) has certainly been proven to be effective at

⁸As Schutz notes, these discrepancies between interpretative frames of reference are often regarded as the unwillingness or inability of immigrants to adopt the cultural patterns and norms of the host community (Schutz, [1944] 1964: 104f.).

⁹Gallagher & Hutto (2008) elsewhere refer to this feature of interactions as “pragmatic intersubjectivity”.

unifying the in-group, and, simultaneously, generating and justifying collective hostility against migrants as out-group members. As a result of the campaign, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments among the public peaked in 2016. In tandem with self-categorisation, the stereotypical perception of migrants has also been prompted. Now, what is interesting for the purpose of this paper is how out-group categorisation took place, i.e., the outgroup characteristics and corresponding stereotypes being activated and attributed to migrants. As mentioned earlier, some police and military personnel involved in border control referred to migrants as “Gypsies” adding that they look like and behave like Roma Gypsies.¹⁰ It is notable that members of the public also drew comparison between the two groups, arguing that migrants, just like the Roma, are “lazy” and would only be a “burden” to the community; they pose a “threat to public safety” and the crime rate would increase; furthermore, they would be unable to integrate into Hungarian society (see Simonovits, 2020). However, it is not self-evident why Roma Gypsies and the associated stereotypes (and not something else) are relevant and play a seemingly important role in the out-group categorisation of migrants. To put it another way: why is an intermediary category required to describe migrants in the first place, instead of referring to *migrants* as such? To answer this question, one needs to be (1) aware of the fact that this was the first time Hungary saw mass migration from the Middle East on that scale in its modern history, i.e., it was a novel experience for most Hungarians, and (2) familiar with the significance of the *Gypsy* as ideal type in Hungarian popular- and police occupational culture. As to the second condition, although the Roma community is the largest ethnic minority in Hungary, the perception of the public towards them is traditionally and notoriously hostile. The overwhelming majority of the non-Roma population avoid any social interaction with Roma people, who are stigmatised, discriminated against and often live in poverty with all the implications segregation entails (Fekete, 2016). The police have a long record of institutional racism and abuse of power against the Roma (Hera, 2017). Ethnic profiling, disproportionate stop-and-search practices and brutality have been an ever-present feature of police-Roma encounters. Although the term “Gypsy-criminal” is nowadays mainly used by openly far right groups, the corresponding attitudes have remained part of both popular and police culture, i.e., the Roma are perceived to be dangerous and a threat to society. Thus, based on Schutz’s theory of relevance, perhaps the following pattern can clarify why the ideal type of the *Gypsy* has been triggered. The memory or stock of knowledge comprises all possible types applied in previous situations when encountering individuals crossing borders: traveling for leisure - tourist; searching for a job - economic migrant; fleeing warzone - asylum seeker, and so on. Each of these types has interpretative relevance as far as people on the move are concerned, i.e., they are all on the inner *horizon* or the interpretive spectrum of individuals who feature the basic characteristics typical to a traveller. Again, to decide which one of these types as sub-categories defines migrants depends on my prevailing interest. To put it simply, to an NGO worker, an irregular migrant means a vulnerable person in need of immediate protection, while a human smuggler would approach the same person as a customer. Given the purpose

¹⁰ A soldier specifically answered the question what they thought of when hearing the word “migrant” as follows: “Gypsy, immediately, this is how we call them too...they are disgusting, smelly, terribly gross”.

of their role, the police are likely to interpret migrants against the background of their previous work experiences and typifications pertaining to their job. That is, the Roma Gypsy might have served as a characterological type, or an on-hand interpretive scheme, the police already familiar with in terms of danger and threat. On the one hand, the prevailing interest, as per government policy, is to stop migrants at the fence *in order to* refuse entry, *because* migrants pose a threat to the community. On the other hand, to the police, Syrian refugees, having travelled for months in the same set of clothes, and because of the colour of their skin, may physically appear similar to Roma Gypsies (see fn. 9). In other words, the *Gypsy* as the archetype of the presumably dangerous *Other*, whom the police frequently encounter in their everyday work, might appear both motivationally and interpretively relevant to make sense of migrants.¹¹ Such identification of migrants by the police, again, derives from and mirrors the broader public perception of Roma people. In other words, the stereotype of Gypsies as the dangerous *Other* originates from the community (i.e., ingroup) the police represent, hence the overlap between public attitudes towards the Roma and migrants mentioned earlier. In this sense, the police are only citizens in uniform.

It is important to note that, due to the persistent anti-immigrant campaign (sedimentation), the stereotype of migrants as a threat has been solidified over time. With the type of *migrant* becoming part of the common-sense knowledge of Hungarians in its own right, the identification process has been reversed on some occasions. Locals voluntarily reported individuals to the police whom they assumed to be migrants based on physical appearance, such as skin colour or outfit; many of the reported people turned out to be Hungarian Roma citizens.

Implications

The fact that stereotypes associated with Roma Gypsies are deeply rooted in Hungarian police culture, might also have had serious consequences for the treatment of migrants. As discussed above, types, relevance and the corresponding attitudes are interrelated and jointly stored in the stock, and together account for the habitual knowledge we rely on in everyday life; this goes for both our private and professional life. That is, the types, stereotypes, and corresponding habits sedimented during professional socialisation amount to the “recipe” knowledge the police draw on when

¹¹ One could argue that referring to the Hungarian Roma community as *travellers* (the paramount theme) is inaccurate from the outset. Although nomadism as such is only applicable in their case in a historical perspective, the Roma as outsiders who may have settled but never fully belonged is an integral part of their public image. During the anti-immigrant campaign, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself once urged his audience to remember what happened when people “en masse” migrated to the town “from the outside,” referring to the local tension between non-Roma and Roma communities. It is also important to add here that, in social psychology, the issue of why an assemblage of people is perceived as a group is discussed under the concept of *entitativity*. The literature differentiates between categorical and dynamical entitativity, the former referring to the physical similarity of group members, while in the latter case, the collective gains its “groupness” by virtue of the perceived coordinated actions and shared goals of its members (Rutchick et al., 2008). In short, it is perhaps reasonable to argue that “migrating en masse” as dynamical group determinant might have been interpretatively relevant to putting the Roma into the main category of travellers. (On the relationship between entitativity perception and out-group categorisation see Phillips, 2021).

performing their duty (see Schutz, 1970: 116–122; 1972: 181–201). The Police, as an organisation, functions based on codes of conduct, certain formal and informal rules and practices shared by its members. These rules “confront” its members as an unquestionable objective facticity, i.e., they make up the common-sense knowledge of the police and are taken-for-granted. Officers become accustomed to these routine practices during their socialisation and learn “how things are done” in the organisation, which take the burden of choice off the individual (see Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 71, 112). Again, the function of these practices is to solve typical issues in a typical manner that usually occur in the context of a typical situation (see Schutz, 1970: 120). This “recipe” knowledge becomes the framework within which future experiences are approached and interpreted (see Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 70–84). In any situation that requires intervention, the police necessarily rely on this practical toolkit and respond in a way in which they would respond in a similar situation. Because, as shown earlier, the meanings, relevances and corresponding attitudes associated with the Roma have been transmitted to migrants, the routine practices relating to the former have arguable determined the way in which the police have treated the latter.

Conclusion

According to self-categorisation theory, when categorising people into groups, the stereotypical perception of others seems to be inevitable. Empirical research found that the stereotypes applied, and how they are activated in the first place, is heavily determined by the perceiver’s underlying interests in the given situation. This article demonstrated that Schutzian phenomenology can provide a resourceful theoretical clarification for how this occurs. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for this claim is the increasing attention paid by cognitive and social psychologists to the role of motivational relevance in person perception. Schutz argued that whenever we interact with others, especially as members of a social group, the way in which we approach and understand our interaction partner is a function of the integrated structure of typifications and relevances pertaining to the community we live in. That is, we categorise people based on the pre-established cultural patterns of everyday social life as taken for granted within our group. To illustrate the Schutzian approach to intersubjective understanding, the paper took the example of the Hungarian police’s encounter with migrants. As has been argued, based on their pre-existing routine and habitual knowledge, the *Gypsy* as ideal type has seemed to be interpretatively and motivationally relevant to make sense of the phenomenon of mass migration, an experience novel to the police. Not only have the corresponding stereotypes been prompted, but attitudes towards the Roma, such as hostility and aversion, have also been transmitted to migrants. Hence, routine practices in relation to the Roma might also have informed the way in which the police performed their border control duties and treated irregular border crossers. In other words, what we can also learn from Schutz is that while the fundamental underlying mechanisms of social categorisation certainly show similar patterns from society to society, the selection and content of

stereotypes, i.e., precisely *how* we are prejudiced, discriminate against, and hate others, as opposed to Tajfel's claim (1981b: 148), is highly culture-specific.

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