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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
UNACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS IN
ITALY: BETWEEN IDENTITY,
RELATIONSHIPS, AND EVERYDAY
RESISTANCE PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Dagli anni Novanta la questione dei Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati (MSNA) è diventata sempre più rilevante nel panorama italiano. Secondo la legge 47/ 2007, generalmente conosciuta come Legge Zampa, un MSNA è un *«minorenne non avente cittadinanza italiana o dell'Unione europea che si trova per qualsiasi causa nel territorio dello Stato o che è altrimenti sottoposto alla giurisdizione italiana, privo di assistenza e di rappresentanza da parte dei genitori o di altri adulti per lui legalmente responsabili in base alle leggi vigenti nell'ordinamento italiano»*. Nel corso dei decenni il fenomeno si è trasformato, parallelamente ai cambiamenti e agli eventi politici e ambientali che avvenivano a livello globale.

Il quadro normativo dell'attuale sistema di accoglienza e protezione dei MSNA si basa su una serie di fonti giuridiche che si sono succedute e accumulate nel tempo, a partire dalla Convenzione internazionale sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza del 1989. La sopracitata Legge Zampa del 2017 è stata la prima ad occuparsi nello specifico dei MSNA ed è ritenuta una proposta innovativa e all'avanguardia rispetto al resto dei Paesi europei. Nonostante ciò, diverse ricerche e recenti report di monitoraggio hanno dimostrato che l'implementazione di tale sistema è ancora lontana dalla sua piena realizzazione e la qualità dell'accoglienza dipende eccessivamente dalla singola struttura di accoglienza.

La presente ricerca consiste in uno studio etnografico su una comunità residenziale di accoglienza di MSNA nella città di Padova, nello specifico si basa su 8 mesi di osservazione partecipante e 17 interviste qualitative semi-strutturate condotte con educatori/trici, volontari/e e i/le ragazzi/e stessi/e.

A partire dal concetto di pratiche di resistenza quotidiana di Scott, ben definite da Saitta come *«quegli scontri che hanno per oggetto poste di differente natura, materiali e immateriali, legate a interessi evidenti a fare o a possedere qualcosa, così come ad affermare una piena e libera soggettività affrancata dagli status ascritti»*, la presente tesi esplora i discorsi e le pratiche dei MSNA all'interno della comunità. I risultati e la loro discussione si concentrano su tre dimensioni principali: identità, relazioni e tempo.

Per quanto riguarda la prima, vengono esaminati i tentativi dei/le ragazzi/i di conservare il “vecchio sé”, ovvero il proprio background nazionale, culturale e religioso. D'altra parte, sono osservabili la loro crescita e il cambiamento delle loro identità. In particolare, viene approfondita l'adesione di alcuni/e alla subcultura della trap - storie personali e aspirazioni simili, estetica, gusti di consumo, social media, figura della madre - e vengono discussi i processi di stigmatizzazione a cui vengono sottoposti/e e che possono addirittura interiorizzare.

Un'altra dimensione estremamente importante per i MSNA è quella delle relazioni: tra pari, con i/le educatori/trici e i/le volontari/e. All'interno del gruppo si formano ruoli e dinamiche, che contribuiscono al funzionamento interno del gruppo ed esterno rispetto alla comunità. Inoltre, il gruppo offre coesione sociale, senso di appartenenza e aumenta l'autostima. In secondo luogo, negoziazione, ambivalenza e alleanza si presentano nella relazione con l'équipe di educatori/trici e in parte con i/le volontari/e, con particolare attenzione alle difficoltà nel rispondere ai bisogni dei MSNA in quanto minori e immigrati. Infine, la comunità può essere vista come uno spazio liminale, in cui i MSNA crescono e trovano supporto in una rete di relazioni positive e stabili.

Infine, il periodo di tempo in cui i MSNA sono accolti nella comunità viene analizzato come un tempo liminale, in cui i/le minori hanno esperienza di una forma di attesa, che può essere interpretata come “l'essere bloccati/e”, a livello temporale, geografico, ma anche esistenziale. La percezione dei MSNA del tempo è approfondita anche alla luce delle motivazioni che li hanno spinti a migrare e le aspettative che hanno per il futuro.

La presente ricerca è solo un piccolo contributo a un dibattito più ampio sull'accoglienza dei MSNA e suggerisce ulteriori studi che adottino un approccio interdisciplinare che includa anche la pedagogia, la psicologia e l'antropologia.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1990s the phenomena of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs) increasingly started to emerge in Italy. Law 47/ 2017 defined UFM as «*a foreigner (a citizen of non-EU countries or stateless) minor who is found in Italian territory or is subject to Italian jurisdiction, who lacks the material assistance and representation of their parents or other adult who would be responsible for them in the context of Italian legislation*». Over decades, entity, composition, and features of this category of migrants changed depending on geopolitical and environmental events. After the Second World War, they were mostly escaping from war zones, while from the end of 1990s and the beginning of 2000s, besides asylum seekers, there were also minors who migrated for other reasons.

Indeed, Helfter (2010) proposed the following classification, based on the motivations behind their migration: 1) refugees, minors who are in danger in their country of origin because of wars, persecutions or political activities engaged by relatives or friends; 2) entrusted, who are accompanied to Europe by an adult who is responsible of them, but is not able to take care of them; 3) reunited, those who autonomously decides to reach their parents beyond legal procedures and without knowing where they are; 4) exploited, minors used as small labour or unpaid workforce; 5) chosen ones, usually the first son, who are encouraged by the parents to migrate to escape poverty; 6) conquerors, who decided by their own to migrate. The present research adopts such nuanced definition, because it better cover the variety of UFMs who are housed in the studied community.

Over the years, the legal framework around reception and protection of UFMs developed following the trends and changed several times in order to face the challenges of such phenomena. Italian legal framework followed the example of international and UE directions, in other cases it adopted innovative systems before other countries. The current legislation is primarily made by Law 47/ 2017, commonly known as *Legge Zampa*, which is considered a comprehensive and innovative system, but it is far from its best implementation. However, reception of UFMs also vary a lot according to the structures of first and second reception where they are collocated, and their future depends on a question of luck, «*a lottery of*

reception», as D'Arrigo stated in a report published by Save the Children: «*everything can change positively or negatively according to who host and accompany them to their come of age*» (Biella, 2023, p. 38). That is why monitoring and doing case studies on specific structures of reception may contribute directly — highlighting good and bad practices — and indirectly focusing to the improvement of the system promoted by *Legge Zampa*.

Being foreign minors does not only imply dual legal affiliations, but also a dual vulnerability profile (Howard, 2020): the difficulties of being foreign are intertwined with those of being minor. It is important that local authorities and reception structures that guarantee reception and protection consider the minors as migrants with peculiar characteristics and present specific challenges. Moreover, focusing on the specific case of UFM's allows to explore a phenomenon that is quantitatively relevant, but also to evaluate policies (Ricucci, 2018) and the practices in the fields of inclusion, education, training, social capital, relationships, autonomy, and social cohesion (Surian *et al.*, 2018).

Based on an ethnographic study conducted in a residential reception community of minors in the city of Padua, the present thesis aims to shed light on some aspects of UFM's reception and integration process. Through Scott's concept of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985), this research investigates some of the practices adopted by UFM's to cope with their situation¹, including the difficult and often traumatic journey to Italy, the stay in structures of first and second reception, the time of waiting before their 18th birthday, their migration project, and expectations for the future. In the context of this study, we define resistance as «*conflicts that have as their object different kinds of tangible and intangible stakes, linked to an interest in doing or obtaining something, as well as in affirming a full and free subjectivity, unfettered by a status attributed by others*» (Saitta, 2015, p. 15). Through the lens of everyday resistance, we will examine UFM's practices in three dimensions: identity, relationships, and time. The present research strives to contribute to the

¹ Cf. Maculan, A. (2021). Asylum Seekers, Power Relations, and Everyday Resistance Practices: an Ethnographic Study, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Springer, vol. 23(2), pp. 431-447; Avallone, G. (2018) Il sistema di accoglienza in Italia. Esperienze, resistenze, segregazione, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes Editrice.

broader debate on UFMs' reception and integration, giving voice to those who support them in reception structures, as well as to the UFMs themselves.

The development of this thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter I, a brief description of the current situation is followed by an overview of the Italian legal framework on reception and protection regarding UFMs, with a specific focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Legislative Decree 142/ 2015 (*Decreto Accoglienza*), and Law 47/ 2017 (*Legge Zampa*). In the following Chapter, there is a presentation of the research method and techniques that were used, the context of the study, and the research methodology, i.e., how participant observation was employed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Chapter III addresses the issue of identity, UFMs' attempts of keeping the past identity and the development of a new one adhering to the trap subculture. In Chapter IV, relationships within the group of peers, with educators and volunteers, are outlined in the context of the community. Chapter V explores the motivations and expectations behind their decision to migrate, but also their perception and experience of time, especially the waiting period before the age of 18. In conclusions, the main findings of the research will be summarised and discussed.

CHAPTER I: THE ITALIAN RECEPTION SYSTEM

1.1 Current situation

According to a report dated 31st January 2023 (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2023), there are 19.333 UFM^s on the Italian territory. Their ages range from 15 to 17 years, 45,2% of them are 17 years old. Out of the total, 62,6% were found on the national territory, while 37,4% arrived through disembarkation. Most of them arrived from places not considered high-risk countries (e.g., Albania, Morocco, and Tunisia). In terms of gender distribution, 85% are male while 15% are female. The main countries of origin for male UFM^s are Ukraine, Egypt, Tunisia, Albania, and Pakistan. On the other hand, most of UFM^s females came from Ukraine, Egypt, Eritrea, Albania, and Guinea. The Italian regions that host the higher number of UFM^s are: Sicily (19,1%), Lombardy (14,6%), Emilia-Romagna (9,2%), and Calabria (8,6%). Veneto is the 12th out of 21, receiving 4% of the total.

1.2 Legal framework

As Petti (2004) stated, the foreign minor – especially the unaccompanied one – can be considered a social construct, the product of the interrelation between social constructions and representations of the minor and the foreigner. Both are perceived and seen with strong ambivalence, which turns the foreign minors' treatment into a combination of protection and control, moving between inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, as minors they are treated according to juvenile law, which is oriented by principles of protection and guardianship, and adopts a “traditional pedagogical discourse”. On the other hand, as foreigners they are seen as danger for the public order and are subject to public security legislation, which is instead based on the principles of defence of borders and control of immigrant inflows. Therefore, although foreign minors are considered a “vulnerable group” that needs protection, they are also often victims of restrictive immigration policies². Actually, they can be considered having a dual vulnerability profile (Howard, 2020).

² For the specific case of unaccompanied foreign minors seeking asylum Cf. Rizzi, E. S. (2020) I minori stranieri non accompagnati richiedenti asilo, in Giovannetti, M., Zorzella, N. (Eds.) *Ius migrandi. Trent'anni di politiche e legislazione sull'immigrazione in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, pp. 852-865.

Since the status of foreign minors is characterised by multiple legal affiliations, the legal regulation of their migration is complex (Giovannetti and Accorinti, 2018) and involves different but intertwined levels: judicial, administrative, and social (*Id.*). Over the course of years, Italian legislation of UFM's changed and developed, sometimes following the international and UE directions, other times anticipating other countries with innovative proposals.

We decided to analyse some of the legal sources, that are considered to have been fundamental in the development and are relevant in the application of the legal framework.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

For many years before 2015, while national legislators marginally considered the minors in the regulation of immigration (Cottatellucci, 2020), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations by its resolution 44/25 of 20th November 1989 and ratified by Italy with Law 176/1991, was a key reference for the rights of children, including the unaccompanied foreign ones. Article 2 regards the commitment of States Parties to respect and ensure the rights outlined in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind and protection against all forms of discrimination or punishment. Article 3 sets out the most important principle that guides the decisions regarding minors: «*in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*» (UN General Assembly, 1989). Moreover, States Parties shall assure to the minor who is capable of forming their own views the right to express them freely and to be heard in all matters affecting the child, accordingly to their age and maturity (Article 12). Particularly relevant for UFM's condition is Article 22:

States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set

forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

Decreto accoglienza

The first definition of UFM in Italian legislation was given in Article 2(2) of Legislative Decree 142/ 2015, generally called *Decreto accoglienza*, that transposed the EU Directive 2013/33/EU in the Italian Law. An unaccompanied foreign minor was referred to as the foreigner (a citizen of non-EU countries or stateless), under the age of 18, who is, for any reason, on the national territory, without assistance nor legal representation. Such definition was later adopted also by the so-called *Legge Zampa*. Without making a distinction between those seeking asylum and those who do not, Article 19 (4) provides for a general prohibition of detention of all UFM. Indeed, they shall be accommodated in reception facilities for minors and entitled to a permit to stay “for minors” until they are 18 years old, unless they applied for international protection.

Legge Zampa

Italy is the first country in Europe to pass a specific resolution for the reception and protection of UFM: Law 47/ 2017 Provisions on the protection of foreign unaccompanied minors, commonly known as *Legge Zampa*. In fact, it is considered the first comprehensive legislation concerning UFM, that introduced important innovations and assurances with regard to their protection and reception. Article 1 establishes that UFM have the same rights as Italian and EU minors. Article 3 sets a general and unconditional prohibition of refoulement at border, regardless of the reasons for the minors’ entry in Italy and the fact that they are or are not asylum seekers. In other words, UFM cannot be returned to their country of origin, unless it appears that reunification with their family is the best interest of the child and that in their homeland they would live in better conditions. Article 7 promotes reception in foster families as a priority option rather than in structures as for Italian minors. Unfortunately, few families decided to join such an initiative (Howard, 2020). Law 47/2017 assesses that UFM can get a residence permit in two cases: for minor age and for family circumstances (Article 10). Article 11 outlines better rules for nomination of guardians with the registration of voluntary guardians by the juvenile

courts. UFM's have the right to stay in reception centres before 18 years old and 6 months after their 18th birthday. Further extensions up to the age of 21 can be requested to and authorised by juvenile court for personal needs, for particular and motivated circumstances, such as the need for continued support in their process towards autonomy (study, stage, training, etc) or health reasons (Article 13). Article 14 is about the right to subscribe to the National Health Service, the right to education and study. Indeed, educational and training institutions at all levels should activate measures to favour the realisation of compulsory education and training, also through specific programmes³. Minors under 16 are enrolled in compulsory school⁴, those over 16 in the so-called CPIA (Provincial Centres for Adult Education). Article 15 relates to their right to emotional and psychological assistance, their right to participate to all the jurisdictional and administrative procedures that regard them with the help of a legal representative, and the right to be heard.

Another important innovation that Law 47/2017 introduced is the definition of a structural national reception system, with minimum standards that have to be respected in all reception facilities. Such system is organised in two stages:

- First reception facilities for minors, the so-called AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) centres, for the first aid and immediate assistance purposes; they are run by the territorial representatives of the Ministry of Interior (Prefectures); they host minors for a maximum period of 30 days; children are identified⁵ (within 10 days), informed about their rights, including the right to apply for international protection, and provided with cultural mediation, legal, medical, and psychological assistance;
- Second reception in SAI (Accommodation and Integration System) centres; they are run by Local Councils; they have to comply with the assistance

³ However, in the Law itself there is a specification: the interested administration provides the implementation of such dispositions within the limits of available financial and human resources and without new or exceeding public finance charges. About UFM's right to education, Cf. Thiene, A. (2018) *Minori stranieri non accompagnati. Compiti e responsabilità del tutore volontario entro e oltre la scuola*, in *Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente*, Vol. 10, n. 15-16/2018, pp. 111-126.

⁴ Although, not always and not all the schools accept 16-year-old UFM's, Cf. Howard, P. (Ed.) (2020) *Superando le barriere*, p. 46.

⁵ Before *Legge Zampa*, minors were identified in hotspots, that were not appropriate structures for them.

standards of the general Italian system of residential care facilities for children; in addition, they have to include school courses, vocational training, professional orientation and job placement services; their final objective is to grant social inclusion and autonomy of minors⁶.

It can be argued that the Italian legal framework regarding protection and reception of UFM is particularly advanced⁷ and is significantly based on the principle of the best interests of the minor. However, the actual situation encountered by UFM at Italy's internal and external borders is not exempt from illegitimate practices and violations of their rights⁸. That is why it is important to monitor and study cases regarding their reception and protection, in order to shed light on the bad practices and point out good practices which can contribute to the improvement of a system that is far from its best implementation. Indeed, the present research aims at exploring the specific context of a residential reception community in the city of Padua. Methodology and context will be outlined in the following Chapter. Then, the analysis of results will be developed and in three dimensions and the main findings will be discussed in the Conclusions.

⁶ Before SAI system, UFM were accommodated in SPRAR (Asylum Seekers and Refugees System) centres, but due to limited availability of places in SPRAR centres, they were often hosted in temporary facilities (CAS), that did not meet the appropriate standards of reception.

⁷ Although, in the last years, Decree Law 113/2018 (best known as *Decreto Sicurezza*, converted into Law 132/2018), Decree Law 53/2019 (also called *Decreto Sicurezza-bis*, converted into Law 77/2019) and the most recent Decree Law 20/2023 (the so-called *Decreto Cutro*), made some changes, that seem to go in the opposite direction, Cf. Howard, P. (Ed.) (2020) *Superando le barriere. Percorsi di accoglienza e inclusione dei giovani migranti*, Roma, Save the Children Italia Onlus and <https://www.meltingpot.org/2023/06/unanalisi-della-normativa-contenuta-nel-decreto-legge-n-20-del-2023-c-d-decreto-cutro/>

⁸ Cf. ASGI (Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione) (2021) *Unaccompanied minors. Critical conditions at Italian External and Internal Borders*, Policy Paper.

CHAPTER II: AN EXPLANATORY STUDY ON IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIPS OF UNACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS IN PADUA

2.1 Introduction

The present thesis aims at observing and discussing bad and good practices in UFM's protection and reception processes through the lens of everyday resistance and from their point of view. The research is based on an ethnography conducted in a residential reception community of minors in the city of Padua, where the researcher was a volunteer from January to August 2023. In fact, the specific case of the residential reception community, the privileged position of the researcher as a volunteer and the relationship of trust established over time with all the people involved allowed a unique perspective on the discourses and practices adopted by UFM's to cope with their situation.

Before proceeding with the description of the context, some definitions of the used research method and techniques are needed.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a research method in which the researcher is immersed in a social setting for an extended duration. The ethnographer engages in different activities: making regular observations of participants' actions, listening to and interacting in conversations, and writing down detailed notes on what is observed. They can also collect documents about, or relevant to, the studied actors. The final objective of such research method is to develop an understanding of the culture of the group and people's behaviour within the context of that culture (Bryman, 2021).

Participant observation

Through participant observation the researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors, spending with them a period, ranging from 2 months to many years, in their environment, with the aim of observing and describing their behaviours, participating to their everyday ceremonies and rituals, learning and

understanding the meanings of their actions. Such method is distinguished from non-participant observation, when instead the researcher observes “at a distance”, without interacting and interfering with the subjects in order not to influence their conduct⁹. Participant observation requires that the researcher gets involved in the studied actors’ life, but at the same time they have to keep an adequate cognitive distance to properly do their scientific work. More precisely, the person who participates is temporarily and cognitively different from the one who observes. Thus, participation and observation are not contradictory but rather two separate moments. In other words, participant observation is being intermittently “in” and “out” of the studied context (Gobo, 2016). Semi and Bolzoni have defined it as «*the art of approach and taking a distance, as if we were a pendulum swinging around a precise point*» (Semi and Bolzoni, 2022, p. 69).

Semi-structured interviews

In order to complete the observations, the researcher has conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews (also called “discursive interviews”¹⁰) using an interview guide, i.e. questions framed in an open way, that allows the participant to articulate detailed answers, encourages them to use their own words, and invites them to organize their speech with their own schemes, metaphors and metonymies (Gobo, 2016). Such kind of interview was chosen because of its flexible and dynamic nature: following the flow of the conversation, the researcher can adjust the questions to better address particular issues that emerge, asks new questions to follow-up the interlocutor’s replies, vary the order, and even alter the wording of the questions (Bryman, 2021).

⁹ Although the entire social research can be considered a form of participant observation, since it is impossible to study the world without being part of it, Cf. Atkinson, P., Hammersley, M. (1994) “Ethnography and Participant Observation”, in Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

¹⁰ Cf. Rositi, F. (1993) “Strutture di senso e strutture di dati”, in *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, XXXVI, 2, pp. 177-200.

2.2 Context

The residential reception community where the ethnography was conducted housed a maximum of 10 adolescents, who ranged from 15 to 19 years old, from East Europe, West Africa, Central and South Asia, few from Italy. The personnel of it consisted of 6 operators/ educators, 5 people doing European Voluntary Service (EVS), Universal Civil Service (SCU), or an internship (usually of the faculty of psychology), named “day volunteers”. Furthermore, almost every night there were the so-called “night volunteers”, who helped with the dinner, spent some free time before going to bed with the group, slept in the house and woke the adolescents up the next morning.

Sociodemographic characteristics		
Gender	Male	10
	Female	4
	Non-binary	/
Age (year of birth)	2004	4
	2005	3
	2006	3
	2007	4
Nationality	Afghanistan	2
	Albania	4
	Guinea	1
	Italy	2
	Kosovo	1
	Nigeria	1
	Pakistan	1
	Tunisia	2

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of minors in the residential reception community from January to August 2023.

2.3 Research methodology

Participant observation

Participant observation was employed almost one night per week as a night volunteer in the months from January to August 2023. Although the possibility of visiting the community was easy thanks to the role of volunteer (proximity to the field¹¹), the actual access to the field gradually happened as the adolescents started knowing, recognising, and accepting the researcher. Participant observation consisted in entering into a reality already inhabited by people who were there before, and probably will be even after the end of the research, a world with its own history and structure of social relations, where people can be curious, feel distrust or disinterest of the researcher. Thus, accessing to the field involved both emotional and relational dimensions (Semi and Bolzoni, 2022). On the one hand, emotions, including empathy, were fundamental in the process of approaching and understanding¹². Through dense, significant, and long-lasting social relations with the subjects, the researcher was recognised as part, even transitorily, of their everyday life (Semi, 2016).

In the researcher-participant relations, social identity (Harrington, 2003) (being young, female socialized, Asian and a university student) played a relevant part. Similarity between the researcher and the social actors (proximity to the structural dimensions) fostered the establishment of a relation of trust and solidarity with many of them. It is the specific context that defines which physical and social features are relevant and the researcher has to recognise the socially constructed meanings associated to such key-features¹³.

All the field-notes were taken the day after the night shift, describing basic actions with a “concrete language”¹⁴, sometimes transcribing exactly what was said (*verbatim*), and adding emotions, ideas, and eventually intuitions.

¹¹ Meaning that the researcher has precedent relations with the context that they want to study, Cf. Semi, G., Bolzoni M. (2022) *L'osservazione partecipante*, p. 28-29.

¹² Although excessive empathy can lead to identifying too much with the studied actors, Cf. Gobo, G. (2016) *Descrivere il mondo*, p. 102.

¹³ Such as age, generation, gender, social class, *race*, nationality, Cf. Semi, G., Bolzoni M. (2022) *L'osservazione partecipante*, p. 29-31.

¹⁴ The culture of a group or an organisation is expressed through everyday practices, Cf. Gobo, G. (2016) *Descrivere il mondo*, p. 132 and Spradley, J.P. (1980) *Participant Observation*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Semi-structured interviews

17 semi-structured interviews were conducted in July and September 2023 with the objective of discovering the cultural meaning that the participants use and exploring the aspects of the observed culture that were not clear or resulted ambiguous even after observation. In other words, interviews were necessary to grasp the meanings and the interpretations that were not directly observable or easily recognisable in the months of participant observation. It is extremely important to distinguish «*what we say*» from «*what we do*». Indeed, interviews were conducted to examine the relation between words and actions (Semi and Bolzoni, 2022, p. 76)¹⁵, that are different from each other, but at the same time are intimately intertwined.

The adolescents were previously informed of the research and of the interview by the team of educators. Thanks to their familiarity with the researcher, most of them opened up to answer to all the questions, some briefly, and others extensively. All the interviews followed a personalised and specific guide, tailored to each interviewee's personal experience and avoiding potentially triggering questions. As Vervliet *et al.* (2015) and Halilovich (2018) stated, research with such kind of subjects requires also relational ethics, i.e. taking every single decision in regard to the most suitable actions, with the objective of ensuring the dignity and the safety of the participants. The researcher has also to reformulate the questions adapting them to different levels of knowledge of Italian language. One interview was conducted in English, two interviews were conducted by switching between Italian and English.

Besides the UFM, operators/ educators, day volunteers, night volunteers and Italian adolescents who lived in the community as well were interviewed as key informants, who are particularly important during the research process, who can help the researcher revealing some schemes of interpretation, sharing their personal experience, and expressing their point of view (Bryman, 2021). Some questions of the interviews were structured as “back talk”, i.e., a form of triangulation when the researcher give back to the subjects their report and interpretations with the aim of discussing and comparing them, both when they coincide and when they do not¹⁶.

¹⁵ Cf. Deutscher, I. (1973) *What We Say/ What We Do*, Glenview, Illinois, Scott Foresman & Co.

¹⁶ The other reason is that it is part of a non-written pact between the researcher and the participants of the study that they have the right to know what the researcher has thought of them and eventually

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, which allowed further and repeated examination of participants' answers.

Categories	Interviewed
UFMs	9
Other minors	2
Educators	2
Volunteers	4

Table 2. Interviewed participants divided by categories.

to take distance from such interpretation, Cf. Semi, G., Bolzoni M. (2022) *L'osservazione partecipante*, p. 128.

Dimensions	Keywords
Identity	Family Home country Culture Religion Islam Trap Maranza Social networks Stigma
Relationships	Roles Group Educators Rules and punishments Negotiation Ambivalence Alliance Volunteers
Time	Motivations Chain migration Rite of passage Waiting Stuckedness Expectations Work Remittances Future

Table 3. Three dimensions of results and keywords.

2.4 Identity

The sociology of identity and the self

The premise of every sociological perspective of identity is that the self is not determined at birth, rather it evolves through interactions with other people, i.e., through social interactions within groups and social contexts. In other words, it can be argued that the self is socially constructed over the course of time. Cooley (1902) proposed the concept of the “looking-glass self”: our identity is what we imagine other people think we are. He posited that the social self is based on three key elements: 1) the mental image of our appearance to others; 2) the imagination of their judgments of that appearance; and 3) some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. Thus, «*the object of self-feeling is affected by the general course of history, by the particular development of nations, classes, and professions, and other conditions of this sort*» (Cooley, 1902, p. 53). Mead (1934) expanded upon Cooley’s model of the self by identifying three distinct components: “me”, which is our perception of how others view us; “I”, the unpredictable and spontaneous aspect of the self; and the “generalised other”, which represents the organised community or social group which is the audience for our behaviours and actions. Additionally, the concept of “permanent visitors” was introduced as the internal representations of influential people in an individual’s life in their thought process (Wiley, 1994). Instead, Goffman (1959) argued that the self is an act that we play for other people: «*a correctly staged and performed scene leads to audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation — this self — is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it*» (Goffman, 1959, p. 181). Lastly, following Becker’s labelling theory (1999), critical sociology of deviance or critical criminology analysed the processes of stigmatisation and criminalisation¹⁷ of migrants with an intersectional perspective — considering class, *race*, and gender — and discussed the relation between structural selectivity and social representations offered by traditional and new medias.

¹⁷ Namely, a process which adopts a punitive attitude towards migrants, Fabini *et al.* (2022) *Migrazioni, criminalità, criminalizzazione*, in Pitch, T. (Ed.) *Devianza e questione criminale. Temi, problemi e prospettive*, Roma, Carocci editore, pp. 81-102; Cf. Sbraccia, A. (2015) *Migranti tra mobilità e carcere. Storie di vita e processi di criminalizzazione*, Milano, FrancoAngeli.

Due to their double status as both adolescents and migrants, UFM's experience significant transformations in their lives, in terms of time and space. Their way of dealing with growth and migration at the same time is ambivalent. On the one hand, the researcher observed many attempts to keep their old selves, through language, music, cuisine, religion, and cultural values. On the other hand, some of them process their past and present experiences by adhering to rebellious and criminal imaginaries, especially to the emerging subculture of trap, and by developing a new identity. Thus, their perception of their own identity is characterised by ambivalence, contradiction, and change.

Keeping the old self

In their case study, Surian *et al.* (2018) pointed out that 53% of the minors who arrived in Italy before the age of 10 considered themselves as foreigners and only 17% identified themselves as Italian. National identity is significant for most of the interviewed minors, who usually introduce themselves saying where they are from, since when they arrived in Italy and how long they have lived in the community. Many UFM's have written their nationalities next to their names on the laundry baskets and have hung the flag of their home country on their room walls. They frequently listen to songs in their native language as a way to remember their homeland and seek solace. Furthermore, the adolescents often refer to what and how they “used to do” or “would have done at their home” as a topic of conversation or an argument in case of disagreement. Lastly, being almost everyday in contact with family and friends left behind in their country of origin is also essential for them.

Maintaining persistently religious rituals and other familiar habits gives them comfort during their stay (Kohli and Kaukko, 2018). Especially in the first months of reception in the community, some minors exhibited resistance to the dishes — mostly Italian — that were prepared by volunteers¹⁸. Particularly during national or religious holiday in their home country, UFM's often request and are encouraged to

¹⁸ Cf. Di Masi, D., Defrancisci, E. (2018) “La regola è l’eccezione”: l’accoglienza dei Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati dal punto di vista degli operatori, in Segatto, B., Di Masi, D., Surian, A. (Eds.) (2018) *L’ingiusta distanza*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, p. 112.

cook or prepare dishes, desserts, and beverages from their home country, such as tajine, biryani rice, brik, flija, trilece, sholezard, kheer, and chai tea. Those who are used to cook in their families simply remember how to do it, some others search on the Internet the recipes of the dishes that their mothers used to make and they now miss. A volunteer suggested that in this way they recollect joyful moments they lived with mothers and grandmothers, since many of them came from difficult family situations, where the abuser was mostly the father. Such moments are also occasions of sharing and sociality, where they can prepare something to offer to other minors, educators, and volunteers. For example, chai tea almost became a tradition of every evening before bedtime, especially in the cold months.

The most notable thing that the researcher observed is the relationship Muslim minors have with their religion. For example, the concept and the word *haram* are frequently used in their everyday conversations, to the extent that even non-Muslims reference it in their dialogues. During the Ramadan month¹⁹, they supported each other in the most difficult moments: sometimes playfully referring to it as a challenge, where they compete in a sort of endurance test; other times seriously reminding the importance of respecting the rules and recalling their parents' — particularly the mother's — judgment, explicating those whom Wiley (1994) defined as “permanent visitors”. Talking about Ramadan, a volunteer stated: *“I think that sometimes it is one of the ways they find themselves: some of them do it better than when they were in their country, because probably for them it is a way to immerse in their own identity”*. Another informant highlighted how they live their religious faith not without some contradictions: while they engage in activities considered *haram*, such as smoking cigarettes, and do not pray five times a day (except for one), they put great effort to observe the rules during the Ramadan month.

Developing a new self: trap and stigma

Migrating from one country to another, UFM's lost many reference points of their lives: parents, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers, etc. As suggested by all the

¹⁹ A month of fasting in which they cannot eat nor drink before sunset, Giddens, A., Sutton, P. W. (2013) *Fondamenti di sociologia*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 249-250.

interviewed educators and volunteers, they also lived traumatic experiences before and during the journey. Moreover, reception in the country of arrival is not immediately and not always a positive experience. Since their cognitive and emotional development is not completed and they do not have enough tools to cope with such traumas, children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable (Taurino *et al.*, 2012). Music can be considered as a medium of expression of such difficulties, particularly the anger that they feel. Indeed, many minors in the community listen to trap music and identify with trappers, once described by M.C. “*those singers who tell their stories, who came from the bottom and rose up*”, especially those who are first or second-generation immigrants, as for example Ghali, Simba La Rue, Baby Gang, 22simba, Nabi and Slings.

Trap is a musical subgenre²⁰ of hip-hop, that was born in the city of Atlanta, USA, in the early 1990s and gained popularity in Italy in the 2020s, with artists like Sfera Ebbasta, Ghali, Dark Polo Gang, and the producer Charlie Charles (Magaudda and Spaziante, 2022; Giorgi and Gerosa, 2022). Trap evolves together with the youth subculture transformations of disadvantaged urban areas, such as French *banlieues* and American *projects*. Its cultural normative code is based on violence, young age, exaggerated individuality and exteriority, drugs, urban peripheries, poverty, and semantic repetition in music (Conti, 2020). Indeed, trap itself can be analysed as a subculture, i.e., «*a relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalisation from or resistance to a perceived ‘conventional’ society*» (Haenfler, 2014, p. 16).

Some UFM in the community recognise some common traits with trappers, such as their disadvantaged origins and the goal of economic success. Indeed, in trap lyrics the artists declare that they come from a low socio-economic background where the automatic prospect for young people is to become drug traffickers and the only way to change their future is through music business. There are also many references to everyday life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, immigrant families, lack of interest in school and work. Trappers are admired, because they achieved

²⁰ Characterised by more syncopated rhythm, voice modified through the use of auto-tune, combined use of sounds like strings and instruments, Conti, U. (2020) Urban Youth in Transformation: Considerations for a Sociology of *Trap* Subculture, Italian Sociological Review, 10 (2), 257-270.

wealth on their own in a short amount of time and can buy and consume extra-luxury goods²¹. As an informant once stated, “*seeing someone who is similar to them, who has their same background, who apparently is living la bella vita (which can be translated into “a great life”), makes them think “I want to be like them, I am like them”*”. In fact, the adolescents try to emulate their idols by copying their distinctive clothing²² and seeking to buy a few, but branded, clothes and shoes. During an interview, a volunteer suggested an additional interpretation of their attempts to flaunt what they own: “*it is something typical of the immigrant, who wants to show that everything is going well, they have made it, they have been good, they are arrived*”.

As Lane demonstrated, conversations, interactions, and performances take place both in online and real world, especially among adolescents (Lane, 2018). Indeed, as well as the trappers, their identity and reputation are also constructed and negotiated on social media platforms. When asked about their use of digital platforms, some of the interviewed minors showed their online profiles. Many of their photos portrayed them alone or with a group of friends, posing in studied positions, making stereotyped gestures, all wearing and showing off similar branded piece of clothing. Employing Goffman’s concept of the “front stage”²³, it can be argued that they present and “self-represent” (Giorgi and Gerosa, 2022) themselves to an audience made of peers who can understand the symbolic meanings behind their *posts* and *stories*. Furthermore, many of their videos feature trap songs as soundtracks.

Following the tradition of rap, many trappers have at least one song dedicated to their mother or mentioning her, asking her sorry for not behaving well, promising to gain money, and resolving all the problems related to family poverty. Saitta (2023, p. 100-103) explained that the figure of *«the mother is in this framework a*

²¹ Actually, trappers’ ostentation of extra-luxury goods can be considered in continuity with the consumerist culture of the rest of society, Saitta, P. (2022) La “teppa” oltre la classe. Ordine ed evasione nell’età dell’incertezza strutturale, in Bertoni, F., Caroselli A., Sterchele L. (Eds.) *Le strade della teppa*, pp. 24-29; Saitta, P. (2023) Violenta speranza. Trap e riproduzione del “panico morale” in Italia, Verona, ombre corte, pp. 94-99.

²² Jackets, hoodies, and sport t-shirts of brands such as Nike and Adidas, Conti, U. (2020) *Urban Youth in Transformation: Considerations for a Sociology of Trap Subculture*.

²³ Defined as *«that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion we define the situation for those who observe the performance»*, Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Penguin Books, p. 486.

shelter and the only glimpse of stability in lives» characterised by precarity and hardship. Similarly, UFM's oftentimes refer to their mothers, whom they miss and whose guidance they lost to some extent by migrating in Italy. As will be discussed further in the Chapter III, despite the geographical distance, the mothers of some UFM's still play an important role in their reception program. Lastly, mothers are also the most recalled when minors are asked to talk about their past in homeland and their future. For example, when the researcher asked about their plans for the next 5-10 years, M.C. answered: *“when I will have a job and enough money, I'm going to build a house for my mother in our hometown. She will be free to choose to stay there or to come to Italy”*.

Trap offers to UFM's universes of meanings and frameworks that the adolescents can use to interpret their personal experience and the world around them: from the disadvantaged origins to the condition of marginality, from the conflictual relationship with any figure of authority to the feeling of abandonment by state institutions, or even explicit hostility against the State. Indeed, youth subcultures and musical phenomena can be analysed as forms of resistance at a symbolic level. At the same time, as for many other youth phenomena (mod, punk, metal, skinhead), trap subculture has also been object of a process of stigmatisation in the public debate: it has been associated to urban decay²⁴, crime, and antisocial youth behaviours, including use of drugs and violence (Magaudda and Spaziante, 2022). Ilan (2020) suggested that music can be an easy target for those wishing to be seen to be doing something about crime, but who are unwilling to discuss growing socio-economic inequalities and government 'austerity' policies that have drastically cut welfare state, including youth services. Following the example of Cohen, Saitta (2023) studied trap in the Italian context using his concepts of “folk devils” and “moral panics”. Analysing the trap *scene* in the North of Turin, Molinari and Borreani (2021) stated that the frequent display of flags from their home country in the video clips and the use of words from different languages — Arab, French, Albanian, Spanish — highlight the fact that trappers do not perceive themselves as “strangers”²⁵ because of their parents' origins, rather as the product of a process of

²⁴ *Degrado* in Italian, it is a strongly instrumentalised term in the Italian political and political debate, Cf. Pitch, T. (2013) *Contro il decoro. L'uso politico della pubblica decenza*, Editori Laterza.

²⁵ Cf. Battisti *et al.* (2018) *Straniero. Percorsi di analisi in sociologia*, Roma, Aracne editrice.

racialisation and criminalisation by police and institutions. Indeed, in the space of discretion (Fabini, 2022) between law and everyday life, police officers do not always respect the law and sometimes replicate some social prejudices and stigmas that already exist in a society (Scalia, 2022). As Moore (1985, p. 2) posited in her research on isolation and stigmatisation in the development of Chicano youth gangs in East Los Angeles:

Stigma involves a stereotype, and for minorities the stereotypes include perceptions of deviance. The larger society certainly does label some minority persons, a priori, as “probably deviant”. [...] To be a visible member of a population that many Anglos associate with violent crime is to evoke hostile and fearful responses, I would like to call this “ascribed deviance”. [...] The ascription of deviance is based, of course, on generalized stereotypes, but it is focused on a particular segment of the minority population. Ascribed deviance, then, is deviance that is ascribed to minority young men on the basis of visible characteristics (or, if you like, ascriptive characteristics).

Another interesting contribution was given by Guénif-Souilamas (2022) who reflected on the restricted social perspective of Arab boys' in French *banlieue* and pointed out the reduction of their identity in the public debate into the figure of an offender, both of the bodies and of the places.

Going back to our analysis of UFM's identity, the risk of processes of ethnicization of crimes (Fabini *et al.*, 2022), stigmatisation and labelling is that such identity can be imposed to them and even internalised by them. For example, many of the minors in the community sometimes call themselves *maranza*, a combination of *magrebino* (a person from Maghreb) and *zanza* (a cheater), without exactly knowing its meaning. Once M.M. said “*I don't know what maranza means. Italian people are used to say it, but I don't know why they say so. If they see someone who is wearing all clothes branded Lacoste, they identify him as maranza. Maybe they think that he is a drug dealer, who messes up. I just like how they look*”. The same minor displayed stereotypes and stigmas on their own compatriots in another conversation.

The identity of the adolescents is the result of many factors, sometimes concordant, other times conflicting: from their everyday attempts to keep their old selves through language and communication with family to occasional moments of

preparation of traditional dishes and religious celebrations, from their experiences during the journey to the moment of reception in Italy, from their identification with trap subculture to the interiorisation of criminalising stigmas. Certainly, the identity of UFM's is not static, but rather always developing, thanks to their educational project and, most importantly, through relationships with others.

2.4 Relationships

As we discussed in the previous Chapter, individuals' identity evolves, particularly as they establish relationships with other people. In the specific case of UFM's, besides exposition to traumatic experiences, they lost their attachment figures, leaving their home country, family, and loved ones, and arrived in foreign contexts, losing relationships that are fundamental for a proper development (Taurino *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, in the time of their stay in the community, seeking connections that can provide psychological (Kohli and Kaukko, 2018), social, cultural, and existential support (Eriksen, 2020) is essential for them. The main groups of interaction for the adolescents include peers, educators, and volunteers.

Group of peers

Roles

When a newcomer arrives, it is essential to hold meeting in which the educators with the help of a cultural mediator explain how the reception process works and the rules of the community. Sometimes, when the mediator is not immediately available and it is impossible to hold this meeting as soon as possible, UFM's who are already in the community and can speak the same language are very helpful for the first days. F.C. talked about being helped by their compatriots with an explanation and the understanding of basic rules of cohabitation in the following weeks. Thus, on the one hand, the newcomer can settle down more easily if there is already one or more minor who can speak the same language and share a common cultural background. On the other hand, it is important that they do not continue talking only the native language and start learning and using Italian with the rest of the group. Indeed, ethnic/ racial and religious homophily (van Tubergen, 2020) — i.e. that people prefer to interact with members from their own group as opposed to

individuals of other groups — can lead to the development of distinct factions within the same group. For this reason, before the arrival of a newcomer, the team of educators evaluates carefully who they can accept depending on nationality, gender, and personality. In this way, they prevent the formation of a separate group based on the same nationality and make sure that the group can receive new arrivals without losing its balance.

A volunteer brought attention to the case of E.F., who was one of the “oldest” (in order of arrival) in the community and became almost a “older brother” for the entire group: they helped the newcomers — particularly those from the same country of origin — to settle in during the first days, introduced them to the rest of the group and facilitated their inclusion, and frequently supported educators and volunteers in the resolution of conflicts. The same informant observed that being trusted in such role made them “*develop a sense of mediation, maturation and personal growth in terms of self-confidence*”. In other words, putting people in a certain position/ role has an impact on them as they act to fulfil the expectations of their role identity. In this specific case, finding a valued role in life and being appreciated by the people around them was extremely empowering for them.

In fact, during the months of participant observation in the community, as the group composition transformed, dynamics and roles within it changed as well, but some roles remained the same and others were recurring: the “older brother” or “older sister”, the joker, the charismatic leader, the supporter, the “good boy” or “good girl”, the peacemaker, and the scapegoat²⁶. As within a small group of any kind, the researcher observed that the adolescents played roles that provide them with identities and allow them to interact with other group members. Roles consist in coherent sets of behaviours expected of people in specific positions within a group or social setting. According to identity theory (McCall and Simmons, 1978), people act to fulfil the expectations of their role (role identity) and the group is a set of interrelated individuals, each of whom performs unique but integrated activities, has their own perspectives and negotiates the terms of interaction. In this specific case, the roles within the group of minors in community can be considered

²⁶ Cf. Gemmil, G. (1989) The Dynamics of Scapegoating in Small Groups, in *Small Group Behavior*, Vol. 20 No. 4, November 1989 406-418, Sage Publications.

relationship roles, i.e. related to meeting the interpersonal and emotional needs of group members.

Group

Belonging to a group gives a positive “we-feeling”, a sense of being connected to other people who belong to the same group, an emotional “glue” that holds the group together. For example, a volunteer outlined how usually the UFM’s become friends with the new arrivals after a few days and establish relationships of solidarity across language barriers. Moreover, according to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), an individual’s self-image derives from the social categories to which they perceive themselves as belonging and people strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem. Having a social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like the other members of it, and seeing things from the group’s perspective. An informant proposed that *“having a group and having the sense of belonging can mean a lot for them, who have arrived here, who are far from home, family and friends”*. Social influences shape every person’s practices, judgments, and beliefs. Especially in the context of a group it is important to behave uniformly and following the example of the other members. For example, it is very likely that non-smoker newcomers adopt smoking habit after a few weeks or months if it is prevalent among their peers.

Despite the differences of nationality, religion, and age, many UFM’s in the community form strong bonds over their common interest in trap subculture. In fact, one of the earliest activities they engage in upon arrival in the community is recognising and singing trap songs, often without knowing the meaning of the lyrics. Trap is central not only in the identity construction of many UFM’s, but also in the process of group socialisation, which is the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member’s behaviours. As a matter of fact, Lipsitz (1994, pp. 126-127) emphasised the utility of music *«as a device for building unity between and across aggrieved populations»* and that *«as a highly visible (and audible) commodity [music] comes to stand for the specificity of social experience in identifiable communities when it captures the attention, and, even allegiance of people from many different social*

location». Words from trap subculture like “bro”, “fra”, “snitch”, “diss”, and “flex” are recurring in their conversations²⁷.

Educators

Negotiation

For the minors in the community, breaking rules and opposing to the “adults” — the team of educators and volunteers — is another way of strengthening their bonds with peers and reinforcing group cohesion. The main rules which are also the most frequently violated are: 8 PM curfew; no phone from 12 AM to 3 PM and since 8 PM; respecting the schedule for weekly chores; and helping with meal preparation. When there is an infringement without justification, the adolescents cannot hang out, use the phone for a week, nor receive the weekly pocket money of 15 euros. In the last scenario, money takes on a symbolic meaning of reward and is used to encourage or dissuade certain behaviours.

Disobedience is the attitude or action of a person who is perfectly aware of the established norms but behave voluntarily in opposition to them. According to Dallari (2009), it can be considered as an act of self-determination and a way for adolescents to assert their own identity. Moreover, it can provide exciting, exultant, and liberating feelings. Indeed, a volunteer suggested that disobedience is particularly relevant for the minors in the community, “*who have been disappointed, judged, condemned, criticised by adults, more than any other adolescent*”. In their developmental years, it is common that adolescents experiment the limits of their autonomy, their power over their own lives and the world around them, mainly compared to adults and parents. Breaking rules, making mistakes, and dealing with the consequences is essential for a deeper understanding of the meaning of the rules. This learning process can be effective if the parents or the adults explain the reasons behind the norms and the prohibition of their violation (Santamaria, 2009). It happened very often that after a quiet conversation the minor understood the importance of the rules and accepted any consequences that may follow, including the “punishment”, if it occurred.

²⁷ Also on their social media profile, Cf. Giorgi, G., Gerosa, A. (2022) #BRNBQ Le estetiche della teppa urbana nella «piazza digitale» di Instagram.

Despite complaints from UFM's about the rigidity of the rules, the team of educators appeared to be open to considering new proposals and making adjustments. Every Sunday they hold a meeting in which minors and educators all together organise chore shifts, address eventual conflicts, and discuss suggestions for changes. For example, initially the adolescents could use their phones from 4 to 8 PM. During one of the meetings, they obtained an extension of phone use time from 3 to 8 PM. After a week of trial, the new rule on phone use was established. When both sides commit to it, there is indeed a space of open dialogue and constant negotiation in the relationship between the adolescents and the educators, between observance and violation of rules, between rewards and punishments, between the imposition and the transformation over time of norms.

Ambivalence

As Bertozzi (2018, p. 60) clearly explained:

[...] working with UFM's imply understanding how to move between different antinomies. Individuality v categorisation, namely recognising the expectations and the resources of each person, helping them to keep together the identities and the personal journey with the constraints imposed by the context and the norms. Protection v autonomy, since the minors have the right and need to be protected but at the same time should be accompanied towards the future, with an approach which fosters responsibility and autonomy [...] Personal expectations v real possibilities, because they often idealise their destination [...] and their approach should be re-guided in the direction of real possibilities offered by the system and the contexts of reception. Education v employment, since the minors often want and need to enter the labour market as soon as possible, but realistically what is the best for them is to get involved in the educational path, also in anticipation of a job.

When they arrive, UFM's can be disoriented and have high expectations that may be disappointed shortly after. This can lead to frustration throughout their entire migration experience. To avoid so, educators have to be able to listen, communicate, and give trust in order to redefine and re-elaborate the minors' migration project and guide them towards autonomy before their 18th birthday. This is extremely important especially because in recent times arrival of minors close to the age of 18

is increasingly frequent²⁸. In many cases, the period before the 18th birthday is not sufficient to provide all the educational, social, psychological, economic tools for autonomy. In fact, a volunteer underlined that “*the fact that our community tend to obtain as many administrative continuation²⁹ as possible, in some cases up to the age of 21, is a clear evidence of the fact that we want to ensure that UFM’s have a better chance of standing on their own*”. The difficulty of moving between different antinomies creates ambivalence in the educational practices: while they aim at promoting autonomy, they can reproduce mechanisms of infantilisation (Di Masi and Defrancisci, 2018), which could hinder development of independence. The “care, cure and control” paradigm can be noticed in this context but has been strongly observed also in other studies on reception centres for migrants³⁰.

Alliance

In this paragraph, two types of alliance are discussed: one between educators and various stakeholders involved in UFM’s reception program, and the other between educators and the minors themselves.

Educators’ work requires collaboration with many other people and specialists. First of all, when it is possible, parents — particularly the mother — are involved in the decision-making related to their children’s educational project and consulted in case of difficulties. Educators are assisted by cultural mediators, sometimes former UFM’s from the same community, especially during the first days, asylum application processes, and conflict resolution. Although it is difficult for minors to overcome the stigma associated with therapy, psychological support is more and more needed and requested to address the effects of traumas³¹ and losses (Bertozzi,

²⁸ 24% of 16 years old and 45,2% of 17 years old, according to Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Direzione Generale dell’Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, Divisione II (2023) Report mensile minori stranieri non accompagnati (MSNA) in Italia.

²⁹ Article 13 of Law 47/2017.

³⁰ Cf. Talocia, F. G. (2019) Contraddizioni e debolezze di un sistema di accoglienza. Lo SPRAR di Roma e i suoi operatori, pp. 107-127; Di Cecco, S. (2019) *Ringraziare per l’ospitalità?* Confini dell’accoglienza e nuove frontiere del lavoro migrante nei progetti di volontariato per richiedenti asilo, pp. 211-235; Cammelli, M. G. (2019) La varie forme di un muro: accogliere dietro le sbarre. Un’etnografia, in Fabini, G., Firouzi Tabar, O., Vianello, F. (Eds.) *Lungo i confini dell’accoglienza. Migranti e territori tra resistenze e dispositivi di controllo*, Castel San Pietro Romano, manifestolibri.

³¹ They are generally categorised into: 1) pre-migratory traumas: situations of violence in the territory of origin, on specific groups or single individuals, and of reduction of life expectancy (war

2018). In recent times, it is emerging the approach provided by ethnopsychology and ethnopsychiatry, which do not view manifested distress exclusively as psychopathology, rather aim at «*understanding the world left behind*» and at «*finding a symphony between the different universes of belonging*» (Finco and Jacob, 2018, p. 100)³².

Several studies (Bertozzi, 2018; Di Masi and Defrancisci, 2018) identified challenges related to a lack of adequate competences, sufficient resources, and collaboration with external actors in the exosystem and mesosystem, e.g. Municipality, social services, police headquarters, public health systems, and schools. Difficult coordination with these entities may negatively impact the quality of reception and care provided to UFM. Indeed, an educator told that sometimes what they can do is limited by external conditions and emphasised the fact that the whole reception system should be improved. Maculan (2021) highlighted that operators can sometimes share resistance practices with the migrants as a way to distance themselves from a system with which they do not entirely agree. Besides all the reasons above, the same educator admitted that it is a tiring and sometimes frustrating work, also because they can see its results only after a few years, when the minors keep them informed about their lives and come back to greet them. As stated by an informant, “*the seeds planted by educators will sprout in the future*”.

Volunteers

A brief discussion is reserved to the group of volunteers, since they are a peculiarity of the studied community. Volunteers' position is in the middle between the figures of educators and peers. Besides practical tasks, e.g. helping with homework,

violence, environmental disasters, famines, epidemics, persecutions, physical and sexual abuse, deprivations and constraints, parental loss, loss of loved ones, humiliation, torture) ; 2) migratory traumas: continued exposition to dangers and traumas (forced departures, prolonged periods of time in refugee camps, difficult journeys, malnutrition, diseases, aggressions, death of companions, exploitation and sexual abuse, detention in transit countries, refoulements); 3) post-migratory traumas: situations of impact of deterrence policies, mental health risk factors, denial of rights (refoulement, forced repatriation, risk of detention, loss of freedom, change of habits and lifestyle, cultural shock, unemployment, precarious or illegal employment, homelessness, poverty, discrimination and marginalisation, no access to health services, inequality), Taurino *et al.* (2012) I minori stranieri non accompagnati tra trauma e riparazione.

³² Cf. Quaranta, I., Ricca, M. (2012) *Malati fuori luogo. Medicina interculturale*, Raffaello Cortina Editore; Finco, R. (Ed.) (2022) *Esperienza di cura in migrazione. Forme dell'invisibile e narrazioni possibili: l'orizzonte etnoclinico, ombre corte*.

cleaning, and cooking, their role and functions are not clearly defined. Some of the interviewed volunteers remarked that having such an ambiguous role is challenging: the most is done in the relational dimension, establishing a relationships of trust, providing psychological and emotional support; on the other side, they still have to be “professional”, that is doing an educational work, enforcing rules, treating everyone equally, and not forming too strong individual relationships. This aspect is particularly important for the young volunteers, who are close in age to UFM. The adolescents themselves perceive the volunteers as individuals who are “playing a role”, saying oftentimes sentences like “*not as a volunteer, but as a normal person*”, “*in your normal life*”, or “*in your life outside*”, distinguishing the volunteers’ role within the community and their personal lives outside of it.

Although frequent turnover of volunteers could lead to a sense of instability — for example, the minors do not remember the names of volunteers who come less regularly — the adolescents demonstrated an incredible adaptability regarding such issue and even pointed out its positive aspects. In fact, some stated that “*it is nice to talk to different people, who come from other countries (especially the EVS volunteers, Ed.), study at various faculties, or have diverse professions*”. Similarly, such positive encounter was observed also in a project in Palermo that involved UFM with international university students (Pavesi, 2018). I.P. said that they can spend more time with volunteers than with educators. Lastly, a volunteer argued that having relationships with adults, who are neither their parents nor educators, may be beneficial.

Community

Talking about cultural shocks and clashes, an educator affirmed that the community for UFM “*is like a bubble, a parenthesis where it is easier for them to accept many things*”. Regarding certain matters, such as family, religion, marriage, sex, women and LGBTQ+ community rights, some adolescents showed initially some resistance. Through a slow process made of dialogues with educators, workshops on specific topics, and casual conversations with peers and volunteers, UFM are socialised to some new values, which can be learned, understood, and internalised

to different extents. Indeed, besides being a liminal time (as will be discussed in the Chapter V), community can be viewed as a liminal space, where resocialisation takes place. Resocialisation is the process in which a person is taught new norms, values, and behaviours that help them transition from one social role or group into another. Migrating to another country requires a certain degree of it. However, an educator observed that *“to avoid getting into trouble, some of them just pretend to accept”* such values and ideas.

The community is also a liminal space where UFM's can finally find stability and safety, *“a place where they come back to, a place where they know they can come back to”*, where they can deal with past traumas and plan their future not by themselves. It is the context for the elaboration of their past hardships, the achievement of present emotional and psychological well-being, and the realisation of future projects. A good network³³ of positive, stable, and supportive social relationships provide protection and safety, which may have been denied in their previous life experiences (Taurino *et al.*, 2012). For example, A.P. was extremely surprised and moved when all the peers, educators and volunteers showed up at the final performance of a theatre laboratory he did for an entire year. Relationships are indeed at the core of the community, though they can be characterised by negotiation, ambivalence, and alliance. The complexity of the work that volunteers and mainly educators undertake is better conveyed by the volunteer G.O.'s words:

They are adolescents who have life experiences that many adult people that we encounter in our daily lives will never have. So, they have a background, experiences, the ability to fend for themselves, and also traumas, a whole life in the body of a 15-year-old, who is an adolescent and, as such, faces, in addition to everything else, the changes of any typical teenager. (As educators or volunteers, Ed.) we must take all of this into account.

³³ Cf. Dalbon, M. (2022) Le reti sociali dei minori immigrati stranieri: il valore delle relazioni nel processo di integrazione, Tesi magistrale in Innovazione e Servizio Sociale, Università degli Studi di Padova.

CHAPTER III: TIME: PAST, PRESENT, AND EXPECTATIONS

Time is the third dimension of the results, but also a transversal one: it plays a relevant role in both the dimensions of identity and relationships, how they change and develop as human beings and how they establish new relationships with peers, educators, and volunteers over time. UFM's experience of time is central in their personal growth and migration project (Bertozzi, 2018). More precisely, their perception of the time of their stay in the community, the ways they spend it, the rhythm of their daily life, and the activities they engage in, but also the imaginaries they had before their departure and their future aspirations may impact their psychological well-being, as well as their experiences of socialisation and integration. Moreover, the way they live through reception and life in the community may have a major influence on their future life, their dreams, and their projects. Indeed, UFM's experience differently the time they spend in the community, depending on the motivations that pushed them to migrate and the expectations they have for the future. Time will be discussed in three distinct moments: 1) past, precisely why they decided to leave their home country; 2) present, namely how they manage the time of waiting; 3) and future, that is their aspirations and expectations, as opposed to their actual reception process.

3.1 Past/ motivations

The motivations behind UFM's decision to migrate are various and sometimes intertwined: to escape war, to move away from condition of poverty, to find better educational and employment opportunities. Another significant factor is chain migration, i.e. following the example of friends or relatives who have already left their home country (Ambrosini, 2006; Giovannetti and Accorinti, 2018). A volunteer explained the importance of having someone who is already in the destination country:

Very often, when they arrive in Italy or in Europe, they have the reference of a relative, who could be a cousin or an even more distant relative, and with them they have a very strong bond. Such presence sometimes provides them the incredible strength to do so long journeys: knowing that someone is waiting for you on the other side is something that gives so much strength, because they are already

leaving everything behind, if they have nothing in the place of arrival, some of them would lose all the strengths.

For instance, F.D. decided to depart with his cousins in the direction of France, where another cousin already settled down. They left a country marked by political instability and extreme poverty and wanted to pursue their “European dream”. This quest for a better life is perfectly captured in the lyrics of the song “*Immigrato*” (“Immigrant” in Italian) from the homonymous album by rapper 8blevrai: “*to die in peace or live in war/ there is no future in my land/ so much misery/ our food goes to those who govern us/ Europe is a dream like a legend/ there is who sees it thanks to an antenna*”³⁴.

Quiroga *et al.* (2018, p. 40) argued that minors’ migration can be seen as a rite of passage where they also face a process of transformation towards adult life with a spirit of adventure, or vice versa, «*the symbolic journey becomes at the same time a physical, tangible, and geographical one*». This vision of migration is shaped by a shared social imaginary, that contemplates migration as a way to improve their social status. Such social construction takes form through means of communication and information technologies, emigrants who return to home country for holidays and share their stories, and group of peers, especially through narratives of “success”. By departing for Europe, the United States of America, or other Global North (Potter *et al.*, 2018) country, UFMes escape from a situation of objective and subjective stagnation: not only from poverty, war, and family conflicts, but also from cultural and social constraints. Moreover, the decision to migrate at the age of 18 or below is also often motivated by the fact that as minors they enjoy more rights and advantages in the migration process. As A.P. explained “*here getting documents is difficult after turning 18: minors can get them more easily because they live in community, for adults is very hard*”. This aspect is further addressed in paragraph 3.3.

³⁴ In Italian: “*morire in pace o vivere in guerra/ non c’è futuro nella mia terra/ tanta miseria/ il nostro cibo va a chi ci governa/ l’Europa è un sogno tipo leggenda/ c’è chi la vede grazie ad una antenna*”, 8blevrai (2022) *Immigrato*, on *Immigrato*, Epic Records.

3.2 Present/ waiting

As previously discussed in Chapter III, UFM's go through a delicate phase of identity development and reinforcement. The current waiting period they experience may undermine their ability to envision their future and to face the transition into adulthood, which represents a particularly crucial and problematic step for them (Bertozzi, 2018). All the minors in the community are well aware of the fact that they have to be autonomous and self-reliant by the age of 18, at the latest by 21. Hage (2009, pp. 1-2) introduced the interesting concept of "stuckedness", which can be defined as «*a sense of existential immobility*» and «*a situation where a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation one is in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves*». We all possess indeed a form of imaginary mobility, a sense of "going somewhere", a sense of progress that provides meaning to our lives. Regardless of their specific motivations, it can be argued that people who migrate seek a better space for their social and existential selves, where they feel they are "going somewhere" as opposed to the conditions they are abandoning. Similarly, Giddens (1984) pointed out the importance of "ontological security", namely that having some idea of what and where one will be in the near future is fundamental to experience the present.

After their arrival in Italy, UFM's are placed in a community, have to follow an educational project and, precisely, wait until their 18th birthday. During this period in the community, they often experience the feeling of being "suspended" between the expectations of their families and the reception context, between their own migration project and administrative and juridical obstacles (Surian *et al.*, 2018). This sense of "stuckedness" is coupled with the impatience of becoming adults and realising their migration objectives, that is in most of the cases achieving economic success and a certain social status. These feelings are reinforced by comparisons with immigrant adults who already have jobs and earn income, or with underage peers who exited the legal reception system and immediately and quickly made money engaging in illegal activities. UFM's personal expectations are closely linked to their starting conditions: in some cases, they are encouraged and supported by their family in their migration project, with the aspirations of finding a better job,

improving economic condition, and assisting the family; in other cases, they left without the family approval and feel it is vital to return with substantial wealth. For example, A.P. departed their country without their parents' consent and does not want to come back to their home country until they have enough money to pay back the parents for the expenses incurred during their journey to Italy and sustain economically the entire family. We can conclude that the adolescents are stuck both in time and in space: they have not yet achieved their professional-economic objective and cannot go back to their homeland. Being "stuck" either way could lead to UFM's developmental "stuckedness", the inability to transition from childhood dependence to adult independence³⁵.

Another form is the waiting to return home, which can be treated as a form of resistance. According to Lakha (2009), yearning for "back home" is an active way of resisting the various assimilationist social processes which the immigrant person face in the country of arrival and a way of preserving one's culture. Additionally, new communication technologies allow instant, frequent, and regular contacts with the community in the country of origin. Indeed, many of the UFM's in the community called their families and friends almost every day. If possible, most of them would come back to their home country for a period every six months, the so-called "six months mantra". Studying South Asian migrants, Lakha observed that although Indian migrants' expectation of returning to their home country permanently or semi-permanently did not actually realise, while waiting to return they maintained certain religious rituals and familiar habits to "keep their old selves" (as we previously discussed in Chapter III). Lastly, it has been argued that at least the first generation of migrants do not have a stable notion of "home" and it is common for them to frequently move between their homeland and the host country.

While they wait, UFM's experience everyday life is experience like a limbo characterised by routinised practices — such as school or work, chores and preparation of meals — and empty periods, especially during the summer season. Nevertheless, Rotter (2015) argued that this period is not time wasted "doing

³⁵ Cf. McEvoy-Levy, S. (2014) Stuck in circulation: children, 'waithood' and the conflict narratives of Israelis and Palestinians, *Children's Geographies*, 12:3, pp. 312-326.

nothing”, rather it is employed by some doing what Dewey³⁶ labelled “dramatic rehearsal in imagination”. In essence, they constantly anticipate what *could* happen, which can be a useful way of coming to terms with reality. Anticipation occurs in two ways: expressive, which is about how things will be in terms of emotional state, and practical, which is oriented towards planning what to do. Many UFM think and often talk about their incoming adulthood in every single detail: their future jobs, the objects they will buy with their earnings, the house they will live in, how often they will visit their homeland and the gifts they will give to their families. In other words, waiting is not an empty interlude, rather a preparatory period that is useful for their exit from communities. Furthermore, engaging in different activities may contribute to overcome the feeling of limbo and produce a sense of progress in time. For example, in the studied community, all the adolescents are encouraged to participate in activities beyond school during the weekdays, such as sports, theatre laboratory, voluntary work. They also take part in occasional events such as celebrations on special days, birthdays, workshops, and hanging out with friends. Finally, the most important event of the year is a week at the beach as a summer holiday³⁷. Despite these activities, they generally perceive the time of waiting with boredom and even distress. A minor once confided in the researcher: “*I cannot go to sleep too early, because when I am alone in my bed, bad thoughts start to come up. Here, I can only think about sad things*”. Problems falling asleep at night and disturbed sleep-pattern have also been reported by Brekke (2010) in his research on young asylum seekers waiting for a decision.

UFMs find themselves between past and future, perceiving their present as without a meaning, directionless, and a waste of time. Eriksen (2020, p. 60) perfectly described the complexity and difficulties in their experience of time:

The lack of a regular, cumulative rhythm in life is implied by the shifting temporalities of the migratory process, where long periods of stasis are punctuated by quick bursts of movement, inactivity interrupted by the flurry of movement or the sudden appearance of new opportunities for work or residency [...] the clash between temporalities can be identified in many of the situations refugees engage in:

³⁶ Cited in Rotter, R. (2015) Waiting in the asylum determination process: just an empty interlude?.

³⁷ A clarification is needed: such activities can vary greatly from community to community, and strongly depend on the geographical position of the residential reception community.

the regimented clock time of the bureaucracy and the NGO world of support and volunteering; the indeterminate, empty time of passive waiting; the urgent, precious temporal window of sudden opportunities for further mobility, work or residency; the slow, degenerative time of ageing; the fast time of instant messaging, and so on.

3.3 Future/ expectations

As stated in the previous paragraphs, UFM's expectations are intimately intertwined with motivations, family background, and their migration project. For instance, B.S. came from a middle-class family and wanted to go to school and then to university, on the contrary A.P., like most of the UFM's, came from a lower-class background, possessed previous work experience, and seek immediate employment opportunities. In fact, some of them were already treated as adults in their home country. Consequently, they considered contradictory the fact that they were treated as minors and felt they were forced to wait for an adulthood and independence that they had already achieved. A volunteer highlighted that their expectations also depend on their age of arrival: if they are under 16, they attend middle school and usually do not feel the pressure to immediately start working; if they are 16 or older, they are impatient to have the documents and to find a job shortly after. Other studies (Di Masi and Defrancisci, 2018) demonstrated that the first request of many incoming UFM's is indeed "when will I go to work?". This strong desire to work as soon as possible is often driven by the need to support their families back home. Indeed, families frequently played a relevant role in pushing and supporting them: it is likely that they invested all their money, sold their lands and properties, or got into debt to offer a better future to at least one of the children (Ambrosini, 2020). When the researcher interviewed M.M., they were frustrated because the educators did not allow them to send to their family some money just earned from the first job: "*They (the family, Ed.) sent me here with 6.000 euros, what are 50 euros (in comparison, Ed.)?*". In fact, as soon as they get a job, many UFM's want to send remittances to home. Remittances is the outcome of cultural traditions and social practices. They are a part of a system of strong transnational connection between people over distances, between the immigrant worker who sends them and the family and friend left behind who depend on them for support (Cohen, 2011). In particular, they are essential for the receiving households that lack local

opportunities. Furthermore, remittances reflect and build the social status of the emigrant person, justifying their departure and demonstrating that they achieved the “European dream”. As in the case of M.M. they mainly have a symbolic meaning, a way of remembering and showing gratitude to the family left behind.

In response to the fact that the educators took such decision for their interest, for *their* future and not the family’s one, M.M. said “*I understand them (the educators, Ed.), but they don’t understand me. If I cannot use my money (as I wish, namely sending them to my family, Ed.), why did I come here (in Italy)?*”. Dealing with migration of UFM’s is indeed a delicate issue: on the one hand they have to be protected as minors, on the other hand they must support their families and achieve their migration objectives. The increasing number of UFM’s who escape from reception structures demonstrates that the current reception system does not fully meet the aspirations and expectations of many of them, such as finding immediate employment, earning money, or having a clear project proposal. Other reasons can be that the adolescents are not involved in decision-making processes, have to follow too strict rules, are not protected and followed enough by the reception structures, or want to move further to the north (Bertozzi, 2018). Furthermore, Ambrosini (2020, pp. 215-216) suggested that «*UFM’s phenomenon is mainly a paradoxical result of restrictive migration policies: countries of the Global North reject fathers in search for an employment, classified as “economic migrants”, but cannot expel children who arrive alone and request for protection*». Consequently, the families are forced to encourage their children — especially male adolescents — to migrate, work as soon as possible and send remittances to home. The responsibilities they are invested by conflict with the long-term educational projects, which focus on schooling, language learning, and professional training. It can be argued that UFM’s phenomenon is most of all the consequence of the lack of legal channels that allow migrations for work, for asylum, and for protection of minors.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, resistance can consist in «*individual, everyday, and extemporary or systematic forms of opposition*», an «*“evasion” or “escape” from an order*» (Saitta, 2015, p. 7-8), that is the control and discipline of international migration, the Italian reception and protection system, and the stigmatising and criminalising public discourses . It can be made of an action (cognitive, verbal, or physical) in opposition to someone or something, sometimes so quiet to be hardly noticed. The present research intends to give voice to the UFM: their thoughts, their discourses, and their actions for the sake of their “right to escape” (Mezzadra, 2004), physically or symbolically.

The first finding regards UFM’s identity while they experience big life changes in terms of time and space, namely coming of age and migration. On the one hand, the researcher observed attempts to maintain some features of their “old selves” and some elements of their lives in their homeland, such as language, music, cuisine, religion, and cultural values. Preserving religious rituals, such as Ramadan, and other familiar habits, especially the traditional dishes, is extremely important for them. On the other hand, their identities evolve as they grow up and settle down in Italy. In this development, trap subculture plays a relevant role in giving meanings and frameworks for their life experiences and providing a way of expressing their struggles. In particular, the adolescents can easily identify with people with similar backgrounds and histories, adopt their discourses on aspirations and hardships of being immigrants, and imitate their way of “self-representing” themselves on social media platforms. Lastly, it is argued that, besides being a form of resistance, trap subculture is object of stigmatisation as well as the UFM themselves, enhancing the interiorisation of stereotypes and stigmas.

The second issue that has been discussed is about the importance of relationships, given that UFM lost all their attachment figures, arrived in foreign contexts, and lack of any support. In the group of peers, it was noticed that compatriots are very helpful at the arrival of newcomers, but on the other side the formation of a separate faction based on nationality is carefully prevented by the team of educators in the evaluation of new entries. Identity theory has been employed in the analysis of a

variety roles within the group: how having a role is empowering (e.g., “older brother”) for the single person, it fulfils interpersonal and emotional needs of group members, and it contributes to the internal balance of the whole group in a different way. Instead, social identity theory has been used to highlight the significance of the group, which provides a positive “we-feeling” and a social identity. Trap subculture is once again a central element in the process of group socialisation and formation of strong bonds despite the differences of nationality, religion, and age. In the interaction between UFM s and educators, three main dynamics has been identified: negotiation, ambivalence, and alliance. One of the first aspect that was noticed is indeed UFM s’ opposition to the rules in the community. Considering also pedagogical contributions on adolescence, disobedience can be interpreted as an act of self-determination and a way to assert their own identity. Then, it has been addressed educators’ struggle in moving between different antinomies and the “care, cure and control” paradigm in their educational practices. Thirdly, different forms of alliance are outlined: the positive one with parents, cultural mediators, and psychologists; the difficult or absent one with Municipality, social services, police headquarters, public health, and schools; but also, and most importantly, the alliance with the minors themselves. In addition, the presence of volunteers is overall positively evaluated by UFM s and supports the professional staff in its educational project.

The last observation on this dimension is that community is a liminal space, where cultural clashes and resocialisation frequently take place. However, it is also a space where UFM s finally find stability and safety, where they are supported by a good network of positive social relationships and can think about their past and future not by themselves.

The third chapter is dedicated to UFM s’ perception of time. Among the motivations behind their decision to migrate, it has been emphasised the significance of chain migration and the shared social imaginary on migration and the “European dream”. Besides the advantages and protections that are guaranteed in moving to the Global North as minors, such choice can be experienced as a rite of passage, where the symbolic journey coincides with the geographical one. Secondly, UFM s’ experience of the stay in the community can be interpreted as waiting, precisely

using the concept of “stuckedness”: they are “suspended” between their migration project — often encouraged by the family — and the administrative and juridical difficulties in the reception context. Such feeling is strengthened by impatience to fulfil their aspirations and comparison with other immigrants. Furthermore, it has been suggested that engaging in different activities may produce a sense of progress in time and prevent from the negative consequences of waiting. Lastly, in the reflection on future and expectations, the main findings are about the role played by families, the practical and symbolic meaning of remittances, and the struggles of dealing with migration of UFM, namely balancing the need to protect them as minors and to help them in the achievement of their migration objectives.

Due to the small number of participants, it is important to make a clarification: the group in the studied residential reception community is not representative of the whole population of UFM in Italy. The findings are not generalisable since reception structures are extremely differentiated — «*a lottery of reception*» (Biella, 2023, p. 38) indeed — and the experiences and circumstances of the adolescents are various. This thesis aims to be a small contribution to the wide debate on reception and protection in Italy of UFM (or immigrants in general) and to suggest further research with an interdisciplinary approach that includes pedagogical, psychological, and anthropological perspectives.

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