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Liminal resistance towards and within migratory hotspots – On the transformative potential of critical participatory action research with African unaccompanied minors in Italy

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"This is not a question of whether to abandon psychology; it is a question of whether psychological knowledge will be placed in the service of constructing a society where the welfare of the few is not built on the wretchedness of the many, where the fulfilment of some does not require that others be deprived, where the interests of the minority do not demand the dehumanization of all."

(Martín-Baró, 1996, p.46)

To our research collective

To cripsy

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Abstract

In an age of migration, movement in-between and across both physical and symbolic borders becomes increasingly prevalent. Such liminal experiences are particularly unsettling for more vulnerable people on the move such as unaccompanied minors. Nevertheless, the Italian reception system creates a thriving ground for liminal hotspots due to the precarious conditions of extraordinary reception facilities (CAS). Here, the experience of life on hold might become chronically stuck within confining borders thus producing further vulnerabilizations. In order to support unaccompanied minors in this transitory phase, there is a need for psychosocial support. In the current study we conducted a community based, participatory action research project with African unaccompanied minors living in a CAS in Italy. Aiming at the conceptualization of a critical approach to psychosocial support that acknowledges the interconnectedness of well-being and social justice, we integrated a Critical Conscientization framework with socio-historical cultural psychology and liminality theory. Throughout the course of three months, we implemented seven semi-structured interventions and several informal meetings around the generative theme "Power". Hereby, we combined critical discussions, experiential activities and art, particularly the Photovoice method, in order to create a holistic dialogue. Within our research collective, we aimed at exploring the potentialities of conducting critical participatory action research as a form of psychosocial support. In this thesis, I particularly analyse the various resistance strategies we encountered and created during the project in order to deal with the in-between nature of the CAS environment, highlighting how such strategies reflect both confining and transformative potentials. I conclude by discussing (theor)ethical and practical implications for psychosocial support for unaccompanied minors as well as directions for future research.

Keywords: Unaccompanied Minors, Migration, Liminality, Crit. Consciousness, Photovoice

Introduction

Constant movement across *bona fide* (i.e., physical) and *fiat* (i.e., humanly demarcated) borders is a defining characteristic of human history (Smith & Varzi, 2000). Nevertheless, due to a complex interplay of factors, notably the pervasive influence of globalized capitalism and the widening chasm of inequality, international migration across geopolitical fiat boundaries has increasingly become a defining factor of our modern societies (Gamsakhurdia, 2022; Mecheril, 2010). Differently put, humans – once again – live in an "age of migration" (Haas et al., 2022). The overlap with what Szakolczai (2014) calls an age of "permanent liminality" is not arbitrary. Every migratory experience is characterized by navigating liminality i.e. transitional spaces in–between countless physical and symbolic borders.

One important group of migrants seeking international protection in Europe are minors that take perilous journeys, motivated by different and unique needs as well as by a collective desire to improve their and/or their families living conditions (Moutsou et al., 2023). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1997, p.1) defines a so–called unaccompanied minor (UAM) as "a person who is under the age of eighteen, […] separated from both parents and […] not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so". In 2023, 18.820 unaccompanied minors arrived at the Italian coast after having survived the deadly border of the Mediterranean Sea. Many others have died in their attempt to reach Europe. This year (until the 30.09.2024) already 5.817 new young asylum seekers have landed on Italian territory (Dipartimento della Pubblica sicurezza, 2024). This data doesn't include the young travellers arriving in Italy over land e.g. through the Balkan Route.

Most illegalized migratory journeys are characterized by extreme adversities culminating in increased states of vulnerability for those on the move. In particular, unaccompanied minors have long been argued to be one of the most vulnerable groups of people on the move as the lack of parental or guardian protection at their young age makes them more susceptible to adversities such as exploitation, trafficking, abuse, and neglect throughout their journeys (Radjack et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Dobler, 2021). They are more likely to expose behavioural and emotional criteria associated with the psychiatric category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety (Ulrich et al., 2022). Furthermore, upon their arrival in Europe, unaccompanied minors are far from experiencing safe and supporting environments. Instead, they are often confronted with different adversities such as racism, poor living conditions and legal barriers (Korkiamäki & Gilligan, 2020; Moutsou et al., 2023; Radjack et al., 2020). The precarious nature of the current Italian reception system structurally fails to meet the needs of unaccompanied minors as persons (Centri D'Italia, 2023; Testore,

2021), and its precarity-creating politics often create what Greco & Stenner (2017) conceptualize as *liminal hotspots*. Here, the state of limbo – of being in-between - UAM might experience becomes stuck/chronical or prolonged. This contributes to further marginalization as migratory liminal experiences increase a person's vulnerability (Göttsche, 2021).

The necessity of psychosocial care for unaccompanied minors is widely acknowledged (INEE, 2018; Moutsou et al., 2023; Ulrich et al., 2022). Nevertheless, conventional western approaches mainly aim at changing individual attitudes and behaviours of e.g. UAM while tailoring them to be more culturally fitting (Dutta, 2007). This failure of centring cultural-ethnic and social-systemic frameworks in interventions frequently perpetuates colonial continuities, thus contributing to a confining psychological outcome (Dutta, 2007; Santana & Fryer, 2014). For example, the increasing reliance of positive psychology on individual resilience and autonomy fails to address, if not obscures, the structural roots of oppression which causes marginalized positions in the first place (Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Tommasi et al., 2024).

Consequently, we argue that well-being and social justice are inextricably intertwined, making it necessary to mutually reflect and critically act upon power dynamics in order to promote holistic psychosocial support (Prilleltensky, 2012). People can only liberate themselves by entering the historical process as responsible subjects who know and act, rather than remaining objects that are known and acted upon (Freire, 1970). This process known as critical conscientization holds potential to support unaccompanied minors in navigating their liminal experiences as it is precisely in this in-betweenness where the potential for liberation resides (Ortega, 2016). In fact, emerging literature highlights the promising empowerment outcomes of integrating critical conscientization into psychosocial interventions with marginalized youths (Heberle et al., 2020; Maker Castro et al., 2022; Watts et al., 2011). In order to counteract epistemic violence (i.e. the erasure and invalidation of certain types of knowledge) we argue that holistic psychosocial support for unaccompanied minors needs to ground itself in their meaning-making of the worlds they are moving in and between (Montero & Sonn, 2009; Radjack et al., 2020).

In the present study, we conceptualized and conducted a community-based, participatory action research project with unaccompanied minors in Italy, combining a Critical Conscientization framework with socio-historical cultural psychology and liminality theory. In the following I will elaborate on the theoretical underpinnings of our interdisciplinary, exploratory approach.

Theoretical Background

Migration studies have gained increasing importance and attention in recent years (Mayblin & Turner, 2021). However, while the term "migration" is exponentially used in political and scientific discourses, it is often based on imprecise definitions (Guccione, 2022). In the subsequent section I will outline a working definition of migration and ways in which current migration-related discourses and practices have historically grown.

What is migration?

Deriving from the Latin verb "migrare" etymologically "to migrate" means "moving from one place to another" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2019). A place becomes a meaningful section of the space only through the symbolic demarcation of its boundaries. While such an act of demarcation separates one place from the other it also simultaneously connects them. Border phenomena thus constitute a dialectic that unites and divides, e.g. the here and the there (Marsico, 2016). Fiat borders are not rigid entities but processual practices (Gilmartin & Kuusisto-Arponen, 2019; Smith & Varzi, 2000). These entail a wide range of actions from the deadly compartmentalization practices at national borders to the psychic bordering practices that allow us to make sense of the reality (De Vincenzo & Zamperini, 2023; Español & Marsico, 2021). Traditionally, migration is referred to as a long-term change of a person's place of residence across territorial borders. This can be from the village to the city, between parts of the country or across national borders (bpb, 2018; UNHCR, 2019). Nevertheless, as migrants move, they cross not only territorial borders, but also those of symbolic nature. This implies that movement in a geographical space is always preceded, accompanied and followed by semantic movements. For example, people often start directing their expectations, hopes and fears towards their imagined life in a new place before embarking on their physical journey (Gillespie et al., 2012). Similarly, upon their arrival in a new place migrants have to negotiate questions of identity and belonging (Gamsakhurdia, 2022; Mecheril & Velho, 2014).

In their migratory endeavours, people find themselves being "on the move" across countless borders (De Vincenzo & Zamperini, 2023, p.2). This also includes finding themselves stagnating in-between borders. In fact, migrants are constantly navigating liminal zones of dis-/continuities. The term "liminal" was first coined by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (2016; original in 1909) in order to describe the transitional space that arises between different rites of passage. Stenner (2017, p.14) elaborates on this concept applying a sociopsychological lens and describes how we experience liminality "when the forms of process (socio-psycho-organico-physical) that usually sustain, enable and compose our lives are, for some reason,

disrupted, interrupted, transformed or suspended". The term form-of-process is used here to stress and point to the processual nature of the reality ranging from the tiniest atom to big-scale societies. Considering liminality in the context of migration disrupts a binary conception between migration and immobility and challenges the "implicit teleology that drives migration studies – from immobility to mobility and back to immobility" (Raghuram et al., 2024, p.5). Rather, we can see migratory journeys as a "nested series of journeys within journeys […] [i.e.] of immobility and mobility" (Brigden & Mainwaring, 2016, p.3). People undergoing such (suspended and intermittent) movement recurringly experience liminality as they navigate "a world-within-and-between worlds" (Stenner, 2021, p.3). It is precisely in this transformative in-betweenness where the possibility of restructuring subjectivities lies (Raghuram et al., 2024). For example, some migrants may feel alienated both from their homeland and their host society which positions them in a liminal space between cultures (Gamsakhurdia, 2022). There, they might engage in creative meaning-making processes such as developing "multiplicitous becomings" and belongings in transnational spaces (Ortega, 2016, p.145). De- and re-structuring processes of the self are a key characteristic of individual and collective experiences of being on the move (Gamsakhurdia, 2022).

Without denying the rich diversity of migratory experiences, we fundamentally frame migration as the embodied practice of movement across and within "borders of cultural, legal, linguistic and (geo)political significance" (Gamsakhurdia, 2022; Kuusisto-Arponen & Gilmartin, 2019; Mecheril & Velho, 2014, S. 1180).

On the construction of (il)legitimate mobilities

Migration takes place in and is shaped by a globalised world dominated by nation-states and capitalism, structurally depicting colonial continuities (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Who gets to move within or across international borders and who gets to stay in old/new lands is inextricably intertwined with a person's positioning in this world (Piacentini, 2008). To understand the construction of legalized and illegalized migrants we need to understand contemporary migratory flows as historically grown realities.

European colonialism was central to the creation of global injustices due to its politics of displacement, dispossession and destruction of colonized people (Haas et al., 2022; Mayblin & Turner, 2021; Rapoport, 2014). Colonial policies enabled the structural dispossession of land and extraction of resources, thus profoundly shaping the unequal distribution of capital, while under-developing local economies (Rodney, 1983). This points to the fact that European colonialism was also inherently a capitalist endeavour (Mayblin & Turner, 2021). Thriving on such a ground, political-economic globalization has spread neoliberal capitalism around the

world (Teo, 2023b), encouraging labour mobility as well as aggravating already existing global crises. As a consequence, people are led to the decision/forced to move (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Mayblin & Turner, 2021). Relatedly, migration policies are increasingly linked to a person's perceived profitable productivity (Mecheril, 2010).

One significant manifestation of this dynamic is the way mobility from the Global South is often framed as problematic and undesirable by the Global North, while "skilled" and affluent *white*[1] individuals are frequently exempt from being categorized as migrants but rather as "expats", reflecting a deeply racialized and classist construction of who is deemed entitled to cross national borders and thus exercise freedom of movement (Anderson, 2017; Gilmartin & Kuusisto-Arponen, 2019). I want to emphasize that all migratory experiences are profoundly shaped by the interaction of different societal positionalities such as (dis-)ability, race, class, age or gender (Mecheril, 2010). Such positionalities are organized along an axis of power and demand an intersectional perspective to grasp their complex influences on a person's (im)mobility (Anthias, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Mecheril (2010) proposes the term "Migrant Other" to grasp the hierarchical structures and processes underlying the colonial construction of a specific group of migrants that is seen as moving illegitimately.

The European Border Regime

Modern migration regimes are fundamentally shaped by the historic racialization of mobility (Mayblin & Turner, 2021). The control of movement was a fundamental part of the colonial project as exemplified by the enclosing of indigenous people in US reservations (forced immobility) or the transatlantic slave trade (forced mobility). The continued attempt to govern bodies that are constructed as illegitimately-moving led to their illegalization in the juristic system, as legal barriers delineate (un)acceptable justifications for migration (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Reflecting a biopolitical exercise of power (Foucault, 2010), the state defines the worthiness of people's lives outside versus inside its borders through the regulation of migratory movement (Kuusisto-Arponen & Gilmartin, 2019; Mignolo, 2013; Wiertz, 2021). Furthermore, it has led to a normalization of hazardous journeys marked by adversities towards Europe justified by dehumanizing discourses and practices (Esses et al., 2021). Dehumanization is one of the main strategies to delegitimize the other, to exclude them from the circle of those who are considered human, justifying measures of extreme cruelty. There are animalistic and mechanistic forms of dehumanization, which may appear in forms such as demonization,

[1] "*white*" is a socio-political designation for people who mainly benefit from racism (Arndt & Ofuatey-Alazard, 2011). In order to distinguish it from a biologistic/culturalist understanding, I deliberately write the word in lowercase and in italics in this work (Kelly, 2019).

biologization, objectification, and invisibility (Volpato, 2013). These dynamics culminated in the normalization of death at European Borders, as the European border regime implements rigorous measures to prevent illegalized migrants from entering European territory. So-called pushbacks deny any moral and/or legal responsibility towards the people seeking refuge in Europe (Barnes, 2022). Only those who manage to enter the symbolic fort of Europe and who can prove that they fled their home country because of a threat to their live or freedom have a right to international protection. Just then a so-called asylum seeker will be granted refugee status (UNHCR, 2019). Contemporary Italian politics illustrate efforts to revise the list of 'safe countries' that consequently allow deportation, employing questionable definitions of safety that do not accurately reflect the realities in these nations (Adnkronos, 2024). Such exclusionary border practice "produces (illegalized) migration as a category and literally and figuratively renders it visible" (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p.67). It is an extension of Europe's violent colonial history and reflects what other scholars have called the "Black Mediterranean" (cf. Danewid, 2017).

On migratory hotspots in Italy

The southern EU border represents both a symbolic and literal critical border zone, with places like Lampedusa serving as key loci of the European border regime (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). Here, first reception structures, so-called "hotspots", have been installed where newly embarked people are supposed to undergo medical examinations, receive basic information about the legal immigration system in Italy as well as get pre-registered (Ministero dell'Interno, 2022). If at this point or later they don't comply the requisites, they will be sent to prison-like centres (Centro di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio, CPR), where they are retained under dangerous and even life-threatening conditions until the deportation to their home countries is effectuated (ASGI, 2024). If instead they show intent to apply for asylum and comply to the requisites, they will be send to first reception facilities (Centri di Prima Accoglienza, CPA), located in different parts of Italy where the official registration is supposed to take place (Ministero dell'Interno, 2022). Ideally, they would subsequently be transferred to the regular system of reception and integration (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione, SAI), where people live mainly during their asylum-seeking process and sometimes beyond that until certain stabilities are achieved, such as housing or working. The SAI generally offers a wide range of services like social and psychological assistance, cultural-linguistic mediations, or Italian language courses (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there are neither enough spots in the CPA nor in the SAI to accommodate and support all asylum seekers in Italy. This reflects that, even if the phenomenon of irregular migration is long withstanding, portrayals through

media and politics continue depicting it as a temporary emergency. The current Italian asylum system is mirroring this emergency approach, leading to provisional and inadequate policies (Pitzalis, 2020). Indeed, it has expanded the idea of migratory hotspots beyond the scope of regulating migrants' immediate arrival by sea increasingly encompassing also the subsequent stay at certain reception facilities (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020).

(Hot-)Spotting the nature of Italian CAS

In 2014 a new type of migratory hotspot called CAS (Centri Accoglianza Straordinaria; extraordinary reception facilities) was created due to the deficient functioning of the hitherto operating reception system (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). Here, asylum seekers are supposed to stay until their request for international protection is granted or rejected, or until they can be transferred into the regular reception system (Fondazione Italia Sociale, 2021; Ministero dell'Interno, 2022). The CAS symbolises an extension of the European border regime attempting to control the movement of migrant Others (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020).

Particularly since the Salvini reform came into force in 2018, the resources available for such CAS are cut down to a bare minimum, reducing this type of reception facility to mere lodging purposes (Testore, 2021). The CAS are operated by various social cooperatives who establish and finance them through public tenders of the respective prefectures (Fondazione Italia Sociale, 2021). Due to this decentralized nature of the reception system and the limited financial resources available, the quality of services provided by different social cooperatives varies significantly. While some strive to provide additional, more holistic support, others merely meet the basic requirements (Maculan, 2022; Testore, 2021). Mirroring the above-mentioned emergency approach in handling irregular migration, the hotspot nature of these precarious facilities has increasingly been regularized with around 60% of asylum seekers living in CAS in 2022 (Centri D'Italia, 2023; Fondazione Italia Sociale, 2021). In a period of three years (2020-2023) the number of tenders calling for the establishment of CAS for unaccompanied minors rose from 3 to 50. Furthermore, even though by law unaccompanied minors can only stay in a CPA or CAS up to 30 to 60 days until they must be transferred into a SAI, in reality many minors are accommodated there for much longer periods of time (Centri D'Italia, 2023).

The transitory nature of the CAS, the uncertainty of asylum seekers' asylum status, and the unknown future that lies ahead of them all constitute prime examples of life on hold. These challenges are particularly pronounced for unaccompanied minors as they navigate not only migratory transitions, but also diverse transitions linked to coming-of-age. A facility like a CAS is not only officially called hotspot, it also embodies a symbolic hotspot where individuals are

likely to experience a profound sense of limbo (Cangià, 2021). While, as elaborated before, all migratory experiences include in one way or the other liminal experiences, certain forms of liminality can become prolonged or stuck. We argue that the specific spatial, temporal and symbolic characteristics of a CAS might culminate in a state of being chronically stuck in-between various worlds or what Greco & Stenner (2017) refer to as *liminal hotspots.*

On the creation of liminal hotspots in CAS

Liminality has been used as a powerful framework to understand a huge range of phenomena in contemporary societies which are increasingly defined by continuous, fluid transitions, or what Szakolczai (2014) calls permanent liminality (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017). From the moment a person on the move crosses the first migration related border – may it be of physical or symbolic nature - their known state of affairs gets suspended and the new state of being on the move becomes indeterminately permanent (Cangià, 2021). Nevertheless, when the uncertainties and ambiguities inherent in any liminal experience acquire a lasting gestalt, a so-called liminal hotspot may arise (Stenner et al., 2017). A liminal hotspot is "an occasion characterised by the experience of being trapped in the interstitial dimension between different forms-of-process, and in the situation of ontological indeterminacy that characterises such a dimension" (Greco & Stenner, 2017, p.11). A CAS is situated at the threshold of expectations of life in Europe and the reality, it is the embodiment of a "non-place" (Augé, 1995) existing somewhere between the past migratory route and the upcoming journey in Europe. In a CAS, spatial, temporal and symbolic borders converge, creating a space of profound limbo charged with ambiguity, tension, and possibility. For instance, the forced waiting for their asylum process to proceed or for their coming-of-age constitutes a temporal expression of life on hold.

A liminal hotspot can arise due to the encounter with paradox(es) which are not scarce to find in life in a CAS. As unaccompanied minors' physical movement is on hold, their semantic movements still continue to take place as they have to navigate a novel semiosphere i.e. the complex web of meanings from which we act and make sense of the world (Gillespie et al., 2012; Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017). This hints towards the creation of one particular type of paradox that is especially relevant for a psychological understanding of migratory phenomena. Cultural-historical psychological approaches offer a dynamic conceptualization of the human psyche as being (re)produced transactionally between the person and their cultural milieu instead of being an enclosed entity in a person's head (Salvatore et al., 2019). This "mind in society" first conceptualized by Vygotsky (1978) is based on the assumption that "cognitive processing is grounded and embedded in culturally, historically, and sub-culturally specific traditions and worldviews" (Salvatore et al., 2019, p.5). In this view, psychological enquiries

need to be concerned about the on-going meaning-making processes of humans. If we understand meaning-making as a continuous "transition among signs" (Salvatore et al., 2019, p.7), any act of individual relating with one's surrounding world includes a liminal momentum. Due to the social embeddedness of mental processes, usually the personal way of making sense of the world and the sociocultural context in which one acts and thinks are congruent. During migration, this sociocultural context in which one's cognition is embedded undergoes a sudden and dramatic shift (Lucic, 2023). Here, migrants experience a suspension of their usual modes of interpreting the world as they have to navigate a new semiotic scenario consisting of a complex set of cultural signs and meanings that may differ significantly from their previous cultural horizon (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017). We argue that one characteristic aspect of the experience of a liminal hotspot in the CAS is this state of being in-between two symbolic worlds.

Stenner et al. (2017) conceptualize four important features of liminal hotspots: paradox, paralysis, polarisation and (potentially) pattern shift. Paradoxes hold the power to disrupt the experiential flow leading to a moment of paralysis. In order to resolve the paradox, two processes are possible. On the one hand, a person could polarize as a way to escape the indeterminacy of the situation, e.g. refusing completely to engage in a deep way with one's social environment. On the other hand, it can also lead to the more complex process of shifting patterns towards an integrated, more complex form-of-process capable of resignifying the existing paradox (Greco & Stenner, 2017; Stenner et al., 2017).

A liminal hotspot is not classifiable in a good/bad dichotomy, even though particularly the first three features may be associated with elevated negative affectivity such as stress or discomfort (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017). Rather, it holds risks and potentials. Particularly in the latter lies the innovative potential for creative change. In order to support UAM in these liminal transitions, there is a need for psychosocial support (PSS) that tackles the experienced paradoxes aiming at supporting pattern shift.

Re-thinking psychosocial care

The need for psychological solutions to support unaccompanied minors in vulnerable times has been widely recognized as essential (Migliorini et al., 2022; Moutsou et al., 2023). There has been a wide array of studies researching psychotherapeutic interventions for UAM based on e.g. cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic and artistic approaches (Moutsou et al., 2023). Acknowledging the inseparability of the psychological and the social, i.e. the psychosocial interface (Stenner & Taylor, 2008), PSS for unaccompanied minors constitutes a valuable complement to such psychotherapeutic approaches in promoting the holistic well-

being of individuals in their social environment (INEE, 2018; Moutsou et al., 2023). In order to do so, PSS aims at helping "individuals recover after a crisis has disrupted their lives and to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events (INEE, 2018, p.14). This individual capacity of bouncing-back to critical life events known as resilience has been conceptualized as being on the other end of a continuum with vulnerability (Dorsch & Wirtz, 2020). It is considered a protective factor that enhances well-being in minimizing physical and psychological harm (Ungar, 2006). Nevertheless, while positive psychology suggests that resilience is linked to overcoming adversity and achieving a fulfilling life, this conceptualization risks solidifying oppressive structures (Tommasi et al., 2024). The mainly reactive conceptualization of resilience portrays the resilient individual as enduring and surviving adversities without engaging in proactive resistance (Slaby, 2017). Furthermore, instead of challenging systems responsible for the conditions people are facing, it plays into the neoliberal logic of shifting political responsibilities into the private sphere (Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Joseph, 2013; Luthar et al., 2000). Resilience-based approaches therefore paradoxically threaten to perpetuate the very structures that produce individual's vulnerabilities. These risks and limitations underscore the need for an emancipatory approach, which questions the adequacy of conventional PSS in explicitly addressing systemic injustices.

Fundamentally, such an approach requires the recognition that the same way that contemporary migration flows are historically intertwined with the racialization of movement, western psychology has a long tradition of (re)producing racism (Rapoport, 2014; Santana & Fryer, 2014; Teo, 2023b). An emancipative approach to psychosocial support needs to be a decolonial approach. Through "being a relay for western/northern individualized medicalized "mental health" discourses, technologies, practices", psychological practices still follow the footsteps of colonial traditions many times (Santana & Fryer, 2014, p.263). In the attempt to establish alternatives to dominant psychological epistemes, "border epistemology goes hand in hand with decoloniality" (Mignolo, 2013, p.133). Furthermore, all practitioners of PSS, but particularly those from Western traditions, must continuously practice reflexivity and epistemic modesty, i.e. acknowledging that our core assumptions are shaped by culture, history, and society, to avoid and resist colonial continuities (Teo, 2023a).

Additionally, to construct a *culture-centred approach* that is committed to radically start from the perspectives of the people involved, we must not tap in the trap of creating a merely *culture-sensitive approach* that adapts conventional western psychological assumptions to be more fitting in diverse cultural contexts (Dutta, 2007). If not, there is a risk that once "groups are marked as 'vulnerable' […] [they] become reified as definitionally 'vulnerable', fixed in a

political position of powerlessness and lack of agency" (Butler et al., 2016, p.24 & 25). This vulnerabilization can lead to UAM becoming increasingly dependent on well-meaning "professionals" and state-support to guide them through the troublesome period they are living through (Heidbrink, 2021; McAdam-Otto, 2023). Therefore, critical PSS must prioritize the empowerment of its target group to become responsible, interdependent subjects.

As previously discussed, psychosocial support for unaccompanied minors is intended to enhance their holistic well-being. While we concur with this objective, interpretations of holistic well-being can vary significantly. We will work with a definition from Prilleltensky (2012), who postulates well–being to be a positive state of individual and cultural thriving through the balanced satisfaction of both objective (i.e. material and physical) and subjective (i.e. psychological and emotional) needs that is inextricably linked to questions of social justice. Consequently, a holistic approach in psychosocial care interventions needs to aim at fostering individual and community well-being by encouraging the youths in question to become responsible subjects. It should mobilize and strengthen individual and group resources to better understand and act upon the challenges they face in a new environment full of structurally embedded injustices and to become agents of social change (Prilleltensky, 2012; Radjack et al., 2020). Such an approach might be enhanced through practices that reaffirm vulnerability as an ontological state of the human being that holds potential for empowerment. Judith Butler et al. (2016) argue that vulnerability should not be seen as synonymous with powerlessness. Instead, it can include and enable agency and, when collectively organized, serve as a site of political resistance. Such an understanding of resistance overcomes individual(izing) resilience discourses or the description of the other as passive and instead highlights its relational and political nature (Tommasi et al., 2024). It is important to recognize the dialectic relationship between vulnerability and resistance, as it holds potential to perceiving unaccompanied minors as active agents rather than passive victims (McAdam-Otto, 2023). This shift is essential in empowering UAM to navigate and potentially transform their liminal experiences, as it is precisely within this experience of in-betweenness where the potential for liberation lies (Ortega, 2016). In order to do so, there is a need to reflect and critically act upon the social conditions that cause oppression in the first place. This process has in the past been conceptualized as *conscientização* or critical conscientization (CC; Freire, 1970).

On the transformative potential of critical consciousness

In the pursuit of a juster society, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) argued that people in situations of oppression must first become critically aware of this situation and its causes, so that through dialogue they can transform it. In his pedagogical theory, he proposed a

learning approach where traditional borders between teachers and students are challenged with everyone being seen as active co-creators of knowledge. His method aimed at shifting the power dynamics in education from a traditional top-down deposition of knowledge to a more egalitarian process that generates knowledge through dialogue (Carlson et al., 2006). Dialogue is to be seen as constituted of the synthesis of reflection and action – transforming the world through naming the world. People are required to exit the state of objects who are known and acted upon in order to exist as knowing and acting, responsible subjects (Freire, 1970). It promoted a very inclusive understanding of liberation as an everyday practice which everyone is capable of participating in (Montero, 2014). Critical consciousness is not a final state to be reached, but should be understood as a process of challenging and changing the already existing consciousness of a person through problem-posing education (Montero, 2014). Problematization can be defined as "the critical and puzzling doubting about the knowledge so far considered as the way for things to be" (Montero & Sonn, 2009, p.75). Through problem-posing dialogue, in contrast to indoctrination, new knowledge can be constructed, analysing and contextualizing dominant narratives serving oppressive interests (Montero, 2014). Expanding on Freire's work, Watts et al. (2011) defined three components of critical conscientization processes: *critical reflection*, which involves naming and analysing social injustices; *political efficacy*, also called critical motivation, which is the belief in one's individual and collective ability to bring about change; and *critical action*, which refers to participation in efforts aimed at effecting change.

These conceptualizations of critical consciousness were primarily developed within the Latin American context but have had a significant global influence. Moreover, there have been many important African/Afro-descendant decolonial thinkers who have promoted and developed similar concepts, often drawing inspiration from, paralleling or further elaborating these ideas. Intellectuals and activists like Frantz Fanon (1952), Steve Biko (1978) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) all analyse ways in which European colonialism has imprinted itself in the mind and body of the as inferior-constructed colonial subject, and emphasize the need for a development of a decolonial conscience on the path towards liberation.

Since its original pedagogical formulation, the transformative potential of critical consciousness has gained popularity also in psychology, particularly resonating in more critical psychological approaches (Montero, 2014; Teo, 2015). One of the most prominent figures in applying Freirean pedagogics to psychology is Ignacio Martin-Baró (Teo, 2015). In his practices and writings on liberation psychology, he advocated for a psychological practice that is centred on Latin American realities and focused on a dialogical knowledge production

between people and psychologists, with the goal of developing transformative practices for daily life (cf. Martín-Baró, 1986).

In the Global North, a growing corpus of literature has focused on the potential of focusing on critical conscientization in psychosocial interventions with marginalized youths with promising results (Watts et al., 2011). In a systematic review, Heberle et al. (2020) analysed that critical consciousness was linked to various positive developmental impacts, such as career-related, civic, social-emotional, and academic outcomes, particularly for marginalized youths. Maker Castro et al. (2022) further conducted a systematic review on the connection between CC and well-being, indicating that particularly critical motivation may foster well-being for marginalized youths in the context of supportive organizations. Nevertheless, both reviews call for further research to better understand the interactions of the different dimensions of critical consciousness across diverse developmental stages and various intersections of marginalizations. Even though there are no specific methods directly related to conscientization, it is often approached through participatory action research (Montero & Sonn, 2009).

Critical Conscientization through Participatory research

Participatory action research attempts to apply a lens of democratic participation throughout the whole research process foregrounding otherwise marginalized perspectives (Torre, 2014). It is rooted in the epistemological assumption that experiential expertise, i.e. the knowledge produced through the lived experiences of people, holds immense value and needs to be centred in research (Aikins et al., 2021; Fine & Torre, 2021). However, concerns have been raised about the potential misuse of participation as a superficial guise that conceals and justifies the continuous exploitation of the knowledge held by marginalized people and communities (Cooke & Kothari, 2007).

In response, there has been a recent push to reaffirm the critical foundations of Participatory Action Research, emphasizing its roots in feminist, queer, critical race, neo-Marxist, and indigenous theories (Torre, 2014). Such Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) is a methodology deeply committed to issues of social (in)justice and power structures and seeks to collaboratively centre these in its research designs (Fine & Torre, 2021).

Power here is understood as fundamentally relational, i.e. not a possession of the powerful, but a network of interactions that shapes every aspect of social life. It is omnipresent and interacting through discourses and practices thus dynamically influencing every interaction between e.g. individuals, groups or institutions (Foucault, 1981). Here, the privileges enjoyed by some often stem from the systemic oppression of others (Spivak, 2020, original in 1988).

The awareness of one's position within these networks of power holds the potential for transformative action against oppressive structures (Freire, 1970; Martín-Baró, 1986).

CPAR is interested in "how people make sense of the worlds they inhabit and the worlds they make" (Fine & Torre, 2021, p.10). Furthermore, it aims at acting upon those worlds, reflecting the principles of psychological research "of and for world-making" (Power et al., 2023, p. 278). The explicit focus on power rests on the assumption that the more one knows about power structures, the more they can be challenged (Fine & Torre, 2021; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of "organic intellectuals", practitioners of CPAR believe in research critically informed by the oppressive conditions of current global and local power dynamics, that sees and encourages critical conscientization of people as a way to interrupt these. Indeed, the idea of participatory research as a means of fostering critical consciousness lies at the heart of CPAR (Torre, 2014). In the CPAR attempt to democratize and decolonize research lies the possibility for it to become "one more resource in, by, and for movements for justice" (Fine & Torre, 2021, p. 6).

On the capacity of channelling liminality through art

Liminal experiences usually occur spontaneously as they challenge the structured order of everyday life. In the in-betweenness, the previously functioning modes of making sense are not sufficient anymore and new semiotic paths ought to be created (Stenner, 2017). As in the case of UAM, they have to engage in creative ways of making sense of the new environment they encounter in Italy. Stenner (2017, p.25) proposes that "liminal affective technologies help us to create that symbolism and to drag it into emergence from the very edge of semantic availability". *Liminal affective technologies* are methods conducive to affective experiences that enable psychosocial transformations. These so-called *devised* liminal experiences might in an anthropological tradition be seen in the form of rituals or *rites de passage* (Van Gennep, 2016, original in 1909). Yet, various forms of art can take that function too in allowing the spontaneous liminal experience to be symbolically expressed (Stenner, 2017). Art then becomes itself a form of "liminal experiencing that supports transitions by engaging imagination" (Stenner & Zittoun, 2020, p. 240). Through art, people can explore how to "re-position, re-signify and re-imagine" (Stenner, 2021, p.3) the way they can relate to themselves, others and the world, thus finding new ways of re-structuring what was previously de-structured. This is facilitated through the engagement of all senses when trough art we "touch each other by seeing, hearing, moving, and feeling" (Meyer DeMott, 2017, p.156). Hereby, the relational creative process is always prioritized over the final product. Using art as a medium in psychosocial care is a promising approach when working with culturally diverse groups. A recent systematic

literature review has highlighted the effectiveness of incorporating art in psychosocial interventions with migrants as the creative practice supports their well-being by providing alternative, non-verbal means for emotional expression and processing (Oepen & Gruber, 2023). Here, psychologists can provide the role of "liminal affective leadership", which aims at balancing "the volatile liminal affectivity that it induces" (Bjergkilde & Stenner, 2021, p.1).

Nevertheless, art alone doesn't bridge cultural differences and power dynamics. One example of a culture-centred, arts-based approach is called *Photovoice* (Dutta, 2007). Combining Freirean pedagogics with feminist theory and documentary photography, Dr. Caroline Wang and her colleagues (C. Wang & Burris, 1994; C. C. Wang, 1999) developed this innovative method in the mid-1990s in the field of health research with rural Chinese women. Since then it has travelled far, with increasing use in Sub-Saharan African countries such as Uganda (McMorrow & Musoke, 2023), South Africa (Kessi, 2018; Walker & Oliveira, 2020), Nigeria (Olumide et al., 2018), Mali (Esquith & Tamboura, 2023), Sierra Leone (Denov et al., 2012) and Cameroon (Ronzi et al., 2019). It has also been applied with African unaccompanied minors in Europe (Lögdberg et al., 2020; Marcu, 2018; Moore et al., 2020).

Photovoice involves capturing people's perspectives in letting them take pictures on a relevant topic and subsequently discuss their various meanings. Photovoice is a community-based participatory action research and aims at fostering real change for the particular community involved. The discussion–reflection–action-cycle characteristic for Photovoice projects (Catalani & Minkler, 2010) reflects the core components of critical conscientization processes (Carlson et al., 2006). It aims at facilitating participants' sense-making of their experiences and cultivates a commitment to social justice (Kessi, 2018). It is a method that radically attempts to practice epistemic solidarity through creating a space where oftentimes marginalized stories are listened to, validated and amplified (Van Der Aa, 2017). Also, it is challenging semiotic alienation and colonial dominant narratives as it allows people to tell their stories the way they want (Kessi, 2018).

Connecting the dots – the current research

At this point, I wish to emphasize that I am not suggesting that any of the approaches discussed here are universally applicable. Rather, I propose them as a specific framework for bridging the cultural differences and power dynamics that may hinder the collaboration between psychologists from the Global North working with marginalized youth from the Global South. I intend to challenge and decentre traditional dominant Western psychological knowledge systems, while acknowledging that due to my own positioning, I will never fully escape these (Santana & Fryer, 2014). I advocate for practicing such epistemic humility while accepting and

embracing pluriversal perspectives on knowledge production and practices (Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Ortega, 2016; Teo, 2023a). Only then, maybe, this work holds potential to serve as a piece of epistemic disobedience to dominant (neo)colonial discourses around migration (cf. Mignolo, 2013).

Based on these theoretical considerations, we conceptualized a critical participatory action research project with African unaccompanied minors in Italy. These young people on the move are experiencing important transitions that need special attention in order to escape the symbolic condition of life on hold in the CAS and meaningfully transform this experience of prolonged liminality. We aim at investigating the emancipative potential of CPAR as a form of holistic psychosocial support for them. In the next section I will describe the methods we implemented.

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.

Our research design is firmly grounded in qualitative research traditions, combining a critical epistemological paradigm with liminality theory and socio-historical cultural psychology (Freire, 1970; Salvatore et al., 2019; Stenner, 2017; Teo, 2015). In the attempt to include and amplify the voices and perspectives of people that have been historically excluded from active positions of scientific knowledge production, we conducted a Critical Participatory Action Research Project that intends to resist the epistemological violence that has structurally shaped migration studies (Fine & Torre, 2021; Mayblin & Turner, 2021). Therefore, we immersed ourselves in the field creating a power-critical PSS intervention. Such ethnographic methods are a useful tool for exploring dynamic acts of world-making (Power et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the ethnographic endeavour of studying a particular community context demands a critical approach, as historically this type of research has been a colonial instrument of material and epistemic exploitation (LeFrancois, 2014; Poddar et al., 2011). As a response, critical ethnography proposes to explicitly address power and oppression in its research designs (LeFrancois, 2014). This aligns with CPAR approaches that call for centring power issues in community conversations as well (Fine & Torre, 2021).

I would like to emphasize that this research does not aim to be generalizable, but to give an insight into the lived experiences and embodied meaning-making processes of a group of unaccompanied minors in the particular context of an Italian CAS. To ensure the ethical principle of anonymity fundamental to ethnographic research, we will not disclose any information that could enable the identification of the inhabitants of the CAS (Pelto, 2013). In conducting research, there is a need for constant reflection on our own standpoint in relation to the phenomenon in question in order to identify the ways in which this point of view influenced the research process and results (Willig, 2022). We continuously confronted ourselves with such questions either individually in our research diaries or discussing within our research collective, in the attempt to create an emancipatory and transparent research project.

The research collective

During CPAR, differently positioned people come together to investigate a theme relevant to all of them. In this process, particularly the perspectives, knowledge and expertise of marginalized community members are valued and centred (Fine & Torre, 2021). We all have different relationships with power and vulnerability. During the research process, these

differences serve as resources to share, contest and (re-) construct meaning around the generative theme (Fine & Torre, 2021). We all learn, we all teach. Paulo Freire (1970) names the importance of dissolving the dichotomy between teachers and students as we are never just students nor merely teachers in positions he terms "teacher-student" and "student-teacher". As data is constructed in the interaction of everyone involved in this project, we are always both researchers and participants at the same time. Nevertheless, to not obscure that there are different privileges, responsibilities and interests involved, I decide against blindly calling everyone involved the same (e.g. researcher). Therefore, in the following I will use the terms "researcher-participant" to describe the ones that organize/conceptualize this research project from a position of psychological professionalism and "participant-researchers" for the unaccompanied minors living in the CAS.

The researcher-participants

In total, five researcher-participants collaborated in the creation of this project. We all occupy different positions in the field of psychology: as students, as researchers, as activists, as professors and as psychotherapists. Furthermore, we have all been interested in and engaged with issues around migration professionally as well as personally for a long time. We all crossed significant borders more than once making us migrants in the broader sense. For contextualization, I would like to explicitly mention that four of us are socially positioned as *white* and one as Mestiza[2]. The latter is from Ecuador, all others grew up in Europe (more precisely in Italy and Germany). These positionalities are inseparable from our migratory experiences and our resulting perspectives on migration. The limits inherent to these standpoints should be critically considered while reading the present study.

Professor Sara Santilli and Professor Ciro De Vincenzo guided us in the conception of this research project as well as offered their expertise to support us in the analysis of the unfolding diverse social interactions. As Professor Ciro De Vincenzo is working as a psychologist in the CAS, in which this project was implemented, and consequently knew the participant-researchers well, he helped us in establishing a first contact as well as with the practical coordination of our interventions. Both professors didn't participate in the interventions which were conducted by María Emilia Montaño, Paula Cramer and me. The three of us worked closely together in the development and implementation of this research project, complementing each other's knowledge and ideas. Prior to this project, we didn't know the

[2] This is the identification of María Emilia Montaño, based on the experiences of having both Indigenous and Spanish ancestry in the Latin American context

participant-researchers. All three of us are enrolled in the master's programme Clinical, Social and Intercultural Psychology and based our final dissertations on this research.

The participant-researchers

In total, 18 participant-researchers joined us in the process of this project. Overall, between 4 and 12 participant-researchers were present in each meeting. Some were more consistent in their participation than others. Participation varied greatly between the different encounters sometimes including nearly all of them, sometimes just around five. All of them are officially recognized as unaccompanied minors and are currently living together in the above-mentioned CAS. Consequently, they knew each other prior to this project. They have been in Italy for less than a year. Their countries of origin are Tunisia, Egypt, Cameroon, Mali, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Guinea. All of them are socially positioned as Black[3]. Taken together, they speak several different languages, among them Arabic, Bambara, Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Maninka, Pulaar, English and French. They have different educational backgrounds ranging from illiteracy to higher formal education. As motivations to participate in this project, they mentioned various aspects such as wanting to learn something, to understand what Power is, to have fun, because they were told to come, because they don't have anything else to do, because they want to get to know us, because we are "three beautiful girls" as well as to exchange knowledge.

The context of the CAS

The CAS, which is located in Padova, was established in August 2023 and is (depending on funding possibilities) planned to operate at least until the end of 2024. It has been hosting up to 33 unaccompanied minors with 5-8 general operators and 4 operators with specialized profiles (psychologist, legal operator, social worker, coordinator) working there.

The current research is embedded in a bigger developmental process of this CAS. As mentioned above, a CAS is a transitory place created out of a supposedly "extraordinary" necessity (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). It is filling the gaps left open by the ordinary reception system operating under the precarious conditions of future uncertainty and few resources. By definition, it is meant to merely satisfy basic needs such as food and a place to sleep of its inhabitants (Centri D'Italia, 2023; Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020; Testore, 2021).

Operating for about a year, there has recently been rising frustration among the operators who feel limited by the defined boundaries of the CAS context in furthering their relationship

[3] Black is a political self-designation of people who experience racism (Ogette, 2020). I write it in capital letters to express that it is not a description of a skin color but of a sociopolitical position (Kelly, 2019).

with the inhabitants. While the operators generally agree to have fulfilled their formal obligation, they feel the need to push the tight boundaries imposed on their work by the reception system legislation and allow new practices and resulting interactions to unfold. In an équipe meeting we attended, they attempted to decipher this frustration in distinguishing between *operational* work, that is focused on fulfilling basic requirements, and *practices*, which involve engaging with the actual needs of the inhabitants. Grounding their work in theoretical frameworks, the operators could thus move beyond predefined boundaries.

There have been several attempts to implement such practices, but the inhabitants of the CAS themselves answer with putting limits in the relationships with the operators as a result to the limitations they face, preventing all involved parties to enter into full contact with each other. In a way, it seems like for the UAM, the operators themselves become the embodiment of the CAS boundaries. As they cannot directly resist the structural conditions that cause their precarious situation, they seem to redirect their resistance to the one type of relationship that is within their reach: the one with the operators.

As non-Italian, young professionals that are external to the CAS system, we are neither like the operators nor completely different from them, rather something in-between – representing a liminal figure ourselves. With our research project, we propose that this liminality inherent to our positions holds potential to disclose or even disrupt some of the existing dynamics between the UAM and the operators.

Research Question(s)

Our research is of exploratory nature which is why we defined a very broad research question that guided us in the conceptualization and implementation of the project:

> What are the potentials of conducting critical participatory action research as a psycho-social intervention with African unaccompanied minors in Italy?

In order to ground our research in the immediate reality of the participant-researchers we decided against defining a specific research question for this thesis prior to the practical implementation of the project. Afterwards, María Emilia Montaño, Paula Cramer and me each decided to focus on a different, more specific aspect in the analysis of the general research question. María Emilia Montaño focuses on processes of self and mutual recognition on the path to belonging, while Paula Cramer puts emphasis on the potentials of fostering dialogue in a liminal space. For me, the theme “resistance” became increasingly relevant as I will further explain in the results. Therefore, I decided to focus my analysis on the following research question:

Which strategies did we encounter and create during our project to resist the confining boundaries of a liminal, migratory hotspot? How do these resistance strategies acquire an emancipatory dimension?

Procedure

The project planning started in February 2024, with recurring meetings between the researcher-participants. In the beginning of July 2024, we started familiarizing ourselves with the environment of the CAS and created a first contact with the operators and the participant-researchers. We immersed the project within an artistic atelier that is taking place a.o. ateliers in the CAS during the summer months in which school is closed. In the span of about a month, in July and August 2024 we conducted seven semi-structured interventions, each lasting around two hours. We usually arrived at 09:00 in the morning, setting up the space and asking the operators to remind the participant-researcher of the beginning intervention. The timeframe of the interventions varied as initiating early wasn't one of the UAM's priorities. Nevertheless, arriving early seemed necessary to initiate the process of waking them up. Most of the times we left the CAS around 12:30/13:00 before they would go to lunch.

Furthermore, we passed by the CAS in-between these interventions for more informal encounters. In total, 8 of such colloquial meetings took place between July and October 2024, each lasting between one to three hours.

To generate initial interest in participating, we designed a flyer (Appendix A) titled "Let's talk about Power", introducing ourselves with our names and a picture. The flyer was hung in the entrance of the CAS. Participation was encouraged by the operators but not obligatory.

Throughout all meetings we communicated in Italian, English and French, translating where necessary. Furthermore, some multilingual participant-researchers slipped in the role of translators of other languages where necessary. Upon division into smaller groups, we split up by preferred language. Moreover, we attempted to include a variety of non-verbal activities to facilitate the participation.

The semi-structured interventions

While having elaborated a detailed plan for each semi-structured intervention previous to the implementation of the project, we adapted it oriented on the needs and ideas of the participant-researchers after each session. This resulted in the project being extended by one semi-structured intervention, totalling seven sessions.

The interventions took place outside, at the community garden of the CAS. We were surrounded by a small vegetable garden, a lot of grass and different trees as well as the walls of the CAS and the neighbouring building, which all contributed to a very protected, calm atmosphere. Each morning, we offered juice and cookies as well as picked some ripe figs from one of the trees. Under the protecting shadow of a big tree, we gathered either sitting in a circle or in smaller groups around tables. To make our presence heard and encourage participation we started each session by playing music, chosen by one of the participant-researchers. Except for the first session, each meeting began with a recap of the activities from the previous sessions. Subsequently, we outlined the plan for the session on a whiteboard to offer guidance and transparency.

Throughout the sessions, we alternated between more experiential and more dialogical activities. The experiential, often arts-based activities, aimed at different goals such as engaging the body and the senses, fostering team building and experiencing different aspects of power. As described above, these affective liminal technologies hold potential to enable psychosocial transformations (Stenner, 2017). In order to foster critical conscientization, we framed these experiential activities in dialogue, contextualizing and elaborating on them. The dialogical activities were therefore aimed at engaging everyone in critical discussions, reflect on the generative theme and the co-creation of knowledge (Freire, 1970; Montero, 2014). These two types of activities recursively provided input and inspiration for each other.

The generative theme we chose for our intervention is “Power”. In choosing this theme, we aimed at inciting the UAMs curiosity, attempt to break free of their presumptions of what psychologists might want to talk about with them and subsequently meet them in this unexpected space to centre more specific issues that they judge as relevant for them. Furthermore, it aligns with the idea of CPAR to centre power issues in participatory action research (Fine & Torre, 2021).

1st Session. The first semi-structured intervention served as an introduction to both the CPAR project and the generative theme, aiming at stimulating interest for further participation and establishing the foundation for the subsequent interventions. We began by deciding together in which languages we would (mainly) communicate. This was followed by a brief introduction in which everyone was invited to share their name, the meaning of their name, the languages they speak and a movement representing their current mood. Whoever spoke was thrown a small ball, then the ball was passed to another person. In a next step, we played a game called "Crossing the River" aimed at building teamwork and cooperation (Unicef, 2024). For this, the group divided in two and everyone was handed a piece of paper representing a stepping stone.

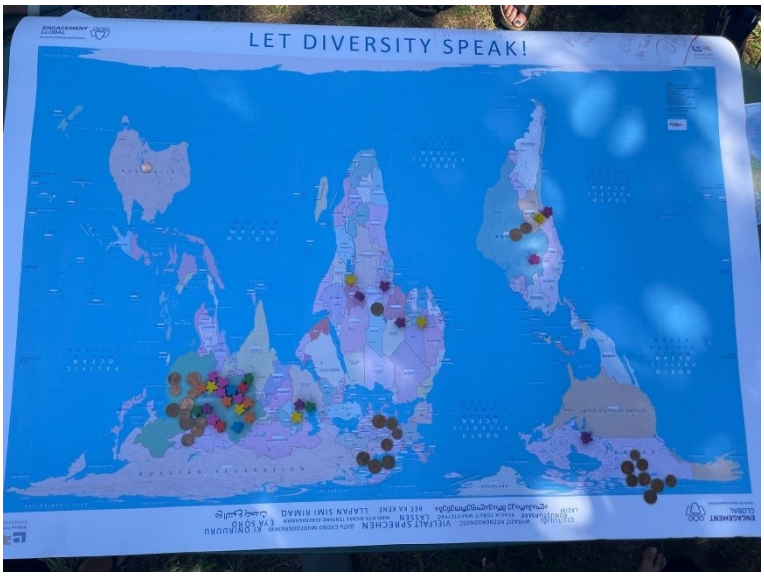
The goal was to have all team members cross an imaginary river without touching the ground. After this, we introduced the topic of Power in starting a conversation about different world map projections. We had printed the Peter's Projection and the Mercator's Projection and asked which one seems more familiar and what differences we see. From this arose a discussion about what Power means. Also, we asked everyone to write on the map the translations of the word "Power" in all the different languages we brought to the table. After this, we played the "World-Game" (Figure 1) to visualize and incite a discussion on some global Power dynamics and our perspectives on these (EPiZ, 2022). Everyone had to place a game -piece on the world map guessing how human population is distributed around the globe. Then, we repeated the same process with Coins guessing how wealth is distributed around the globe.

In between, we shared the actual distributions and discussed in which ways the mentioned ideas diverged from reality, if they are surprising and what could be explanations for this. We wrapped up the session with a brief introduction to the concept of research and the idea that we would like to research the topic of Power together. We shared and copied our favourite dance-moves as a closing activity.

2nd session. Our goal of the second session was to establish safety rules and to dive further into the topic of Power, particularly into colonialism, as the need for a deepening of the topic arose in the last meeting. Before starting the check-in round, we distributed Post-its, where everyone could write down questions, they would like us to discuss. All questions circled

Figure 1

The world-game



around wanting to understand what Power is. Then, we took a moment to discuss the ways we want to communicate with each other, asking everyone to think about what makes us feel good in a group. Again, we wrote our ideas down on Post-its and as the answers were more diverse this time we clustered them by topics on the whiteboard. It was mainly agreed on that active listening and no use of derogative terms is the most important way to feel safe and valued in this group. We moved on by playing a game aimed at feeling power(lessness) (Figure 2). For this, we walked around in pairs in the garden while one person was blindfolded, and the other one was guiding. After everyone had occupied both positions, we gathered to discuss this experience and how it relates to Power. In a next step, we divided the group by language into three smaller groups. We played a small Quiz about Colonialism (Appendix B) where everyone had to pick a card, read the question out loud and then discuss possible answers together with the group.

Figure 2

Experiencing Power(lessness)

3rd session. In order to satisfy the demand of getting input on the topic of Power, we decided to dedicate the third session to work on a metaphor of Power relationships. The first activity after the check-in was an energizing and team-building game. The group was divided into two teams that competed against each other to see who could build the highest “human tower”. Subsequently, we conducted an activity aimed at visualizing some aspects of power relations, in which we asked for two volunteers to hold a metal stick with an 8-kilo weight in the middle. As they moved, the weight shifted, making it harder for one side to be moved than the other. We used this as a metaphor to illustrate how power operates in relationships, where one side's privileges are connected to the oppression of the other, and how these dynamics apply

to both individuals and larger social structures. In a consequent step, we introduced the idea that we want to work on developing a power-critical perspective. To visualize this perspective, we proposed to design "power-critical" glasses. In small groups, we crafted and decorated these carton-based glasses. After this, we conducted an activity called "Map of Influences", where everyone brainstormed different reasons that influenced their decision to come to Italy, placing them closer or further to the question which was written in the middle of the paper (the closer the bigger the influence). This activity aimed at visualizing the different power dynamics that influence everyone's life with a practical example. As a concluding game we played HI-HA-HO in which standing in a circle we conduct different movements depending on the syllable.

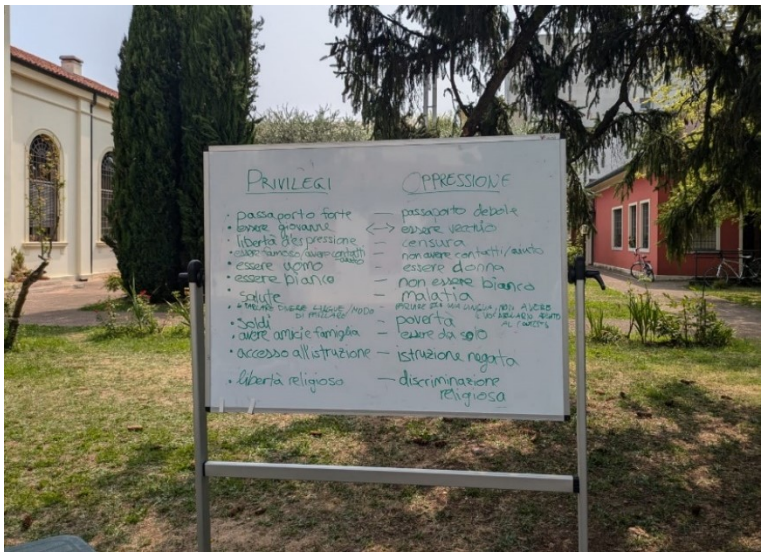
4th session. In this intervention, we aimed at creating a small moment on hold to understand the objectives of this research project as well as introduce the Photovoice method. We started this session with an activity called "human knot", in which we stand in a circle and after everyone grasps a hand of someone else, we have to resolve the knot. To meet the participant-researcher's need to understand the objectives of the research project, we dedicated one activity to gathering why we are here. To facilitate this, we tried turning around the roles, first guessing among the researcher-participants why the participant-researchers could be taking part of our interventions. Again, we made use of the small ball, throwing it always to the person who was speaking. After this, we gave space to contest or add reasons to the ones we mentioned. In a next step we repeated the same process letting the participant-researchers guess why the researcher-participants are there and then commenting on that. We gathered everything on the whiteboard. Subsequently, we introduced the Photovoice method. Two of the participant-researchers had already participated in a Photovoice project before and shared their experiences. After establishing the idea that Photovoice is about expressing our voices through photos, we brainstormed together in the research collective about what question we would like to investigate. We democratically voted between 4 different proposals, choosing the question: "How/where do I see Power in my everyday life?". Everyone had two days to take the pictures and send them for us to print them in time for the next session. We closed the session with an activity proposed by one of the participant-researcher: Chairs were set up in a circle (one less than people) and music was played while everyone walked around them. Once the music stopped everyone had to find a seat and the person who doesn't is out. A chair is removed each time, and the same procedure is repeated until there is only one person left.

5th session. This session was twofold: First, we gave another input attempting to better understand power dynamics. Second, we took the photos together as none of the participant-researchers had taken the pictures for the Photovoice on their own. We repeated the knot game

from the previous session as it was appreciated by everyone. We introduced the theoretical input as a metaphor we would like to elaborate on, which sparked a discussion on the meaning of a metaphor. The goal of this metaphor was to visualize how different privileges and oppressions influence our lives. Therefore, we invited one of the participant-researchers to help us in standing up and stretching his arms widely away from his body. We gave him two bags, one representative of privileges and one of oppressions. Then, we gathered different forms of privileges and oppressions and their counterparts with the group (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Forms of Privileges and Oppressions



We wrote the privileges on a small balloon filled with air and the oppressions on a balloon filled with water and put them into the two respective bags. In total we labelled 12 balloons. Consequently, the "oppression-bag" became increasingly heavier, and the "privilege-bag" stayed light as the air inside. We asked some more participant-researchers to take the two bags and walk around with them, describing how it affects the way they can move. We worked on this metaphor as each of us is carrying a bag filled with different combinations of these two types of balloons, so some people carry heavier bags than others. This method incited a discussion on the context-dependency and intersectionality of different types of oppression. In a next step, we played the privilege-game, where standing in a line, each of the before-brainstormed categories were read and everyone had to take a step forward when they were privileged in this aspect and a step backwards when they were experiencing oppression in this aspect. After each category, we returned to the middle to not create a hierarchy of who is the most oppressed/privileged. This led to some further discussions on our personal experiences. After this activity, we moved to the second part of the session. We recapitulated the idea of what Photovoice is about and then took one hour to take the pictures. Providing support where

needed, we helped each other in taking the pictures either discussing ideas for motives or taking the picture so that the other person could be inside of the picture if wished. Upon request we agreed that they could also choose pictures that they took in the past, as one participant-researcher interestingly noted that in his home-country he had more privileges, and he prefers to represent himself in that context than in the context here.

6th session. This session aimed at the discussion and construction of meaning based on the previously taken pictures and turned out to be a key moment for the whole project. We started by doing Yoga, as it came up in one of the informal meetings that I practice Yoga, and the participant-researchers asked me to show them. This lay the ground for a serene atmosphere throughout the session. Previously, everyone participating chose two to three pictures which we brought printed in 13 x 18 cm format to this session. As in this meeting there were only few people, we decided to conduct the discussion all together. Everyone chose one picture they wanted to talk about, participant-researchers and researcher-participants alike. We approached each Photovoice cycle in asking everyone present to describe what they see in this picture. Then, the presenting person would elaborate on the picture and its meaning(s), answering to some reflective questions we had developed beforehand, thereby merging different Photovoice projects (Bank et al., 2022; Marcu, 2018; Wang & Burris, 1994). The questions were:

1. Is there a difference between what we see and what is really happening? If yes, what is really happening?
2. How/What did you feel while taking the pictures? (What was easy and what was difficult in this process?)
3. Why did you choose to take a picture of this person/place/event? What does it mean to you?
4. What kind of memories does this photo bring to you?
5. Why did you choose to share this picture with us?
6. Where do we see power here?

With the last question, we aimed at contextualizing the individual stories in order to extend the discourse to the broader, shared theme as recommended by Wang & Burris (1997). While the reflective questions were primarily answered by the person who chose/took the picture, everyone contributed with some reflections and observations in-between. After each Photovoice cycle, we clapped for the respective person.

7th session. This session aimed at offering the opportunity to discuss the pictures for those that were not present in the previous session, frame the pictures and find a closing for the

semi-structured interventions of this research project. We started with a small stretching session to warm up our bodies and minds in which everyone presented one stretch and everybody else copied it. After recapitulating what we did in the last session, we proceeded with a Photovoice cycle for three participant-researchers that couldn't participate in the previous session. Afterwards, we invited everyone to design a frame for the picture, gluing them on a bigger piece of carton. In doing so, everyone chose a title for their respective picture that we would add on the frame (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Artistic picture-framing

Once finished, we took pictures of the person with their art-piece. As this was the last session, we took some time for final reflections. To make the reflection more dynamic, we had printed pictures that we lay chronologically on the grass. We asked everyone to take a look at them to remember what we did. Many of the participant-researchers asked if they could take the pictures with them after the session, to which we agreed. Then, we invited everyone to stand at a certain activity that they particularly liked, one that they think we could have improved and subsequently one that they didn't like. We also asked these three things for general feedback. Afterwards, we discussed together the idea of doing a small exposition about this project in the CAS. Finally, we all thanked each other for our participation and our efforts in making this a fruitful and safe project. We concluded by applauding each other.

The colloquial meetings

Immersing oneself in the environment under question is the central characteristic of ethnographic fieldwork. One way of developing a deeper understanding of the community

context and related psychosocial experiencing are informal conversations (LeFrancois, 2014). Inside our project design, we incorporated recurring meetings that mainly served the purpose of deepening our relationships with the participant-researchers, developing a thicker understanding of their daily life in the CAS and observe the potentially different social interactions that such colloquial encounters might enable. Also, we used that opportunity to remind them of the times and dates of the semi-structured interventions, as well as took one extra informal meeting to take pictures for the Photovoice method. In these meetings, the roles were subverted, as now the participant-researchers were the ones inviting us to join them for a talk, share some fruit or dance and sing to their favourite music. In these colloquial meetings, topics from the semi-structured interventions were often picked up and elaborated on, emphasizing the fact that the topics discussed together were thought-provoking even beyond that specific context.

Data construction

In the construction of the data, we followed an interactional, process-driven logic. Hereby, we combined different data collection techniques in the form of observations, focus groups and informal conversations (LeFrancois, 2014). This data was documented through extensive journal entries from the researcher-participants, mind-mapping techniques during the semi-structured interventions, photos shot during the process and particularly throughout the Photovoice session as well as audio-recordings from some of the focus groups. The journal entries concentrated on documenting events that occurred, while also discerning implicit non-occurrences. Furthermore, we broadly captured what was directly said while exploring the nuances of meaning and potential interpretations of the unfolding situations (Pelto, 2013). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and thus form a basis for the subsequent evaluation (Mayring, 2016). Since communication during the intervention took place in several languages, we decided to use a direct translation into English for the transcription. To guarantee transparency, we marked at which points we translated from which language. The transcription was carried out manually by María Emilia Montaño, Paula Cramer and me. To ensure the consistency of the transcripts, we created a transcription guide (Appendix C). To ensure anonymity we assigned each person a number giving only the additional information if they are Participant-Researchers (P-R) or Researcher-Participant (R-P).

Such a multitude of information sources is necessary for ethnographic research methods to grasp the unfolding dynamics under question in their complexity (LeFrancois, 2014). Also, this type of data triangulation is one of the validity measures of qualitative research as it allows to gain different perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation (Mayring, 2016).

Data Analysis

I conducted the analysis following the guidelines for thematic analysis in psychology according to (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Hereby, I particularly aimed at applying an abductive approach grounding the analysis in the interactions and discussions that occurred as well as combining it with theoretical underpinnings. Abduction is used not to reach a single objective truth but to identify a useful and logical explanation of the phenomenon under examination (Thompson, 2022). Thematic analysis is a flexible method that while understanding coding and the construction of themes as a fundamentally subjective and interpretative process, still provides a solid basis for systematising one's approach (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Coding here constitutes a recursive and iterative process which enables a constructive intertwining between the empirical data and theory. The coding was facilitated with the software *ATLAS.ti* (ATLAS.ti, 2024). In regular meetings with the other researcher-participants I presented the respective state of my analysis and solicited their feedback in order to enhance its rigor and depth. However, I want to stress that I was not able to incorporate feedback from the participant-researchers limiting the participatory aspect of this research project to the exploration of questions around Power. These are not explicitly the focus of my analysis in which I concentrate more on identifying underlying relational dynamics that could inform professionals working with UAM. It is important to keep this distinction in mind while reading the following section.

Results

Our research aimed at understanding the potentials of conducting critical participatory action research as a psychosocial intervention with African unaccompanied minors in Italy. In order to contribute to this goal, I decided to investigate the various resistances that we encountered and created throughout the process with a special focus on which emancipatory potentials these hold. In the following I will briefly elaborate on the definition of resistance I base my analysis on. Afterwards, I will describe the results of my analysis, first giving a comprehensive, processual overview and subsequently narrate in-depth examples of the themes I constructed.

What is resistance?

In a cultural psychological formulation, resistance is proposed as one of the fundamental tenets of the human psyche (Wagoner & Carriere, 2021). It occurs in the border area when a subject's directional movement towards a goal meets counteractive forces. The resulting tension holds potentiality for creative change – or for confinement within the respective boundaries (De Luca Picione, 2021).

Positive psychology agrees on the importance of resistance, nevertheless, it expresses this mainly in concepts such as resilience, which aims at an individuals' capacity to bounce back to adversities. It is a concept necessary for survival, but due to its individualizing and reparative nature it risks perpetuating the very structures that are confining in the first place (Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Joseph, 2013; Slaby, 2017). A more relational, political understanding of resistance on the other hand transcends these confining psychological categories, e.g. in defying to see subjects as isolated and knowable individuals (Tommasi et al., 2024).

Throughout the sessions, the participant-researchers foregrounded the various ways they resisted throughout their journey, suggesting resistance to be a fundamental continuity of their experience of life on the move. Due to its important role in psychic functioning, different "forms of resistance are not just nexuses in which people self-resist to a certain situation, but are, instead, essential sites that function to create and maintain personal and relational identity within unchanging structural inequities" (Tommasi et al., 2024, p.2). This is not meant to diminish their potential for eventually altering structural inequities, but rather to avoid romanticizing an expression of resistance that detaches people from their confining material context. Such a vision of resistance embraces fluid and contextual strategies (Tommasi et al., 2024). Accordingly, we understand resistance broadly as the personal, collective and political opposition to encountered boundaries in order to creatively move beyond.

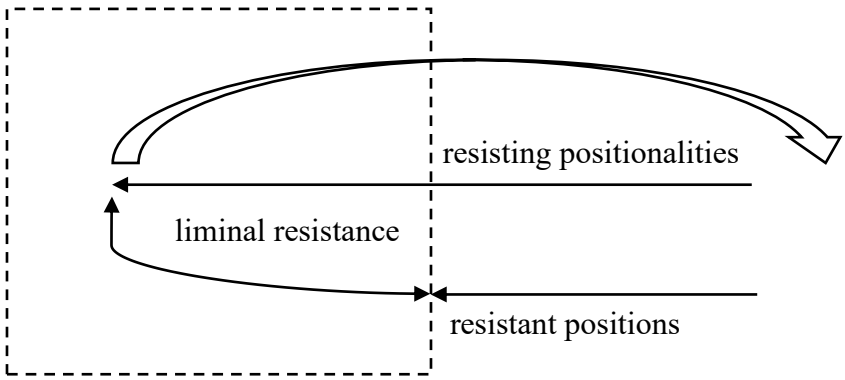
Position(alitie)s of resistance

Any bordering process is shaped by power, and as Foucault (1978, p.95) argued, "where there is power, there is resistance". Thus, any demarcation of boundaries will be inevitably met with acts of resistance within and towards them. Following this line of argumentation, the inherent resistance embedded in life on the move, coupled with the constraints of a space like a CAS, will inevitably give rise to some form of resistance.

We propose that a deeper understanding of the psychological and material need for resistance on the side of the UAM as well as the professional responses to these offer insights as to how to move beyond relational boundaries and towards a transformation of the "stuckness" of liminal experiences. We argue that in the shift from *resistant positions* to *resisting positionalities* on the side of professionals working with UAM lies potential for meeting in a liminal space. Resistant, static positions embody the hotspot border. Resisting positionalities enter the liminal space through a dynamic play with encountered and created boundaries. Liminal resistances symbolise strategies to deal with the hotspot nature of the CAS. These, facilitated through mutual resistances, ultimately hold potential for creative transformations. Figure 5 represents a comprehensive model of these dynamics which I will describe more in detail in the following.

Figure 5

position(alit)ies of resistance



Note. The dashed line represents the hotspot border.

In the initial équipe meeting we discussed how the operators struggle to move beyond merely *operating* towards *practicing*. We propose that a key obstacle to this is the way they embody the hotspot border. In a confined space, whose boundaries are marked by structural conditions of precarity, resistance will be expressed. The relationship between UAM and operators can serve as an outlet for the volatile affectivity of UAM that cannot be directly

directed at the root causes of their situation. When statically counter-resisted, i.e. resisting the resistance instead of the border, the operators working there become increasingly perceived as embodied extensions of the CAS boundaries. Conceptualizing the CAS as a political hotspot that fosters the experience of a chronic limbo for UAM and viewing the operators as the embodiment of the system's boundaries, it follows that the operators may struggle to enter this liminal space they help to demarcate.

Initially, we assumed that our position as non-Italian, young professionals external to the CAS system, would automatically enable us to join this liminal zone. Indeed, this position introduced a momentary rupture in the normative dynamics, allowing for a glitch of possibility that might not have otherwise existed. Yet, once within the material walls of the CAS, we did encounter relational boundaries. Our positions were to be challenged - to be resisted. When met with resistance, it is likely to respond with resistance, particularly if institutional pressures rest heavy on one's shoulders. However, such resistant positions often lead to an intensification of the other side's resistance, further reinforcing the boundaries that both sides wish to transcend. Throughout our research, we, too, deployed a range of resistance strategies to navigate and dismantle the relational and structural barriers we encountered. However, some distinctions between our approach and that of the operators allowed us to enter the liminal space shared by the boys. Here, we were no longer seen solely as objects to be resisted but shifted towards increasingly being perceived as subjects engaged in resistance ourselves. Our actions that contrasted the confining boundaries of the CAS, seemed to become a form of liminal resistance that joined the struggles of the participant-researchers, though from distinct positionalities. This was not a linear process, but rather a recursive spiral of ongoing dialogical reflections and negotiated adaptations grounded in mutual mirroring, naming and challenging of boundaries and consequently setting and accepting of protective ones while creatively over-stepping others.

These abstract elaborations are based on an analysis of the different resistance strategies that the participant-researchers as well as we, the researcher-participants, applied (Table 1). Each form of resistance is a coin with two sides: depending on the underlying dynamics, it may hold either conflicting/confining or rather collective/transformative potentials. Different strategies overlap, influence each other and/or enable each other's occurrence. Figure 6 represents a processual model of this analysis combining the above illustrated shift from resisting positions towards resisting positionalities with the different intertwined resistances we engaged with and within. While introducing a precise timeline of when the different forms of resistance were more prevalent would oversimplify the process, we want to point out that the strategies listed lower in the graph tendentially appeared at a later point in the intervention.

Table 1

Themes and subthemes

Resistance strategies	Examples
Shifting physical/affective presence	denial of interaction/ distrust/suspicion/emotional guardedness/opening – up/silence/ intentional (dis)interest
Profanation of (psychological) professionalism	pushing/ setting/ stepping out of our professional boundaries
(Re)claiming and accepting agency/control	selective disclosure/ temporal control/ deliberate exclusion & inclusion/provocations/exertion of power
Negotiation of personal/ community recognition	demanding to be seen as individuals/emphasizing the collectiveness of experiences / claiming (extra-) ordinariness
Critical dialogue	emphasis on power issues/sharing, questioning and respecting of each other's knowledge
Emphasizing empowering narratives	foregrounding positive aspects of power/stories of de-alienation/connection/ creating a sense of coherence between life in their home country, on the move and in the CAS
Community/Solidarity acts	Defending/standing in for each other/ hosting/welcoming/ community bonds

In the following I will explain and exemplify the different resistance strategies and their underlying dynamics using excerpts from our research diaries, transcribed dialogues and pictures of the Photovoice session.

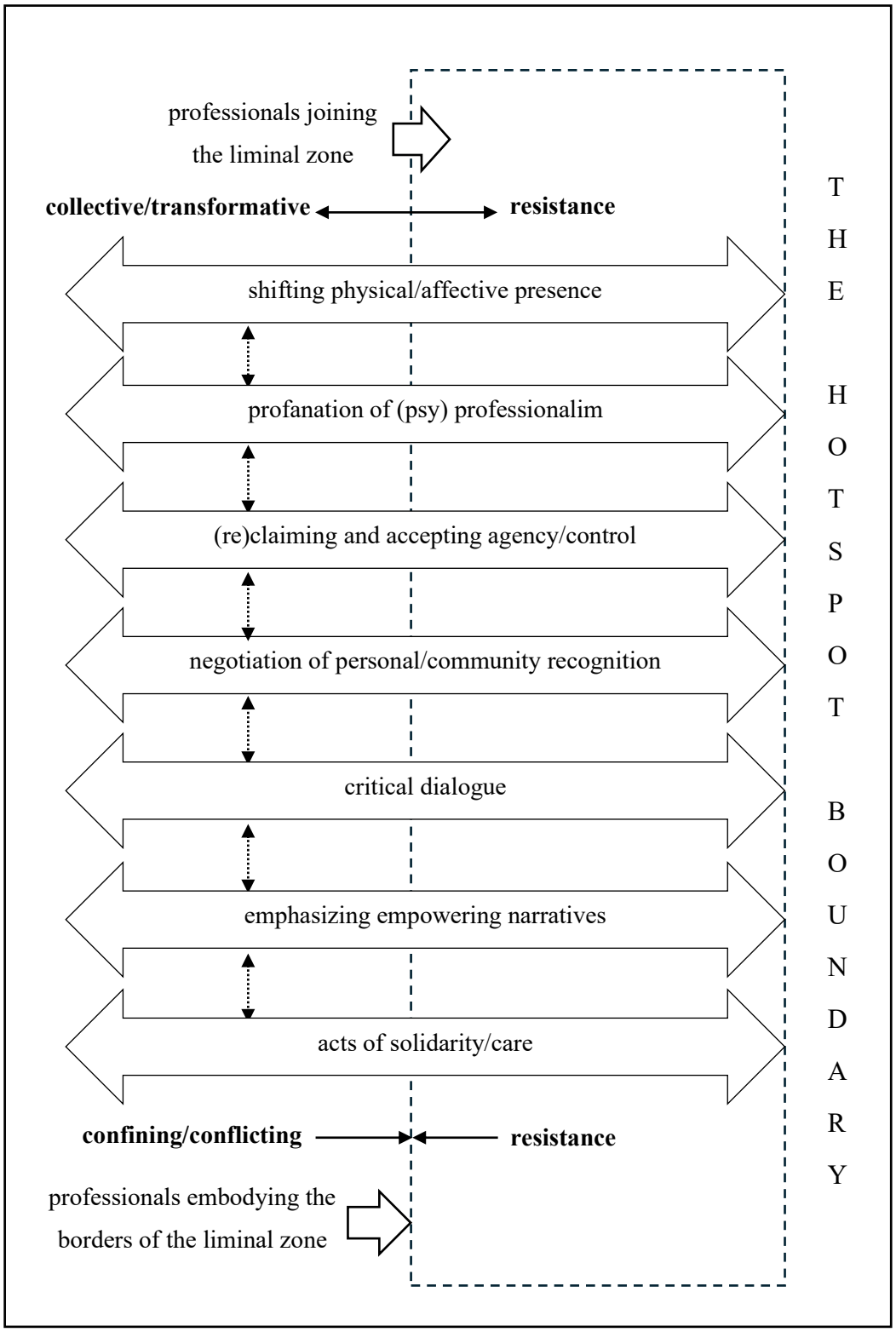
Shifting physical/affective presence

Throughout the course of the project, the levels of our physical and/or affective presence varied significantly, which deeply influenced the ways in which we were able to build and maintain relationships. This manifested in various forms of interactions – from complete physical withdrawal to moments of deep emotional connection.

Physical presence is the fundamental basis for building relationships, yet it was a rather inconsistent element of our meetings. While the CAS is the (for now) permanent house of the

Figure 6

Processual model of resistances in a CAS



Note. The outer line represents the CAS border.

participant-researchers, we only went there for the purpose of our meetings, deliberately able to choose when to be present. However, the UAM could and took the freedom to decide when and how to participate in our meetings. Some of the CAS inhabitants never attended any sessions, while others participated inconsistently, showing up on their own terms. Only a few were present at every meeting. This deliberate physical (non-)presence became a way of exercising agency, closely linking it to the next theme of (re)claiming agency/control. Some chose to deny any opportunity for interaction altogether, making relationship-building impossible.

However, when they did choose to be present, it created a momentary opening for connection as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> "Today we were supposed to have an intervention but this time it was planned in the afternoon. Many of them had dispersed and we quickly decided that we would postpone today's session. Instead, we hang out a bit with the ones who were there. One of them who had a lot of knowledge about bikes repaired […] [the bike of R-P1] and pumped mine. We played some of the games we had planned for this meeting like the knot game with a few of them who were there. […] It was a light afternoon."
> (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

Being physically present however did not always mean a similar presence on the affective level. Whether to open up in and to each other's vulnerabilities was an ongoing tension. We cannot fully connect with each other if we don't engage on a deeper affective level, yet our different positions and past experiences called for sensitive caution. This tension between displaying or withholding vulnerability marked our unfolding interactions with both functioning as a form of resistance on the relational level. For us as researcher-participants, this resistance was perhaps more linked to questions of professionality while for the participant-researchers it was a form of self-protection due to their past experiences with institutional structures. Them showcasing distrust or suspicion illustrates this hesitance. They were careful as to what to share with us and how they presented themselves, reflecting their discomfort of feeling observed. During the map of influences activity in which we invited them to reflect on the different factors affecting their decision to move to Italy this was strongly perceivable:

> "There was immediate hesitation. One guy asked us "why" and said he won't share because this is a Questura question. I felt a bit uncomfortable in this situation, it felt like we were overstepping [a boundary]." (Research Diary, *R-P2*)

Other times, they were physically present but clearly disengaged, their attention focused elsewhere. This silent disinterest, a subtle resistance to our invitation to participate, was particularly visible when they were absorbed by their phones. Nevertheless, silence was also a tool we deliberately implemented in creating or welcoming moments of silence.

> "[He said] how he did not want to talk about it too much because he was too much in his thoughts. But even though he didn't seem to feel very talkative, he seemed present and interested and wanting to be there." (Research Diary, *R-P2*)

In such moments, silence felt heavy with unspoken thoughts. As trust grew over time, moments of deeper affective presence emerged, culminating in particularly meaningful exchanges during the Photovoice Session. We collaboratively managed to create a space in which we were able express our vulnerability:

> "While the boy who took the picture talked about it, he started being very sad and tears came to his eyes. His sadness was welcomed by the group who went with it and became even more calm and attentive to what he was saying. The boy didn't try to hide his tears but instead asked for a tissue to wipe them off." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

The shifting physical and affective presence served as a strategy of resistance, initially against each other and, over time, as a means to bridge the affective alienation between our different positions. The use of body language and physical presence literally represents an embodiment of resistance—at times conflicting and leading to non-interaction, but also transformative when we allowed ourselves to disclose and appreciate our vulnerabilities. This transformation was closely tied to our mutual effort to create and meet inside a liminal space between professionalism and friendship.

Profanation of (psychological) professionalism

Stepping out of our professional roles was a fundamental aspect of engaging in mutual resistance throughout the project. Both we and the participant-researchers frequently pushed, set, and tested the boundaries of professionalism in order to connect on a deeper relational level. Such moments of boundary-blurring, while often productive in building connections, also brought confusions and tensions to the surface, revealing the complexity of balancing professional distance with personal engagement. This can be observed in the following reflection brought to paper after one of our informal gatherings:

> "At some point we were sitting together outside with some of them eating watermelon and talking about life. It was a very nice atmosphere. I wonder how I can manage the

> professionality-privacy binary. If we are meeting as researchers and participants both at the same time, then that includes us meeting outside of pre-set roles. But does that mean casual friendship? One of the boys asked me for my number to send me his pictures and I wasn't sure if it would be fine to give it or not. Because how can we be meeting as equals if I don't want to give you my phone number? Or can we? Is that a line that needs to be drawn? I did, I didn't give out my number. But I felt it created a cut in this relationship." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

This moment reflected the negotiation and setting of boundaries—both from the participant-researchers' side, who sought to push our professional limits, and from our side, struggling to balance openness with professional standards. The decision to withhold personal contact information, especially given the gender dynamics at play, felt necessary. Yet, at other times, we tested and pushed these boundaries, as illustrated by a more casual interaction during one of our informal meetings:

> "We fooled around a bit singing some songs, and dancing. [one of the researcher-participants] danced Salsa with one of them. It was looking fun but also I was not sure if for me that would have overstepped a boundary. But probably that is also my very German way of seeing dancing and body contact during dancing." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

Interestingly, the different professional/personal boundaries seemed to be in a way also related to our cultural upbringings. It would have been interesting to explore what professionalism means to the participant-researchers - with which type of professional boundaries they came into contact before stepping foot on European grounds and how this influences their perception of the operators' positions.

This dynamic of challenging psychological professionalism was further underscored when the participants scrutinized our very role as psychologists. What happens when the methods of psychology are mirrored back by the very subjects it seeks to understand? Such an act disrupts the traditional dynamic of psychological inquiry, profaning its foundational assumption of a knowable, analysable object. It resists the implicit psychologization of individuals, challenging the profession at its core. This reflected in one of the interactions right at the start of the third intervention:

> "Before we officially started with the Check-In I had a small, interesting conversation with one of the boys who told me that he feels like we are there because we want to analyse them. I laughed and agreed and reversed what he said, telling him that I think

> he comes also because he wants to analyse us. Which he is doing in telling me he thinks I'm analysing him. He laughed too and agreed." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

This dynamic of reversing the analytical gaze revealed an inherent skepticism toward our motives. Three sessions later, during Photovoice, that same person made another comment that further highlighted the fragility of our relationship, revealing a lingering suspicion about whether our stepping out of professional roles was truly authentic or merely part of our professional performance.

> "One of the boys didn't write anything and I suspected that he might not know how to write but didn't want to say it. So I told him I really like drawing and if he would let me design a bit his title for him. He agreed a bit amused and after some brainstorming together he chose a title: Allez les gars [Let's go boys]. Afterwards he was very happy with the outcome of the design and told me he would hang it in his room. […] [Then, he paused and] 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 I am always like this, that me doing the writing for him didn't have anything to do with my purpose of being there. But I found it very interesting." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

Taken together, the profanation of psychological professionalism—through challenging, setting, and transforming our relationship—seemed like a core resistance strategy. For the participant-researchers, it expressed for instance in the refusal to being reduced to mere objects of analysis; for us, the researcher-participants instead, it was displayed in the willingness to meet on a more cordial, equal position. All of these strategies confronted the inability to fully interact, pushing against relational boundaries that hindered deeper connection. These strategies often revealed the fragility of our evolving relationship, where personal and professional boundaries were constantly in flux. Such resistance strategies hold the potential to be confining when one side refuses to step out of their position or are not able to put no limits at all, but they also offer transformative possibilities when both sides successfully resist the sacralized image of psychological professionalism and find a way in-between.

(Re)claiming and accepting agency/control

In a CAS, waiting in the limbo of the asylum process, the participant-researchers often endure long periods where they are not in control of their own decisions. In response to this loss of autonomy it seemed, they employed various strategies aimed at reclaiming agency and

control. These moments of resistance manifested frequently throughout our intervention, highlighting their efforts to reassert their power in a context that often stripped them of it.

A subtle but frequent form of reclaiming agency was expressed through their control of time. Each morning, we would arrive, expecting to start the session, but the boys would arrive slowly, usually about an hour after we did. However, even though it was a way for them to mark their ability to control the pace of the intervention, it may have been even more significant for us. As with each passing meeting we became more assured that they would eventually arrive our feeling of "waiting" gradually transformed into an "awaiting" filled with an atmosphere of curiosity, anticipation and trust.

Another manifestation of agency was them selectively disclosing their thoughts, emotions and stories. At first, this behaviour seemed like a refusal to open up, but it soon became clear that they were simply choosing when and how to share. This wasn't passive but a deliberate act of control, signalling that they would determine the right time and space for displaying vulnerability. The following interaction right after the map of influences activity illustrates this tension:

> "One of the boys explained to me, that I cannot just come and demand them to open up on such delicate questions. Especially not in a big group. Maybe if we had built a long relationship of trust and he would approach me with the wish to talk about this, we could. But not like this. I appreciated seeing that they could clearly communicate this need for privacy. Was it another way of showing power? Like with the phone? They take themselves out of this discussion because they can, because they want. It is a clear border that cannot be overstepped." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

Language also became a tool through which we could include or exclude each other. Whether deliberate or accidental, the choice to speak in languages not everybody could understand created a barrier, reinforcing control over the social space. The ability to switch between languages—sometimes choosing to include, other times choosing to speak in smaller dialogues—was an effective way to regulate the flow of conversation and determine who was part of the interaction.

Another way of reclaiming agency was through provocations or exertion of Power. We tested each other's boundaries through humor, challenging questions, or more overt disruptive behaviors. These forced us to reflect and/or react, placing the disrupting party in a position of control over the interaction. One of the most difficult moments to handle during the project was a rather explicit demonstration of male dominance:

> "At this point […] [said participant-researcher who] was sitting next to me made some comments about what he thinks power is. He was giving examples about how everyone has some powers for example he said that his strength to box someone else is a type of power. Then he said something that only [one other researcher-participant] and I heard and that threw us off guard completely. He said it is also a type of Power that he is exerting when he f*** his girlfriend for two hours non-stop. That then he has the Power over her. I felt that in this moment, him choosing these precise words and just making me and […] [the researcher-participant] hear was an exertion of Power as well. […] I had all my warning lamps immediately on in my head." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

> "He said it in a very low voice that no one understood, but they [the others] realized that we felt uncomfortable. They asked me what happened, but I didn't want to answer, even though he told me several times to repeat it. Deep inside, I felt that I didn't want to give space to that kind of disruption. But I also felt in a dilemma, it was an extremely important topic when we talk about power, but I didn't feel safe or comfortable because it came from a figure that I interpreted as threatening and provocative. I felt that if I gave him space, it would create more rift in the group. In the end, I felt confused and a little scared about the comments that he had made in the group. I also felt that he had taken away a little of my power from his position as a man talking about forcing a woman to have sex, and I had to listen and almost repeat that from my position as a woman. I felt that we were not communicating from an equal position." (Research Diary, *R-P1*)

His clear exercising of Power left us very on guard in our subsequent interactions with him. He had tested our boundaries and understood that one was not to be overstepped. At least until the end of our project he did not try to provoke us again. Instead, after this disruption he became more ambiguous in his behaviours: Attending but pretending not to be interested. Listening but displaying not to care. Sharing but stopping himself when it became too personal.

There were other ways though of provocations that were of more playful and respectful nature. One example of this occurred during one of the colloquial meetings:

> "Another thing I found interesting is that one of the boys playfully started mocking me in calling me Madame Pouvoir. Because I always want to talk about power. Was he annoyed at me always bringing up this topic? Was he amused?" (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

The importance of a sense of control was not only an observation we made but also explicitly stated by the participant-researchers. During the Photovoice session one of them

illustrated the way he (re)claims control in a state of life that is marked by injustices and insecurities. His picture of green peppers (picture 2) was taken during a community gardening-project in the CAS.

Picture 2

Bio Live – Live style

> *"P-R1* (IT & FR): This photo, how to say it […] for me it is a way of choosing, choosing what one wants. What one wants to eat, when we think of the future it is not sure. Thinking of the future comes with difficulties. […] The choice, to be able to nourish yourself better […] That is something biological, it is something natural. There is no chemicals, no toxins, it is beneficial for the body, for nature and for the whole world/everyone. […]
>
> *R-P1* (IT): so who do you see power in this photo? [...]
>
> *P-R1* (IT & FR) The power that I see is that all the world, everybody has a choice in their life. The choice to have a good health, something like that. The basis for health is food […] So, depending on what is good for me, I can choose."

In another moment during the intervention, he mentioned that ultimately in the CAS he cannot cook for himself, not choose what to eat, which is a fundamental way of taking power from him. But he can always choose to not eat, which he doesn't do during breakfast for instance.

In reclaiming and asserting their agency, the participant-researchers resisted the structural conditions of confinement imposed by the CAS. Subtle acts such as controlling time seemed not to be merely passive responses but deliberate expressions of power. These

interactions revealed a profound desire to test boundaries, confront relational hierarchies, and assert a sense of control in an extremely instable condition. Small, but practically realizable acts of experiencing agency in a liminal space might provide a necessary ground to not loose oneself in the uncertainty of the situation. They reflect the struggle to carve out space for self-determination in a rather disempowering climate.

Negotiation of personal/community recognition

Throughout the process it seemed like a big paradox the participant-researchers are navigating is the need to be recognized both as the person they are as well as in the collectiveness of their being. This search for a more balanced form of recognition expressed itself for instance in the way they shifted between wanting to be seen as "ordinary" boys who enjoy football and dancing, and as extraordinary survivors of immense adversity. These shifts between claiming ordinariness and extra-ordinariness were not contradictory, but rather intertwined aspects of their identity - they wanted to be seen in their full complexity. In our interactions this reflected in them initially searching a lot of individual attention as described in the following:

> "I wanted to reflect on a feeling I have been getting more and more in the interaction with some of the French speaking boys. Some of them 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. […] 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." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

This demand for recognizing them as the person they are also reflected in the increasing discomfort to not name them as distinct people in our research diaries:

> "I was reflecting on the fact that for anonymity reasons I chose to not name any of the boys. In the beginning this was not a problem for me, but the more time passed and the more I got to know them the more it felt wrong to generalize them and not name them. (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

However, this tension did not only occur one-sidedly. We too wanted them to see us, to remember our names, to not just perceive us as three anonymous psychologists that tomorrow could be replaced with someone else without it really mattering. From my perspective this shift did eventually occur, first rather in one–on–one conversations and later also in a bigger group context (even though I want to emphasize that towards the end we were rather interacting in smaller groups with around five participant-researchers). These moments of personal connection were essential in building trust, which ultimately enabled them to engage more fully in the collective dynamics of the group. I would go as far as to say that it was necessary to create these moments of personal recognition for us to move towards the possibility of community recognition. In the first Photovoice session, this shift became evident as they moved seamlessly between sensitively valuing their personal stories as well as emphasizing the collectiveness behind that experience. The following excerpt of one of the Photovoices (based on Picture 1) illustrates this dynamic powerfully.

Picture 1

La vita

> *"/P-R1* (IT): This is morning breakfast in Tunisia. I know this moment.
>
> *P-R2* (IT): […] There was just one Senegalese person, the others were Gambian and then me from Sierra Leone. I was the smallest. They told me to come and eat with them because I don't know anybody there. So, I did a round, because I was also calm. The people liked me because I was small, and they always invited me to come and eat. When

I didn't go and eat there the next time, they would ask me why I hadn't come to eat yesterday. I like this one even if it is a bit sad because of the difficulty. Also, because there was my mother who told me to return but they say no. I shouldn't have the mentality to return, I should continue. Because if I make it there are so many possibilities for me. To study, continue to study. To do different things. […]

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-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): 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. […] 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.

R-P2 (EN): It's very difficult.

R-P1 (IT): […] *[Name of R-P2]*, why did you…

R-P2 (IT): Do you have a tissue? [tears have entered his eyes] [*R-P1* gets up to get him a tissue] You were asking?

R-P1(IT): Yes, I wanted to ask why you chose to share this picture?

P-R2 (IT): Because, also, all the people in this house. Like he said – there is the story of every one of us inside. If I tell my story, there is the story of […] [name of *P-R1*] inside, of […] [name of *P-R4*] inside, of […] [name of *P-R3]* inside. Of all the people here."

The participant-researchers demonstrated a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of their personal narratives. They longed to be seen as their own person, but

not in isolation—rather, as people whose stories are intertwined with those of their (newly formed) community. I frame this dynamic of negotiating personal and collective recognition as a form of resistance towards homogenizing narratives and individualizing approaches. None of us are neither completely isolated individuals nor a homogenous group but occupy a positionality somewhere in-between. The acceptance and allowance for this shift to take place enables authentic dialogue.

Critical dialogue

In fact, one of our main goals in these interventions was to create a space where authentic dialogue according to Freire in a Critical consciousness framework could take place. Accordingly, from the beginning on we centred power issues – aiming to collectively name social injustices as well as oppressions and privileges that come with our different societal positions and create knowledge together. We wanted to create a space where authentic dialogue could enfold through centring the perspectives of the participant-researchers which are otherwise often marginalized. Nevertheless, once we entered the CAS in the position of psychological professionals, the participant-researchers expected certain behaviours and stances they were familiarly associating with this role. There was a constant conflict between us not wanting to fulfil this role and at the same time meeting their pushing for us to fulfil this role. This can be observed in the following excerpt post-intervention number two, captured in our research diaries.

> "While the boys were drippling in, we distributed Post-its and asked them to write some questions on them that they would like to ask us, of course related to the topic. They all said OK, but no one wrote any question down. […] Right after the introduction, we asked them again if there were some open questions that they would like us to talk about and a few wrote down or said the question: What is Power? 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. And that we didn't only ask questions, but that we also gave some input such as the map. But of course, it is true that we gave examples and inspirations, but we didn't directly give them a definition of what Power is to us." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

We had come to the CAS with the clear goal of not creating a strict student – teacher, participant – researcher dynamic. Instead, we found ourselves in a position of having to break that dynamic as it existed already prior to our arrival. The participant-researchers had come to

the intervention with the goal of learning something concrete from us which we were not willing to give them in their anticipated way. Consequently, they resisted in rejecting our anticipated type of their participation. We negotiated - in the subsequent sessions we tried to take a step in their direction giving more input as to what different aspects of power might encompass, still refusing though, to give a precise and clear definition.

> "[one of the participant-researchers] mentioned […] that it would be important for him to give them more concrete information about power and what it means, he kept asking us for a clear definition. [Others] […] joined in this request. He told us that he would like us to come more prepared and ready for the activity. Here we explained that we prepared a lot for the sessions with them but that our goal was never to give them our own definition of power but that the goal was to name it together. […] [While some of the participant-researchers] were talking about our activities, something clicked in them and they realized that our activities had not been planned randomly but that they were all interconnected with each other and that even the games were part of feeling power or naming power together. Suddenly I felt like their speech and dialogue changed and […] [the participant-researcher who first complained about us not giving clear definitions] began to defend us and explain how everything made sense. I was glad to see this click, it made me wonder if it was something we needed to explain in a more concrete way or if it needed to be like this so that it would make sense to them and the whole group." (Research Diary, *R-P1*)

In many moments, we found ourselves questioning whether we might have acted differently, as many unforeseen events took place. Yet, in retrospect, it often felt as though these occurrences were not merely chance but essential for the process. Chronological time seemed on hold, yielding to a deeper sense of tairological time, where events aligned with an inherent necessity. In the fifth session, interestingly, another external professional joined us: one of their Italian teachers. There was a misunderstanding in the timing, so she kindly agreed to fuse the Italian class with our intervention that day. This led to a clear contrast between our approach and her approach:

> "An unusual factor was also that the Italian teacher joined the session. At first, I agreed with her to do it but then I felt that we had a very different […] approach to the boys, she kept her role as teacher while we were trying to break that dynamic." (Research Diary, R-P1)

> "When talking about "race" and the privileges that come with it, […] [one of the participant-researchers] said that many Africans have it internalized that *white* people (Europeans) are better than them, and that it would be fundamental for them to get rid of this judgement and see the value in themselves as they are, which includes appreciating the way of life and not necessarily striving towards the ideal of the European lifestyle. Then the Italian teacher went on a whole rant on how she knows people in South Africa and studies saying this and we were all annoyed. From then on it felt to me like we lost the groove a little bit and decided to only do a couple more before stopping the seminar for the day." (Research Diary, *R-P2*)

While in that moment we were clearly disappointed by which turn the intervention had taken that day, retrospectively it might have been a very important moment as it made visible the difference between our approaches – to the participant-researchers but also to us, functioning as a reminder that this dynamic will not lead us anywhere desired. In the next session, the 6th one, something switched. While we were using the photos to amplify our voices, the dynamic shifted.

> "And then we continued, it was absolutely beautiful and powerful. Afterwards, […] [one participant-researcher] 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. […] It also seemed like while we were talking about power, we were creating power between us. We were taking down the walls of power, some aspects of that dynamic having shifted, away from us being teachers." (Research Diary, *R-P2*)

This process of nourishing a space where critical dialogue could take place was, in itself, a form of resistance—not only against the expectations placed on us as professionals but also against the broader, entrenched dynamics of knowledge production. By refusing to adhere to the traditional teacher-student role and instead encouraging the co-creation of knowledge, we resisted reproducing hierarchical structures. One important aspect critical dialogue allowed to emerge was the focus on empowering narratives.

Emphasizing empowering narratives

In order to put the emphasis on empowerment, we decided to first acknowledge and name the oppression people face. We tried to create a balanced intervention that would eventually focus more on empowerment than on oppression, nevertheless we thought it necessary to start from the oppressive aspects of power. It was in naming the forces that disempowered them that we created a space in which they could focus more on those that uplifted them. Gradually we could see that transformation throughout the sessions culminating in the Photovoice sessions which were particularly marked by this shift. Here, they shared stories that made them feel strong and which created a sense of coherence and connection—weaving together their past, their journey, and their new life here.

"R-P1(IT): What do we see?
P-R2 (IT): The monkey is giving a kiss to [Name of P-R 3] […]
P-R1 (EN): The name again? [of the monkey]
P-R4(EN): Selasi
R-P1(EN): What does the name mean?*[...]*
P-R4 (EN) The last emperor of Ethiopia, Selasi. […]
R-P1 (EN): Now you tell us what the photo is about.
P-R4 (EN): This photo I like it and when I look at it I feel happy, you know? I feel like I am seeing my monkey. Because I mean, the time I am having [it] is like a baby. And not having this *[...]*
R-P1(EN): [Name of P-R4], how did you feel when you took the picture?
P-R4 (EN): This? I feel happy, no? Even you look the picture you know, the action speaks that I am feeling happy with my monkey you know at the moment. […]
When I see the picture it is like I am seeing my home. […] I choose this picture because I like this picture. This my remembrance. Real remembrance. And this picture I will save it ….
P-R2 (EN): For life.
P-R4 (EN): …anywhere I go I will take it with me."

Furthermore, one of the research participants shared a picture of himself standing in the community garden of the CAS, holding in his hand one of the vegetables he grew there. He elaborated on the connection between the vegetables he grows here and his life back home in Guinea:

"P-R3 [IT]: […] before, me and my mom, we did a little of this in the house of my mom. when we didn't have money, we worked in the garden. We got peppers and eggplants, when we didn't have money we planted them at my house.

R-P3 (IT): […] so that was also a way to support your family?

P-R3 (IT): yes, exactly, when it grows. [...] My mom, because I don't have many people here [...]

R-P1 (IT): How did you feel when you took this picture?

P-R3 (IT): I felt good, because when I work here, when they grow, many people here eat. So I feel happy, because I did this.

R-P2 (IT): So the others have already tried the food that you have grown?

P-R 1(IT): Yes. […]

[*P-R 1*] is showing around a photo of the vegetables that [*P-R 3*] grew. [...]

[Everybody is in awe.] […]

P-R3 (FR): […] That is power, letting things grow, that is what power is here.

R-P3 (FR): Me, in my head I am still a bit thinking about the connection between your mom's garden and the garden here. Do you also see power in there, in creating something here that is connected to something that you have at home, you see what I mean?

P-R2 (IT): [nods in agreement] [...] It is always like this, when I think of mom, I think of her fruit."

Particularly after the picture of the kiss of the monkey a discussion arose on the way humans have alienated themselves from nature in the relentless pursuit of wealth. This is exemplified by the following comment:

"P-R1(FR): I have something to say. This [the picture with the monkey] is very beautiful, everyone sees. But there is something that has come to change Africa: money. Due to money, we don't find this anymore, we don't see that anymore. And the people who have money, pay the Africans to approach the animals as it is easy for them. When an animal sees an African in the forest he doesn't flee."

These are just brief excerpts from our conversations about their pictures, but I believe they transmit the general atmosphere that emerged. Through emphasizing the importance of re-connecting to nature and animals and seeing the interconnectedness of all beings suggested one

important resistance strategy to be these stories of de-alienation, coherence and connection. As a participant-researcher remarked about his picture of the bell pepper he grew himself:

> *"P-R1*(FR): On this photo, you can see the balance between night, sun and the earth. Why did I choose this? Here it is daylight, you cannot have the plant without the sun. But also at night, the plant does work to breathe, […] that's why there is a balance, there should be a balance with us"

Through these discussions, the participant-researchers wove a web that connected their past lives in their home countries with their present reality in the CAS. In this way, it seemed, the imagery became a symbolic act of crossing the boundaries imposed by the CAS. These stories did more than recall happy memories—they became acts of reclamation, connecting their past agency with their current lives.

> "While setting up the space outside the boy who is always going on strolls with his bike came and greeted us. He started feeding some of the birds with bread crumbs and they gathered all around him. It was a beautiful picture the way he kneeled on the floor surrounded by birds and I had to think of this image again later, when he was talking about his photo [with the monkey]." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

Within the walls of the CAS small acts such as growing vegetables or feeding birds become ways to resist alienation and express their power in both continuity and adaptation, bridging worlds through everyday actions. Furthermore, their empowering stories served themselves as acts of narrative resistance. Resistance to disempowerment and alienation as well as a reclamation of the agency to tell their own stories the way they want. Creating a space to share these stories and actively listen to them became a form of resistance on our part—a resistance against the disempowering structures that often negate listening to their authentic stories they find themselves in and an act of connection that fostered mutual recognition.

Community/Solidarity acts

A red line that has threaded through our intervention was the emphasis on highlighting and building of community - among them as inhabitants of the CAS, among all of us as a research collective. We were taking care of each other, making sure that everyone feels safe and seen.

> "At one point [one of the participant-researchers] made a comment (in another language, I didn't understand) but I felt like most of the guys, […] 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." (Research Diary, *R-P1*)

In this moment, the boys stepped in to defend us, showing a deep sense of respect and solidarity. This wasn't an isolated act; care and mutual support were recurring throughout the project. In a very different context and a different type of care, but nonetheless connected to the theme occurred in the last session. This moment captures a range of dynamics—cultural knowledge, past experiences, and simple acts of taking time for one another:

> "Today upon my arrival I heard some calm, meditative music coming from the back of the garden. While I was setting up the chairs for our intervention, I saw one of the boys sitting with his head bowed opening his locks. I wasn't sure if he was in a mood to be alone or if I should greet him but after a few seconds he noticed my presence and looked up. We greeted each other and started chatting a bit. I offered him help for opening the locks. I know how much time this takes. I had my hair braided myself while I was living in Ghana and also oftentimes helped my friends opening theirs. There, I got to know hair as a very important cultural element and the act of braiding and opening as a community thing. Oftentimes I would see several women standing around one person and with incredibly quick hands do magic with the person's hair. I wanted to help the boy but I wasn't sure if I would be overstepping a boundary in touching that boys hair because I have also come to know Black hair in Europe as a battleground of racist behaviours […]. In the end I settled for the simple solution of offering my help without pressuring and he gladly accepted. We started having some small conversations and I felt in this moment something in our relationship clicked. He asked me where I had learned to undo Cornrows and when I told him I did that in Ghana he was surprised and remarked that Ghana is the neighbouring country of Ivory Coast, where he is from. We chatted a bit more about hair and different methods of taking care of it when I saw [the other two researcher-participants] arriving. They were a bit surprised to see me there working on the boys hair and were a bit hesitant to approach us at first probably to not be rude interrupting our nice moment. But after some time, [the other two researcher-participants] came and both joined to help undoing the hair. To me, this was a beautiful image and also when some of the other boys started dropping in they seemed happily

amused to see us three […] perform such an African community act. Due to the combined workforce we managed to finish quite quickly and the boy several times thanked us for our help." (Research Diary, *R-P3*)

This scene unfolded at the beginning of our final intervention. I doubt it could have happened at an earlier stage, yet I found myself wishing it had. In hindsight, it feels as though so much more could have happened if we had more time to spend with them. But then, I wonder if it was precisely this before mentioned tairological moment that was needed—if extending it into normalcy would have dimmed its glow.

During Photovoice one of the pictures (picture 3) that were shared represented the scene of a football match. Here, the participant-researcher motivated his team-mates to keep going as it was a decisive moment during the semi-finals of a bigger cup.

Picture 3

Allez les gars (Let's go boys)

"*R-P1* (IT): How did you feel in this picture? Do you remember?

P-R5 (FR): Yes, with a lot of confidence in myself and to help my team win and tell them that we can win. I trusted that I can give the force to the team to do whatever we need. […] It is my passion to connect other people

R-P1 (IT): […] [Name of P-R5] where or how do you see the power in this picture?

P-R5 (FR): In the confidence that the others put in me, even if I am supposed to be in the front. I see the power in them trusting me to support them and motivate them from the back, that is powerful."

Throughout the project, these acts of solidarity were abundant, from welcoming us into their home to sharing food over repairing our bikes when we arrived with broken tires towards recounting how they benefited from and shared solidarity during their journey. These small and big acts of resistance challenge a world that tries to isolate and fragment people. By finding community and acting in solidarity, the boys demonstrated one of the most fundamental forms of resistance in the face of their dangerous and challenging journeys towards and within Europe. One of the participant-researchers formulated it better than I could ever express:

> *"P-R1* (IT): Me, I see power in resistance. It's simple like that. […]
> *R-P3* (FR): And the resistance where do you see it there?
> *P-R1* (FR): I see it in the unity. I see it in all the facts and gestures. Because look, all this people that have taken the route, that have left their respective countries. They are not from their countries anymore. It's the people that have crossed "au-de-la" that are, how can I say, their own community. It's not anymore the people that stayed in their countries. Like he, he has Sudanese friends, […] Cameroonians, Nigerians. The people with who you have faced death, how do you say, with who you have faced death, if at any moment you see that he calls, you will stand up quickly and pick.
> *R-P3* (FR): So that forms a new type of people?
> *P-R1* (FR): You can say that. That forms a new type of people. A bit like people who don't think only about their countries, but who think for the whole of Africa in general. Because all that, when you look, it is not just one country that leaves. It is a lot of countries. It's the whole of Africa."

This approximates a Pan-African idea of the formation of a new collective African identity but grounded in the shared experiences of migration. In the liminal state of life on the move it seems, new possibilities for alliances and care open up. Here, solidarity transcends national borders and forms a community based on resistant movement. Recognizing and nurturing this continuity of resistance, embodied in all the above-mentioned themes of resistance, became an act of resistance from our side as well. Furthermore, by actively fostering and engaging with this sense of collective care, we joined them in challenging the alienating structures that confine life in a CAS.

Discussion

The present study aimed at exploring the potentials of a critical participatory action research approach as a form of psychosocial support for unaccompanied minors in Italy. The process has shown that indeed, together we managed to create a space that momentarily and symbolically escaped the borders of the CAS that usually limit their lives. Reflecting on the relational dynamics that shaped our experience I argued that acknowledging the symbolic and material needs for resistance during life on the move and particularly inside confining hotspot boundaries seems like a promising framework to understand the underlying dynamics of liminal transitions. Working with these resistances, challenging and encouraging them as well as stepping outside of our own predefined roles, seemed a necessary form of counter-resistance that ultimately allowed for a relational turning-point: from resisting each other towards resisting the borders that limit our interactions in the first place. In my analysis I structured this shift we experienced as occurring within seven types of resistance strategies: shifting physical/affective presence, profanation of (psychological) professionalism, (re)claiming and accepting agency/control, negotiation of individual/community recognition, critical dialogue, emphasizing empowering narratives and acts of solidarity/care.

In the following I will contextualise my analysis of the project reflecting on (theor)ethical issues particularly how psychological practices and knowledge can make sense of and use of their very own profanation and how they can inform the everyday work of different professionals working with unaccompanied minors.

(Theor)ethical reflections

There have been some tentative scholarly efforts to explore resistance strategies among migrants in the past (cf. Cohen & Hjalmarson, 2020; Maculan, 2022). Many frame these based on the elaboration on infrapolitics by James C. Scott (1989) who posited everyday resistance strategies as a way of navigating, coping with, or subtly undermining systems of domination. The different everyday resistance strategies people apply depend significantly on the historical and material context that binds them (Maculan, 2022). Cohen and Hjalmarson (2020) for instance, analysed different resistance strategies of migrant farmworkers in Canada such as finding work outside of legal contracts, collective work pacing, altering time sheets, and reappropriation of farm produce. In an ethnographic research conducted within several CAS in Northern Italy Maculan (2022) carved out various resistances by asylum seekers like devising creative stratagems to working the system, creating alliances with influential people, pushing the boundaries of confinement with whatever resources are available, defying the rules,

opposing what is perceived as oppressive, negotiating, refusing to comply and sabotage. Here, we can see strong overlaps with some of the resistance strategies I described such as the different acts of reclaiming agency through e.g. temporal control or provocations. We concord with the idea that there is an inherent conflictual nature in resistance that aims at achieving certain improvements in one's daily life as well as affirming one's full and free subjectivity (Maculan, 2022). According to Scott, there is an important dimension of survival inside these everyday resistance strategies, as they are not directly aimed at transforming a system but to survive in it (Scott, 1989). Based on my analysis, I would extend this argument suggesting that, when playfully nourished and critically reflected upon, these everyday resistances indeed hold potential for psychic, relational as well as structural transformations.

Consequently, we particularly highlighted types of resistance that emphasize the power of community, hope and care. In many ways the resistance strategies we defined align with Awad et al.'s (2017) description of resistance as "(1) a social and individual phenomenon; (2) a constructive process that articulates continuity and change; and (3) an act oriented towards an imagined future of different communities." As a border phenomenon, resistance not only drives material change but also fosters new meaning-making processes, which makes it of utter importance for psychological theory and practice (De Luca Picione, 2021). In fact, as mentioned earlier, cultural psychology conceptualizes resistance as a fundamental tenet of psychic functioning (Wagoner & Carriere, 2021). Through resistance, novel processes of imagination can flourish and take creative forms in everyday life (Awad et al., 2017).

This dynamic of creatively re-thinking and re-acting borders constitutes the basis of what we called the transformative shift from resistant positions towards resisting positionalities. This resonates with Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of "war of position" in which subaltern people seek to shift power dynamics to an extent that is possible for them (Chandra, 2015). The different resistance strategies I defined in my analysis could be read as practical examples of this Gramscian type of war. The idea of shifting from fixed positions to dynamic positionalities echoes within this concept as we continuously negotiated power relations. In fact, this shift was enabled through "the negotiation rather than negation of social power" which constitutes a pure act of resistance (Chandra, 2015, p.563).

Furthermore, the shift from positions to positionalities of resistance reflects a performative process akin to what Judith Butler (1990) describes in their theory of performativity. Here, identity is seen as an ongoing performance that is shaped by social norms which in turn can be undermined by alternative performances. Extending this idea towards the resistance strategies deployed by the participant-researchers and researcher-participants in this

project I argue that they serve as performative acts aimed at subverting confining boundaries. In a later work, Butler et al. (2016) highlight how acts of resistance, especially by marginalized individuals, assert agency and challenge the very structures that produce their vulnerability. In this way, resistance becomes a mode of reclaiming identity and agency resonating with the scope of my analysis of recognizing resistance as a means of empowerment. The experience of migration-related liminality is characterized by increased vulnerability (Göttsche, 2021). As noted in our intervention, it was an ongoing negotiation to open up and share these vulnerabilities with each other. We saw a strong connection between embracing and valuing our vulnerabilities and the empowering potential it holds. “Vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment” (Butler et al., 2016, p.12). In resisting disempowering vulnerabilization by e.g. institutional conditions and instead focusing on how to critically reflect on our vulnerabilities as well as connect them to a broader political context, we managed to turn towards resisting (vulner)abilities.

If we understand vulnerability as an ontological state of being human (Butler et al., 2016), and discourses around migration as dehumanizing (Esses et al., 2021), then resisting forms of vulnerabilities connect to reclaiming ones humanity. This aligns with Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed, in which he describes resistance as a vital and necessary affirmation of one’s humanity in a position of oppression. Resistance as a process of humanization constitutes a core aspect of authentic liberation (Freire, 1970). It is thus in line with a critical conscientization approach to value, foster and engage with people’s everyday resistance strategies. Resistance needs to be seen as a “natural human capacity, an everyday strategy people use to assert their humanity in a society that undermines it” (Rogers et al. 2024, p.491).

However, I would like to discuss that this idea is extendable to any living being as it is not only humans that resist oppression. Any critique of dehumanization risks reinforcing speciecist stances towards which living beings are worthy of a dignified life and which ones are not. If the construction of being human is made in contrast to being animals, any act of rehumanization then risk upholding the very instruments that make dehumanization (Khazaal & Almiron, 2021). Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the paradox that antispeciest critique can only happen from a position of privilege as some individuals are forced to first prove their humanity before they can critique the very concept of humanity itself (Timeto, 2024). All struggles, whether human or non-human, are deeply interconnected, and there is power in recognizing and overcoming these divides (Khazaal & Almiron, 2021). Such posthumanist

perspectives seek to challenge the boundaries that separate human and non-human, opening up possibilities for more inclusive and transformative forms of resistance.

Another parallel I would like to draw between the shift from positions towards positionalities is the difference between ceremonial and ritualised practices in a liminal space. Victor Turner (1977) describes rituals as transformative acts that allow people to temporarily step outside of their usual roles thus opening up possibilities for re-imagining social positions and possibilities. Ceremonies on the other hand only confirm a given social configuration, but have neither the will nor the power to reshape it (Förster, 2003; Turner, 1977). Turner (1977) argues that through rituals in liminal spaces a type of new community – *communitas* - can spontaneously emerge based on a deep sense of solidarity. Such communitas transcend social hierarchies and other differences rooting rather in mutual recognition of facing the same obstacles or sharing a similar purpose in that particular space. In recounting the experience of forming a new people on the move, the participant-researchers suggested it to be a form of such a spontaneous communitas. These can be meaningful sources of emotional and social support, where people organize their individual struggles into a collective identity and in doing so resist the dehumanizing forces that seek to isolate and alienate them. Experiences of communitas are often of temporary nature. Nevertheless, they often have lasting effects on the people who experienced them. Through mutual reflection on the experiences made in the liminal zone broader, collective transformations might take place (Buechner et al., 2020; Turner, 1977). I propose that the shift from resistant positions towards resisting positionalities could be framed as happening within a secondary formation of communitas that was made possible due to the ritualised, devised liminal space we created with our research project. More ceremonial acts of resistance could be rather compared to the static positions of resistance. These leave a given social structure untouched - given boundaries uphold (Förster, 2003; Turner, 1977).

Taken together, the nature of the present analysis of the emancipatory nature of resistance fits in a broader decolonial framework as well as critical psychosocial support. By recognizing the everyday acts of resistance employed by unaccompanied minors in the CAS, we validate their agency and challenge the colonial legacies that continue to structurally shape migration and psychosocial practices. In questioning the hegemony of Western frameworks of care we were able to co-create a space in which participant-researchers and researcher-participants could explore alternative ways of knowledge production and relating to one another. In emphasizing the personal, relational and political dimensions of resistance we carve out its emancipatory potential as well as highlighting its importance for a psychology of and for world-making (Power et al., 2023).

On the potential of profaning psychologies

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) describes in his elaborations on liquid modernity how contemporary societies pervaded by neoliberal capitalism are characterized by constant flux, instability and uncertainty. The concept of permanent liminality by Szakolczai (2014) extends this idea connecting it to liminality theory. In a society where continuous transitions become the norm, liminality embodies the status quo instead of the exception. Here, globalization functions as a strong force of border control. It reduces geographical, social, and digital divides for some while intensifying interconnected networks of exploitation and control for others. This continuous erosion of boundaries creates a condition of perpetual transition, where instability and precarity are tools to manage the multitude, keeping life fragmented yet bound within the circuits of a neoliberal economy (Hardt & Negri, 2003). Following a radical rupture between the spatial (and the geographical) as well as the social order - constantly moving towards different reconfigurations - transition and uncertainty are no longer interruptions but the very fabric of experience, connecting to Deleuze & Guattari's (2007) concept of deterritorialization.

The emergence of liminal hotspots, in which liminality gets "stuck", in a society entrenched in permanent uncertainty, drives the instability ad absurdum. A place like a CAS which epitomizes a thriving ground for liminal hotspots, radically exposes and magnifies these underlying structures of liquid modernity. This era is marked by profound experiences of alienation (Bauman, 2000), an experience that resonated deeply in the stories shared by the participant-researchers. In order to deal with this alienation, they responded with resistance. Many times, the participant-researchers recounted acts of resistance throughout their journeys towards Europe, suggesting it to be a continuity of life on the move. Perhaps, in a world increasingly characterized by permanent liminality, resistance itself becomes one of the few possible constants.

Nevertheless, in a society that is deeply shaped by neoliberal ideals, change is only accepted to the extent that it upholds that very structure i.e. through reforms. Here, individual subjectivity is pervaded by values such as self-reliance and productivity (Teo, 2018). The psy-disciplines promote this grand-scale shift from collective responsibilities to overcome systemic issues towards supporting individual virtues such as resilience, allowing the functioning and thriving of neoliberal subjectivities (Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Teo, 2018).

Our research became in a way an act of resistance itself against hegemonic psychologizing narratives that shift structural, political issues into the psychological sphere. We explored the possibilities and potentialities of rethinking the subject beyond the boundaries of mainstream psychology, resisting the separation of people from the material context they cannot escape

from. Such a profanation of psychological approaches posits itself in the service of the person it seeks to support. Embracing resistances towards psychologization such as the promotion of resilience is a crucial first step in profaning the sacralized image of positive psychology (Teo, 2018; Tommasi et al., 2024). We based our intervention on decolonial epistemologies, centring the voices of those traditionally excluded from scientific knowledge production (cf. Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Rogers et al., 2024). This deliberate profanation of western psychologies' hegemony questioned the power dynamics inherent in psychological practice and allowed new forms of engagement to emerge. It posited resistance at the centre of our practice - acknowledging its various emancipatory facets. In the face of confinement, resistance itself constitutes a form of bordering practice - both at the material and symbolic levels. Its transformative side enables dialogical redefinitions of boundaries rather than merely responding to them. Throughout the process of our relationship-building, we showed that resistance is not about breaking borders but about negotiating and re-creating them. This is the heart of resistance as a transformative act - bordering practice that shapes new spaces of possibility within the confines of liminal hotspots. "For to profane" writes Agamben (2007, p.87) "means not simply to abolish and erase separations but to learn to put them to a new use, to play with them" (Agamben, 2007, p.87). In the act of profaning psychology, we witnessed the possibility of a shift from rigid, sacralized roles to a more fluid, participatory practice.

This profanation returns psychology to its nature of being a liminal science - one that examines psychological functioning at the borders of the body and its environment (Marsico & Varzi, 2016). By resisting its sacralization we place it where it belongs – in the material life of the people it seeks to understand. Inside the border of the person and the society. This profaning transformation nourishes hope for psychology as a scientific, emancipatory discipline (Tommasi et al., 2024). Only then, maybe, research itself holds potential to become a *world-within-and-between-worlds*, capable of shifting patterns (cf. Greco & Stenner, 2017).

Liminal lessons for future research and praxis

The present research is centred around as well as permeated by different boundaries. Some of them imposed significant practical limitations on the implementation of our project. Others have touched possibilities that are to be further explored. Our project was of exploratory nature as neither the researcher-participants nor the participant-researchers knew exactly where the wind would take us. None of this was ever intended to be generalizable but to explore the possibilities of conducting critical participatory action research as a form of psychosocial support. In the following, I will outline some of the limitations we encountered and created,

along with insights gained from these experiences as well as our overall approach/analysis, proposing some directions for future research and practice

Structural barriers such as resources and graduation deadlines compressed the timeframe of our project that could have easily stretched over a much longer period. Future research should be equipped with proper funding so that the potential of long-term participatory action research could be explored. Furthermore, the changing constellation of participant-researchers throughout the span of our research project constitutes a limitation to this project. The moments we were particularly able to move in transformative directions were the ones towards the end in which we met in small and intimate groups. These built on the trusting relationship we had built in the previous sessions. Therefore, a longer initial period of familiarizing ourselves with the environment and getting to know the participant-researchers better prior to the interventions would probably have facilitated the building of a space in which we all feel safe. Also, further research could put more emphasis on working in smaller groups.

Additionally, a lacking collective support from the side of the operators limited the process. Individually, they tried to support us in e.g. giving us materials or waking up the participant-researchers. Nevertheless, they structurally prioritized other duties. Future projects could emphasize on embedding the activities more inside the CAS-structures ensuring that everyone is pulling in the same direction. Also, the need for the project arose from the side of the operators and we, the researcher-participants, came to the CAS with a prepared research topic and plan. Even if we adapted these flexibly, we could have given more space to the immediate needs of the inhabitants of the CAS. Further research could emphasize this aspect and with more time, create a more grassroots project. This reflects that we were not fully able to integrate all aspects of critical participatory action research which defines another big limitation.

Moreover, the present project was particularly focused on unaccompanied minors from African countries. Even if they constitute a particularly big group of unaccompanied minors, future research could evaluate the potential of conducting CPAR with minors from different cultural and continental backgrounds.

Given that this was our first experience with community-based participatory research, our limited familiarity may have impacted the overall effectiveness of the project. Particularly with methods like Photovoice we acknowledge the lack of expertise e.g. concerning photography from our side. Future research would benefit from incorporating experienced facilitators or training to enhance methodological proficiency.

One of the most significant limitations of this thesis is the absence of a fully participatory analysis. Due to constraints in time and resources, my analysis on resistance is based on my personal observations and reflections as well as the collaboration with the other researcher-participants. However, I excluded the participant-researchers in the analytic process significantly limiting the validity of the results. Future studies should aim at integrating participant-researchers into all stages of the research process in order to enrich findings and ensure a more inclusive approach.

Another significant point of criticism of this project is that as researcher-participants, we personally benefit from this research - not only in gaining new knowledge but also in earning academic qualifications i.e. our master's degree. Concerning qualifications, the participant-researchers merely acquired a certificate stating that they took part in this research project. Noah Sow (2018) warns that Black struggles and Black knowledge should not be appropriated as a means to advance careers. The predominance of *white* researchers in psychological research exemplifies this problem, reflecting deep-seated institutionalized racism. Even if María Emilia Montaño's Mestiza perspective broke a bit with the *white*-European perspectives of us other researcher-participants, future research should aim at further abolishing this hegemony. If for instance the researcher-participants would have themselves brought African and/or asylum seekers perspectives we would have probably chosen different foci or conducted differing analysis.

Finally, we advocate for a psychological research that dares to function as epistemic disobedience (cf. Mignolo, 2013), testing and overstepping the boundaries of what it can and should entail. For this we particularly encourage the application and further development of decolonial, participatory frameworks.

Towards practicing critical psychosocial support

One of the most significant insights I gained from this research and that I would like to share with other professionals working with unaccompanied minors particularly in the frame of psychosocial support (PSS), is the importance of understanding resistance not as an obstacle to be minimized, but as a powerful part of human being. Recognizing resistance as a necessary expression of emancipation and creatively engaging with it instead of aiming at its minimization holds potential to renegotiate structural barriers. Examining the everyday resistance asylum seekers practice enables professionals working in various positions within the asylum system (such as operators, psychologists or lawyers) to recognize and name the role they play in various power relationships (Maculan, 2022). Furthermore, I would encourage practitioners to particularly reflect on their own intuitive responses to the minor's resistances. Acknowledging

the resulting dynamics and their consequences on the lives of UAM can help fostering alternative ways of understanding and relating to each other. This might consequently allow spaces for deep and meaningful interactions.

In order to create such spaces, a brave step out of predefined roles and into more liminal forms of interaction might be necessary. Re-imagining our roles here means re-negotiating power dynamics particularly in creative and hopeful ways. As professionals we have an ethical responsibility to recognize our own intricateness in power relations and actively work towards its profanation.

This might for instance involve fostering less hierarchical and more collaborative practices and encourage spaces in which minors have more say in decision-making processes. Also, using art and particularly photography as a medium has proven to be a very effective measure in bridging language and relational barriers. Incorporating more experiential, artistic ways of communicating and learning into one's practice is a promising lesson we take from this project. Our position as externals to the CAS system proved to be an advantage indicating that professionals in a position of power concerning such decisions could put more emphasis on regularly collaborating with external professionals. Moreover, we observed that most of the inhabitants in the CAS are close to reaching legal maturity which is connected to a change of reception facility. Cross-facility collaborations could be a solution to deal with the constant flux in one facility contributing to a more stable group of participant-researchers in a long-term intervention.

Next steps

Due to time constraints, we were not able to bring the present research project to an end before the submission of this thesis. We have already planned some practical next steps that we will implement after the submission of the thesis. In the middle of November 2024, we are going to organize a small community event including a photo exhibition inside of the CAS. We would like to bring together the different members of our research collective as well as the operators of the CAS to open a space for further dialogue. Afterwards, we are going to prepare a small training for the operators of the CAS merging and sharing the results of our different analysis. Hereby, we will focus on giving practical input on how they can make use of our research project to negotiate new ways of interacting with the minors living in the CAS. Additionally, we are planning to amplify the enriching experiences we were able to make during this research project in bringing it to the university. In a class of Prof. Sara Santilli we are planning to invite some of the participant-researchers and together narrate our research process.

Conclusion

In navigating the intricate landscape of migration and liminality, in this research project we sought to better understand some of the experiences of unaccompanied minors within the Italian reception system, specifically within the confines of a CAS. These precarious facilities create a thriving ground for amplifying experiences of being trapped in liminality. Through critical participatory action research, we sought to explore the emancipatory potentials of psychosocial support. By centring resistance, we propose an innovative framework for understanding the ways UAM navigate the CAS limbo and how we can support them in this endeavour, notably affirming resistance to be a fundamental psychological and socio-political expression of their lived experience. In creatively challenging, respecting and nourishing these resistances, new pathways of relating to each other can emerge.

This project underscores the importance of participatory frameworks that empower young people in liminal spaces, positioning them not merely as recipients of support but as active agents within the process. We contributed to a body of critical literature on migration and psychosocial care in suggesting that by embracing the complexities of liminality we can create more inclusive and holistic approaches. Most importantly, this research represents a step towards bridging the border between psychological knowledge production and grounded practice in affirming that meaningful psychological research of and for world-making requires a commitment to social justice (cf. Power et al., 2023)

The present research project unfolded like a matryoshka of liminality with each layer revealing a new threshold of possibilities. After I began to immerse myself in the depths of liminality theory, I started seeing liminal moments woven into the very fabric of my daily live embedded in the current society. Through questioning, discussing and implementing subsequent reflections the project progressively transformed into a space of transition itself. Progressively bonding in our research collective, we created and engaged in interactions in which traditional boundaries were contested, deconstructed and re-imagined. Ultimately, this liminal journey culminated in the writing of this thesis which embodies a significant transitional border for me. All this while, I was navigating different worlds – between being a researcher and a participant, a professional and a friend, a student and a teacher, a psychologist and an activist. This research is an attempt to resist the hegemonial tendencies of psychological knowledge production. The strive towards thinking and practicing critical respons(e)ability in psychology. Liminal resistance unfolded here, as a *world-within-and-between-worlds* overcoming normative, binary horizons and searching for a place within pluriversal perspectives (cf. Greco & Stenner, 2017; Ortega, 2016).

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Appendix A: Flyer

Appendix B: Quiz Colonialism

1. *How were your ancestors living before European colonization?*
2. *What is Colonization?*

   → when a country takes over another land, rules it, uses and harms its resources for its own profit [4]
3. *In what conference did the Western Powers divide Africa in between them?*

   → The Berlin conference (in 1884)
4. *What was one of the main ideologies that was meant to justify European colonization?*

   → Racism
5. *What were the main goods/resources that European colonizers were aiming for in Africa?*

   → Gold, Ivory, Diamonds, Rubber, Copper, Slaves
6. *What was the transatlantic slave trade?*

   → a centuries-long practice of forcibly transporting Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas, where they were sold as slaves
7. *What colonies did France have in Africa?*

   → 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
8. *Which colonies did Great Britain have in Africa?*

   → Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Egypt, Sudan?
9. *What year did your countries gain official Independence?*

   → Mali (1960), The Gambia (1965), Ivory Coast (1960), Cameroon (1960; French Part & 1961; British Part), Sierra Leone (1961), Guinea: (1958), Tunisia (1956)
10. *Are there places that are still under colonial rule and if yes, how are they called now?*

    → Overseas territories e.g.: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion
11. *Who were some important fighters for Independence in your countries?*

    → some examples:

[4] The indicated answers are of exemplary nature

- *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 Presiden 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* (The Gambia): 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): 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

12. *In which ways do you feel your countries up until today are influenced by European colonialism?*

Appendix C : Transcription instructions

1. Verbatim transcription in standard orthography
2. During transcription immediate translation into English; original language needs to be marked at the beginning of the transcribed paragraph
   → (IT) : Italian
   → (FR): French
   → (EN): English
   → (GE): German
3. Filler words such as “um” are not transcribed
4. […] : Something was said in the background that couldn’t be deciphered
5. In order to add context information, write them in [brackets]
6. “…”: a sentence was cut off from someone and then continued in a next sentence
7. “/”: Two parallel conversations were going on, to distinguish who said what to who
8. Transcript does not need to be anonymised, nevertheless any excerpts presented to an outer audience (e.g. in the thesis) are anonymised by coarsening or aggregating information, e.g. “from Douala” becomes “from [city in the Cameroon]”