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**Fostering Dialogue in a Liminal Space:
On the Transformative Potential of Critical Participatory
Action Research with African Unaccompanied Minors in Italy**

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*To my parents, Jan and Doris, for showing me unconditional love and how to extend
this to others*

To my brother, Stan, for being my inspiration and always making me laugh

To Emilia, for the home we created together

To Hanna, for learning what loving practice means together

To the boys, for trusting us and for creating something beautiful together

*To the CriPsy collective, for showing me what a safe space means- without you none
of this would have been possible*

*And to the compagn3, all those here today, and all those that have paved the way. May
we never stop fighting for a better world*

For the creation of a world in which it is easier to love

Freire, 1970

The very being of man (both external and internal) is the deepest communion. To be means to communicate...To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself.

Bakhtin, 1984

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Abstract

This thesis explores the intersection of critical conscientization, migration and liminality in the context of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) arriving in Italy. Migration is conceptualized as a multifaceted and dynamic process, shaped by colonial histories, political borders, and economic pressures, as well as individual agency. In their journeys and beyond their arrival in a new country, migrants occupy "liminal spaces"—states of being between worlds, marked by uncertainty and marginalization, but also by transformation.

This research employs Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) to examine the role of dialogue and collective meaning-making in a process of critical conscientization among UAMs. By creating a safe*r space for interaction, the project aims to engage in reflective processes that challenge existing power dynamics, and together articulate experiences and empower the UAMs' voices. The study also incorporates art-based methods, particularly photovoice, as a liminal affective technology to facilitate these dialogues and support the development of new cultural identities.

Through this intervention, the research investigates the transformative potential of liminal spaces, particularly within the framework of critical conscientization. In doing so, it specifically looks at the potential for fostering authentic dialogue in these spaces and explains some of the key factors present in its development. The study highlights the importance of addressing structural inequalities and creating supportive environments for UAMs, not only to navigate the challenges of migration but also to actively participate in reshaping the narratives surrounding their experiences.

Keywords: *Migration, Photovoice, Liminality, UAMs, Crit. Consciousness*

Introduction

The current global socio-political climate is marked by fear and uncertainty. Economic instability, growing populism, and the escalating climate crisis are reshaping societies, particularly in Europe. Within these challenges, existing oppressive systems such as capitalism, racism, sexism, and ableism become even more entrenched, exacerbating societal divisions. In the face of these complex, interlinked issues, one big question is how to harness the potential of theory to create real, impactful change in people's lives.

In an increasingly polarized Europe, immigrants are frequently scapegoated as the root of various societal problems. Despite a wealth of academic and anecdotal evidence demonstrating the positive contributions of immigration, the rhetoric of fear continues to grow, often leading to misguided policies and narratives that dehumanize marginalized communities. By focusing on the narratives of those most often pushed to the periphery—unaccompanied minor refugees—we hope to provide a space where marginalized voices are heard and amplified.

This thesis is grounded in Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), an approach that aligns with feminist, decolonial, and critical psychology theories. It begins with the recognition that the issues migrants are facing today are multifaceted and cannot be addressed through simple solutions. Instead, transformation must happen across multiple levels of society—politics, corporate change, and grassroots activism (Wright, 2021). This work, however, focuses on starting at a grassroots level, engaging directly with unaccompanied minors in Italy who are frequently left out of the dialogue that concerns their own futures.

The intervention discussed in this thesis was designed with unaccompanied minor refugees residing in a temporary reception facility in Northern Italy. Through a series of structured participatory workshops, the project sought to create a safe*r space¹ for authentic dialogue and collective meaning-making, focusing particularly on processes of critical conscientization—the development of a critical awareness of the social, political, and economic forces shaping peoples' lives. By integrating art-based methodologies, particularly photovoice, we sought to utilize creative expression as a way to navigate and reimagine the liminal spaces that these young people inhabit.

The overall research question guiding the interventions was: What are the potentials of engaging in Critical Participatory Action Research with unaccompanied minor refugees

¹ The formulation “safe*r space aims to show that spaces can never really be fully safe, however, we can try to shape them to be as inclusive, accessible, and safe as possible for marginalized peoples a little bit easier (Minkov, 2021).

(UAMs) from African countries? More specifically, this thesis seeks to answer: What were the key elements that enabled us to develop authentic dialogue within this context?

Psychology is, as everything, rooted in a specific time and place in society. As such, psychologists carry a responsibility to engage in research and praxis that is concerned with the well-being of all people- in this it is essential to critically question and actively work towards dismantling unjust structures. In this intervention, we tried to live up to that responsibility. Through dialogue, breaking down traditional power dynamics, and leveraging art as a form of expression, this work aims to empower participants and challenge the structures that limit their opportunities. The following chapters will present the theoretical foundations, describe the intervention, and analyze its outcomes, highlighting the possibilities for transformation when marginalized voices are given space and legitimacy. Ultimately, this thesis is a call to action: to rethink how we understand migration, to foster inclusive environments, and to actively participate in building a society that values all its members equally.

Chapter 1: Theory and background

The following section explores the most important concepts and theories related to the project at hand. It aims to introduce the ideas that this research and the interventions were based on. Firstly, I attempt to define Migration, then look at the concept of liminality, and its relation to Migration, adolescence and the power that liminal spaces can hold. Then, I dive into the concept of critical conscientization, looking specifically at authentic dialogue in this context. Finally, I aim to provide an overview of the interconnection of these topics and draw the connection to the construction of our project.

Migration

At the heart of this thesis lies the concept of migration, a multifaceted and complex construal deeply intertwined within various social, political, and economic dimensions. While it is beyond the scope of this work to address all of these aspects, the following section will provide an overview of migration, exploring its definitions, the reasonings behind its problematization, and the challenges faced by migrant populations in Europe, especially the conditions of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Italy.

It is difficult to find a clear definition of the meaning of migration due not only to its complex and broad nature but also to its constantly changing epistemological status. Looking at the literature, however, some aspects seem to repeatedly come up, and thus might be considered defining features. Migration entails movement, and as such it is a dynamic process (de Haas, 2021). In this movement, migration also entails a crossing of borders, whether those by nation-state bound, regional, literal or symbolic (Alvarez, 2012). Migration also includes people, and thus people's desires, dreams and needs (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012) And, importantly, migration is tied to broader society, influenced by the possibilities and constraints of people's collectiveness and their context (Carling, & Collins, 2018). Considering these different aspects, one definition of migration might be "movement of people across borders or regions, driven by a combination of economic, social, and political factors, and shaped by opportunities and constraints that both enable and limit human mobility"².

As every socially relevant issue, migration has experienced what one might call a metaphorical "botanical phase", where different hierarchies, differentiations and ramifications were made. And yet, while these differentiations might be important, they risk losing the possibility of comprehending the lived migratory experience. As such, they are created in a specific societal context, where certain types of migration and the migration of certain people(s)

² It is important to note that I make no attempt to fully conceptualize migration, but rather pose this as a working definition for the thesis at hand.

is encouraged, and others are not. What it means for migration to be considered as “regular”, “irregular”, or “voluntary” in the European Immigration context, is strongly shaped by societal ideas and values stemming from a *white*³ European perspective and thus neglects to consider the perspective of many people that actually migrate. In doing so, historically rooted power dynamics are maintained and perpetuated (e.g., El Qadim, 2017; De Carvalho, 2023).

Hundreds of millions of people fall into the category of “migrant” internationally (IMO, 2024). While labelling these people to fit them into a certain category can be a powerful tool to visualize individual and collective experiences, it can also be harmful, by essentializing people’s experiences and losing sight of the individuals’ agency (de Haas, 2021). In academia, people’s motives for migrating are frequently divided into two categories: one where people are compelled to move due to overwhelming pressures that overshadow economic considerations, and another where migration is primarily driven by economic forces, such as labour demand (e.g., George, 2016). However, research highlights that the experiences and motives behind migration are more complex than these binary categories suggest. Migration decisions are also shaped by collective forces such as family ties, social networks, and community dynamics (see e.g., de Haas, 2021; Massey & Parrado, 1999). It is therefore not only an individual, but a collective process and experience, where social and societal ties play key roles in shaping the movement of people.

Thus, to understand migration processes better, we should consider them not in isolation, but conceptually connected to larger social change processes of which they are an integral part (de Haas, 2021). This includes considering the colonial origins and consequences of many of the issues immigrants, and specifically those seeking asylum are confronted with (De Carvalho, 2023). Not only is the perception of European “natives” of asylum seekers strongly linked to the racist and classist ideology inherent to colonization, but as are the reasons for people seeking refuge in Europe in the first place: While people have been “on the move” everywhere for a long time, the migration to and from Europe as we know it is largely traceable to colonial times (de Haas, 2021; Van Mol, & De Valk, 2015, pp. 33-35). Consequences of colonialism are still felt in many countries in the Global South, oftentimes fostering instable political landscapes and an economic dependence on the Global North, leaving migration to the Global North as one of the few choices in the strive for a better life.

³ The term “*white*” is a socio-political term for people who mainly benefit from racism (Arndt & Ofuately-Alazard, 2011). To distinguish it from a biologicistic/culturalist understanding, we deliberately write the word in small letters and italics in this work.

The problematization of certain types of migration

(Im-)Migration has become one of the most popular and controversial topics in contemporary politics around the globe. In recent times, phrases along the lines of “migration is at an all time high” are stated by individuals and institutions alike, accompanied by calls for emergency action against the “waves” or “floods” of immigrants coming to Europe (e.g., Fox News, 2024; Hedlund, 2024; Magnani & García-Ajofrín, 2024; Die Welt, 2024; Wiegelmann, 2024). This language frames immigration to Europe as a *temporary emergency* that needs to be dealt with, as well as using language that makes immigration seem like an uncontrollable, unnatural phenomenon (Pitzalis, 2023). In reality, people have been migrating for thousands of years and the percentages of people that are internationally on the move relative to the amount of people alive on earth has been comparatively stable (around 3%) in the last decades (De Haas, 2023)⁴. The same applies to the numbers of immigrants coming to Europe within the last ten years (apart from a peak in 2015/2016 with the arrival of many Syrians fleeing their countries Civil war) (IOM, 2024a). Some of these claims can be connected to faults in data collection or evaluation because these are largely centred around the Global North. The UNHR for example, stated the “world’s forcibly displaced population remained at a record high” (UNHCR 2017, p. 2), which was widely reported by media and also reproduced in the academic field (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018). However, these statistics neglect numbers of displaced people(s) in large parts of the world (de Haas, 2023). Misreporting or misinterpretations of this type of data contributes to misunderstanding of the scale of migration, specifically of refugee migration. It connects to and further fosters already existing racist and xenophobic sentiments in Europe (Friese, 2019).

Fear and rejection of immigrants is not a new phenomenon, however, in the last decades this sentiment has gained popularity for right-wing parties across the globe and in Europe (Ratkovic, 2017). While the term “immigrant” often used generically in this context, it is colloquially equated with a specific type of migration: seeking asylum. People seeking asylum are those people that are looking to achieve refugee status, which, simply put, is meant to be granted to people that have been forced to flee their home country and are unable to return because of a fear of persecution (UNHCR, 2019). In this rhetoric of panic and hate, racialized portrayals of people immigrating suggest an “invasion” or an overwhelming “flood” of migrants. Stark images of vulnerable individuals arriving on the island bolster a narrative that frames undocumented mobility as either a humanitarian crisis or a menace to European welfare

⁴ Considering the origin of the author, this paper will mainly address migration from a European perspective (i.e., migration to and from Europe and the discourse around it)

and identity, prompting calls for extreme measures against ‘traffickers’ and endorsing a continuous state of emergency. The idea of “cracking down” on asylum seekers has become a normalized European governance strategy, ignoring the violent consequences and humanitarian disaster that fuels and neglecting measures that could benefit society at large and take into account human rights (Friese, 2019).

This rhetoric and the consequent actions taken, take place against the backdrop of the larger power dynamics already existing between the countries people flee from, oftentimes formerly colonized countries in the Global South, and the countries they come to, frequently the colonizing countries in the Global North. This creates harsh realities for people seeking asylum in Europe. This already challenging situation is further accentuated for people that experience multiple forms of marginalization or discrimination, e.g., LGBTQ* people, *FLINTA*⁵* people, disabled people and minors.⁶

Asylum system in Italy and UMAs

After having survived the journey across the Mediterranean on paths that are becoming increasingly deadly due to their illegalization by the EU, many people seeking asylum arrive at the coasts of Italy (IOM, 2024b). In the last years, the number of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) that arrive here has increased significantly, to five times the amount from the years 2010 to 2016 (UNICEF, 2017, p.2). UAMs are considered a high-risk population from psychopathological and psychosocial points of view, but also bring with them a lot of coping skills and collective resilience or resistance. Italy is one of the main countries where a lot of UAMs arrive, being at the crossroads of Europe and Northern Africa. This location is particularly prominent because more UAMs are journeying from West Africa to Europe via Northern Africa (UNICEF, 2017).

Upon their arrival, asylum seekers, including UAMs, are taken to "hotspots" near major entry points like Lampedusa (Asylum Information Database, 2023). Here, they are subjected to undergo medical exams, receive legal information, and are pre-registered. If eligible, they are transferred to first reception facilities (Centri di Prima Accoglienza, CPA) located across Italy, if not they are sent to the (Centro di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio), where they are detained until

⁵ German abbreviation for female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, transgender, and agender persons that is frequently used in queer and transfeminist spaces.

⁶ While public rhetoric emphasizes the need to control migration, both European and some African states have underlying economic interests that rely on the continuation of migration flows (De Haas, 2008). The economies of receiving and sending countries increasingly depend on migrant labour and remittances, respectively. This gap between rhetoric and practice underlines that states are not unified entities. They have diverse, often conflicting, political and economic interests - particularly between employers and wider economic forces that favour immigration, and politicians who take a tough stance on immigration to secure or maintain power.

they are deported back to their countries of origin. The extraordinary reception facilities CAS (Centri Accoglienza Straordinaria) offer temporary housing while asylum seekers await a decision or a spot in the regular reception system, the SAI (Sistema Ordinario di Accoglienza). Some of these centres are specifically assigned for UAMs (Asylum Information Database, 2023).

The limited capacity of the SAIs forces many UAMs to remain in CAS for extended periods, often far beyond the intended 90 days (Asylum Information Database, 2023). The situation for asylum seekers, and UAMs specifically has worsened in the last years, reflective of the Italian government's ideas. The 2018 Salvini decree as had big impact on this, because it drastically reduced funding to the CAS', making them to basic lodging facilities that consequently provide inadequate support, heightening the vulnerability of UAMs during the asylum process (Asylum Information Database, 2023). The introduction of the October 2023 decree worsened the situation for UAMs further. It allows for minors over the age of 16 to be placed in temporary adult reception centers for up to 90 days. This goes against earlier legislation that emphasized housing UAMs in specific facilities with a multidisciplinary approach to their care and age assessment (European Website on Integration, n.d.; Refugee.info Italy, 2023). These laws also allow for expedited age determination of UAMs, bypassing previous requirements for a more thorough, multidisciplinary evaluation by trained professionals. This may lead to incorrect age assessments that can consequentially undermine minors' access to proper support and integration services (European Website on Integration, n.d.; Refugee.info Italy, 2023).

CAS facilities often lack the essential resources needed for proper education, psychological support, and vocational training that could aid UAMs in building a stable future. Inadequate funding and service reductions also contribute to overcrowded conditions and make it even more difficult for UAMs to access the tailored support and services provided by the SAI system (Asylum Information Database, 2023). This cycle of limited resources and prolonged uncertainty significantly affects the mental health and social development of young asylum seekers, ultimately impeding their ability to transition successfully into adulthood and society. These issues underscore the need for more tailored and comprehensive approaches to asylum and integration, particularly for those who are most at risk (Migliori et al., 2022).

Liminality

Liminality in its most literal interpretation means "threshold". Chakraborty describes this as "the sill of a doorway, which has to be crossed when entering a house. It indicates the point at which the public outside world ends and the private, familial, inside world begins"

(2016, p.145). Liminal places can be thresholds, as well as more extended areas, borderlands, that are placed in-between larger civilizations, larger groups, or even whole societies (Thomassen 2009, as cited by Wood, 2016).

In the anthropological field, liminality has been used to define phases of transition, phases in which individuals find themselves in a state of ambiguity, where they find between their former and future identities. The concept of liminality, as a world between worlds was introduced by van Gennep (1909, as cited by Stenner, 2021). Individuals in liminal states are neither in their original state nor fully integrated into their new environment. Turner (1969, as cited by Chakrobarty, 2016) emphasized liminality represents a state of anti-structure, where the usual social norms and hierarchies are suspended. Similarly, Stenner (2021) describes liminality as a space where individuals experience disorientation between a former state and a future one. In post-colonial theory, liminality holds particular importance, as it highlights the in-between spaces where cultural shifts occur, leading to the emergence of new discursive forms, which can enable transformation (Bhaba, 1994).

Usually, liminality is not a space in which one stays permanently. However, there are situations where the transition from one phase to the next, or from one social position to another, is hindered or left incomplete (Chakrobarty, 2016). Being stuck in this limbo has been called “perpetual liminality”, and has been commonly observed in the migration experience, and even more so in the refugee experience (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022).

Migration as a liminal process and experience

The in-betweenness that refugees experience during their journey after being thrust onto a pathway and assigned identities that they have not chosen. The status of being without status, of being undefined both legally and socially, has long-standing impacts on a person even after the initial migration is over (Yahya, 2021, p.26)

Liminality is very present in the migration experience and generally in (im)mobility (Raghuram et al., 2024). Throughout the entire migration process, which includes the time after arrival, people find themselves in-between, in liminal spaces: whether it is the travel in itself with an end-goal in mind and the crossing of various borders on the way, the endless waiting at various stages of the journey, or in the confrontation with a new culture.

In illustrating the liminality of the refugee situation, Yahya describes the in-betweenness of crossing the Aegean Sea: “Physically you are crossing the sea. Legally, you are perforating bordered territories of the European Union. But psychologically, you are crossing between the known to the unknown, crossing into a new and unfamiliar system” (2021, p.29).

This illustrates some shapes that liminality takes in the refugee journey: the physical, the legal and the psychological are all in a space of uncertainty.

The physical is particularly visible in the crossing of borders and the stay in camps throughout the journey. Refugee camps embody spaces of prolonged liminality, where individuals are caught in a state of social and legal suspension (Ramadan, 2013; Tsoni, 2016). Migrants, having left their homelands, find themselves neither fully able to enter European society nor return home, creating a "protracted socio-spatial and temporal liminality" (Tsoni, 2016). This "liminal loop," as Tsoni describes it (p.41), extends beyond the camps themselves, perpetuating a sense of social and legal ambiguity. In these spaces, time and identity are frozen, as refugees navigate the uncertainties of their journey, caught, once again, between the past they have left and an uncertain future ahead. The camps, reinforce the notion of liminality by blurring the boundaries between detention and mobility, creating a setting where time is lost, and lives are essentially "on hold" (Tsoni, 2016; Ramadan, 2013).

In a legal sense, spaces of liminality along the refugee journeys, such as borders and detention centers (largely created by nation states), engage in the production of irregular migrants as "liminal legal subjects" (Tsoni, 2016, p.38). This impacts the im/mobility of migrants, capturing them in a space that is neither here nor there, but imposes strict rules and regulations. Borders, in particular, exemplify this liminality by acting as thresholds where individuals are often caught in a bureaucratic limbo, stripped of rights and agency, while also embodying the tension between national sovereignty and humanitarian obligations (Dauvergne, 2008).

The arrival in a new country is an extension of the liminal experiences confronted and survived throughout the migration journey. Even if the physical and legal liminality might be overcome, the psychological withstands for a long-time (Yahya, 2021). Two aspects where this can be visible are concerning the notion of "home", i.e., people not feeling they belong neither here or there, and in the confrontation with different cultures (Chakrobarty, 2016). Whether migration is voluntary or forced, it involves leaving one's homeland and resettling in an unfamiliar territory. This displacement often results in feelings of homelessness and disconnection (Chakrobarty, 2016). Migrants frequently long for their homeland, and this sense of "homelessness," can be both literal and metaphorical.

This confrontation with new places and is made even more difficult through the encounter with a different culture. According to the dialogical theory of self, a person's identity and concept of self exists in relation to the concept of culture (Gamsakhurdia, 2018). Culture is not static but constantly evolves. Culture becomes evident through human action, emerging

from the interaction between individuals and their environment. Human development is deeply intertwined with the cultural symbols in one's surroundings, as people and culture mutually shape one another (Gamsakhurdia, 2018). Already challenging and requiring adaptation in itself, when confronted with such an abrupt change in culture, this enforces a strong need for the reconstruction of one's self (Bhaba, 1994).

Culture in itself is already strongly liminal in its development (Sharma, 2013) and the experiences it provides (Stenner, 2021). When different cultures interact, this liminality becomes even more present, creating something not entirely new, not entirely old that has been characterized as “hybridization” (Bhaba, 1994)⁷. From this emerges a “third space”, a connective tissue between cultures, which is neither completely one culture or the other. Here, new identities, dialogues, and forms of cultural meaning can develop, challenging fixed notions of identity and culture (idem). By rejecting rigid binary thinking, this hybrid space allows for inclusion and the integration of diverse perspectives. It is a space where traditional boundaries are blurred, posing new challenges, while simultaneously enabling cultural reinvention (Chakrobarty, 2016).

The liminal quality of refugees' experiences does not end with the arrival in the destination country but continues on for an unspecified amount of time throughout the process of creating a (new) home (Wimark, 2021). This and many other factors, can contribute to refugees finding themselves in perpetual, rather than transitional liminality (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022). They remain in a limbo with an imposed identity (that of being a refugee) and little to no control over the social structures limiting the resolution of these feelings. All they can do is wait; and thus embrace another form of liminal existence (Seitz, 2017). This existence—between past and present, belonging and alienation—can create a confusing experience, as they continue to navigate life in a space that feels both real and distant, resulting in a re-evaluation of meaning and identity (Chakrobarty, 2016). Individuals caught in these spaces, lacking a clear place in their social structure, often experience feelings of marginalization, exclusion, and a loss of identity or agency (Chakrobarty, 2016). This can have long-standing impact on people, especially for those that experience it in vulnerable times of their lives (Yahya, 2021).

⁷ Bhaba describes hybridity as a process used by colonial powers to try to reshape the identity of the colonized within a singular framework. However, rather than succeeding at monolithizing identity, a hybrid identity is created that blends elements from both the colonizer and the colonized, disrupting any notion of a pure, essentialist cultural identity.

The multiple liminalities of the UAM experience

The process of growing up and transitioning between youth and adolescence and adulthood is already rife with liminality—to experience these transitions while already in a space of uncertainty and in-betweenness may further compound its effects on that child’s future and development (Yahya, 2021, p.34).

Next to the challenges posed to UAMs by the migration in itself, they are also faced with another challenging liminal experience: adolescence. Young people occupy “border spaces” in society (Woods, 2016, p.482) The rite of initiation, and with that the transition from being a child to being an adult, is the most common/typical rite of passage, and with that a key liminal experience (van Gennep, 1909, as cited by Gamsakhurdia, 2018). They are not seen as independent political agents or cannot enjoy the rights associated with adult citizenship, for example being allowed to vote and work (Woods, 2016). UAMs often make their way to the Global North in the hopes of making money to send back to their families (UNICEF, 2017). Until they are officially of age, however, they cannot meet this expectation, which once again, puts them into a limbo. The liminality experienced by UAMs is thus not only highlighted in the various confrontations with journeying and arrival as described before, but also by their suspension between adolescence and adulthood, waiting to work and fully begin their lives. The liminal challenges that UAMs face are specifically present in the CAS, which is a strongly liminal place. Like other places on refugees’ journeys, the CAS is constructed as a temporal solution, that oftentimes becomes extended indefinitely (Asylum Information Database, 2023; Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022). UAMs find themselves not fully being able to participate in larger society, often amongst each other without much contact to the larger world beyond the physical limits of a CAS. Once again, they find themselves in a sort of world-between worlds (Stenner, 2021).

The power of liminal spaces

While being a very challenging phenomenon, various authors, highlight the power of liminality. The disorientation experiences in a liminal experience or space can lead to opportunities for transformation; both on an individual and a collective level. Buchener and colleagues defined this as an “emergent and shared worldview shift that is grounded in collective experiences” (Buechner et al., 2020, p.87). Liminal experiences allow for meaning-making and can thus catalyze the development of new self-concepts and communal identities, especially when individuals collaborate in the meaning-making process (Stenner, 2021; Turner,

1969; Chakraborty, 2016; Buechner et al., 2020; Bhaba, 1994). Ultimately, liminality thus not only facilitates personal transformation but also challenges existing social structures.

Overall, liminality plays a pivotal role in the migration experience of unaccompanied minors, facilitating both personal transformation and communal solidarity. Understanding and leveraging these liminal spaces, could help to foster critical meaning-making processes, and interactions. The process of meaning-making during these liminal phases can be harnessed vital for the development of critical consciousness.

Critical conscientization

Critical conscientization, or *conscientização* (as coined by Paulo Freire, 1970), refers to an individual's ability to perceive and critically analyse the social, political, and economic forces that shape their lives and perpetuate inequality. More than that, next to self-awareness and societal awareness, critical consciousness requires taking *action* upon this awareness with the goal of authentic liberation of people in a “process of humanization” (Freire, 1970, p.52). Three parts of critical conscientization have been identified: *critical reflection*, which involves recognizing and examining social injustices; *political efficacy*, also known as critical motivation, which is the belief in one's personal and collective power to create change; and *critical action*, which involves actively participating in initiatives aimed at making a difference (Watts et. al, 2011).

As the name suggests, critical conscientization is a process. One important part in this, is humanization. Oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressors by denying individuals their full humanity and potential (Freire, 1970). *Authentic liberation*, therefore, means restoring the human dignity of all people. This humanization is deeply relational and requires solidarity and mutual recognition between individuals (idem). Thus, this transformation happens not on an individual level, but a collective one. Individual growth is inseparable from the collective because individuals are always situated within a social context where power dynamics, cultural norms, and societal structures shape personal development (Vaughan, 2011). Considering this, an individual's critical consciousness evolves in tandem with their engagement in dialogue with others.

Fostering critical consciousness through dialogue

The idea that knowledge is necessarily relational, is very present in critical conscientization. It seems particularly visible in the concept of *dialogue*, a key part of the critical conscientization process, because it enables power-critical learning dynamics and

provides a basis for critical consciousness to develop. Dialogue aims to encourage critical thinking and works as a jumping off point for critical reflection of one's own knowledge and the development of new (shared) knowledge (Vaughan, 2011). Key here is the interaction between self and others and the view of the construction of knowledge as a collective phenomenon. Ideally, dialogue fosters individuals' capacities to critically reflect on societal structures and take transformative action (Vaughan, 2011). For dialogue to be authentic, it must be based on principles of love, humility, trust, and mutual respect (Freire, 1970, p.62-64). It requires participants to view each other as equals, as partners in the process of understanding and transforming their reality (Freire, 1970; Shor & Freire, 1987).

One method in order to encourage dialogue is a concept which Freire called *problem-posing education* (Freire, 1970, p.52), where people are engaged in a constant process of questioning, doubt and a level of embracing of uncertainty. This enables individuals to begin to see the world in new ways and develop the agency to transform it (Freire, 1970). This contrasts with the traditional *banking model* of education, where students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge. In line with the collective nature of critical conscientization, problem-posing education, focuses on learners and educators engaging in a reciprocal relationship where knowledge is co-constructed, and learners are encouraged to question and critically reflect on their world (Freire, 1970).

Thus, by contrasting with monological forms of communications, authentic dialogue can help to deconstruct existing power dynamics within the process critical conscientization in itself (Freire, 1970). The power dynamics present in dialogue mirror those present in society at large, since people are "rooted in temporal-spatial conditions" (Freire, 1970, p.82). These conditions, the context both immediate and at large, are oftentimes rooted in coloniality⁸. These legacies of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy have created imbalances in power that also impact the possibility for open and equal exchange (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). A (neo)colonial context may make it difficult for marginalized individuals to fully participate in dialogue, as they can feel (and often times are) silenced or invalidated by dominant discourses (Fanon, 1961). These power-dynamics are almost always also reflected in the relationships and identities of students and teachers, wherein various factors give the teacher power over a student.⁹ Throughout critical conscientization and thus also within dialogue, we should aim to

⁸ Coloniality refers to the enduring patterns of power, knowledge, and being that originated during colonialism but persist even after formal decolonization. It highlights how colonial structures continue to shape global hierarchies, racial inequalities, and epistemological dominance, privileging Western ways of knowing and being over others (Maldonado-Torres, 2007)

⁹ These factors vary from aspects related to positionality and authority, to gender, race or class-related identities and associated values.

build to deconstruct these dynamics and build new identities that highlight the collaborative nature of dialogue and break down hierarchal structures (Freire, 1970).

In order to address the unavoidable power inequalities inherent to our society, and thus inherent to the context of dialogue, it must be sensitive to issues of power and privilege. Herein it is essential to actively work to create spaces where all voices can be heard (Shor & Freire, 1987). Today, a very prevalent type of such a space is the concept of safe*r space. Safe*r spaces are places where people feel psychologically and emotionally secure enough to take risks, engage in dialogue, and express themselves freely (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Collective and personal transformation involves confronting uncomfortable issues, which challenge people's beliefs and identity. However, for this kind of self-disclosure and vulnerability to happen, the potential must outweigh the possible penalties (Holley & Steiner, 2005). The goal is for these environments to provide the psychological safety needed for individuals to challenge dominant power structures, reflect on their experiences, and collectively work toward social justice. By creating spaces where marginalized voices are heard and validated, communities can begin to heal from trauma, build resilience and resistance, and mobilize for change (hooks, 2000).

Bringing it all together in the current study

In the current study, the concepts and ideas introduced above are brought together to engage in critical qualitative research via creating an intervention with UAMs in a CAS in Northern Italy. Hereby we aim to look at the transformative potential of such an intervention in relation to critical conscientization.

The intervention is based on the idea that authentic thinking about reality does not take place in isolation, but only in relation with others. If it is true that “thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world by action” (Freire, 1970, p.50), *authentic communication* needs to take place in a context that aims to be free of hierarchical dynamics. This applies to strictly educational contexts or in research contexts, which (too) often fail to consider or question these dynamics (Fine & Torre, 2021). In order to ensure these values are met, we decided to engage in qualitative research, mainly using a *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR) approach.

At the core of CPAR is the idea that all people have “a right to research [...], to ask critical questions about the systems and practices that shape their lives, and to imagine through research-how they might be otherwise” (Fine & Torre, 2021, p. 3). CPAR operates on the premise that knowledge production is a shared endeavour in research as well as in other settings, “subject-subject relationship” thus dismantling the researcher vs. participant hierarchy (Sadik,

2019; Kemmis et al., 2014). It allows participant-researchers¹⁰ to engage actively in the research process, contributing their lived experiences and insights to co-create knowledge that is relevant and transformative for themselves and their communities (e.g., Summak, 2022; Sadik, 2019). It also holds potential for empowerment of those engaging in it and helps to democratize knowledge production and ultimately foster transformative action and social justice (Kemmis et al., 2014). This reflects ideas introduced above related to critical conscientization.

CPAR, like critical conscientization, crosses lines of power and difference in relational and contextual ways, shaped in conversation and dialogue (Fine & Torre, 2021). In order to enable this exchange to take place, and for *authentic dialogue* to occur, two things intuitively seemed essential: ensuring the possibility for *collective meaning-making* and thus fostering critical conscientization and secondly, the *creation of a safe*r space* for both the participant-researchers and the researcher-participants. Thus, the intervention aimed at creating such a space. By organising a new project within the CAS, a place with which the participant-researchers already were familiar with, with new, ambiguous rules¹¹, we attempted to break out of the given scripts, i.e., what the participant-researchers might expect from three psychologists coming to “talk to” them. By doing so, we attempted to move into a space of liminality, where the rules of encounter are a bit unclear. This discomfort can facilitate the decoupling and subsequent re-coupling of the psyche and social, creating new meaning (Stenner, 2021). Working together as researcher-participants and participant-researchers, we hoped to use this liminal experience as a starting point to establish new cultural norms within our group and changed position within the researcher-participant relationships and hopefully create a safe*r space.

Establishing these safe*r spaces is important for developing capabilities and fostering collective experiences. Certain types of art and media can facilitate this process of transformation (Stenner, 2021). Incorporating *art* in liminal processes can facilitate openness to new possibilities, thereby expanding capabilities and emotional connection (Atkinson & Robson, 2012). Art can function as a turning point and allow for people to navigate the complexities of their experiences while promoting ongoing change rather than returning to a stable state. As such it can function as a *liminal affective technology* (Stenner, 2021). Art also provides opportunities to engage people in the examination of social issues and can be used to

¹⁰ This study uses the terms participant-researchers and researcher-participants along the same lines as Freire uses the student-teacher and teacher-student labels, in order to point out and challenge hierarchical dynamics (Freire, 1970).

¹¹ E.g., no clear authority figures, similar ages of participant-researchers and researcher-participants, new topics that usually don't have a place

catalyse dialogue (Romney, 2005). Various projects have integrated art and CPAR to make the voices of marginalized people(s) heard (Fine & Torre, 2021). The method of photovoice, wherein participant-researchers document and express their experiences through photography and narratives, is particularly interesting in this case, as it also an engaging and fun for both participant-researchers and researcher-participants (Gorritz et al., 2023). For these reasons, we wanted to incorporate art with a particular focus on photovoice in this project.

For the intervention, we chose power as the generative topic. As indicated above, power is very present in critical conscientization, both in examining dynamics between educators and learners, as well as in the emphasis that is put on critically looking at and engaging with society. Power relations shape all aspects of our lives, influencing the ways individuals interact with and respond to systems, institutions, and one another. For UAMs, who navigate complex structures of authority, legality, and support in their daily lives, exploring the concept of power seemed especially relevant and interesting.

Overall, the intervention aimed to instrumentalize the liminal space that is ever-present for UAMs (whether in the CAS, in their journey, stay or stage of life) to engage in the collective formation of critical meaning-making processes. In this process, various art-based projects, and importantly the photovoice method, were used with the (expected) function as a liminal affective technology that enables authentic dialogue.

Chapter 2: Methodology and methods

The present study is part of a broader research project conducted within the frame of a research group on migration of the FISSPA department of the University of Padova. This study aims to engage in praxis, combining theory and action, as well as action and reflection to create a public psychology that is accessible to all (Freire, 1970). Our research is rooted in qualitative exploratory methodologies, chosen for their capacity to amplify the voices of marginalized communities, particularly those historically excluded from the production of scientific knowledge¹² (LeFrancois, 2014). In addition to this, by adopting a critical epistemological framework we hope to counter the epistemological violence and the inherent *Othering* that has long shaped migration studies (Teo, 2015, 2022; de Genova, 2002). Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) serves as the core of our approach, allowing for direct engagement with participants, who actively contribute to the research process (McTaggart & Nixon, 2014). This framework challenges traditional research hierarchies and centres the lived experiences of those often marginalized by academic discourse. Along these lines, we aim to adopt a critical ethnography stance, which actively addresses issues of power, inequality, and domination at both macro and micro levels in order to expose, challenge and transform oppressive systems (LeFrancois, 2014). This aligns closely with CPAR's focus on power-sensitive methodologies, which seek to bring marginalized voices to the forefront of community conversations and promote collaborative, transformative action (Fine & Torre, 2021).

Research group

This thesis stems from a larger research group founded at the University of Padova, consisting of two professors, Ciro de Vincenzo and Sara Santilli and six students. The overarching goal was to investigate the concept of migration from a psychological perspective.

Researcher-participants

The project at hand specifically, stems from the collaboration of the two professors and three students of the Masters “Clinical, Social and Intercultural psychology”, María Emilia Montaña, Hanna Reisch and Paula Cramer. Two of us are young women from Germany and the other is a young woman from Ecuador, all with different academic and personal background, different migration experiences and a shared interest in critical psychology. All of us have been

¹² Qualitative and ethnographic studies often carry underlying assumptions that can be just as problematic as those found in other research approaches and have been used to justify various forms of exploitation and by exoticizing “the Other” (Smith, 2008; LeFrancois, 2014). Thus, while they carry much potential, the use of these methodologies must be done with this in mind.

interested in and worked in the field of migration and particularly with refugees. Between us we speak English, Italian, Spanish, German and French.

Participant-researchers

The participant-researchers were a group of 18 young men from the CAS, an emergency welcoming house for young unaccompanied minors, mostly ranging from 4 to 12 per session. All participants were officially recognized as minors. The participant-researchers largely come from Western African countries, with the main countries being the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Guinea, The Gambia and Cameroon, as well as two from Egypt and Tunisia. Unrelated to their ages, the participant-researchers all had varying degrees of formal education. The main languages spoken between them are Mandingo, Wolof, Bambara, Fula, Maninka, Pulaar and Arabic as well as French, English and Italian.

Considerations on power dynamics

As mentioned, a key aspect in critical conscientization is developing an “equal playing field” for communication. Copying Freire’s approach here, of student-teacher and teacher-student, the people that participated in our study, will be referred to as participant-researchers and the three organizers as researchers-participant. Further recognition of power-dynamics is essential in order to try to ensure their deconstruction throughout the intervention. In the research group, we tried to individually and between each other continuously confront ourselves with reflections on our standpoints in order to understand how our positionality influences our understanding of our interactions and the process, which is a necessary aspect of research (Willig, 2013). Some of these aspects are mentioned in the following paragraph. It in no way claims to illustrate all the topics that were present in the intervention.

One important factor to consider, are that two of the researcher-participants are racialized as *white*¹³ or *Mestiza*¹⁴, while the participant-researchers are all racialized as Black or POCs. These dynamics echo broader societal power structures, where whiteness is often associated with authority, especially in academic research settings. In addition, the prior identify as women, while the later all identified as men, which, in line with traditional gender power structures, may have influenced our interactions. The researchers' slightly older age compared to the participants added another layer of power dynamics to the study. We made a concerted effort to position ourselves as co-learners in the participatory process, encouraging participants to share their expertise based on their lived experiences. However, we are aware

¹³ Identification of Hanna Reisch and Paula Cramer, keeping in mind the note made on *whiteness* above.

¹⁴ This is the identification of María Emilia Montaña, based on the experiences of having both Indigenous and Spanish ancestry in the Latin American context.

that various differences may have influenced the participants' willingness to share openly or fully engage with the research process.

Research question

Throughout the intervention we wanted to try to explore the potentials of CPAR with UAMs in the context of a CAS in Northern Italy. During the implementation and preparation process, we noted various aspects that are interrelated, but slightly different in their foci: Hanna Reisch focused on the emancipatory potential of liminal resistance, and María Emilia Montaña looked at processes of self and mutual recognition on the path to belonging. I tried to look at authentic dialogue, with the question in mind of what were the key elements that enabled us to develop authentic dialogue within this context?

Procedure

The start of the project was enabled with the help of *Ciro De Vincenzo*, who bridged the connection between the research team at the CAS. We first went to the CAS to join a meeting of the *équipe* between the various people involved in the CAS in different functions. The goal here was to introduce ourselves and our project and to understand how our project could contribute to the CAS.

As previously noted, a CAS serves as a temporary solution born from what is perceived as an “extraordinary” need and is by design intended to meet the fundamental needs of its residents, such as food and shelter. However, this CAS had been operating for about a year with mainly the same residents. In the meeting we joined, it became clear that frustrations about a lack of opportunities for the staff and the residents seemed to be rising. While the team believed to have met their formal responsibilities, they recognized a pressing need to challenge the restrictive boundaries set by reception system regulations. Although several initiatives had been attempted to engage in practices beyond these regulations, the residents often impose their own boundaries in relationships with staff because of their frustration and the constraints they face. This dynamic prevents all parties from fully engaging with one another.

With our intervention we thus wanted to explore and possibly disrupt the existing dynamics, bridge the borders imposed by the regulations and “must-dos”, in order to build relationships and a space that extend beyond the boundaries of what a CAS is usually able to be.

The semi-structured interventions

We designed a preliminary plan for an intervention consisting of six sessions, however, throughout the process we made many adjustments and went along with the input of the participant-researchers. Although we initially planned each session in detail, we adapted the activities based on the needs and ideas of the participant-researchers after each session, which led to an additional structured intervention. In the end, there were seven semi-structured interventions and a handful of more informal meetings. The informal meetings helped us build stronger relationships with the boys, gain deeper insights into their daily lives at the CAS, and observe how social interactions differ in a more casual setting.

Each structured intervention lasted about two hours, and throughout all the meetings, we communicated in Italian, English, and French, translating as needed. Some multilingual participant-researchers acted as translators for other languages when necessary. The interventions were held outdoors in the community garden, where we gathered in a circle or in smaller groups around tables. At the beginning of each session, we played music selected by one of the participant-researchers, to create an inviting atmosphere and encourage participation. Apart from the first session, each meeting started with a recap of the previous activities, followed by a clear outline of the session's plan, which we wrote on a whiteboard, in order to try to provide transparency of the process.

Throughout the intervention we used different methods and activities such as experiential, arts-based and dialogical activities. The experiential activities had various goals, such as engaging the body and senses, promoting teamwork, and exploring different aspects of power. These activities were framed with dialogue to encourage critical thinking and reflection. The dialogical activities, on the other hand, facilitated discussions on the generative theme and the co-creation of knowledge, with both types of activities feeding into and inspiring one another.

The generative theme we selected for the intervention was Power. We chose this theme to spark their curiosity and challenge their assumptions about what psychologists typically discuss with them, while also addressing specific issues they deemed important.

Session 1. The first structured intervention was an introductory session. Going into it, the goal was to generate interest in future participation and lay the groundwork for subsequent sessions. We began by collectively deciding the main languages for communication. This was followed by introductions, where everyone shared not only their name but also its meaning, the

languages they speak, and a movement that reflected their current mood. A small ball was thrown to whoever spoke, who then passed it to the next person.

Next, we played a team-building game called "Crossing the River," where the group was divided into two, and each person was given a piece of paper representing a stepping-stone. The objective was for all team members to cross an imaginary river without touching the ground. Afterward, we introduced the topic of Power through a conversation about world map projections. We showed them the Peter's Projection and the Mercator's Projection, asking which one seemed more familiar and what differences they noticed. This led to a discussion about what Power means to them. We also asked them to write the word "Power" in their native languages on the map.

Then, we played the "World-Game" to visualize and discuss global Power dynamics. Each participant placed game pieces on the world map, guessing how human population is distributed globally. They repeated the same process with coins, guessing the distribution of wealth. We shared the actual figures and discussed how their guesses compared to reality, whether the results surprised them, and potential reasons for any discrepancies. We concluded the session with a brief introduction to the concept of research and explained that we wanted to explore the theme of Power together. To end the session, we all stood in a circle and one after the other shared our favorite dance move, which the others then copied.

Picture 1

Writing power in our languages



Picture 2

What does power mean?



Session 2. In our second session, we aimed to create a safe environment by setting group rules and delving deeper into the topic of Power, with a particular focus on colonialism, which had come up in the previous meeting. To start, we distributed Post-it notes so everyone could

jot down questions they wanted to explore, most of which centered around understanding Power more clearly. Afterward, we facilitated a discussion about group communication, asking participants to reflect on what makes them feel comfortable and respected in a group setting. These responses, written on Post-its, were grouped by themes on the whiteboard, with the general consensus being that active listening and avoiding offensive language were key to feeling safe and valued.

We transitioned into a game designed to explore the feelings of power and powerlessness. In pairs, one person was blindfolded while the other guided them as they moved around the garden. After both partners experienced each role, we regrouped to discuss how these dynamics related to Power. To deepen the conversation, we divided into three language-based groups and played a quiz on colonialism.¹⁵ Each participant picked a card, read the question aloud, and the group discussed potential answers. This activity not only sparked dialogue but also helped to connect historical power structures with the present.

Session 3. For the third session, we focused on providing insight into Power dynamics by working with metaphors. After the check-in, we kicked off with a lively team-building game where two teams competed to create the tallest “human tower.” This activity energized the group and set the stage for the more complex concepts we would tackle.

Next, we introduced an exercise that visually represented Power relations. Two volunteers held a metal stick with an 8-kilogram weight in the middle. As they moved, the imbalance caused the weight to shift, demonstrating how Power can be unevenly distributed in relationships—one side's ease often coming at the expense of the other's difficulty. We used this as a metaphor to discuss how Power dynamics exist not only in personal interactions but also in broader social structures.

Building on this, we introduced the idea of cultivating a "power-critical" perspective. To make this idea more tangible, we had the participants design and create "power-critical" glasses from cardboard. In small groups, they crafted and decorated these glasses, symbolizing a new way of seeing and questioning Power.

To further explore influences on their lives, we conducted the "Map of Influences" activity. Participants brainstormed reasons that led them to come to Italy and positioned these reasons on a paper, closer or further from the center, based on their level of influence. We wrapped up the session with a fun, group activity called "HI-HA-HO," where everyone stood

¹⁵ See the full quiz in Appendix B

in a circle and performed different movements according to the syllables, creating a lighthearted end to the session.

Picture 3

Creating power-critical glasses



Session 4. In this session, we reflected on the goals of the research project and introduced the Photovoice method. We started off with an icebreaker called the "human knot," where participants stood in a circle, grasped someone's hand at random, and worked together to untangle themselves. This helped to build a sense of collaboration and set the tone for the session.

To address the group's interest in better understanding the goals of the project, we conducted an activity focused on why we were all participating. First, we flipped the roles, having the researcher-participants guess the reasons others might be involved in the interventions. A small ball was passed to whoever was speaking, adding an element of play to the discussion. Afterward, the participants had the chance to confirm or challenge these guesses and add their own thoughts. We then repeated the process in reverse—this time, participants speculated about the researchers' motivations, and we provided feedback on their assumptions. All responses were gathered and organized on the whiteboard to clarify our shared objectives.

Following this discussion, we introduced the Photovoice method. Two of the participant-researchers who had prior experience with Photovoice shared their insights with the group. We explained that the method involves using photography to express personal perspectives and stories. As a collective, we brainstormed research questions and democratically voted on four proposals, eventually selecting the question: "How/where do I see Power in my everyday life?" Participants were given two days to take photos related to this question and send them to us for printing in preparation for the next session. To close the

session, one of the participant-researchers suggested a game of musical chairs. We then said goodbye and ended the session.

Picture 4

Why are we here?



Session 5. This session had two main objectives: first, to deepen the group's understanding of power dynamics, and second, to collaboratively take the Photovoice pictures, as none of the participants had done so independently. We began with the popular "human knot" game from the previous session to re-engage the group.

We then introduced a theoretical concept through a metaphor, which sparked a discussion on the nature and meaning of metaphors. The metaphor aimed to visualize how privileges and oppressions shape our lives. To demonstrate this, one of the participant-researchers stood up and stretched his arms wide. We handed him two bags—one representing privileges and the other oppressions. Together with the group, we brainstormed various forms of privilege and oppression and their opposites.

To make the metaphor more tangible, we wrote down privileges on small balloons filled with air and oppressions on water-filled balloons, placing them in their respective bags. In total, we labeled 12 balloons. As the “oppression bag” became heavier with water, the “privilege bag” remained light, filled only with air. We then asked other participants to carry the bags and walk around, describing how the weight affected their movement. This metaphor illustrated how everyone carries a different combination of these burdens, with some bags being heavier than

others. It prompted a discussion on the context-dependent and intersectional nature of oppression.

Next, we played the "privilege game." The group stood in a line, and for each privilege or oppression category that we had brainstormed earlier, they took a step forward if they experienced privilege in that aspect or a step back if they faced oppression. After each category, they returned to the middle of the line to avoid creating a hierarchy of who was more or less privileged. This activity opened up further conversations about personal experiences with privilege and oppression.

In the second part of the session, we revisited the Photovoice concept, reminding the group that it was about using photography to express their perspectives on Power. We then gave them one hour to take photos. For those who felt uncertain, we offered support, discussing ideas or even taking the photos for them if they preferred to be in the picture. At one participant's request, we agreed that they could also choose photos they had taken in the past. This sparked an interesting conversation, as one participant-researcher noted that he had more privileges in his home country and wanted to represent himself in that context rather than in the current one.

Session 6. This session, which focused on discussing and interpreting the photographs taken earlier, turned out to be a pivotal moment in the entire project. We began with a yoga exercise, as some participants had expressed interest in learning yoga during one of our informal meetings. This helped establish a calm and relaxed atmosphere for the rest of the session.

In preparation for this meeting, each participant had selected two to three photos, which we printed in a 13 x 18 cm format. Since only a small group attended this session, we decided to hold the discussion together as one group. Both participant-researchers and researcher-participants took part in this discussion, with each person choosing one photo to share and reflect on.

For each photograph, we followed a structured approach, beginning by having everyone in the group describe what they saw in the image. Afterward, the person who presented the photo shared more about its significance, using a set of reflective questions that we had developed based on previous Photovoice projects (Bank et al., 2022; Marcu, 2018; Wang & Burris, 1994):

1. Is there a difference between what we see and what is actually happening? If so, what's really going on?
2. How did you feel while taking the picture? What parts of the process were easy or difficult?

3. Why did you choose to capture this particular person/place/event? What does it mean to you?
4. What memories does this photo evoke for you?
5. Why did you choose to share this image with the group?
6. Where can we see Power in this photo?

The final question aimed to link personal stories to the broader, shared theme of Power, following Wang & Burris' (1997) recommendation for contextualizing individual experiences within larger discussions. While the person presenting the photo primarily answered the questions, everyone else chimed in with reflections and observations. After each discussion cycle, we applauded the individual who shared their story.

Picture 5

Photovoice: Peppers from the garden



Picture 6

Photovoice: tools



Session 7. This final session was designed to give participants who had missed the previous meeting a chance to discuss their photos, frame their images, and bring a formal conclusion to the structured interventions of the research project. We began with a light stretching exercise, where each participant demonstrated a stretch, and the rest of the group followed along. This helped warm up both body and mind.

After a brief recap of the previous session, we moved into another Photovoice cycle, allowing three participant-researchers who couldn't attend the last time to share and discuss their photographs. Following this, we introduced an art-based activity: everyone was invited to create a frame for their photo by attaching it to a larger piece of cardboard. As part of this process, each person chose a title for their picture, which they added to the frame (Figure 4). Once completed, we took photos of each participant with their framed artwork.

Since this was the final session, we set aside time for group reflection. To make this more interactive, we laid out printed photos on the grass in chronological order, representing the different stages of the project. We asked everyone to walk through the timeline, revisiting

what we had done together. Many participants expressed interest in taking the printed photos home, to which we gladly agreed.

Next, we invited everyone to stand next to an activity that they particularly enjoyed, one they thought could have been improved, and one they didn't like as much. We asked for feedback on these points as well as general thoughts about the project. Together, we also discussed the idea of holding a small exhibition about the project in the CAS.

In closing, we took a moment to express our gratitude to one another for the participation, efforts, and contributions that made the project both safe and successful. We ended the session by applauding each other, marking a positive and celebratory end to the journey.

Picture 7

Framing and labelling our photos



Data collection

During the intervention we utilized a variety of data collection techniques, mainly from ethnographic research. This included observations, focus groups, and informal conversations, as well as taking photos of collected ideas during the interventions in the shape of mind-mapping. Our documentation process involved extensive journal entries from each researcher-participants, which were shared amongst us to enrich our collective understanding and explore the different perspectives from which we viewed the occurrences. Two of the sessions were voice-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to ensure consistency amongst the researcher-participants, we followed the guideline presented in Appendix C. This diverse array of information sources is essential for ethnographic research as it enables us to grasp the complex dynamics at play (LeFrancois, 2014).

Data analysis

The process of analysis of the data was based on a thematic analysis, where the focus is on identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) with underrepresented and marginalized communities (UAMs), as it empowers individuals to articulate their experiences, thereby validating their voices and fostering agency. The analysis was based on all the mediums introduced in the above section. By analysing the themes that emerge from these narratives, we aim to touch open systemic issues affecting UAMs, and get a better understanding of how dialogue developed, in order to (hopefully) inform future action plans for the CAS that can help them to break out of the borders imposed on the operators by their position (Willig, 2013; ATLAS.ti, 2024). This process aligns closely with the principles of critical conscientization and authentic dialogue, as it encourages participants to reflect critically on their lived experiences and engage in transformative discussions.

Chapter 3: Results

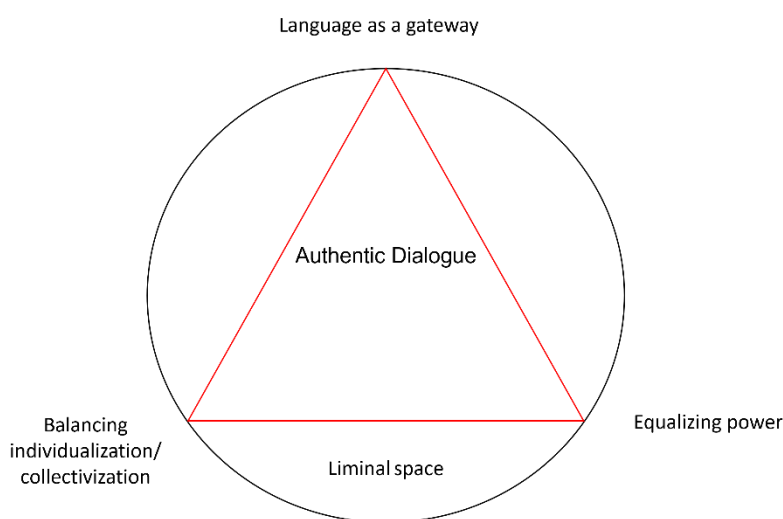
Throughout the intervention and the processes around it, we aimed to understand what the potentials are of CPAR with UAMs from African countries. Having noted how present the concept of dialogue was, I decided to focus specifically the key elements that enabled us to develop authentic dialogue throughout the intervention. This section will look at the main topics that came up in relation to the development of authentic dialogue.

This development was not a linear process, but rather shaped by ups-and downs, and people moving away from each other before finding closer to each other again and authentically engaging with one another. In this process of moving towards each other, three elements seemed particularly important: *processes of individualizing and collectivizing*, *challenges to the power-dynamics*; and *(mis-)understanding each other* in terms of language. All of these aspects do not occur in isolation but are rather in constant exchange with one another. The liminal space of the intervention provided the basis for the balance between and within these spectrums to flourish. Their intersection played a role for the opportunity for authentic dialogue to develop. Figure 1 is an attempt at illustrating this dynamic.

With the here presented results I don't aim to give exhaustive information on how authentic dialogue develops in general, but rather to provide some insight into the factors that seemed to be relevant in the context of our work in the hopes that this can be useful future similar projects.

Figure 1

The development of authentic dialogue in a liminal space



The illustration shows the reinforcing relationship between different aspects mentioned above: balancing individualization and collectivization (in the sense of acknowledging each other both as individuals and as parts of a (shared) collective), (attempting to) equalize power-

dynamics (in the sense of creating a space where all can participate equally), and language as a basis for communication to occur (both in a literal and symbolic sense¹⁶). These aspects constantly influence each other and are also in constant exchange with authentic dialogue. They exist both at the foundation of it, as well as in response to and through dialogue. All of this exists within the liminal space that we (researcher-participants and participant-researchers) created together.

The liminal space

As mentioned above, in the CAS there have recently been some struggles in the relationships of the operators and the inhabitants, some of which are due to the limiting regulations impacting the static positions of the operators in relation to the inhabitants. Entering the CAS, we had a slightly ambiguous role, being introduced as psychologists and researchers, which usually have quite a defined position, but not taking this up in the expected ways. Coming from outside the CAS, we were able to move more freely and approach the participant-researchers in a different way. By resisting these boundaries, both the participant-researchers and us, researcher-participants, found a common ground in a liminal space that allowed us to co-create new meaning(s) and provided the basis for authentic dialogue to come to be.

The ambiguity of the liminal space provides the possibility for collective meaning-making: in order to attempt to understand the situation better, people can come together and foster collective knowledge production. One manifestation of this ambiguity was the uncertainty of the participant-researchers as to the position(ality)¹⁷ of the researcher-participants. During the intervention, we were asked a couple of times about our intentions within the CAS and assumptions were made about our role(s), that were then contested. In one situation for example, a researcher participant assumed that a researcher-participant was being nice to him because she was paid to do so.

There was also another interesting moment where the one who I wrote the title for told me an interesting thing, he asked me if I am always this nice or if I am doing it because it's my work. I told him that this is not my work, that I don't get paid. And then he said yes sure, but still I am there for a reason, because I want something from it. I told him

¹⁶ The term literal is used here to describe languages in the sense of systems of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar; while symbolic refers to more abstract forms of communication, including cultural understandings, etc.

¹⁷ Position vs. Positionality: position is often static, rigid and passive, while I understand positionality as something dynamic that is actively created rather than imposed.

I am always like this, that me doing the writing for him didn't have anything to do with my purpose of being there (journal of R-P3)

A similar situation occurred later, where one of the boys was confused as to why we were organizing activities in the summer.

P-R7 (IT): yeah, I did not sleep well in the night. But I think the operators are in holidays, but you are here

P-R2 (IT): (Laughs) are you an operator?

R-P2 (IT): but because we are not operators, we are not paid for this, it is not our job

There were certain expectations towards us in regards to how the sessions would proceed, which we actively tried to counter. On occasions where we went to the CAS outside of the official meeting times, we actively tried to engage with the participant-researchers in a way that (we assumed) went against their expectations of us. For example, by dancing with them.

[in one of the extra meetings] We played some of the games we had planned for this meeting like the knot game with a few of them who were there. We fooled around a bit singing some songs, and dancing. R-P1 danced Salsa with one of them (journal of R-P3).

These moments were also liminal for the researcher-participants, in the sense that we at times were also unsure about what our roles were. We simultaneously wanted to deviate from their ideas of how we should act, but at the same time maintain boundaries. One challenge for us, was around the question of what would still be “professional” while remaining authentic in our interactions. One example of this was for example considering how to contact them.

It felt strange not to be able to give them our cell phone number directly because some of the kids asked for it. [...] This has happened before with a similar population, but it is strange to want to work with this group so closely but at the same time maintain such strict “professional” boundaries (journal of R-P1).

Multiple times we received the feedback that the boys were frustrated with the way in which we “taught”, criticizing that all we were doing was asking questions, but not providing any straightforward knowledge. Our explanations that our intentions were not to come to teach but to learn and co-construct together were only accepted grudgingly (if at all). The ambiguity of our role and the liminal meaning that that carried seemed to be a frustration to them.

Later, one of them told me that he doesn't understand why we always only ask them questions, but never give answers. That he wants to understand how we would define Power. When he said that I stressed again, that we don't want to be here as teachers, but that we want to learn together (journal of R-P3).

Having noticed that this topic of “teaching” came up regularly, we attempted to explicitly engage with this ambiguity, once for example through an exercise in which the researcher-participants first expressed their impressions as to why the participant-researcher joined the intervention, then let them express their actual reasons and vice versa.

After having introduced the plan, I sat back down and we introduced the topic of 'why are we here?' by saying that this is a question that we have been asked before and we want to give some input on it. Our idea behind this was to 'break out of the script', as a response to them having asked us this question before (journal of R-P2).

Asking these questions in themselves, is not necessarily an expected thing for perceived authorities, teachers or psychologists to do, and as such, seemed to break out of the mold and helped the creation/maintenance of a liminal space. At the same time, this activity seemed essential in addressing the expectations and ideas we have imposed upon one another, and how we do not (necessarily) meet them, inherently creating a liminal space.

In this context, there was an interesting occasion in which the participant-researchers were trying to understand why the researcher-participants were not giving straight answers and at some point it “clicked” for one of them. He started explaining to the others that we were using metaphors in order for them to make sense of it for themselves. This situation was a direct example of how the frustration turned into understanding and an acceptance of what was going on. It seemed like a direct link of liminality and meaning-making.

*During this process, P-R1 and P-R6 specifically brought up that we were not giving clear-cut enough definitions of what power is, and were kind of arguing about it against us. In this process, P-R1 mentioned (in French) that the level of knowledge (he said *analfabetisme*) in the group is quite varied, so that some people might struggle with understanding the abstract concepts and that they might require more specific input and clear explanations. During this discussion, it seemed that something clicked in P-R6 and he said to P-R1: so the games we are all part of understanding what power is and to illustrate it in a way that we understand it (journal of R-P2).*

Language as a Gateway

Even before the start of the sessions, we were aware of the fact that language would be fundamental in order to form relationships and enter a space where authentic dialogue would be possible. At the same time, we expected it to pose a challenge. Without finding language to communicate, engaging in any sort of dialogue is not possible. Throughout the intervention, the use and comfort with different languages (both in terms of symbolic and literal language) became more and more easy, but nevertheless remained one of the most challenging aspects.

Initially, the diverse languages spoken by participants posed a challenge for all people involved. At the beginning of the first session, we had asked which languages the participant-researchers would prefer us to speak, in order to ensure that most people were understanding what was going on, but in the end, this changed a lot depending on who was present in the interventions. We had the impression that there was a language barrier, keeping all of us from fully engaging with one another.

Throughout the discussion I felt like some boys were more quiet than others which might be due to the more dominant communication behaviour of some boys, but maybe also due to language issues (R-P3 journal).

Similarly, in some moments the group organically divided into groups that spoke the same language, even though the intention was to be present in the larger group as a whole. This sometimes felt disruptive to the development of a group connection.

During this time there was also a group where they spoke a lot of French and R-P3 had to translate for the group, I feel like a lot of things get lost in these moments because the group disconnects. But there is no language that everyone speaks well enough to be able to use [it to connect] (journal of R-P1).

The researcher-participants were not excluded from facing language difficulties. We all spoke the three languages (French, Italian and English) to different skill levels, which meant that not all of us were equally able to engage in the conversations at all times. This also posed the possibility for misunderstandings. There was one instant specifically, where two of the participant-researchers were talking to each other in a very animated manner that seemed to two researcher-participants as if they were fighting. Two of us then interrupted their conversation, but afterwards discovered we had simply misunderstood the nature of their talk.

At some point the French-speaking people started talking to each other across the circle, in a way that seemed very aggressive to me (Body language). After half a minute or so of this, where everyone was watching, I said in Italian, how I think it is important that we stay calm and talk to each other in a way that everyone understands. I said I feel strange just sitting there and not understanding what is happening. They then quickly calmed themselves and R-P3 said: what do you mean, that was French? Later we talked about how this was from R-P3's perspective, and how since she understood what was being said, it was a very harmless situation. This shows how important communication about these things and linguistic understanding is (journal of R-P2).

The differences in language knowledge also impacted the ways in which each of us could relate to one another. The fact that R-P3 spoke French the best made it easier for her to connect with some of the boys, because quite some of them felt more comfortable speaking French than the other languages used in the interventions. While this helped in individual moments of conversation, it also hindered connection in the larger group.

These are moments where I feel strongly connected and like we are truly touching each other. [...] Meanwhile, when we are speaking in the big group, the connection feels less

strong diluted in the general atmosphere. I wish we could bring these moments of mindful conversation/connection also into the group dynamic. Very often that one is a bit chaotic and people are it seems not fully entering into interaction with each other (maybe also because of the language barrier though) (journal of R-P3).

It seemed essential to actively check in on who was understanding was also inherent to creating a bond between everyone involved. As the interventions went on and everyone got to know each other a little better, this checking-in became more natural. About the 6th session one researcher-participant wrote:

We tried to make sure that everything was translated (especially the things said in French and English, seeing as Italian was the common language) and I felt quite satisfied with the level to which we were able to do that (obviously still room for improvement, but overall it felt the most complete [of all the sessions] from my perspective) (journal of R-P2).

More and more, participant-researchers also showed increasing willingness and interest to point out when others did not understand what was going on. In session six, for example, participant-researchers were actively looking out for each other.

P-R1 (FR): P-R3 didn't understand. We need to explain.

P-R3 (FR): No, it's ok.

R-P3 (FR): Did you understand?

P-R3 (FR): No, I didn't understand.

R-P3 (FR): Alright then I will do the translation.

Similarly, especially during the photovoice sessions, the participant-researchers took over more responsibility in asking questions to each other, but also to the researcher-participants. Here is an example of such a dialogue in the first photovoice session.

P-R2 (IT): there is your dad and your mom

R-P1 (IT): my mom no, she was taking the photo

P-R2 (IT): why is she not there?

R-P1 (IT): because she took the photo. And my father is this (points at the photo).

P-R2 (IT): and these two people?

R-P1 (IT): these are my aunts, and this is my cousin and my sister. And this is my dog, the brown one. [...]

P-R4 (IT): this, where is it? [...]

R-P1 (IT): so this was taken the last time I was in Ecuador. This day we took a walk together. we went to eat typical Ecuadorian food.

P-R2 (IT): what is it called?

R-P1 (IT): we ate, whats it called? Fritada and Pork

P-R2 (IT): who has eaten Paella? Its a typical food from Spain

A lot of efforts were made to bridge the linguistic barriers. In this process, one important means of expression that did not necessarily require a lot of literal language knowledge was provided through the arts-based interventions. These moments were opportunities for expression of thoughts and ideas (thus also connection), as well as a space in which more symbolic language was required, and there was still communication. One researcher-participant recalls in the journal:

[...] we sat in groups and made the glasses, which was a nice bonding moment. In this group, there were four boys with me [...] During this, we had natural conversations, there were also some moments of silence, [...] [one participant-researcher] had once again put some music (after we asked) so we just sat and chilled and talked (journal of R-P2).

The photovoice sessions, specifically, really helped to foster understanding between all of us both in the literal sense, but also in that it enabled more cultural understanding of one another.

In general it was a very respectful atmosphere. There was genuine listening on all sides, none of us was on the phone. Everyone was attentive and it seemed like no one was

bored but actually engaging. It genuinely felt like a moment of truly getting a deeper glimpse into each other's lives. Into how we see ourselves, into some of our values and ideas. It was nice to see how many times people were relating among each other through the pictures. It was like an invisible web that we were spinning (journal of R-P3).

Ultimately, language, both in its symbolic and literal expression enabled communication in the first place, creating the basis for any other sort of connection to be formed within the group. It provided the basis for collaboration, (mis-)understandings, vulnerability and resistance.

Equalizing power

A core aspect of engaging in authentic dialogue is that it should happen in context that aims to dismantle power-dynamics between the people present. As such, our intervention aimed to dismantle traditional power dynamics that often exist between researcher-participants and participant-researchers, or teachers and students. As we all navigated the complexities of our interactions, efforts were consistently made to redistribute power, moving away from the “researcher as expert” model towards each of us being an equal contributor to the knowledge and meaning created. Dismantling these traditional power dynamics was a necessary element in the development of authentic dialogue throughout the intervention.

From the outset, one of the most significant efforts to equalize power dynamics was rethinking the role of the researcher-participants. Here, we actively tried to position ourselves as co-producers of knowledge, rather than authoritative figures who would dictate “how the world works.” However, this was a challenge, since our positionality as older individuals, coming from outside to work on a project of our choosing, inherently gave us a certain level of power over the participant-researchers.

We tried to go against this in various ways, starting from sitting in a circle throughout the interventions rather than leading it from the front. We shared our own stories, were transparent about miscommunications and not understanding things, and by engaging in the activities—really trying to be part of the group, including during the extra meetings. One researcher-participant wrote about such a meeting: *“We played some of the games we had planned for this meeting like the knot game with a few of them who were there. We fooled around a bit singing some songs, and dancing” (journal of R-P3).* Along these lines, we also hoped that sharing from our side would motivate them to share their perspectives: *“I gave*

examples from Latin America and spoke from my perspective in the hope that they would want to share their experience or perspective” (journal of R-P1). We hoped that opening up in this way would make us more relatable and helped in dismantling the notion of us as authority figures.

From the side of the participant-researchers, there were also various attempts to gain power. One way they did this was by resisting and deciding how to show up to the interventions (if at all). While the interventions were not mandatory, participant-researchers were strongly encouraged to join, even if they didn't feel like it. Throughout the weeks, we received push-back from them in different forms, for example by being on their phones (which significantly decreased throughout the sessions), by questioning why we were there, or not actively engaging with us or each other. During the session where we split into different (language) groups for the quiz on colonialism, for example, one participant-researcher was showing us that we did not have power over him by initially refusing to join another language group.

One of the guys was refusing to join any language group: he said he only wanted to do a Wolof group. I responded that sadly we don't speak that so we cannot offer that to him, but that he can choose which one he can join out of the other three languages (all three of which he speaks to a decent extent from what I knew at that time).

This moment highlighted both the resistance of the participant-researchers, but also the difficulties for the researcher-participants in responding well to this. R-P2 wrote:

In that moment I immediately jumped to an assumption that he ‘just doesn’t feel like it’ or that he was being difficult, but very soon after, I regretted my attitude because it would have been a great opportunity to ‘problematize’: asking why Wolof is so important to him or why he doesn’t want to join would have possibly made for an interesting conversation (journal of R-P2).

Our responses were thus not necessarily power-critical, but we also sometimes challenged the participant-researchers’ inputs. There were times, particularly during logistical decisions or moments of tension, where we stepped into a more authoritative role to keep the intervention on track. For example, during the organization of group activities, the need for

structure sometimes led us to take charge. These moments served as a reminder of the complexity of power dynamics and the difficulty of completely dismantling existing hierarchies.

It seemed that throughout the intervention, the strategies for getting power evolved on both sides, especially as an understanding took hold that we didn't have to compete for space or power, but rather that we were all willing to share it. The participant-researchers started feeling more confident in taking up more "powerful" positions, even if only for a limited time. Whether it was getting up in front of the others to help with an explanation, attempting to explain something to others, or translating for each other, participant-researchers began stepping into new roles. In one instance, the participant-researchers even actively took a stance to protect us from a participant-researcher who was making derogatory comments.

At one point P-R7 made a comment (in another language, I didn't understand) but I felt like most of the guys, especially P-R6 and P-R1 came out to defend the 3 of us. I understood them saying things like: they are women show respect, they come to work with us and you can't say those things, you see they understand and speak French you can't say that, and the theme of respect was repeated a lot. I felt protected but also seen by these guys and I felt like I could trust them to also handle discussions that come up within the group (journal of R-P1).

From our side as researcher-participants, we also tried to provide more opportunities for participant-researchers to actively shape the direction of the intervention—such as choosing which activities to do or giving more space in discussions for topics that emerged organically. This was not without its challenges however, since the participant-researchers oftentimes did not give clear preferences, which might also be related to (cultural) expectations or expressions of respect. In the feedback round, for example, it was difficult to get them to criticize us.

It was a little difficult to ask them for "negative" feedback or things to improve because even though they were critical of our "lack" of information about power, at that moment they only said that they were grateful for what we had shared together and the activities we had done (journal of R-P1).

It was difficult to judge whether this was because of respect to us or because they genuinely had little criticism.

Overall, the process of equalizing power dynamics throughout the intervention was one of continuous effort and adaptation. Despite intentional efforts, there were moments when power dynamics resurfaced, and the inherent authority of the researcher-participants could not be entirely erased. However, these practices overall laid the foundation for a new kind of shared authority—one where both researcher-participants and participant-researchers actively shaped the journey together. In the Photovoice sessions especially, this balance seemed more present than before, providing a space for each of us to step forward and facilitate an authentic, mutual exchange in the form of dialogue.

Balancing Individualization and collectivization processes

The starting point of the intervention was characterized by a strong "us vs. them" mentality—participant-researchers saw themselves as a separate entity from the researcher-participants and vice versa. This separation was a product of preconceived notions and societal narratives, influenced by differences in race, nationality, and status. We tried throughout the interventions to deconstruct some of these barriers. Somehow, through various attempts, trials, and errors, a shift occurred from seeing each other as an "Other" to recognizing the individual humanity of everyone involved and, in some moments, culminated in a new sense of shared collectiveness. This transformation was not linear but rather oscillated between individual moments and collective experiences.

After having been introduced to each other as “groups”, i.e., these are the psychologist researchers, and these are the UAMs living in the CAS, there was intuitively an strong sense of meeting with “the other” in the first session(s). The researcher-participants set up the chairs and structure, while the boys slowly arrived, each side unsure of what to expect. During the first game, we noted a tentative shift towards breaking barriers, and this perception at the same time confirmed a distance at the outset.

The movement part seemed to be particularly interesting to the kids; they all laughed at and with each other when doing the movements. I felt like it was a nice way to break a little barrier between all of us (journal of R-P2).

There were some moments that came up organically, where this dynamic switched from us-and them, to more individual recognition. One example of this were conversations that took

place one-on-one, where the researcher-participants felt they could connect more to the participant-researchers

Some of them [the French speaking boys] demand very concrete attention from my side when they are talking to me. It feels like for a second we are leaving the general group atmosphere and dive into a two-sided conversation. These are moments where I feel strongly connected and like we are truly touching each other [...] (journal of R-P3).

These moments seemed especially present in the times we went to the CAS in-between the sessions, where the intention was simply to meet up and get to know each other better. This intention was fruitful, in that these encounters provided a lot of possibility to connect more. Here, the space organically allowed for one-on-one conversations that broke the larger group dynamic. At one of these meetings one participant-researcher (P-R6) approached me upon noticing me being quieter than other people present.

P-R6 noted that I was quieter due to linguistic limitations and started a separate conversation with me, asking if I was okay and talking about my tattoos. This helped create a one-on-one connection beyond the group setting (journal of R-P2).

Other situations in these contexts also helped to break the barriers, such as dancing together for example.

We ended up staying for half an hour, showing them the human knot game and some dances. Once again, P-R6 was very happy with the dancing, and it felt like a genuine bonding experience, outside the constraints of a typical session (journal of R-P2).

Alongside the process of individual recognition, a new kind of collective identity began to form. The whole group started connecting, both over (experiential) shared experiences and by recognizing similarities and differences between one another. Important moments in this process were e.g., moments of collective joy where our similarities as human beings were highlighted. These were particularly present during the games we played, for example.

Since there were so few of them we decided to first start with the game (human knot) in the hopes that more people would join once they saw that we were doing things. While

we were playing, more guys joined. We had a lot of fun doing the game, and round 3 was very chaotic (journal of R-P2).

More and more, this sense was transferred into the other activities that we did, bringing a certain lightness into the conversations, where we could laugh together. For example, when deciding on the paper for decorating the pictures in photovoice.

R-P1 (IT): you want white, right? I will find it for you

P-R2 (IT): yes white

[R-P1 hands in the paper]

R-P3 (IT): but this is almost white, no? [laughs]

R-P2 (IT): and that one is almost yellow, no? [laughs]

P-R2 (IT): Wait, then I am drunk for seeing that one as white [laughs] [...] Let me see, because R-P3 told me that one is white but it is really blue

[everyone laughs]

This kind of banter brought about a relaxed environment and emphasized shared joy. From the beginning, we had hoped that implementing games in the hopes that they would help us create a bond with each other going beyond a “sit-down and talk” dynamic. These moments of collective joy and lightness seemed essential for all of us to feel comfortable around each other and create a sense of “togetherness”.

At some points throughout, specifically towards the latter interventions, the sentiment of “togetherness” and recognition of each other were both present at the same time. A culmination of this was especially felt during the photovoice sessions. On the one hand, this activity provided the space for everyone to express themselves and received as much time and attention as we wanted. We were able to share parts of our individual life stories and share aspects of ourselves and our lives that we wanted to share.

The second he broke out his picture, P-R1 said 'we all know this situation'... I think the descriptions were at the beginning quite focused on the literal aspects of the photos. He said that it was in Algiers. And then P-R2 started talking [...]. He said that for him this photo has so much meaning. It was such a difficult time, with so many feelings and how heavy this phase was... Everyone was listening, everyone was there, so present. At some point he had tears in his eyes and started to cry (journal of R-P2).

The individual experiences were seriously acknowledged and validated by the group. Questions were asked and answered and there was a lot of interests in each other's thought and feelings about these events. And people were open to share these. This interest and openness to each other's experiences fostered a space where individuals were seen, yes, but at the same time it helped to create a feeling of collectivity and togetherness. One researcher participant-researcher wrote "*This whole 'us' and 'them' feels a bit off anyways, it already did before, but after this session it really does. We created a new 'we' (journal of R-P1).*"

This seemed like a pivotal moment—where the group began to truly understand how their individual experiences of migration, though unique, also carried collective elements. We collectively acknowledged the shared struggle for belonging, resilience, and navigating a new cultural landscape. While the researcher-participants did not share the same experiences (i.e., the photo presented was not a situation we were familiar with, unlike the participant-researchers), we were still included in the group, and being “let in” to the experiences of the participant-researchers.

I was impressed to see how the boys were equally interested in our experiences and validated our emotions when we shared. I felt that they finally saw us as human beings who were on the same level as them, instead of seeing us as teachers or psychologists. That was the dynamic we were looking for (journal of R-P3).

The movement between individual and collective identities was neither linear nor absolute. There was a constant interplay between the two—we all shifted between asserting our individuality and recognizing collective experiences. A researcher-participant wrote on the connection with the participant-researchers: "*What was there first? The mindful interaction or the trust of building a relationship? Probably it went hand in hand.*" (journal of R-P3).

This dynamic exchange between individual and collective perspectives underpinned the emergence of authentic dialogue throughout the intervention. By moving beyond initial categories of "us versus them" and fostering both individual respect and collective solidarity, the group was able to navigate complexity and embrace a richer, more inclusive process of dialogue.

Authentic Dialogue as a Dynamic, Reinforcing Process

The intersection of equalized power, language practices, and balancing individuality and collectivity was not only foundational for creating authentic dialogue but also intertwined in a reinforcing cycle with it. Authentic dialogue sat at the center of these three factors, both

being influenced by them and, in turn, reinforcing their development. Throughout the intervention, our attempts to deconstruct power dynamics, balance individuality with a sense of collectivity, and create a shared linguistic space all converged to foster authentic dialogue. While these elements were present throughout the sessions, their intersection was most tangible during the Photovoice sessions.

The Photovoice sessions provided a unique setting that encouraged both personal expression and collective exploration. This balance—offering the chance for each participant to share their individual experiences while also fostering a collective understanding—made the space particularly conducive to authentic exchange. During the sharing of the third picture, these feelings were most tangible.

R-P1 (IT): Do you remember how you felt in this picture?

P-R2 (IT): A bit sad to think about how to exit this zone of difficulty.

P-R3 (IT): Yes, too much. [...]

P-R2 (IT): Even if I was thinking, but my mentality there was not about returning. Even if I was suffering there. A bit not too much, because I was always finding smth to eat. Also a place to sleep, even if it is not perfect. For example sometimes the mosquitoes disturb me or it is cold and I don't have a good jackets. Sometimes tho I would also find a jacket, because the people give me a jacket. Or also the Arabs there, the Tunisians, they would give me a jacket. But I was a bit sad. But sometimes we laugh, we do some jokes together. Because I speak English, I found the Gambians who speak English. But there were also those who speak French that give help, but because I was a not arrogant person. Because of that motive. So everyone helped me.

[...]

P-R1 (IT): This picture speaks for all of us.

R-P1 (IT): In which sense?

P-R1 (IT & FR): In the sense, how can I say, happiness – a bit of happiness, sadness [P-R2 agrees] – there are these moments like this when you eat you start crying because the day was very difficult. [...]

P-R1 (FR): Exactly. And when you go outside you had to run from the police, military, vagabonds, like that, once you get home – [noise representing finally being able to sit]

R-P3 (FR): So it's like a moment of calmness in a very difficult, stressful life.

/P-R1 (FR): A moment of calmness in a very very difficult life. Because you can be like that, you cannot work, but at the end of the day you have to eat. You have to pay the house for those who have the chance. And well, maybe now you go on a journey they take your money, the police, take your money, your phone, they take your shoes. [makes a noise and shakes his head like saying it's not easy]. This is a moment that reminds you where you come from and why you are there. Could be to make your situation a bit better. This photo, it does me bad. And it does me good. It can make you enter in the real sadness. Because you have lost friends. [makes noise and shakes his head like saying it's not easy]. A lot of people, those who made it, those who didn't make it. Look, this is the chair on the car, this is the space where too many people have to sit. You have no water to wash your hands and you have to eat. You will fall sick. You don't have your mom or your dad there. It is too difficult.

Here we could see how the photos acted as literal representations and symbolic conduits, that helped participant-researchers to convey aspects of their identities and experiences and communicate these to the researcher-participants, and vice versa. In doing so, we also crossed cultures boundaries (real or imagined) and found a deeper understanding of each other. It was in these moments where the "invisible web" of shared experiences took shape and made the connections between each other more tangible. Vulnerabilities were shared and positively received by all. This web that connected us all, researcher-participants and participant-researchers alike, in a personal and yet collective narrative.

In these sessions, the power dynamics were notably more equalized than at earlier stages of the intervention. By this point, the participant-researchers had gained the confidence to take a more active role, not just as participants but as facilitators of dialogue. They asked questions, challenged each other's interpretations, and, at times, directed the conversation without needing guidance from the researcher-participants. This shift was crucial for creating an environment where all voices were valued equally. Participant-researchers were no longer passive receivers but active contributors, shaping the conversation in ways that suited their interests and curiosities.

Afterwards, P-R2 also asked questions, it felt like he stepped into a role, and something in the "teacher-learner" idea that they had in their heads about us was taken down. It was a safe space, somehow, all the sessions, all the work, the bonding, the talking, the

*planning had been fruitful. We managed to create a safe*r space where we could hold these conversations. All of us, together. Even though our experiences are so different (journal of R-P2).*

Another example of this initiative was seen for example, when participant-researchers explained to each other what was going on and took the liberty of translating to make sure everyone was included.

[P-R4 speaks in African language to P-R7]

R-P3 (IT): Can you please translate for us?

P-R4 (EN): Yes, I am telling him that in his whatsapp, his profile picture, he is with his friend and they are in their country, a long time ago. He can take that picture and explain

R-P2 (EN): Oh yes, good idea that works

R-P3 (EN): yes good idea!

This example also showed how important language was both in these sessions. During Photovoice, the act of translating and ensuring everyone understood each other became a shared responsibility, which allowed every individual to engage fully, irrespective of their preferred language. Apart from the literal translations, they also enabled a level of dialogue that transcended cultural boundaries and increased our understanding of one each other as people. This allowed for a collective linguistic space where every participant could connect and contribute meaningfully.

The culmination of these dynamics allowed for the emergence of authentic dialogue. Authentic dialogue is not just about talking; it is about being seen, heard, and respected in a shared space. Moreover, the dialogue itself reinforced these foundational processes. As participant-researchers felt heard, they were more likely to challenge power dynamics, to share more deeply personal stories, and to ensure everyone was linguistically included. Authentic dialogue thus both emerged from and strengthened the very conditions that made it possible, creating a positive feedback loop where deeper engagement led to more equitable relationships.

The Photovoice sessions became a manifestation of what we had all been working towards—where everyone had the opportunity to share their voice, where vulnerability was met with empathy, and where our differences enriched the conversation rather than divided it. This dynamic created a moment of true connection and meaning making, highlighting the profound potential of liminal spaces in breaking down barriers and fostering authentic human interaction.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The neoliberal framework that defines much of the Global North's ideology and political action, acts to alienate people from one-another. In this society, which encourages individualization and emphasizes personal over collective success in most situations (e.g., Bauman, 2003), spaces for building community seem ever more essential (hooks, 1994). In the stories of the participant-researchers, this personal desire for finding a better life was very present. But it also became ever clearer that these strives are never taken in solitude. The journeys that the boys took were not about them individually. Even though they are labelled as *unaccompanied* minors, these journeys are rarely taken by oneself. What brought the boys to where they are now was not (only) their individual resilience, but especially the collective strength and the community that accompanied them throughout their journey. It seems to me that upon their arrival in Italy, these experiences of community and feelings of belonging that they recounted from their trips, were extremely limited. The context that young, (immigrated) Black or POC men encounter in Italy, is one that is both, seemingly paradoxically, highly individualizing and *othering*, fostering a sense of alienation of oneself, but also of the society that one is supposed to/expected to/wants to be a part of (FRA, 2023). It seems inherent to create opportunities to counter this, to facilitate de-alienation and with that a sense of belonging, or at least take a step into this direction. Thus, creating the space, both literal and symbolic, in which this can happen seems an essential step in working towards humanization and community (hooks, 2000).

Interventions like the ones introduced in this study seem to be one way to start to approach this topic. Setting out to start this project, the main intention was to try to understand the potentials of a psychosocial intervention with unaccompanied minors in a CAS. At the core of this we found the potential to create bonds and relationships beyond the professional relationships existing between the operators and the boys, which are restricted by the boundaries that are imposed on the context of a CAS. There is the potential to create a sense of community. It also enabled us to engage in the creation of authentic dialogue. This, in turn, promoted a collective empowerment that contrasts sharply with the experiences of disempowerment often faced by UAMs in institutional contexts. Importantly, these bonds that were created are *political*. They challenge the structural alienation imposed by neoliberal systems, by asserting the power of collective support, by emphasizing relational rather than transactional care, and by creating the conditions for a counter-narrative against the prevailing forces of marginalization and exclusion.

Key Factors in the Development of Authentic Dialogue

This thesis specifically attempted to understand how we all together managed to engage in authentic dialogue in the interventions. Several factors stood out especially as contributing to this development. Grounded in the ideas of Freire's critical conscientization four primary elements emerged as essential in cultivating authentic dialogue: the liminal space that was created, equalizing power dynamics between researcher-participants and participant-researchers, creating shared linguistic spaces, and balancing individual and collective identities.

In these interventions, we saw the power of creating a liminal space, a space where established roles and expectations can be blurred, allowing for an alternative form of connection. By stepping away from the formal labels of "researcher," "psychologist," or "UAM," and instead engaging as equal participants in shared experiences, the interventions allowed both the participant-researchers and researcher-participants to transcend their formal identities. This liminality allowed for collective meaning-making and the creation of a new sense of "us". Turner (1969) defines liminality as an in-between state where usual social hierarchies are dissolved, creating space for new forms of community to emerge. The ambiguity surrounding our roles—as neither traditional psychologists nor participants, but something in between—allowed both researcher-participants and participant-researchers to explore a different kind of relationship. This dynamic fostered a space where each individual could express themselves without the burden of external labels, thereby facilitating deeper mutual understanding. It was within these liminal spaces that authentic dialogue flourished, as they allowed for new, emergent ways of relating that were not defined by traditional structures.

The creation of a shared linguistic space seemed important even before the start of the intervention. Nevertheless, while this intuitively important, I underestimated its significance before the start of the intervention. As various authors have pointed out, language is a fundamental tool not only for communication but also for transformation and for how we see each other (e.g., Freire, 1985; Gergen, 2009). The intervention paid close attention to language as a conduit for inclusion and mutuality; our deliberate use of translation and moments when we paused to ensure understanding among all participants highlighted the importance of accessible language in making dialogue possible. Moreover, the symbolic use of language—such as metaphors and storytelling to bridge cultural differences and using arts as a means to express ourselves—created opportunities for expression that transcended literal boundaries and allowed for deeper connection (Aquila, 2022). It was often through these metaphors that participant-researchers felt empowered to make sense of complex ideas—reflecting the core of

Freire's conscientization, where critical awareness is nurtured through shared, understandable language (Freire, 1985).

Another key factor was the intentional effort to equalize power dynamics throughout the intervention. Freire (1970) emphasizes the necessity of dismantling oppressive power structures to foster a space where genuine dialogue can occur. This approach aligns with what we attempted to do by positioning ourselves not as experts but as co-learners. This relational shift helped dismantle the preconceived notion of the "researcher as authority," allowing participant-researchers to become more active contributors. This co-creation of knowledge can be compared to hooks' (1994) idea of engaged pedagogy, where the process of learning is inherently reciprocal, and each participant plays an active role. By stepping back from authoritative roles and embracing vulnerability, we aimed to create such an environment, an environment that encouraged the participant-researchers to challenge, resist, and contribute. This goal was reached, albeit without setbacks and challenges. The moments where participant-researchers resisted our roles—whether through questioning or non-verbal behaviors—were pivotal, signaling that the traditional power imbalance was being disrupted and that true, horizontal dialogue was beginning to emerge.

Balancing individual and collective identities also emerged as a crucial element in facilitating authentic dialogue, wherein individual voices must be heard, but the collective experience must also be nurtured. This closely relates to concepts of recognition, that focus on the need of people to feel seen and heard in order to fully engage (e.g., Freire, 1970; Korkiamäki & Gilligan, 2020; Schweiger, 2021). Early in the intervention, the distinct group identities of "researchers" and "participants" were palpable, but over time, individual recognition paved the way for a shared collective identity. This shift was facilitated by activities that emphasized both individual storytelling and group reflection, such as the photovoice sessions. The photovoice activities provided a platform for participants to express their personal narratives while also contributing to a collective understanding, resonating with ideas on co-constructions of knowledge (e.g., Freire, 1985; hooks, 1994). Through these shared stories, participants moved beyond seeing themselves merely as individuals to recognizing their role in a larger, interconnected group—ultimately fostering a sense of solidarity and communal understanding that made authentic dialogue possible.

Together, these elements contributed to a reinforcing cycle that impacted each other but also nurtured authentic dialogue. Freire's concept of dialogue is not simply a tool for exchanging information; it is a means of transformation—wherein participants become subjects in their own stories rather than objects defined by others. The intervention showed that by

focusing on equal power, shared language, balanced identity, and the creation of liminal spaces, authentic dialogue becomes not only possible but also a transformative force. Authentic dialogue in this context did not emerge as an endpoint; but rather it was a dynamic and evolving process that both influenced and was influenced by the key elements that supported it. This reciprocal, reinforcing relationship points towards the broader implications of psychosocial interventions that prioritize dialogue: they are political and potentially transformative sites.

What did we learn as psychologists/professionals in this area?

At the core of our learnings is the importance of psychologists taking their epistemic responsibility seriously and actively engaging in just practices that do not result in epistemic violence towards other parties involved (Teo, 2014). This includes a critical questioning of one's own position and values, of one's praxis, and one's context. It is important for psychologists to consider their position and positionality and to make these transparent, not just in their research product but throughout the practice, in order to make the research transparent and just to all parties involved. Doing this together with participant-researchers or other involved parties is an important part in deconstructing systemic injustices.

This responsibility towards engaging in and actively contributing to a more just world is integral to psychologist praxis. This study was an example of engaging in such praxis - combining theory with practice and, or action and reflection as defined by Freire. Oftentimes, the balance between theory and action gets lost, with psychologists focusing predominantly on one over the other. This intervention is an example of how fruitful and important the balance of these two can be. By engaging directly in praxis, we ensured that reflection and action informed each other continuously, contributing to a more responsive and transformative approach.

Furthermore, this intervention highlighted the necessity of creating safe*r spaces, as well as the potential these spaces hold for fostering transformative growth. Creating environments that promote emotional and psychological safety is crucial for individuals to express themselves openly and for authentic dialogue to occur, which is a key for psychological praxis.

These insights contribute to a broader understanding of how participatory approaches in psychology can not only foster personal growth but also contribute to social change. Importantly, these principles are applicable beyond the realm of research; they highlight the significance of engaging directly with communities in all areas of psychology. Psychologists must not shy away from addressing potentially political topics and should strive to engage with

people directly rather than merely discussing them from a distance. For future projects, it will be essential to maintain a focus on these elements, continuing to adapt and co-create alongside participants in ways that challenge and inspire both personal and collective transformation.

Limitations

While the intervention showed a lot of potential for fostering authentic dialogue and community, it also had its limitations, which need to be acknowledged in order to better understand its impact and guide future work in similar settings.

One key limitation was the high turnover of participants across the different sessions. Only a few of the participant-researchers attended consistently, and these were the individuals with whom we built the most intimate and meaningful relationships. The irregular attendance made it challenging to foster a stable group dynamic and limited the potential for deeper engagement with everyone involved. We also faced challenges related to communication with the CAS operators. Although the CAS staff did support us, it wasn't always consistent, especially when it came to scheduling and organizing logistics. In some instances, we arrived for sessions and realized that our visit had not been communicated effectively. It's understandable that the operators were balancing numerous other responsibilities, but at the same time, these logistical issues inevitably affected the flow and consistency of our intervention.

Another significant limitation was that we didn't have enough time to *get to know* the participants before starting the sessions. Although R-P3 and I visited the CAS before the intervention began, the introduction was brief and felt somewhat superficial. This made the first few sessions quite difficult, as we were essentially trying to build relationships from scratch, which took time away from deeper processes of conscientization and dialogue. In future interventions, a longer, more informal introduction phase would be incredibly valuable to foster a stronger initial connection. Similarly, the *short overall duration* of the intervention limiting. Interventions aimed at fostering critical consciousness usually take place over a much longer period, often between six months to a year. In contrast, our intervention lasted just under two months. This timeframe restricted the development of group cohesion, critical reflection, and the emergence of authentic dialogue, which typically need time to evolve.

Another important limitation was the *top-down design* of the intervention. The main ideas, activities, and overall structure were developed by us as researcher-participants, drawing on literature and the insights of our supervisors. While we did invite input from the boys throughout the sessions, the foundation of the intervention came from an outsider perspective,

and was ultimately imposed on them. This is not in line with the core values of community-based participatory action research (CPAR), which emphasizes participants having a substantial role in shaping the process. As such, while we used many CPAR principles, the intervention may not fully qualify as such, which limits its transformative potential.

Additionally, the intervention was strongly centered on critical conscientization, aiming to foster awareness of social and political issues while encouraging reflection. However, one key component of critical conscientization—engagement in *critical action*—was missing. Our intervention focused more on self-reflection and fostering self-efficacy than on facilitating concrete social or political actions. Including critical action would have likely made the intervention more impactful, directly linking awareness with real-world change.

Lastly, this research perpetuated the predominance of *white* researchers and *white* knowledge production in academic and psychological research. Two of us researcher-participants as well as the people supporting us in this endeavor come from a *white*-European perspective. Importantly, María Emilia Montaña brought a different perspective with her *Mestiza* and Ecuadorian background. In order to counter epistemic violence and the appropriation of Black and POC experiences, future research should focus on and prioritize those voices (Teo, 2015).

Future Research Directions

With these limitations in mind, future research could address several key areas. Logistically, one important step would be to extend the duration of similar interventions, allowing sufficient time for building relationships before diving into the core processes of conscientization and dialogue. Better integration with the hosting organizations (such as the CAS) is also essential to ensure smoother communication and logistical support, which would create a more consistent and engaging experience for all participants.

Another important direction would be to involve participants more actively in the design and development of interventions. Truly embracing CPAR principles, where participant-researchers are involved in every aspect of the intervention development, could lead to more contextually relevant activities, enhancing the transformative potential. This would align the interventions more closely with the needs and desires of the communities they aim to serve. While our intervention focused on raising awareness, future iterations could go further by creating structured opportunities for participants to engage in actions based on their reflections. This would make the intervention not only a space for critical awareness but also a space for tangible social change. Future research should focus not only on the theory of critical

consciousness but also on its application, ensuring participants are empowered to act on the issues they identify.

Ultimately, more research is needed that emphasizes praxis over theory alone. Our intervention tried to bridge that gap, but future work could push even further by integrating practical, community-driven actions directly tied to the insights gained during the intervention.

Moving forward

As a next step, we are currently working on organizing an exhibition of the photovoice pictures within the CAS. Our aim is to share what we worked on with the rest of the kids and the personnel, and hopefully inspire them to continue similar projects, fostering an environment of collective reflection and engagement. We are also planning to present our project in a class led by Professor Sara Santilli, and we hope that some of the boys will voluntarily join us to share their experiences firsthand. This way, their voices can continue to be heard, and their stories can contribute to broader conversations about the importance of inclusive, community-driven interventions.

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Appendix

A: Quiz Questions for session 2

Answers are not necessarily exhaustive and questions were asked in a random order (by choosing cards during intervention)

Q: What is Colonization?

A: When a country takes over another land, rules it, uses and harms its resources for its own profit.

Q: In what conference did the Western Powers divide Africa in between them?

A: The Berlin conference (in 1884)

Q: What was one of the main ideologies that was meant to justify European colonization?

A: Racism

Q: What were the main goods/resources that European colonizers were aiming for in Africa?

A: e.g. Gold, Ivory, Diamonds, Rubber, Copper, Slaves

Q: What was the transatlantic slave trade?

A: The Transatlantic Slave Trade, also known as the Atlantic Slave Trade, was a centuries-long practice of forcibly transporting Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas, where they were sold as slaves.

Q: What colonies did France have in Africa?

A: Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Benin, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Gabon, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco (as a protectorate), Madagascar and Djibouti

Q: Which colonies did Great Britain have in Africa?

A. Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho, eSwatini, Egypt, Sudan?

A: Great Britain

Q: What year did your countries gain official Independence?

A: Mali: in 1960

Gambia: 1965

Ivory Coast: 1960

Cameroon: 1960 (French Part) & 1961 (British Part)

Sierra Leone: 1961

Guinea: 1958

Tunisia: 1956

Q: Are there places that are still under colonial rule and if yes, how are they called now?

A: Overseas territories, some examples: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion

Q: Who were some important fighters for Independence in your countries?

A: e.g.

- **Modibo Keita (Mali):** leader of the Sudanese Union-African Democratic Rally (US-RDA), the first President after Independence
- **Sékou Touré (Guinea):** leader of the Democratic Party of Guinea (PDG), played a pivotal role in the country's decision to reject the French Community and opt for full independence, the first President after Independence
- **Ruben Um Nyobé (Cameroon):** key figure in the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), Um Nyobé faced significant challenges, including repression by colonial and post-colonial authorities, and he was eventually killed by French forces in 1958 (before independence)
- **Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara:** leader of the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence (PDOI) and later the United Party, he became the first Prime Minister and later the first President of The Gambia
- **Félix Houphouët-Boigny (Ivory Coast):** founded the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) and played a significant role in negotiating with the French government for greater autonomy and eventual independence, the country's first President after Independence, leading the nation for over three decades
- **Siaka Stevens (Sierra Leone):** leader of the All People's Congress (APC), a party that played a central role in the push for self-governance, first Prime Minister and later its first President of independent Sierra Leone
- **Habib Bourguiba (Tunisia):** most prominent leader in Tunisia's struggle for independence from French colonial rule, leader of the Neo Destour (New Constitutional Liberal Party), first Prime Minister and later its first President after Independence & **Salah Ben Youssef (Tunisia):** Salah Ben Youssef was a key figure in the nationalist movement alongside Bourguiba. He was a leader of the Tunisian nationalist party, and his efforts were instrumental in the push for independence

Q: In which ways do you feel your countries up until today are influenced by European colonialism? (open question)

Countries to include:

- Gambia
- Guinea
- Sierra Leone
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Tunisia
- Mali
- Cameroon

In case it fits (no answer from our side):

- **Q: How were your ancestors living before European colonization?**

B: Explanations for transcription

(IT) : Italian

(FR): French

(EN): English

(GE): German

[...] : Something was said in the background that couldn't be deciphered

[Context-Information]

... : a sentence was cut off from someone and then continued in a next sentence

/ : Two parallel conversations were going on, to distinguish who said what to who