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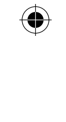

GROWING UP IS NOT A PRIVATE MATTER

Trajectories to Adulthood among Roma Youth

Edited by
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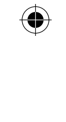
To the boys and girls who
doggedly continue to pursue their own projects,
despite inequalities, and
to those who take on the responsibility of ensuring these are overcome



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We have written this book in the midst of a pandemic, working from home whenever it was possible to do so, when concentrating one's thoughts and fingers on the keyboard was no small feat, reconciling working remotely with daily life. We all live in Lombardy – between Brescia, Bergamo and Milan – being the most affected areas of Italy, where we have passed surreal and trying weeks.

It is thus clear that without help, we would not have been able to do much at all.

An unparalleled and special thanks thus goes to Maria Rosa and Lino – Andrea's grandparents – who took care of her with enthusiasm and love while we wrote.

Without them, this book simply would not exist.

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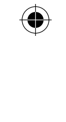
We also want to thank the team of the Autonomous University of Barcelona for the contribution cited in this text and not at all taken for granted, especially given the working conditions during the pandemic. We are also grateful to the individual national teams involved in the STORY_S project from which this text partly originates.

Finally, thank you to the boys and girls whose stories you will read, and whose real names or other details we have not given in order to protect their privacy, with the hope that they may grow to be the adults they want to be.



INTRODUCTION[1]

The aim of this book is to recount certain pathways of growth, trajectories of boys and girls facing adulthood following that period of transformation, choices and conflicts that is commonly defined as "adolescence". The paths of these youths are neither simple nor to be dismissed, due to reasons we shall discover further on. What these boys and girls have in common is that they recognise themselves as Roma and that they are – sometimes despite themselves – the focus of interventions and policies aimed at people who are or have been defined as such. We well know that belonging to Roma families or groups is actually only partially an element of commonality – amongst them are extremely diverse groups, stories, interactions and destinies. But it is undeniable that the external gaze has, above all historically, created homologating categories with often serious impacts on people's lives, not least being the cancellation of differences, a narrowing of prejudicial social imaginations.

Starting from an in-depth analysis of sociological and anthropological literature on schooling and adolescence amongst Romani groups, the aim is to restore the complexity of each story that can be quite rich in complexity, analysing certain crucial issues raised by research in recent decades, in view of the biographical experiences of the boys and girls.

To do so, we started from the experience gained over several years of research and field work with young Roma, not least through "STORY_S – Springboard to Roma Youth Success"[2] (identifier no. 777257), a project funded by the European Commission DG JUSTICE, as part of the Rights,

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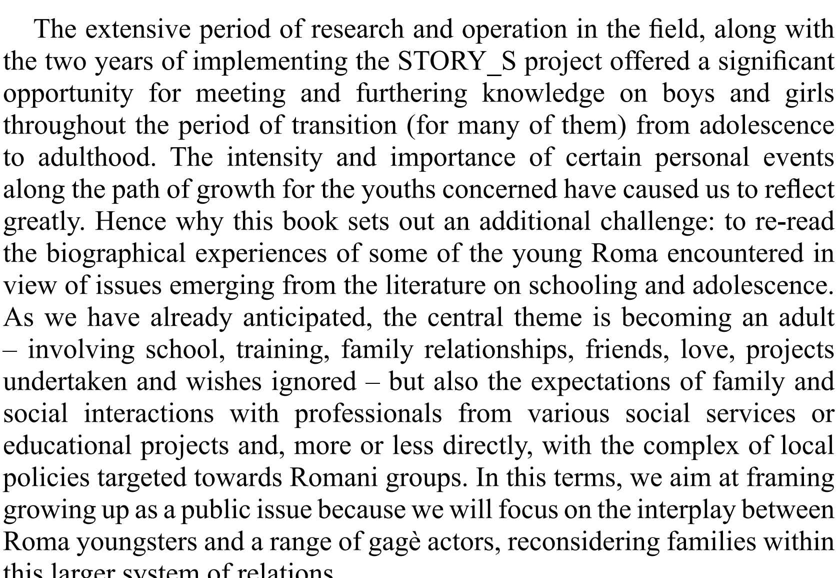
1 This book comes as the result of a joint project, shared in all its parts. For academic reasons, we have attributed the authorship of the following pages in this order: the introduction is by Greta Persico, Cristiana Ottaviano and Ulderico Daniele; Greta Persico is the author of paragraphs 1.2, 1.3, 3.3, 3.4.1, 3.6.1, 3.7 (together with Ulderico Daniele); Cristiana Ottaviano is the author of paragraphs 1.1; Ulderico Daniele is the author of Chapter 2 and paragraphs 3.1, 3.5.1 and 3.7 (together with Greta Persico); whilst Stefano Pasta completed paragraphs 3.2, 3.3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6.

2 https://www.projectstorys.eu/.

Equality and Citizenship Programme, implemented in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Spain from 2018 to 2020[3]. Thanks to the work carried out throughout the STORY_S project's two years of implementation, the field experience has generated discussions and reflections both within the individual national teams and in the consortium. Considerations on scientific and methodological premises, the results achieved and the tools adopted have been published both in the academic field – thanks to two scientific articles (Persico, Marcu, Daniele, Csilla Romano, Santambrogio 2020; Bereményi and Girós 2020) – and through educational publications. Specifically, guidelines on the overall process and an operational manual for implementing peer-to-peer mentoring were published in English and in the languages of the partner countries.[4] These documents are particularly aimed towards social workers, teachers and anyone seeking to avail of the experience gained through the project to implement pathways of empowerment amongst peers of young people in conditions of greater vulnerability, through visual and participatory methodologies.

3 The project STORY_S has seen the University of Bergamo as the lead entity of a group of universities and associations from the voluntary sector, in particular Italy's Association BIR non-profit organisation (http://bironlus.eu/), Romania's Asociaţia Carusel (http://www.carusel.org/), Spain's Barcelona Autonomous University, EMIGRA. CER-Migracions Research Group (http://www.cermigracions.org/) and Federació d'Associacions Gitanes de Catalunya (http://www.fagic.org/) and Bulgaria's Health and Social Development Foundation (https://hesed.bg/) and Bulgarian Youth Forum (http://bulgarianyf.eu/home/?lang=en). The project's overall objective was to raise awareness and combat stereotypes concerning Roma and promote their integration by encouraging and supporting the scholastic journey of Roma youths aged 14-26 years, taking a participatory approach. The main action consisted in a one-and-a-half-year peer mentoring programme and involved both Roma and non-Roma youth as mentors. These mentors – specially trained and duly chaperoned – acted as positive role-models and provided support to young Roma, in some cases building a meaningful relationship with them. In the four countries, a total of 141 Roma youth were involved as mentees, with a total of 49 mentors. The second aim of the project was to implement an anti-discrimination campaign devised by young Roma and their peers during "Awareness-raising Workshops", involving 2,173 youths from high schools, universities and voluntary associations. The campaign was disseminated in schools, universities, volunteer centres, places frequented by young people and places of public interest generally, with over 50 inauguration and presentation events in the four countries, along with a presence on social media, reaching several thousand people. In addition, 47 citizenship incubators were organised to thoroughly discuss the contents of the anti-discrimination campaign, with some 1,434 youths taking part.

4 https://www.projectstorys.eu/download-area/.



The extensive period of research and operation in the field, along with the two years of implementing the STORY_S project offered a significant opportunity for meeting and furthering knowledge on boys and girls throughout the period of transition (for many of them) from adolescence to adulthood. The intensity and importance of certain personal events along the path of growth for the youths concerned have caused us to reflect greatly. Hence why this book sets out an additional challenge: to re-read the biographical experiences of some of the young Roma encountered in view of issues emerging from the literature on schooling and adolescence. As we have already anticipated, the central theme is becoming an adult – involving school, training, family relationships, friends, love, projects undertaken and wishes ignored – but also the expectations of family and social interactions with professionals from various social services or educational projects and, more or less directly, with the complex of local policies targeted towards Romani groups. In this terms, we aim at framing growing up as a public issue because we will focus on the interplay between Roma youngsters and a range of gagè actors, reconsidering families within this larger system of relations.

The text is structured as follows: the *first chapter* aims to provide an overview of Italian literature dealing with Romani groups and schooling, tracing the main qualitative surveys conducted from the 1980s through to the present day. This excursus is in line with the intention of highlighting the various approaches developed by academic research on this topic, to shine light on certain cruxes relative to schooling as an aspect often considered central for boys and girls coming of age. Reflecting on how much research has matured over time in the field of schooling allows us to mark a starting point from which to broaden our perspective to the dynamics of relationship and interdependence amongst Romani groups and majority society, knowing how articulated and complex they are. What's more, reflecting on the school obliges us to observe the processes of transformation of these same dynamics and to question what we know and can glean from the data (or, more often than not, the absence of data – especially quantitative) gathered on the new generations of Roma students.

In the *second chapter*, we will consider the concept of adolescence and seek to investigate the meaning of this particular phase of life within the Roma world. The concept of adolescence is a consolidated mass of reflections in the social sciences from which, over time, numerous interpretative hypothesis have been formulated, ranging from those pointing to a socio-biological mould, those that emphasise historical and cultural differences, through to describing adolescence as an "invention" of the modern West.

The concept of "transition to adulthood" has progressively emerged as the essential reference for interpreting this phase of life. Once cleansed of the most simplistic and mechanical readings, this concept manages to maintain focus on the physical and social transformation as the distinctive features of this stage in life, with vast differences in the definition of what is adulthood and when and how it is reached. The theme of maturation of the body and the parallel social maturation within Romani groups thus refers to what should be the Romanes definition of adolescence. However, this meaning needs to be further placed within the complex framework of relations with non-Roma societies, such as in the rapports with institutions and policies, with the informal players of local societies and – more generally – with the dual stigma associated with being Roma and being young.

The *third chapter* intends to accompany readers of a selection of biographies of Roma teenagers, retracing their experiences, through which emerge the themes dear to the literature, allowing the stories to continue questioning them and us. They are stories – chosen from amongst many – of Roma boys and girls from different housing contexts (some from a nomadic camp or a tolerated settlement, some from shanty towns, and so on) that have Milan as a backdrop. In certain cases, even the migration background differs (Romani whose parents were originally from the former Yugoslavia, stateless persons, those from Romania or even born and raised in Italy), a varying presence and participation in the life of the city, the family context and the heterogeneous group (some having experience with activism or volunteering). Some participated for different reasons in the STORY_S project, the activities of which were an opportunity to expand knowledge of their stories and to discuss the topics covered in this book.

Even though the text focuses on the Italian reality, and in particular on the Milanese context, the book is further enriched by a contribution written by colleagues from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona that offers insights from their specific context of intervention during the mentoring process within the STORY_S project. We felt it was essential to enrich the text with such reflections, not only to maintain the comparative approach that has animated the various phases of the project but also to give an enriched vision of the transition to adulthood in a social context in which the presence of Romani groups have a totally different story from that of Italy.

CHAPTER 1
YOUNG ROMA AND SCHOOLING IN ITALY
A Historiographical Journey

The objective of this chapter is to create a historiographic journey between the main studies that have focused on the relationship between Romani groups[1] and schooling. The discourse retraces what we have identified as three main streams, comprised of phases characterised by different approaches and only partially determined by temporal consequentiality. This pathway does not claim to be exhaustive compared to all the research carried out in Italy.

An initial historical reconstruction renders it possible to explain the origins and premises of the educational routes and determine how such origins have partly marked years on an extremely difficult and contrasted journey from the period post-World War II to the 1980s. There is then a paragraph dedicated to the main research, aimed gathering both the views of the Roma people and those of the school – teachers and institution – marking a crucial turning point in the research approach at a national level. This was in order to provide analyses that were as contextualised as possible, both geographically and with respect to the history of the relationships of specific groups with local educational institutions. Finally, reference is made to certain research projects that, although based on a strong ethnographic approach, went a step further by broadening the analysis of the issue of schooling from a systemic (within individual contexts), transnational and comparative perspective.

An additional and necessary premise is the issue often found in national and international research reports: the lack of reliable data and a reading of the phenomenon of schooling young Roma from partial and biased quantitative data.

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1 In the chapter, we will use the terms “Roma” and “Romani groups” as umbrella terms by which we mean the variety of such groups. The specific name of the individual group shall be indicated where it refers to specific research and is consistent with the term chosen by the author of the text in question.

Indeed, this can be read in *Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Italy* (2019), in matters of Education,

> Until the early 2000s, the Ministry of Education (MIUR) questionnaires sent to schools to register their presence reported the request to indicate the number of "nomad students". This is an essential element: […] the answers provided did not photograph the global situation of the community in Italy; only students living in nomad camps were counted and only students that individual teachers recognised as Roma, according to their own personal knowledge, were considered. (Bravi 2019: 48)

Such considerations raise several methodological issues. Namely, Roma living in camps represent only a small percentage of the total attendance of the various Romani groups in Italy. It is a fact that the level of schooling for those living in the camps, as differential living systems, is often very limited, just as it is easier to encounter in the outcome of early school leaving. Another aspect concerns – also within the reports from the Ministry of Education – the inclusion of Roma minors in the category of foreign students, despite them being Italian citizens amongst them. Finally, in order to avoid forms of discrimination within the school environment, by both non-Roma peers and by the teachers, it is necessary to consider that Roma minors do not often make their belonging explicit. Since 2017, the Ministry of Education reports on school attendance no longer include a section on Roma pupils given that the gathering of data under the label of "Roma" could have posed a privacy issue for those concerned (Bravi 2019:49). In addition to a distorted picture of the phenomenon, all of these aspects contribute to the almost outright absence of information regarding those who have completed a scholastic pathway that we could define as being of greater success, going as far as to attend high school or university. Amongst all examples, we refer to the data relating to the number of Roma students attending secondary schools in the city of Milan. According to the latest available statistics (MIUR 2016, data refer to the school year 2014/15), a significantly lower presence emerges than it was possible for us thanks to field research in direct contact with young Roma. It is clear that the knowledge accumulated through a qualitative project does not claim to compensate for the absence of statistical data; the impossibility of conducting such an analysis leads us, in any case, to consider of great importance the sharing of such stories that otherwise would not be revealed. We do this not to shed light on trajectories of success, which are frankly of little use in reflections about the challenges faced by young Roma in becoming adults, but with the intent of gaining a better understanding of

the possible variables, forces and dynamics that guide the paths of education and – more generally – of growth. We thus interpret the mandate of sociology to investigate and make known phenomena that are both marginal and indicative of an important process of social transformation taking place (Ottaviano and Santambrogio 2017; Ottaviano and Persico 2020).

1.1 *The origins: schooling Roma and Sinti students in Italy since the Second World War through to Lacio Drom classes*

It was 2009 when the stimulating historical analysis by Luca Bravi (2009) was published, retracing the main stages of education for Roma and Sinti in Italy, presenting a very specific aspect of the social history of these groups in Italy since the period post- World War II.

Through the analysis and reconstruction of the scientific premises and methodologies utilised by the now well-recognised *'gypsy pedagogy'*, theorised and applied by Mirella Karpati and Renza Sasso, Bravi brings to light important responsibilities, useful in this context for understanding the history of interactions between educational institutions and minority groups post-World War II. Such responsibilities have long had negative impacts on the processes of interaction between Romani groups and educational institutions in much of the national territory.

Bravi begins his analysis by addressing the consequences of the industrialisation process in relations between Roma and Gagè, composing two different theses, that defined as *deculturation* (Gomes 1998, Bravi and Sigona 2006) on the one hand and the theory of *negative acculturation* on the other. In the first case, reference is made to the fact that the reduction in traditional professional outlooks of Sinti groups leads to a progressive decrease in the exercise of itinerant work that, for some groups, marked the beginning of cultural degradation and the consequent loss of identity of the group itself. Such leanings are compacted by the socio-educational pitch with an attempt to "restore" the *original* traits of what was believed to be gypsy culture and *identity.* That is, a sort of *return to origins* that did not take into account that the condition of the groups being addressed has, by now, changed. On the other hand, in accordance with the theory of negative acculturation, Bravi points out that Sinti were considered completely devoid of a specific culture of belonging, having been lost due to a process of generalisation and attribution of stigmatising traits. It is as a result of such a conception that a socio-educational and pedagogical *fil rouge* was created that saw in the re-education (Bravi and Sigona 2006) of Roma and

Sinti minors a solution and a way for the supposed integration into majority society. This idea was certainly not new in the history of such minorities in Italy and throughout Europe (Piasere 2004; Bravi 2009). In regards to groups needing re-education, the response of educational institutions – as defined by the author – is that of resocialisation through an education aimed at specifically modifying the children's behavioural traits. The main form of re-education then became the specific "*Lacio Drom*" (lit. 'bon voyage') class, held since 1965 – the year in which a convention was established between the Ministry of Education, the Opera Nomadi (founded about two years prior) and the University of Padua, which had directed the Opera Nomadi to promote the schooling of Roma and Sinti children, entrusting Karpati with the task of training the appointed teachers.

Karpati and Sasso broadly applied quantitative tests (CAT, FAT, the projective Duess Test, Village test, and so on) to the Sinti minors, with many doubts being raised in regards to the application and results achieved by the two researchers, expressed on several occasions from various disciplinary perspectives (Bravi 2009, Vitale 2010). In addition to the methodological limitations determined, the results seemed to represent the imaginary that the two researchers had of the groups considered, rather than provide a meticulous description of the complex economic and social division in which the Sinti minor were living. As reported by Vitale:

> The pedagogical research developed through quantitative experimental methods and tests (with dubious scientificity and many serious methodological defects) was explicitly aimed at measuring the gap between the mental development of Gypsies and non-Gypsies. The family was presumed to be responsible for the alleged tragic cognitive and emotional condition of the children. […] In summary: frightened children within violent and inattentive families. Violent and inattentive by culture, as a cultural trait common to all Sinti, they were considered as being immature on the moral, intellectual, social, sexual and emotional level (2010: 38).

The conclusions to emerge from Karpati and Sasso's research nevertheless became guidelines for teachers engaged in differential classes and were widely disseminated, becoming part of the cultural baggage of many educators trained by the researchers, also through the activities of the Centro Studi Zingari (the Research Centre for Gypsy Studies) in Rome founded by Mirella Karpati. Consequently, the launch of the *Lacio Drom* classes, despite having the explicit objective of bringing literacy to Roma and Sinti minors, was in fact founded on the need to create an alternative to the families of origin, considered inadequate when it comes to raising their children,

who needed a training process that would fill an educational void (Bravi 2009, Vitale 2010). The classes, often characterised by neglect and grime and physically separate from the classrooms of *Gagè* children, together managed to strengthen the process of stigmatisation of children and women as "gypsies" – or, "*zingari*" in Italian – (Bontempelli 2015), negatively impacting the experience of schooling for many of them today as adults.

Up to this point, the valuable analysis presented is able to shine light on the limitations and responsibilities inherent in the means of approaching Sinti education, as well as the implicit content in the research briefly described. At the same time, it is useful to bear in mind that during the years in which the *Lacio Drom* classes were established, the entire scholastic world was faced with a differential orientation that excluded the theme of inclusion for those labelled as different. The path of differential education seemed, in fact, one able to ensure greater access to the right to/duty of education. That said, we believe that one of the major responsibilities of educational institutions towards children and towards girls and women and their families, is the prolonged blindness and ineptitude in respect of the long-term effects (Mantegazza and Persico 2012) of a system based on the erroneous and injurious premise, of which the teachers themselves were very often the bearers. As Vitale (2010) writes, the new wave of anthropological – first – and sociological – secondly – researches focused on the systems of kinship and caregiving within various Romani groups created the precondition for educational sciences to return and focus on the matter in a different manner, albeit with great delay. The slow extinguishing of situations in which the *Lacio Drom* classes still existed – being permanently discontinued only in 1986 – led to a formal standardisation of the processes for schooling Roma and Sinti, conducted in the classes in which separation persisted – albeit not the most physical and institutionalised – in the symbolic distance between other pupils, in the expectations and the imaginary of the teachers, and the scholastic world for the most part.

1.2 *Developments and breakdowns: the ethnographic approach*[2] *and the deconstruction of the target group of "nomadic pupils"*

It was 1984 when the European Parliament commissioned Jean-Pierre Liégeois to conduct the first survey on the schooling of Roma and Sinti children in Europe. About twenty years later – between 2000 and 2003, still within the framework of a European project – the transnational research of

2 Part of this paragraph, here updated and expanded, was published in Persico 2015.

The Education of the Gypsy Childhood in Europe was published, promoted within the context of the EU's 5th Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development (HPSE-CT-1999-00033), involving Spain, France and Italy, under the respective supervision of Ana Giménez Adelantado, Jean-Pierre Liégeois and Leonardo Piasere. In Italy, this survey was conducted by a team composed mostly of sociologists and anthropologists, who studied six groups within the country, shedding light on some interesting reflections relative to the processes of schooling that, to this day, represent an important contribution in regard to relations between Romani groups and school institutions. An extremely important element of innovation arising from the Piasere research group was the adoption of a study approach strongly influenced by ethnography, along with direct knowledge, persistent with the components of the individual groups, circumscribed at a territorial level. The intention was thus to achieve a better understanding of the emic perspective of Roma and Sinti basing on the establishment of relationships with the researchers.

According to Piasere, in fact, the strong attention gained from schooling Roma children within the educational interventions over time lead to the production of what he calls as the *target group* of the "gypsy" or "nomad" pupil with the effects of the generalisation of the imaginary of themselves and the exclusion of those subjects for whom the intent was integration. What predominantly emerges from the research is that

> […] the relationship between Roma and school, between Roma and schooling processes, can actually vary greatly on the basis of the local contexts, depending on the rapports that a community has historically established with the surrounding non-Gypsies, and determined by the internal dynamics that the school triggers. (Piasere 2004: 4)

Focus was on the Sinti Estraixaria (having been in the Trentino-Alto Adige area from the end of the 19th century), the Sinti community in Reggio Emilia present in Italy for several centuries, Roma in Turin (of Bosnian nationality and in the city throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s), Roma in Pisa (hailing from Kosovo and Macedonia), Roma in Melfi (present in Italy since approximately the 15th century) and the "Camminanti Siciliani" in Sicily, present especially in the winter period within the city of Noto. Without going into the details of the individual research projects that comprised the study, we shall try to reproduce some of the main aspects of use first of all in understanding how every single community was the bearer of a different epistemolgy of the school (Piasere 2002) and how the impact with scholastic institutions, the territory and housing policies have

– over time – impacted upon such epistemology. In the case of the Sinti in South Tyrol[3], for example, whilst the teachers considered the parents' regard for the school to be negative, the parents thought it was very important in view of the process of fostering and maturing their children's sense of belonging in the community. The school was thus not significant because it was professionalising but because it was necessary to experience – independently from the adults of reference – their own sense of being Sinti amongst the *Gagè*.

For the Roma in Pisa, the effect of relapse into illiteracy is visible, coming as the result of years lived within the nomadic camps. In their country of origin, these Roma had built a positive epistemology of the school, having seen the same change radically in its opposite, as a result of the effects produced by the nomad camp as a differential housing system, decided for many groups of Roma and Sinti in Italy by the public authorities. The phenomenon of relapse into illiteracy is, however, later recorded in other contexts such as the Milanese nomadic camps inhabited by people from the former Yugoslavia, for example.

A different story is that of the Roma in Melfi, gathered by Stefania Pontrandolfo and deserving of special attention. The research should have been conducted through ethnography within the Roma minors' schools of reference. In fact, a a deep and intensive research was completed through the school and parish archives, in order to understand the history of Roma children schooling. Recourse to historical documents was a necessary step since it their identification within schools was not simple, either due to the limited numbers or because of the absence of connotating external traits, recognisable surnames or issues pertaining to schooling, often arising in relation to these groups. The Melfi Roma were, apparently, invisible – not because they were hidden or excluded but because they had been completely absorbed into the network of local relations. So much so that the author comes to question a possible process of assimilation (Potrandolfo 2004). The extensive analysis of the archival data relating to the evolution of the schooling of minors revealed both the gaze of the educational institution over a whole century and the strategies implemented by Roma families towards the school, within which they were present for more than a hundred years. Amongst the results of the research, of note is the detection of the great increase in the level of schooling to have occurred in the 1960s, the years in which there was a cultural change within schools throughout the entire region. In fact, it begins to be perceived no longer as

3 For further study, we recommend the work of anthropologist Elisabeth Tauber.

a place controlled by the local elite but as a school of the peasantry, where the first teachers began to instruct the children of the lower class. Hence, considering that *there was a great cultural discontinuity between the world of the peasantry, which includes the world of the Roma, and that of the school, managed by agricultural ruling class* [*Ibid.*: 69], the Roma attitude of disaffection was a sign of the distrust not of the Gagè but in respect of the class of elitists of the time. In the years of economic boom, the birth of the middle class and the increasingly concrete possibility for many to continue their studies, lead to a rise in the level of education. The school thus played a central role in social mobility by involving the entire society of the peasantry of which the Roma people were also part. The lowering of the level of social tension between Roma and non-Roma, increasingly secondary to the class conflict between peasants and landowners, resonated in the attitude towards trust placed by Roma in the school.

Several interesting aspects arise from the research briefly presented. First, the local context – which over time and through dynamics that transcended the boundaries of relations between Roma and non-Roma – created the conditions for lowering social tensions, as the result of foresight in relation to diversity from school agencies that is not to be overlooked (with all the alterities present in the school, not only the Roma). Indeed, *compulsory public schooling in Melfi did not work so much on the diversity of pupils but on the ability of the school to offer valid, differentiated educational opportunities.* [*Ibid.*: 70].

Through the studies of Stefania Menchinelli, it seems that the experience of the Kalderash subgroup of Romani people within a rest area of the municipality of Rome was far from that of the Roma in Melfi.

> The school is experienced within the community as part of a long process of negotiation with the majority society and the municipal administrations aimed at granting sites where they can stay, documents and residence permits. In such cases, school attendance becomes the substantiating evidence of the commitment to the process of integration, of the dedication with which the community agrees to respect the rules of Gagè society. (Menchinelli 2004: 5)

Contributing to accentuating the families' willingness towards schooling is the possible displacement of the rest area in the vicinity of which a branch of the Roma Tre University should arise. What the researcher notes, in recording an improvement in school attendance by some children in the group, is that the support offered to them not only comes from their families but from the whole community that:

> each day, discussed and sanctioned individual choices, being an investment approved and supported by the community that upholds education as a strategic objective. This collective dimension of individual choices is still completely ignored by the educational institutions that continue, on the one hand, to consider the commitment and support of the pupil's family to be fundamental and, on the other, interpret such changes as a sign that the importance of the school itself is now accepted as part of the Roma culture (*Ibid.*).

What the author proposes is thus an acceptance of the assumptions under which the school *does not have value in and of itself* but in relation to the content conveyed, in order to start a mediation and mutual exchange based on dialogue between the school and families. Such a process of mediation is in this case (but very often, also in many other situations) supported – if not made possible – by entities of the voluntary sector, in agreement with the public administrations. Professional educators or social workers become a valuable link between the camp and the school when conducting projects that support study. For Kalderasha people, the extended family is at the heart of the social structure just as the entire residence group exerts a high social control over individual behaviours, as a result of which, the individual is under strong pressure to conform. The education that minors and youths receive within the group is considered central in the formative process of the members of the same, whilst family education of the minority group takes on a secondary role compared to that offered by the institution responsible for the realisation of the majoritive training project. Through the analysis of the attendance of Kalderasha minors, Menchinelli notes a slow decrease until the early years of Primary School (at the time of the survey, still referred to as Elementary School), which ends with increasing dropout rates. Amongst the causes of such disaffection, as well as the difference in value attributed by the group, not only to the school itself but also to the roles and responsibilities with respect to education of children and girls, would be the *inability of the school to integrate its educational offer with the expectations that the Roma community have of schooling*, for example through an alternative type of involvement of the entire group. In addition to what has already been stated, further signs of a positive evolution often seem to be triggered, in the case at hand, by the presence of certain female Gagè married to Roma men, who come to represent a guarantee regarding "tradition" on the one hand and the possibility of change on the other. Last but not least is the slow decline in the practice of itinerant professions due to being increasingly less profitable or more complex at a bureaucratic level, leading the new generations to give ever greater importance to the functional value of schooling.

A final contribution to the research pertaining to *The Education of the Gypsy Childhood in Europe* project is the work carried out in seven cities throughout the country, the aim of which being to collate the *opinion of teachers on the current state of teaching of Roma/Sinti pupils within the school facilities* (Sorani 2004: 73). The questionnaire was administered to teachers with Roma or Sinti minors and, amongst others, collected information regarding experience with Roma or Sinti pupils. An initial aspect of significance is the evaluation given to the influence of the presence of a Roma pupil in the class. 77.4% of teachers consider their influence negative (whilst only 9% consider it positive, compared to 13% who consider it non-influential). Of particular interest are the reasons for this opinion, linked to cultural characteristics of Roma and Sinti.

> According to the teachers, behaviours such as poor motivation to study, a lack of support from families towards school activities, the poor hygiene of pupils […] are typical elements of Roma and Sinti culture. (Sorani 2004: 79)

In essence, according to the author, there is a widespread belief that a not-well-defined Roma culture pushes its members to reject majoritarian rules, including those of the school. These reasons are therefore identified as central to the persistence of preconceptions within the class group, which presents mutual prejudices between Roma and non-Roma, contributing to a tumultuous working climate. This schism widens with the presence of more students belonging to the minority group. Amongst those who consider the presence to be positive are those who see the exchanges with diversity characterising contemporary society as an experience of cultural growth. Those who have chosen a position of neutrality (with neither negative nor positive influence) justify their stance by asserting that they have chosen to persist in forming relationships based on the recognition of classmates as individuals and not members of one group or another (*Ibid.*: 80). Another subject under investigation is the school-family relationship, where about 60% of teachers say they have established rapports with the parents throughout the school year. In most cases, meetings take place at school, given the infrequency of teachers visiting the camps. An interesting discrepancy arises between the data on the support provided by families in completing tasks, being very limited according to teachers, in the face of attendance and access to the world of education that is high and on the rise. According to the author:

> the high number of those ensuring the children's presence at school as opposed to the high number of those who do not support school activities of

> these same pupils at home, may in fact be a signal of the willingness to change on the part of the families of Roma/Sinti who – whilst unable to assist their children due to a lack of preparedness given the poor schooling of the people in the parental group – help their children and ensure their presence in the classroom. (*Ibid.*: 85)

One last aspect that we consider particularly useful in our reflections is the inconsistency emerging from the characteristics chosen by teachers to describe Roma and Sinti pupils in general, compared to those used in regards to the individual pupils they know in class. "*Restlessness*" and "*antisocial behaviour*" are, for example, terms used with some frequency to describe the basic reasons behind the difficulties of Roma children, whilst the same terms assume a value that is generally quite limited in descriptions of their own pupils, in the description of whom prevail terms such as *"open and willing", "open and lively", "braggart but courteous"*. One stereotype persists in line with the two descriptions – that of the non-sincere Roma (also in this case, sometimes referred to as a cultural trait).

> According to that expressed by the teachers, therefore, the presence of Roma/Sinti students in the classes is not an element that causes problems and gives rise to difficulties in and of itself, to the extent that they negate almost all the elements mentioned in the first part of the questionnaire when assessing the individual. The picture that is being etched thus shows how certain stereotypes persist even in individuals trained both academically and professionally but which are inexorably destined to fail when evaluating an individual. (*Ibid.*: 86)

This latest research highlights how much the relationship between teachers, pupils and Roma families still, in part, reflects the prejudices generating from erroneous premises determined by the social history of Roma and Sinti (addressed in the first paragraph). At the same time, new elements emerge, according to which the construction of positive relations and trust between teacher and pupil can lead to the deconstruction of such prejudices. Needless to say, this brief overview cannot be exhaustive of all the research and all publications produced early in this century but it does allow us to understand the need for a change of perspective in researching the Romani groups and their relationship with educational institutions, ushering in a season where the school and its ability to result in a welcoming place is challenged, being constitutionally destined to any and all, thus by demarcating Roma students and their families with biased and implicit accusations of inadequacy with respect to the school offering.

A somewhat different story emerges from the research conducted in Salento by Ciniero (2017) who, through the use of historical sources and biographical interviews with certain Roma women and youths in Salento, reconstructs the history of rapports between Roma and non-Roma, precisely from the interaction in the school world. The educational pathway, albeit it not without contradictions and difficulties, is characterised as an element that has contributed most to the processes of interaction and an ever-increasing social inclusion of the Roma (Ciniero 2017: 39). The accounts of a woman and her two daughters offers an intergenerational analysis of the transformations that took place both in the social context and within the Roma families, highlighting various phases in the relationship with the school. Indeed, it ranges from a period of strong distrust to an instrumental consideration of learning to read and write, aimed at insertion in the workplace, through to a third phase in which schooling is an element of value in itself, of revendication and social ascent, writes the author. Over time, the school thus seems to play a bridging role between Roma and non-Roma, in addition to having contributed to the increase of mixed marriages and the economic complementarity between Roma and non-Roma. In conclusion, it is useful to emphasise how for the families in Salento, in the process of exchange and interaction between Roma and non-Roma:

> the absence of public policies and interventions specifically aimed at Roma, particularly the absence of such policies in schools and housing, has helped to create the conditions facilitating processes of positive interaction with the territory. (Ciniero 2017: 37)

With regard to the Lombardy region, the only surveys published on the schooling of Roma minors, conducted in the academic field, are the texts *Bambini Zingari a Scuola* (Nigris and Ricci 1997) and *La Parola e il Segno* in 2002, by Angela Sacco.

Following a little less than a decade since the publications mentioned so far and in continuity with the exploration of the imaginary of teachers and of the educational institution more generally in relation to the Roma world, there are the works of the anthropologist Sarcinelli (2012, 2014). Thanks to precise field research and analysis of documents and operational tools (manuals, guides, and the like) produced in particular in the city of Milan and adopted in schools to support the processes of integrating Roma children in schools, the researcher manages to clearly outline the implicit meanings of expressions such as “Roma pupils” and “Roma parenting”. Although the experiences of many schools of the city were characterised by a long and profound experience of interaction with the Romani groups

present in its territory, with situations of dialogue and positive relationship between the school and Roma families, Sarcinelli's research shows how the documents were still bearers of a heritage of the past that could not be overcome. Amongst the many examples is the vademecum "*Accogliere i bambini e i giovani rom e sinti*" ("Welcoming Roma and Sinti children and youths") produced in 2010 by the Roma and Sinti network that presents the Roma student as a carrier of cognitive, affective and material deficiencies that impact their behaviour, in response to which practical advice addressed to teachers is given (Sarcinelli 2014).

As we have seen, this second season of research – if it can be defined as such – is able to highlight the need to broaden perspectives firstly by expanding the variables considered and by furthering both knowledge on the history of attendance of the individual groups throughout the territory of territory of settlement, and their perspective on the meaning attributed to experiences of schooling, along with the response of the educational institution considered in the practices of explicit and implicit thinking, categorisation and interaction with Roma pupils and their families.

In certain cases, the processes of schooling are seen to be broadening their perspective even further to look at the conditions in which certain groups live, especially as a result of research on the negative effects of living in differential forms of housing, being to this day nomadic camps.

1.3 *Towards a systemic, comparative and transnational approach*

The 2012 approval of the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti[4] (RSC) marks an important break with the past in terms of institutional framework and operational proposals of the presence of such groups. The Strategy is issued after years of the disputed State of Emergency, in force until 2011 and declared illegitimate by the State Council of 16th November 2011 (as confirmed by the Court of Cassation on 22nd April 2013). This period, specifically in the 2013-2014 school year, marked the beginning of the experimental Project for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (RSC) Children, promoted by the Ministry of Labour, enacted in collaboration with the Ministry of education, University and Research.[5]

4 The text was publisched by UNAR, the National Office Against Racism: http://www.unar.it/cosa-facciamo/strategie-nazionali/strategia-rsc/.

5 Throughout the new 2017-2020 three-year period, some 5,580 students, 600 Roma and Sinti minors and 81 schools were involved.

It is the design system of this extremely complex project, still in progress in 15 cities around Italy, that is of interest to us. In its initial phase of implementation (2013-2017), whilst bearing aspects that continued from the past, the Project actually proposed some deviations (Persico and Sarcinelli 2017), being necessary and pioneering compared to the panorama of the national measures in the field of schooling Roma and Sinti children. This imitated firstly an operation aimed not only at Roma, Sinti or Caminanti minors but at class groups as a whole, considered as beneficiaries of the operations as part of the project itself. Such openness was concretised also in the experimentation of teaching methodologies based on cooperative learning and the didactics of doing, as well as in motor and expressive laboratories. The intervention within schools was also carried out on a further level – that of the training and assisting teachers and school staff. Secondly, the professionals operate between two poles: the school and the family considered in the housing context, intervening in support of all the players present therein thanks to a multidisciplinary team.

As a result of the first years of implementing the experimental project in primary and secondary schools only, the second phase of implementation (2017-2020) saw an expansion to preschool (3-5 years) and to upper secondary school. In addition to the two areas of intervention already considered in the first three-year period, there is also a third, namely the network of local social services. The gradual expansion of the areas of intervention – the school and housing context first of all, followed by the network of territorial social services – guaranteed a systemic reflection that is, in our opinion, central to an exhaustive analysis of the processes of schooling Roma children. In addition, the continuity with which the project has been developed over time and the accumulation of experience and data from year to year, is producing a body of comprehensive and complex information, useful in contributing to an articulated reflection on the topic on a national scale.

A second strand of publications to be cited refers to an enduring study in the field relative to that experienced in Milan by displaced Romanian Roma families, present in the city since 2007 (Persico 2010; Vitale 2011). We refer specifically to the detailed analysis of Pasta (2019) regarding the history of the Via Rubattino settlement. In Milan, an ever-growing group of Roma minors began their schooling despite the incessant policy of evictions implemented by the Municipal Administration. The children live with their families, all of Romanian origin, in urban slums vacated initially every three to four months and then with increasing frequency. The access these minors have to primary education and the slow intervention

of operators and volunteers from the Sant'Egidio community, aimed at a greater mutual knowledge amongst Roma families, the school and the classmates' parents, led to the establishment of significant rapports between those involved (Giunipero and Robbiati 2011). Such relationships soon surpassed the simple tolerance of diversity. On the occasion of yet another eviction decreed by the Municipal Administration of the Moratti council, something completely unexpected happened. On the day of expulsion, set for November 2009, many people – including classmates' parents, the local citizens in the neighbourhood who had got to know the inhabitants of the shantytown, the teachers, workers and volunteers – all showed up to express their opposition to the families' removal. The eviction would have rendered it impossible for some 36 students living in the camp to continue their regular schooling.

Faced with the inexorability of the decision and the intervention of the law enforcement agencies that demolished the families' homes, many people took on various tasks to aid the families to whom they felt closest. Some hosted the students overnight for a period of time, others launched initiatives to support fundraising aimed at activating work bursaries or to support low rents, whilst others began to cover part of the food expenditure for some families. From the first day of school between 2008 and 2009, and the year in which Pasta's analysis was published exactly ten years later, thanks to the continuous commitment of the movement *Mamme e Maestre di Rubattino* (being, Mothers and Teachers of Rubattino) and the community of Sant'Egidio, most families came to live in housing solutions that would be called normal, the adults have jobs and many of the children have grown up to frequent secondary schools, high schools or vocational training courses. Pasta clearly describes how the school – with its directors, teachers, and Roma and non-Roma parents – was not only an occasion for educating Roma children but also the engine of an extremely complex and enduring process that, with the support of the voluntary sector, managed to create synergies in the short- and long-term that produced effects for the Roma families and also the townsfolk and local policies. The school has therefore not only raised the issue in establishing itself as a democratic educational agency for all but went even further by challenging the institutions and itself, as an institution endowed with power and useful tools – citing Freire – making sure:

> […] to promote problematic dialogical actions, aimed at increasing the mobilisation of synergies towards the growth and change of the community/society. […] This occurred by re-inventing a social connection given by the intermediate relational entities and assets, in micro locations like a "community

> of sense" where it is possible to give voice to the different forms of need and to new significant questions, where it is possible to experiment with forms of work and actions for solidarity, other lifestyles from which to start to have an impact on the world of complexity. (Aa.Vv. 2003: 45-46)

What is, in our view, interesting in the experience of Via Rubattino and in the events that followed throughout the next decade, is the fact that the theme of education in itself was one of the elements that managed to compose a framework that was far more extensive and complex, consisting not only in the housing conditions of the families but also employment and economic precariousness, in which many of these people had been for an extensive period, as well as the local policies for handling the Roma presence. An analysis that only took into consideration the interaction between Roma and the school could not have given an account of the complexity of the processes adopted and the results achieved in terms of normalising the socio-housing conditions of the Roma in Rubattino. Still, being able to take into account a period of ten years has allowed the stories of individual families and the evolution of the policies in the city to be followed in parallel (Daniele, Pasta and Persico 2018), not only in terms of schooling, offering a complex depth of analysis of the trajectories given the context, or rather contexts – the Italian and transnational, in Romania and in Europe – in which it took place.

The most recent research (Persico 2015, 2018) to which we refer in this paragraph meanders between three different countries: Italy within a nomadic camp of Sinti families residing in Lombardy, Romania in a mahalla in a rural village in the region of Vaslui, and Brazil in a part of a town in the state of Goias. Roma, Sinti and Calòn having full citizenship status in their countries of residence. An initial analysis of the historical sources relative to the presence of the three groups in the local context provides a framework that facilitates understanding the contemporary situation, in addition to highlighting how interactions between Roma and non-Roma are to be determined by the historical, political, social and economic conditions not necessarily based on discrimination or conflict (Matras, Leggio and Steel 2015).

The research combines three extremely different case studies, identified with methodological rigor so as to be a source of reflection. This methodological approach is the first innovative component, deviating from the research experiences so far presented.

With respect to the numerous and epistemologically differentiated ways of applying comparison, the work proceeds through the combination of

case studies by monographically examining a specific reality, seeking to bring out interpretative categories of broader interest. The case study itself is a method that in no way aims to produce data in comparable form. Yet the combination of several case studies dedicated to the same problem can have illuminating effects when reading the issues in question (Dei 2009). The analyses conducted in the three countries have thus been intertwined in order to generate themes, with the objective of stimulating reflections that, due to their contiguity or difference, favoured a more detailed investigation of the topics covered. This fosters a dialogue between interpretative categories, so as to construct meanings applicable to other contexts than that narrated (Marzano 2006: 29). If the combination of case studies is not new in and of itself in the panorama of social research methodologies, it becomes so in the context of Italian studies on Romani where the comparison, as we have just outlined, opens up to the international level.

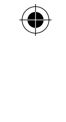
The ethnographic work, having a minimum duration of five months in each of the three countries, presents the different points of view by framing the issue of coexistence as a constitutive aspect of a plural society, within which each of the actors is co-starring in a process of becoming. And herein lies the second innovative element. Schooling is themed as one of the many aspects that comprise the complex network of rapports between Romani groups, institutions and majority society more generally. The research reconstructs the network of relations between the individual groups and each of the institutions present throughout the territory – the school in first place, followed by the network of Social Services, Public Administrations and law enforcement. The work focuses on different yet interconnected levels of analysis, with the first concerning the social processes through which interlocutors are selected and accredited whilst the forms of interlocution between Romani groups and institutions is defined, for example, by reconstructing the various forms of representation or leadership within Romani groups. This is in order to establish the persons of reference within the group and their credibility and effectiveness – if any – in intervening in the mediation of conflicts, be they at school or regarding public order. In the Brazilian case, for example, the effectiveness of a local leader was determined, approached both by schools and by law enforcement. This was not so Romania, where schools had identified a representative who was not recognised as such by the Roma. In Italy, rather, a long process of negotiation to identify certain representatives requested by the institutions resulted in such persons being democratically chosen from within the group and then never called upon by the institutions themselves, which also had repercussions on the inner relations of the group. Directly related

to this initial level, it is useful to consider the knowledge – or lack thereof – regarding certain traditions considered as such by the individual group or the institutions erroneously attributing cultural traits to the groups. The issue of leadership is one example. The second level concerns the criteria according to which the interaction establishes the priorities on which to intervene. One example amongst those within the theme of schooling is the long-standing question of the effectiveness of learning processes and the extent of the minors' attendance/absences, even in the case of the young children of those in travelling entertainment. Research shows that for a long time in the Italian case, attendance was the only criterion for assessing the educational status of minors. This was, however, without the school adopting the measures legally established for cases of prolonged absenteeism. In Brazil, rather, the schools set out on a long process of mediation with the local leader first and then with the families, in order to understand the reasons behind the absences. Once having understood that the cause was the parents' seasonal work not coinciding with the beginning and end of the school year, one of the schools considered implementing a compensatory strategy that promotes learning pathways even at a distance. The second school, rather, on the basis of the erroneous Italian case, continued to adopt the sole criterion of counting attendance without looking at other benchmarks. The research shows how setting priorities and identifying such a problem can generate highly-effective creative abilities even in traditionally more rigid institutions, like law enforcement. One example is the relational capacity and in-depth knowledge of the local context in the field of dispute resolution, as demonstrated by Romanian community policing in the management of a conflict between two Roma families. If it had been governed in other way, the conflict that could have increased tensions in the relations between Roma and non-Roma.

A third level concerns the reciprocal knowledge that the institutions have of their own interventions and policies. It is not uncommon to register inconsistent behaviours when tensions are not high, with the result that if a player of the process loses credibility, the entire system is affected, and vice versa. In Romania, for example, the redevelopment of an extremely degraded housing area by the public administration has resulted in an increase in school attendance. In Italy, the safety policies adopted by the public administration towards the nomadic camp where the group involved in the research project resided, caused a significant calming in rapports also with the schools, being relatively positive so far.

Having reached the end of this excursus, in the next chapter we will consider the concept of adolescence and shall investigate the significance

of this particular phase of life within the Roma universe, within the complex framework of rapports with the non-Roma society or in relations with the institutions and policies, with the subjects of informal local societies and – more generally – with the dual stigma that being Roma and young bears.



CHAPTER 2
A ROMANI COMING OF AGE?[1]

2.1 *From reflections on schooling to the conceptualisation of adolescence*

In this chapter, we will focus on the category of adolescence with the aim of debating if and how it is applicable within the Roma universe.

What we propose is a kind of "longer journey" (Kluckhohn 1949), to take up the well-known formulation of the anthropologist, seeing a return to discussing adolescence in Romani groups after having questioned this concept and verified the possibility of its application to the Roma universe.

The need for this longer journey depends on the fact that the literature addressing the theme of Roma adolescence does so from other research interests and questions. We have seen the extensive and established publications in Italy on the theme of school integration but the works are mainly concentrated on the reasons for success and failure at school, without discussing the significance of this stage of life and often without even acknowledging the other meanings entrenched in the schooling experience. Another series of readings and reasonings on adolescence comes from the world of NGOs and concerns the central themes of their agendas. The most recent works look at the issue of Roma youth participation in politics. This issue is being increasingly debated given that, following European debates, there has been an upsurge in ethnic mobilisation of Romani groups in recent years also in Italy, with an increasing number of associations and groups working to have Roma and especially young people "take the floor". In recent years, literature had focused on the connection between Roma youths and criminal activities, a topic that was at the centre of political debate especially throughout the long-lasting "nomadic emergency" years. Despite the numerous stereotypes and prejudices that "naturally" associate

1 Part of this chapter is an updated and revisited version of a previous publication (Daniele 2013).

Roma people with criminal activities, some of the works addressing this theme, those based on significant research on the ground, provide important reflections such as on relationships with the family and the social group, as well as on comparisons with non-Roma peers. This range of readings only indirectly provides data and interpretations on the existence and characteristics of adolescence in the Roma universe. In reality, the category itself is rarely discussed and no form of connection and comparison with "our" conceptions of adolescence is experienced.

We thus propose discussing this category and verifying its applicability to the Roma universe in order to avoid the dual risk of naturalisation that concerns both adolescence and being Roma.

2.2 *Reflections around the concept of adolescence*

The concepts of youth and adolescence, along with all the other categories with which we consider the different stages in life, have been subject to the reflections of social sciences for decades, at least since Karl Mannheim's work published in 1928. It is evident that the transformation of bodies over time is one of the main factors that produces differences within human groups. And yet this physical fact is processed in radically different ways in different societies and in different historical contexts.

Socio-anthropological research has actually demonstrated the existence of varying ways of thinking and defining the phases of life and, more generally, the passage of time (Kertzer and Keith 1984). Western societies use that which, starting with the pioneering works of Eisenstadt (1956) and Fortes (1984), has been defined as the "chronometric time" (Giddens 1991), based on the idea of uniformity of time, that can be mechanically measured referring to a formal calendar of which the state is the authority and which is able to accurately determine the age of individuals. However, we know that this model of defining time and age is very recent given that, in many other historical and social contexts, the passage of time and the transformation of bodies has been controlled through the definition of classes of age or according to the criterion of individuals' physical and social maturation (Fortes 1984).

Such divergent ways of thinking about time and age are closely linked to the manners in which each society assigns roles (Linton 1940, 1942, Parsons 1949). Many researches, for example, highlight the connection between the conceptions of time based on maturation and those ascribing societies in wich the roles and social positions are defined

by the genealogical position and family relationships. Rites of passage are the most obvious and well-known signs of such societies in which social roles are defined on the basis of the placement in specific classes of age. The model of Western societies is defined by those economic, technological and social transformations that are typical of the so-called "modern" society. In this context, age does not function as the main and only criterion that produces and orders social differences – there are no rigid boundaries creating and separating age groups nor formal transitions from one to the other. In our societies, we speak rather of stages of life, being socially-defined and recognised periods in which individuals are faced with a series of expectations, responsibilities and exclusive and characterising experiences.

Despite the fact that the transformation of bodies may appear as a physical process, social sciences have shown that the articulation of stages in life and the meaning attributed to each is a distinctive feature of every society and every point in history.

From studies on adolescence over time, we can identify three main interpretative hypotheses on the matter.

An initial hypothesis was formulated by anthropologists Schlegel and Barry within the paradigm of sociobiological studies and defines adolescence as the phase of life in which the reproductive abilities of individuals develop but individuals do not yet have a defined social role (Schlegel and Barry 1991, Schlegel 1995). From this perspective, adolescence is the period of life marked by physical maturation and complementary social immaturity, an attitude that thus produces the need of societies to establish pathways of education and forms of control. Criticism of this definition of adolescence has concerned the main assumptions of the sociobiological hypothesis (Shalins 1976), and the comparative data collection model. In particular, scholars of adolescence have criticised the idea of using biological data and particularly the acquisition of reproductive capacity as the distinctive feature of this phase of life to identify the main reference for explaining its meaning and content. Such biological reductionism has been criticised for in fact zeroing out the human and social weight of the passage of the ages. In Bourdieu's words, "Age is a biological datum, socially manipulated and manipulable" (1984: 145).

In contrast to the sociobiological hypothesis comes the idea that adolescence is a "Western invention", given that traces of this phase of life can only be found as of the historical moment in which industrial society took shape and generalised.

In this hypothesis, the meaning of adolescence is essentially unrelated to biological transformation, concerning rather the differences between societies and historical moments. The works of French historian Philippe Ariès are some of the most well-known and successful in this outlook thanks to his capacity for documenting the changing representations and imaginaries on childhood and parenting over time. In particular, Aries demonstrates the absence of an intermediate social figure falling between a child and adult for the entire European middle ages.

Several researchers (Gillis 1974, see also Saraceno 2001 and D'Eramo 2001 in the Italian debate) assert the same hypothesis by noting how some of the characteristic elements of industrial society are closely connected to the emergence of a series of specific and exclusive social roles and contexts, forms of socialisation and institutions. According to this hypothesis, adolescence as a phase of life defined by exclusive and characteristic experiences expands first of all from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie and then democratises and conquers ever larger shares of the population. Once generalised, it becomes the object of specific attention and knowledge, such as that pertaining to the educational and psychological (Demos and Demos 1969, Galland 1991). Experience within educative institutions is the central element that renders the transformation of adolescence evident in industrial societies. The school gives form to the idea that a fundamental segment of education, one that serves to be able to access the industrial society's labour market, is no longer available for imitation within the space of family life but need different places and times along with educational figures independent of kinship. Moreover, it is this education and not the position in and of the family, that is the main resource in defining an individual's social position. In addition to this, two other elements should be highlighted that accompany and make it possible to better understand the scope of the institution and the generalisation of the school experience. In first place is the enactment of laws that establish a minimum age for accessing work, thus implicitly imposing an educative period that will be external to the family. Following is the genesis and spread of forms and places of sociality that are exclusive and typical of this age group.

The hypothesis of the "Western and modern invention" of adolescence is fascinating because, in a manner that is opposite yet complementary to the sociobiological premise, it seems to solve the problem of the origins and function of this phase of life, describing it as an exclusive attribute of a particular social and historical organisation.

Nonetheless, it is precisely the reinterpretation of historical materials, together with the comparison with the variety of socio-cultural structures that has led scholars such as Gillis (1974) to criticise the idea of invention, as a radical change in the conception of the stages of life between the 'before and after' of industrial societies. According to these researchers, some of the features that had been assumed to be exclusive of adolescence in modern societies can be also found in other periods throughout the history of the West. The author focuses in particular on the forms of apprenticeship outside of the family that were present throughout all of medieval society. At the same time, ethnographic research shows how the stages of life in which learning takes place outside the family unit and experiences of "semi-dependence" are also established in other societies.

It is in this context, in aiming to overcome the idea of Western exclusivity of adolescence, that the hypothesis of reading this phase of life in terms of the "transition to adulthood" takes shape. The concept of transition serves to contain – without imposing a predetermined definition – the range of experiences that, in each society and in each historical moment, are used to prepare individuals for their adult roles. Here, the existence of a period of transition is the generalised assumption without predetermining the content of such transition. The theory of identifying the period of adolescence as transitional was formulated in a ground-breaking essay by Modell, Furstenberg and Hershberg of (1976). In its most recent formulations, the concept has been partly simplified, specifying two main areas in which the transition to adulthood takes place – the first concerning educative and work activities, the second the exit from the parents' family unit and the creation of an autonomous family unit. At the same time, several scholars have emphasised the risk that this concept bears, in its linear and mechanical version of the transition to adulthood (Piemontese, Bereményi and Carrasco 2018). To this end, many empirical researches have demonstrated the modulations that the process of transition to adulthood has adopted in contemporary society, triggering the reshaping of the concept in a more complex way[2].

The main data leading to a recalibration of the concept of transition is tied to the progressive lengthening of this phase of life. Statistical research shows that the achievement of economic autonomy and the establishment of an independent household are goalposts reached increasingly later in

2 For the Ialian context see data and reflections published since 1983 by IARD, a research company that from 1983 to 2004 produced, on a periodic basis, six editions of the "Youth Report", the only national longitudinal research on adolescence; see https://www.istitutoiard.org/

life. The phase of transition is thus defined through new categories that seek to grasp the gradualness of the changes (the budding adult then the young adult) but above all, it is replete with a range of phenomena that render the process of acquiring adult status quite complex, to the point of being almost disjointed.

One phenomenon to report is the desynchronisation of the transitions, being the possibility for adolescents to experiment with being adults in certain areas of life whilst their condition remains unchanged in others. Compared to the Italian landscape, it is easy to refer to the extended period that people live with their parents, even after having finished their studies and entered the labour market. Then there is the reverse scenario, that of young people who form a family and manage to live independently only thanks to the financial support of their parents. These are family structures that hark back to changes in the labour market and, in particular, to the fragmentation and breakdown of professional careers and the link with education. In this direction, attaining autonomy is thus not an outcome mechanically connected to reaching a certain age, since – as other empirical works point out – the transitions may be reversible. That is, the levels of autonomy and independence acquired in certain areas can be lost even without significantly influencing that which occurs in other fields. Also in this case, reference can be made to all experiences that prolong adolescence without actually bringing it to an end, such as temporary residence outside the parents' home or the initial experiences with work.

The desynchronisation of transitions and their reversibility therefore call into question the idea of a linear transition to adulthood, accomplished through resources and stages that are substantially homogeneous. The decomposition of this image is closely connected to the reorganisation in the post-industrial sense of our societies, a transformation that has actually decomposed and reorganised career training in the direction of lifelong-learning, with a professional focus, and the very system of social policies, putting an end to the cradle-to-the-grave welfare system.

In this scenario, the concept of transition thus comes to mean not so much a homogeneous set of experiences that characterises adolescence as much as one that serves to determine a time capsule containing a range of experiences that are not interpretable according to an organic project of achieving adult status. We know that the period of adolescence is generally regarded as a time of distinct – even conflicting – experiences with respect to the adult world, yet recent studies show that the paths to reaching adulthood have become fragmented and are not predictable, so much so

that certain authors propose replacing the concept of "transition" with that of the "navigation" towards adulthood. The decomposition of pathways for accessing adult roles and positions brings with it two significant elements. Deprived of recognisable stages and structures, the path to adulthood becomes an unpaved road mainly traversed by the individual, flanked by the range of resources and opportunities to which they access and utilise. Faced with a future that becomes a fundamentally individual undertaking, adolescence seems to take the form of an eternal present, the only time in which – given the absence of clear perspective – the individual can ponder their own direction in life.

2.3 *A pre-modern society without adolescence*

Now that we have an idea of what adolescence can be, we shall seek to experiment with its applicability within the Roma universe. Below is a proposed itinerary mapped out by the different texts wrote by Italian authors that, both directly and indirectly and from very different perspectives, have addressed this topic with the aim of understanding whether or not there is a phase of life comprised of a range of experiences, possibilities and expectations in transitioning to adulthood.

An initial and radical response comes from the authors who affirm the impossibility of identifying adolescence within the Roma world.

Amongst those who propose this position, reference is particularly made to two Italian Roma artists and intellectuals whose works are expressly dedicated to presenting the culture and social organisation of Roma groups to the Italian public. Both of them do not devote a specific part at adolescence and youth amongst Romani groups.

Looking at the scan of phases in life presented by Morelli (2006) we can see that the author makes no mention of any ritual practice nor much less, any specific concept related to adolescence and youth. The key moments in the life of a Roma person, those on which the culture would have developed symbolic codes and ritual practices associated therewith, pass directly from their baptism as a sign of entry into Roma society, to marriage – without any transition in between.

In Spinelli's work[3], the theme of phases of life is addressed in the section on the social organisation of Romani groups (2003: 101-127). The starting

3 Spinelli has published several books in recent years without significant variations in content and structure; we use here the text published in 2003.

point is the absence of structures that formally – or at least recognisably – establish the differences in status between Roma and the complementary centrality of the extended family, or all relatives paternally bound to the individual. The space of the extended family constitutes the main framework for relationships, within which differences and hierarchies are established only on the basis of sex, with a clear prevalence of the male figures and, at the proper age, favouring the role and authority of elders (2003: 105-107). In this depiction of the social organisation of the Roma people, corresponding with the conceptions of age based on maturation, adolescence or youth does not appear as a recognised social unit. Yet, imagine stepping directly and immediately from the status of child to that of an adult, going from a socially-neutral level to a condition in which the individual becomes responsible and the protagonist of their own actions before the entire group.

According to both Spinelli and Morelli, reaching adulthood and acquiring a new status – both for young men and young women – is achieved only with marriage and following the birth of their first child. Both affirm that the passage to marriage occurs with the strong involvement of the nuclear family, playing a fundamental role from the phase of choosing a spouse through to the entire ceremonial sequence that precedes and follows the union of the two newlyweds. According to the authors, marriage is celebrated at a relatively early age, in the midst of what – per the articulations that apply to Western societies – should be the teenage phase. The theme of precocity for being wed, particularly relevant and delicate for the purposes that Morelli and Spinelli have set themselves, is explained in negative terms, linking it to the particular role that the young Roma play in maintaining the honour of the entire family group (cf. Spinelli 2003: 113-117, Morelli 2006: 69-73). In these passages, both authors re-present – without any critical reference – the cliché of patriarchal societies in which the male component of family groups presides over a wide range of taboos and prohibitions that limit the possibilities of contact for young Roma. Virginity thus performs the symbolic function as the measure and vehicle of the family's honour and goes along with the definition of the "price of the bride" (Goody and Tambiah 1973).

It is useful to note that the only phase of mediation between childhood and adulthood recognised and described by Spinelli concerns the period of education in terms of how it is managed within Roma societies. According to the author, the Roma version of education and training occur within the daily life of the family group, without any space or time devoted to

education but through constant closeness, direct observation and repetition of adult behaviours.

> Hence, the upbringing of children is collective and ensured by each member of the parental group. There is no separation between the world of children and the world of adults, given that they are always in physical and psychological contact, protecting each other from the outside world. Children help parents from an early age […]. To empower their children and render them autonomous, parents involve them in the decisions and choices that an adult must face in fulfilling their responsibilities. With this daily exercise, children undertake an apprenticeship in the various family activities and a rewarding honing of skills in observation, adaptation and initiative. (2003: 118)

The absence – on a symbolic level and in social practices – of a specific phase of life interposed between childhood and adulthood must be connected to the overall image that both authors build of Roma society. On this level, the hypothesis of Morelli and Spinelli is extremely clear, concretising the objective of presenting the uniqueness of Roma culture. In referring to the mode of conceiving space and time along with forms of social organisation, Spinelli defines such as "pre-industrial" and "pre-capitalist", whilst Morelli makes reference to Roma spiritual and moral specificity, a particular attitude which he defines as "the intimacy of the East", radically opposed to the rationality and materialism of the West.

Both are based on the specific differences and characteristics of the Roma people, focusing on two elements. First comes the reference to the dimensions of the origins, being the narrative regarding Indian roots, a historical and cultural scenario that would have forged the main characteristics of the culture, starting with the language.

The other distinctive feature with which the authors build an irreducible specificity of Roma culture is nomadism, interpreted as a voluntarily-practiced strategy that has maintained the explicit autonomy and difference.

In Morelli's view, nomadism has been the main instrument of distancing from Western societies and maintaining autonomy. In this way, the relationship with European society that has characterised the history of the Roma people since at least the 14th century (Vaux de Foletier 1970) would be managed by the "gypsy minority" through the practices and compromises to have favoured survival not only in the economic sense but also from a cultural perspective. This is what the author calls:

> a duality of "rescuing", it can be said, chiefly of the Gypsy people, where survival of the species is guaranteed by a kind of mask as a vehicle of interactions with the environment, preserving their own cultural riches (*Ibid.*: 40).

The theme of dualism also appears in Spinelli's work, always directed in terms of a strategy of survival and preservation:

> their world is thus hidden from the host populations. Each member of the Romani population has developed a dual personality – one "external" to be presented to the Gagè, that is often pietistic, remissive and victimistic, the other "internal to the group", based on pride, irreproachability and honour. The two personalities are diametrically opposed and incompatible, kept well separated in the two environments in which they are presented (2006: 66).

In this way, maintaining the stance of the witness who, from within the cultural universe, reveals otherwise inaccessible characteristics, the two authors reduce the centuries-old experience of relationships and interactions with European societies into a unified dynamic, one of cultural resistance and the survival of Roma uniqueness and identity. Hence, according to Spinelli:

> The historical, economic and social events have conditioned the Romani diaspora so much that the various Romani communities as they have gradually become to be are, today, bearers of different cultural traditions that are similar yet diverse at the same time. However, there are basic cultural concepts that are common to all Romanès groups and subgroups, representing a constant in the prismatic Roma universe. For this reason, they can be considered the essence and authentic expression of Romanipè, the Romani identity and culture. (2006: 140-141)

The idea of an exclusively-Roma cultural identity, being based on the specificity of origins and symbolic separation, the essential features of which refer to pre-industrial societies, returns as the basis of an experimental psychological study dedicated to the conceptions of the body between Roma children and youths. According to Italian psychologists Gainotti, Faconti and Maracchioni, "In this culture, there is no specific role of adolescents inspired by the search for one's own model of life and the rejection of adult society" (2004: 24). The researchers also point out the absence of certain mechanisms that distinguish the condition of youth in Western societies, namely the process of building a singular identity that, as already pointed out in the first studies on age (Eisenstadt 1956, Mannheim 1928) also passes through the differentiation and contraposition with previous generations. Also in terms of educational modalities, these scholars confirm the framework proposed by Roma authors:

> Roma children are free to mingle amongst the older Roma people without fear of hearing things not suitable for their ears and can go to sleep at whatever time they want […] Roma children are never punished […] as this goes against their educational principles […]. The salient features of Roma children's education seem to involve: the centrality of the children; a prolonged and intense contact in a one-to-one ratio between the educator (parent, older sibling) and the child (offspring, younger siblings); the rejection of coercive measures and punishment as educational methods; understanding the roles and behaviours through effective participation in the social life of the group; control of behaviour through unified judgement. (Gainotti, Faconti, Maracchioni 2004: 17-18)

This picture of adolescence and educational methods is part of a conception of the Roma society that the authors present at the beginning of their work and use as an overall framework for their research:

> The Gypsy people – although permanently residing in Italy – still live surrounded by deep mystery, rendered increasingly arcane not only by the difficulties that ziganologists have encountered in establishing their origins but also by the fact that throughout history, they have been given different names. (*Ibid*.: 7)

The main themes mentioned in the works of Spinelli and Morelli return once more, being reference to the place of origin as the founding place of difference, without any reference to the broad scientific literature that has addressed this theme.

The same connection between the absence of a social status for adolescents and the cultural identity founded on the dimensions of origins can be found in the text published by Luca Cefisi (2011) that addresses a theme of relevance in Italy, to which we shall return further on, being the connection between Roma youths and criminal activity. Reported in this text are the words of a series of scholars and expert operators who confirm the overview outlined by Morelli and Spinelli. First and foremost, Cefisi affirms the absence of a teenage status within the social organisation of the Roma and the centrality of the family space:

> But how do children live in the traditional Roma family, the family that is their only protection? […] the children, in a community in which growth is traditionally precocious and there is no adolescence because the urge to marry young is very strong, become little soldiers in family cohesion, assigned tasks, responsibilities and duties very early on. (*Ibid*.: 43)

This representation of adolescence and the role attributed to minors within Roma societies is part of a brief description of their cultural identity. Through the experiences of a limited group of operators[4] and researchers, the author composes the image of Roma as a people "outside of history", with pre-modern characteristics, a people distinguished by elements such as orality, endogamy and by a particular relationship with time and space that recalls the pre-industrial society (Cefisi 2011: 30-31). Such traits are then pushed back, in the case of the Indian origins of the Roma peoples, from which the people "outside of history" derive their specific historical and cultural significance.

All of the analyses taken into consideration thus far concur in stating that the category of adolescence does not appear in any way within what have been described as Roma conceptualisations of age. Yet the Roma authors and Italian scholars do agree in recognising only three social statuses constructed on the basis of age: that of the child, *caorò* in the Romani language, the adult – *Roma* – and the elderly, *purhò.* The first is characterised by a sort of social neutrality – all of the literature taken into consideration gives us the image of the child understood as a wealth and gift for the family and for the entire community of reference. The child is, on the one hand, the object of care and attention from all members of the group and, on the other, not involved in any dynamics of conflict that may develop within the group. The elderly, and in particular the men, are mainly attributed with the characteristics of wisdom and authority. Older men are thought to be the chief custodians of and experts in Roma tradition, an expertise that gives credibility and authority in the major decisions that affect the entire family unit and for resolving any disputes within the group.

In its extended version, the family is the main extent of rapports. Although it does not represent a stable and formally-recognised grouping, it does define the scenario within which the individual path unfolds, a way that somewhat directly involves all relatives and their respective families, bound paternally.

What's more, all of the authors we have analysed herein agree in the description of the main model of education in force within the Roma groups – a model that corresponds with the concept of "continuity conditioning" proposed by Ruth Benedict (1938). That is, the Roma child

4 This concerns the association Opera Nomadi and, in particular, Massimo Converso and Annaluisa Luongo, both very active even in the early 1980s. In regards to the central role that this association has played in many local contexts in constructing a system of interaction between Roma and local institutions, see Daniele 2011: 116-120.

would be socialised to their adult role through participation in all aspects of group life whilst learning would take place exclusively through direct experience and imitation of the adults' behaviour. Locations or times in life that are expressly constructed for teaching and thus dedicated and attended exclusively by young people have not been identified.

The passage from the status of child to that of an adult comes at a relatively early age and is sanctioned only by marriage, hence by the formation of a new family unit. Such a transition, definitively marked by the birth of the first child, would bring about the acquisition – for both the young man and the young woman – of a new social status marked by greater autonomy, responsibility and new expectations. A further element can be added to this brief overview: all of the authors agree that the first step subsequent to the wedding and before the birth of the first child consists in a kind of halved autonomy, as the family of the bridegroom's father – the one with which the new family is going to reside – tends to support the new nucleus and to ask for a hand in domestic matters in exchange, starting with the care of all the children residing under the same roof. Here, it should be underlined that all the authors describe marriage within the Roma universe as involving the entire nuclear family from the moment of choosing a spouse. Marriage is, in fact, portrayed as a union that involves not only two individuals but establishes the covenant of their respective family groups and thus concerns the balance of relationships between them. In this sense, a young person's acquisition of adult status also appears to concern the interests and objectives of their respective family groups.

This brief overview of the conceptions of adolescence and age within the Roma universe seems to compose a representation that is very similar to that of "premodern" societies, as described by the historian Aries and by Demos and Demos.

We will now move on to a series of very different hypotheses regarding the existence of adolescence in Roma societies. However, it is worth pointing out that some of the criticisms of the hypotheses we have presented thus far pertain rather to the reference to the initial dimension, the Indian origin, as a means of explaining the cultural identity of Roma people. This rhetorical strategy that, with Amselle (2010) we can frame as a "contemporary primitivism", has been used over the years by numerous researchers (see among the many Calabrò 2008) and is taken up by an increasing number of Roma activists and intellectuals in an attempt to construct and legitimise a cultural specificity (Daniele 2010). From an anthropological point of view, the primitivist explanation proves fallacious since the reduction to the state of the origin tends to repress, through to

cancelling out, the long and articulated range of shifts, also produced in historical situations of cultural contact of which all societies – Romani groups included – are carriers. Yet in a complementary manner, cancelling out the history impels us to think of the cultures as quasi-objects, assets that are profound and unchangeable due to being originating, resulting in people being natural and mechanically-defined bearers. Therefore, we are witness to an essentialisation of cultures which, amongst other things, radicalises the cultural differences that render them mutually inexpressible and incommensurable (Abu Lughod 1991), laying the foundations of more recent forms of "differentialist racism" (Taguieff 1997).

2.4 *Biographical accounts of Roma adolescence*

From the Roma authors addressing the issues at hand, we must flank the works of Spinelli and Morelli with a series of essentially autobiographical texts, written by Roma authors who – without directly tackling the issue – talk of a different adolescence. We refer to the texts published by Davide Halilovic (1999), Najo Adzovic (2005) and Velja Ahmetovic (2005).

The Roma families of the three authors hail from the former Yugoslavia, a historical place of settlement for various Romani groups but also a starting point for huge migratory flows that, since the 1960s, have pushed many nuclei of Roma Serbs, Bosniaks, Kosovars and Macedonians to reach different Italian and European metropolises. The reconstruction of the migratory path is a theme that unites these three autobiographies and distinguishes them from the works of Spinelli and Morelli.

What the three autobiographies and writings of the two Abruzzo authors share is the centrality attributed to the theme of discrimination suffered by the Roma in Italy. For Spinelli and Morelli, the presentation of Roma culture is a way of responding to this condition of discrimination. Albeit in different tones and accents, the condition of suffering and marginality of the Roma people represents the background that pervades the individual narrative or that constitutes its main motive in all three autobiographies. None of the three foreign authors explicitly assume the role of interpreter for the "Roma tradition" but present themselves instead as bearers of an individual experience that seeks to be both singular and exemplary.

The biographical standing is of particular interest to us since the choices and trajectories of each show a dynamic relationship, sometimes even conflicting, with the "tradition" of which Spinelli and Morelli took on the role of spokesmen. The three authors describe themselves as outsiders

in the groups to which they belong. The autobiographical singularity is detached from a background that is both that of the discriminating Gagè society and that of the Roma community, the limits and contradictions of which are recounted along the biographical journey.

A relevant and underlying example of this detachment asserted by the traditional norm is found in the text of Halilovic, who uses these words to describe his marriage:

> We marry at home; we marry our parents and grandparents and there are rules in our marriage. If the woman is not a virgin, her father must return all the money, she must show respect! And she [his betrothed] was not a virgin at the wedding! I should have told my parents and her parents but I didn't confess because if I confessed, she would be punished and I would have been very sorry and would have cried. (Halilovic 1999: 41)

Also in Adzovic's story, the wedding is described as a moment of discussion and mediation with tradition (2005: 32), a clash between social codes and the expectations and individual choices.

In both Adzovic's and Halilovic's narratives, the school experience is presented as the main point of breaking from tradition and the group of origin. Adzovic had already made his mark also in relation to his family, talking about his early years in Yugoslavia, whilst stressing the importance by reasoning about the overall situation that young people experience in Italy:

> Some important and significant changes are already underway in Europe – with our offspring, young children and adolescents, duly attending school on a daily basis, learning to live amongst their peers and now moving towards their own way of thinking and being, thus being able to understand and to be understood, aware of what awaits them in this society and what their future may be. (*Ibid.*: 49)

Halilovic never fails to provide a positive description of the school experience and the relationships with the Gagè but also reveals that, for him, school attendance is still subject to the choices and needs of the family group. In this passage, the author shines light on other grounds for potential conflict and transformation – his individual desire to continue the educational pathway being sacrificed to the higher interests and objectives of the family unit. Yet cracks, or at least individual suffering, begin to show in this family system of managing individual trajectories.

Adzovic's position is more explicitly oriented towards the idea of the need for change, so much so that he concludes his story with these words:

> Throughout this text, I have sought to provide a written account of the new Roma generations – a testimony of our history. A book about the Roma written by a Roma; our culture, our traditions and our customs. But, above all, our change throughout the last few decades. (2005: 105)

The pertinent details emerging from these autobiographies is that, even without directly addressing the issue, all three reveal a phase of life corresponding to that of adolescence – a period of leaving the familiar world but also the limits of the group and the interaction with the world of non-Roma that sees adolescence become a phase of discovery, if not even change. School is a vehicle of such change for everyone but here, it has no significance in terms of academic success or formal learning, yet it does in terms of the place for construction and experimentation of new relationships.

2.5 *Roma adolescence sub specie criminalitatis: from scapegoating to research*

The theme of Roma children's involvement in criminal activities and in the circuits of exploitation is one of the frameworks within which the greatest number of representations, and in some cases also analysis, can be found regarding the condition of Roma youths.

It is, of course, an ambiguous terrain due to largely being dominated by the "securitarian rhetoric" that shapes both the public and the political debates about Roma presence (van Baar, Ivasiuc and Kreide 2019).

The critical comparison with such imagery, however, is an obligatory step not only because of the wide diffusion of such images but also because they are recalled and used in elaborating political measures and since – by reason of their spread – they can also be introjected by young Roma and become a reference point in their own identity.

Take as an example the survey wrote by the Italian journalist Amadori and published by the weekly news magazine Panorama in July 2008 headed "Born to Steal".[5]

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5 Here, we will follow the perspective of media analyses indicated by Italian anthropologist Vereni (2008), according to which we can also investigate the complementary processes of identity construction and difference, a process that takes place in the media, in the dislocation and global production and content agencies, and through the reinterpretation of the mediated content, with an elective dimension on ethnographic practices. Within this frame, Vereni offers a textual

The Panorama survey was published on 8th July 2008, just over a month after the State of Emergency was declared in relation to the presence of nomadic settlements in three Italian regions and at the peak of the debate around the initial operations planned, namely the censuses of Roma populations.[6]

From the texts presented as part of the investigation, we find the image of the young Roma as a source of danger and risk but also as a victim of their family environment: "Child thieves. As soon as they come into the world, they train them to steal, mug and beg. And if they do not obey, it is beatings and violence. This is life (and the voices) on the streets for the young Roma that Minister Maroni wants to take stock of with fingerprints". The subheading of the main article on the investigation confirms the ambivalence of such representation: "Stories from the life of a baby thief. Forced to steal, used to evade profiling with dozens of forged identities, cunning before the cops. And victim of their own parents. The story of 10-year-old Romanian Zafil. And other slave children."[7]

In the investigation, two opposite and complementary poles of representation for the young Roma can be identified. Firstly, there is the exceptional danger that young Roma pose to "our" safety. Young Roma are the most visible protagonists of the widespread phenomena, of the foreigners' "conquest" of city spaces, whether it be parks, piazzas or stations. They are also capable of rendering normal police procedures useless and, finally, they continue their criminal activities until social interventions aimed at reintegration are rendered useless. Thus depicted, young Roma become the main protagonists of such a narrative that interprets immigration in terms of a problem for the security of Italian citizens.

Yet at the same time, young age generates a particular kind of emotional involvement – alongside fear, pity and compassion can also be can stimulated. The young person is not, in fact, portrayed only as the

analysis of the representations of the "Albanian identity" conveyed by the Italian press (*Ibid.*: 69-99) as a priority but not definitive moment in the "deconstruction of cultural forms of production of identity, of belonging and otherness conveyed by the means of mass communication" (*Ibid.*: 24).

6 The main reasons given in the Presidential Decree consists in the fact that "the nomads' settlements, due to their extreme precariousness, have caused a situation of serious social alarm with possible grave repercussions in terms of public order and security for the local populations". For a critical analysis of this unprecedented administrative operation, see Simoni (2008) and Daniele, Pasta and Persico (2018). All institutional acts related to the Declaration of the State of Emergency are available on the Ministry of the Interior website, www.interno.it.

7 This concerns the article written by Giacomo Amadori, "Vita da Baby Ladro".

protagonist or guilty party of their criminal activities – on the contrary, they are described as being "forced to steal" and "victim of their own parents" or other figures who – even with violence – force them to head down a path of crime; a "slave", just like many others to which allusion is made, the result of a criminal and violent system. The young Roma person thus appears as the "victim" of a series of players, from families and – in a complementary way – also of the shortcomings and inefficiencies of the public authority that should "save them from their family".

The depiction of the young Roma as victims, as emerges from the inquiry as a whole, appears to function as the emotional counterpart to the dangers described prior – the Roma childhood and adolescence, which in other parts of the article seem to have taken on a merely brutal and violent nature, return to be portrayed according to the canons closer to those of the host society, being through an implicit allusion to an innocence that has unfortunately been lost due to the environment in which the youths have matured. In this way, responsibility for criminal acts does not fall to the individual but concerns the social environment as a whole – parents are directly accused of leading young people astray, or in any case not being able to prevent such degeneration, surreptitiously blaming the whole Roma society and culture.[8] At the same time, predestination assumes immutable traits and forms that are comparable to those of a genetic blemish that the European history of the Roma knows well, with the degeneration towards criminal activity being, in fact, naturalised as a part of an identity and thus becomes a condemnation of the future of Roma children.[9]

Beyond the particular context investigated, the representation of Roma adolescence resulting from this survey always concerns the tones and themes of excess – an excess of guilt, connoted in the individual and cultural sense and an excess of punishment. Such excess calls for extraordinary political measures: the declaration of the state of emergency in 2008 led to the census of Roma people, comprising the minors, and in a very similar way in 2018 the Italian Minister of Interior, Matteo Salvini announced

8 A similar mechanism that attributes an inability to care for children to the Roma "culture" has been identified in research that has analysed the concrete procedures of child protection systems for Roma – see Saletti Salza (2010).

9 The Roma were involved in the tragic genetic architecture of the Nazi genocide on the basis of the idea that their identity was characterised by the *wandertrieb* – a gene produced by the mixing of "pure gypsies" with vagabonds, asocials and criminals. This mixture would have deteriorated their racial purity, the result of Indo-Aryan origins, so much so as to justify their concentration in the *Zigeunerlager* and the application of the "Final Solution" (cfr. Willems 1997).

a new census of Roma people with the explicit aim of protecting Roma youngsters and the implicit, but complementary, aim of protecting "us" from "them". This representation leaves young Roma with the sole choice of being victim or culprit, concealing – or perhaps projecting – this shadow from a whole range of social experiences that many other Roma encounter in their day-to-day lives.

Besides the attention from the media and in cultural and political debates, another subject that produces representations on the condition of Roma youths is the Italian third sector and associationism.

Research papers are rarely published and therefore participate in the public debate only indirectly and from a position of reduced visibility. Yet, such reports and dossiers are disseminated amongst operators and professionals in the sector, as well as amongst policy-makers who deal with the issues throughout the territory and manage the resources available on a local scale for implementing services and projects.

Amongst the various works available, we are inclined to consider two: the report "Another city is possible. Paths of Integration for Roma and Sinte families in Rome: problems, limits and perspectives of social inclusion policies" (Icardi and Lanzillotto 2010), the essays published by Conte and Rampini (2007) and by Conte, Marcu and Rampini (2009), starting with a study and intervention project conducted in Milan with Roma minors from Romania.[10]

These works are useful on our journey since they address the relationship between young Roma, criminal activities and circuits of exploitation from a decidedly different angle, inscribing this theme within a general reflection on the condition of minors. In addition, the experience of field research that distinguishes both works not only guarantees a minimum level of scientific reliability but facilitates moving away from the political instrumentalisations of opposing rhetoric.

To this end, both works begin by framing the theme of the relationship between Roma youths and crime. The authors of "Un'altra città è possibile" limit the spread of criminal activities to a circumscribed portion of the total population, thus evading any hypothesis of generalising the phenomena and of the analysis that follows. Instead, the Milanese researchers position their study amongst a reflection on the range of stereotypes – mainly negative –

10 The research concerned the same group of about thirty children and youths also portrayed in the aforementioned Panorama survey. The main part of the research was carried out in the framework of an intervention that the NGO "Save the Children" entrusted to the research agency of Codici.

that precede any cognitive operation and any political intervention against those who are defined as "Gypsies" (Conte and Rampini 2007).

In this context, the interpretation of the diffusion of criminal activities and exploitation amongst Roma takes more condensed and specific forms. Both research groups refer to a number of structural factors within which criminal careers are generated – the conditions of marginality that distinguish "nomad camps", problems related to legal status, difficulties in accessing the labour market and the criticalities of the situation in the context of origin.

This last factor is particularly significant since it tends to project the trajectories of the lives of Roma youths within a setting that is transnational, that considers the existence and modification of a wide range of rapports between the context of emigration and immigration (Bash, Glick Schiller, Szanton Blanc 1994: 7).

Within this framework, the researchers highlight a number of phenomena that accompany and define the criminal trajectories: the possibility that criminal activities may overlap or alternate with commitments that are actually legal, even in school; the theme of the "family mandate" or the empowerment of the young compared to the nucleus as a whole, closely related to the economic situation; the matter of emotional involvement, intensity and arousal that accompanies the criminal act that grow to cause forms of dependence in some of the biographies; and the possibility of great economic resources for themselves and the subsequent access to forms of consumption similar to those of their Gagè peers without any regime of compulsion or need.

For our journey, this particular personal motivation takes on a particular interest since it allows us to understand how the criminal trajectories are constructed also in view of the "indigenous" adolescence.

> Some minors commit crimes only for themselves, guided by the aspiration to reach levels of consumption similar to those of Italian adolescents. The contradiction in this case consists in the fact that the youth – in an attempt to homologate with their Italian peers – carries out activities that de facto expels them from the greatly longed-for normality. If they do not undergo a familiar construction, they nonetheless suffer a social constraint, in the sense that stealing is configured as the only possibility for accessing consumer goods that would be inaccessible otherwise. (Icardi, Lanzillotta 2010: 119)

The path of the Milanese researchers reaches a similar point – beyond exploitation or enslavement, the testimonies show that consumption represents one of the main indicators of a successful migratory pathway

for young Roma and their families. This also means that the involvement in criminal activity cannot only be read as the product of the conditions of need and poverty but must be critically recognised as being amongst the tools that can be used to achieve standards and practices of consumption that, in the neighbourhoods of the districts of Romanian cities as much as in the suburbs of Italian ones, the social success of young people is measured.

> It is not a question of denying the conditions of extreme disadvantage and discrimination in which the Roma are forced to live but rather of understanding how such conditions are re-read from an imagery and shared model of development. In some cases, the activities of the criminal organisation are structured with the support of the families of exploited children, not triggered by hunger and misery but by the systematic search for a means of social integration, of the real strategies of success. The exploitation of themselves and of their children is the price to pay so as to be able to – starting from conditions of social exclusion – participate in strategies that do not coincide with the satisfaction of primary needs but with the solution to a profound need for social markers – designer clothes, the latest generation mobile telephones, cars, real estate… status symbols that are immediately and invariably visible. (Conte, Rampini 2007: 17)

Although such analyses are consciously limited to contexts and biographies characterised by inconvenience and marginality, they are nevertheless able to provide us with certain useful elements for developing an overall reasoning on adolescence within the Roma universe.

In particular, the investment practices of consumption as "a strategy of social affirmation" (*Ibid.*: 17) can be assumed as one of the signs of the emergence of what Icardi and Lanzillotto refer to as the "time of the adolescence", being a phase of life during which Roma youths are able to experiment with different contexts and models of behaviour, no longer or not only connected to the family environment or in the space separate from the "nomad camp". This possibility clearly has complex and contradictory consequences. Returning to the work of Icardi and Lanzillotto, the authors analyse "the brain split in two" (*Ibid.*: 130) of one of the witnesses interviewed, describing the "amphibious strategies" with which Roma youths manage to keep together legal and illegal practices, the respect of traditional codes and the ability to even interpret those coming from the world of their Gagè peers. The same phenomenology is described by the Milanese researchers, where they point out, for example, the ways in which the young Roma alternate long skirts and other garments considered as "traditional" (always worn within the nomad camps and in the presence of

family members) with absolutely modern clothing that brings them closer to their Italian peers.

In this direction, the adolescence of the young Roma is detached from the horizon of tradition, extending even beyond places of discrimination and stereotype, finishing up in locations of relationships and contact, from the school to the street and commercial and leisure areas.

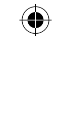
2.6 *From the nomads' camp to the city: a study*

Daniele (2013) conducted a research on the themes of contact and cultural changes, investigating the transitions to adulthood of a group of young Roma living within one of Rome's largest nomad camps. The nomad camp scenario, with its forms of clear physical and symbolic separation from outside the Gagè society (Sigona 2005) has emerged as a central element that influences the possible trajectories of adolescents. In fact, the separation of the nomad camps, the distance from the Gagè world and the perimeter of daily life in a regime of parental closeness seems to reduce the possibilities of openness and experimentation for Roma youths, especially for young women. The imposed community dimension is able to multiply the forms of social control with the effect of tightening the limitations and prohibitions we have seen linked to the ideology of honour and shame. At the same time, however, the institutionalised nomad camp is also where a broad range of social interventions have been activated, many of which are specifically dedicated to minors. This range of interventions manages to directly and indirectly provide numerous opportunities for discussion and interaction with the young residents of the nomad camp and their peers living in the same area of the city. Here we have a contradictory effect: the nomad camp by one side creates the time of adolescence by providing the opportunity to access experiences and places of knowledge and the relationship with other peers, but by the other it compresses the extension, given that upon returning to the inner dimension, the youths return under the lens of community control. For some residents of the nomad camp, the time of transition into adulthood opens and is characterised by this unprecedented availability of experiences that are not only those of education and the approach to work but concern the tastes and passions of leisure (music, sports), the locations where their peers hang out (shopping areas, downtown) where the novel codes of conduct are adopted, from grooming to clothing. In such contexts, many youths adopt the real strategies of mimicry, through the practices of language, dress codes and

body posture – strategies that do not appear to be aimed at distinction or opposition vis-à-vis the parents and the adult world, nor to the keeping their identity in tact in situations of contact (Piasere 2004) but to the need to avoid being recognised and thus stigmatised by the (gagè) peers.

Nonetheless, research has clearly shown that the number of those who construct their transition from such experiences is decidedly limited – few youths have managed to gain access to a stable working position following the proposed educational pathways and even fewer have built significant relationships with non-Roma peers, acquiring resources or opportunities that could guide their career. In spite of the enormous economic investment in schooling, almost all the paths towards working autonomy have instead been paved by valuing internal resources and opportunities or, at most, by restoring know-how and knowledge acquired outside into the circuits of co-residents. The other pivoting point for the transition to adulthood, the formation of a new family unit, is also fundamentally managed within the family group and within the community dimension (Piasere 2015). The time of adolescence is filled with tales of forbidden love and stories of romance that do not respect family alliances or even go beyond the border of the nomad camps. In some cases, these stories end with the *nashdala*, the abduction and escape that the two young lovers plan in order to force their families to accept the marriage. Most often, it is the fear of fight, or "theft" of the daughter that further hardens the forms of control over the girls. The marriage choices are thus replicated within a virtual horizon that links the nomad camp residents with families of relatives and acquaintances who live in the places of origin or who have attempted emigration to other contexts.

In this way, the period of adolescence, of experimentation and contact that opens up within the nomad camp is resolved within a community dimension that detaches young Roma from the city and their peers only to connect them with a network of communities that are and remain marginalised and isolated.



CHAPTER 3
INSIDE THE STORIES OF YOUNG ROMA
Everyday Life and Complex Transitions

3.1 *The possible adolescence*

In this chapter we will present and analyse a selection of biographies regarding Roma youths growing up in the municipality of Milan, focusing on a phase of life associated with adolescence.

Following the reflections of the previous chapters, we have selected segments of biographies that precede – and in some way prepare for – adult status and in which we can find a period of experimentation and separation from the family environment, characterised by new experiences that the youth have to deal with themselves.

As already mentioned, the main identifier for this stage of life is the experience of integration within the schools throughout the territory. We can thus interpret the school or, more precisely, the investment of families in school attendance, as the trigger that sets off this phase of life given that it is from this that the trajectories we present open up to a range of experiences that take the young person has outside the family environment, putting them in daily contact with *other* peers.

Such experiences have a range of effects on the transition to adulthood. At one extreme, we can see youths who can only dream of other ways of becoming adults and in that, at certain moments of their trajectory, they express the desire to go against family expectations or else manage to plan their adult life starting from the tastes and passions they have developed themselves. For these young people, adolescence offers the chance to expand the horizon of the conceivable and the possible (Bourdieu 1984), even only if on a symbolic and proiective level. For other youths, experiences during adolescence offer up a new set of resources for thinking about the transition to adulthood. This may be merely symbolic, with contacts and connections that provide access to a social project or that offer support in a situation of conflict, or can even be material, with the availability of a home, a job

offer, etc … In any case, it concerns resources hailing from the social capital constructed during adolescence which facilitate re-orientation of the transition to adulthood.

In this sense, our work is focused on a limited range of young Roma, being those who have access to a range of experiences and relationships with formal and informal segments of local societies.

As we have said, the school is the first marker distinguishing such adolescences but along the trajectories that we shall analyse, we will see young people investing, together with their families, not only in attending school, the simple act of going to school, but in using this as a springboard for multiplying and intensifying rapports. As many researches have shown analysing the projects of mass schooling of Roma minors, the central element does not consist in guaranteeing school attendance, since a mere physical presence within the institution does not ensure the achievement of the educational objectives. On the contrary, it is the individual and family investment in the school, in friendly relationships with students and other families, the mutual recognition with teaching staff that helps bring scholastic success within reach and, more generally, guarantees new resources and opportunities. We will recount the stories of young people and families who, above all, invest in the school and manage to use it as a springboard to access other relational contexts, resources and opportunities.

Broadening our horizon, we can see that these boys and girls come from families that – at this particular stage in their lives – were undergoing a period of significant change in their economic and housing situation. With respect to the condition of immobility, with enduring nomad camps, with all consequences of a contracted adolescence which we have previously mentioned, these young people find themselves in a context of social mobility in wich their families enjoy the benefits and the pathaways to inclusion paved by the Administration, the third sector and civil society (Daniele, Pasta and Persico 2018). In this sense, the youths' transition to adulthood takes place within a housing, employment and economic transition that involves the entire family. The migration, which for many Romanian families means the transition from rural to urban areas, is definitely the general framework for change in which these families are involved but following we find the breaks and changes of those who leave the "nomad camp" for a means of conventional accommodation, going from the slums and – after recursive evictions – switching to a form of social housing and then to a home, who go to great lengths to find a job. In the individual trajectories, we will see these different transitions interweaving

and overlapping, concerning individual adolescents and their family, each with its own burden of opportunities and risks.

In all cases, the tale of the transitions experienced by young people ends with marriage and the formation of a new family unit. We will not focus on marriages, but the subject of our analyses will be the means and pathways with which young people reach this passage, and the degree of freedom and constraint by which it is accompanied. However, from this point forth, we can anticipate that this passage opens up later in life compared to the trajectories of their parents but in any case well before what happens with their Gagè peers. In this sense, adolescence within the Roma worlds is a space entirely under construction.

3.2 *Some notes on method*

The following stories – through which we will develop an analysis of the relationship between adolescence, ethnicity and family affiliation, and school – are the trajectories of seven Roma girls and boys who “grew up” in Milan. Each path is positioned within a historical context and unfurls in a social environment that presents different opportunities, constraints and difficulties. Elder (1994) motivated the analysis of individual biographies in their becoming and formation through the particular life experiences provided by the historical context in which they materialise.

In the narrative, we shall make reference to sensitive data and private events, which also involve the families and the relationships between them. In the interest of privacy and to prevent the protagonists from being in any way recognisable, we have taken steps to change some biographical details (names, places, certain circumstances), without altering the substance of that which actually took place. The priority of guaranteeing the protection of those sharing their stories led us to some fictional creation and selection that we considered more than necessary, thus constructing certain accounts by selecting research materials and modifying any elements that could have compromised anonymity. Such focus was also a precondition for those concerned to consent to the chronicle of certain events.

The boys and girls to whom the events pertain have established a relationship of trust, especially with one of the authors, with whom they have been in close contact for several years now. This relationship has allowed access to details that would otherwise be difficult to determine, along with grasping the different points of view of the players involved. The data was collected through intensive field work and recorded in

various ways, mainly via ethnography. The stories were then written in their entirety and then reshaped in the form of life trajectories, being second-level narratives that here specifically retrace the process of growth and the transition to adulthood for the young protagonists.

The selection of the trajectories presented below and the analyses proposed derive from the social work and the commitment to research and solidarity that the three authors have conducted for some fifteen years with Roma groups of different nationalities, in a range of locations but principally in Milan.

In narrating and analysing the stories of the seven teenagers – two males and five females – we shall also discuss their families, their siblings, parents, aunties and uncles, other relatives and neighbours present and past. Indeed, for the protagonists in the next pages, adolescence is not a private matter. Or rather, attempts to privatise certain aspects of it are at the heart of the negotiation that accompanies their becoming adults in the midst of family, school, friendships, first loves, sexual urges, marriage and compromises. In each of the trajectories presented, we will search for the period of adolescence, the conditions that have created such and the nuances that characterise each path. We shall identify the various players and the tensions between them before finally seeing how this period ends and thus in what form it is realised, in concluding the process of transitioning to adulthood.

3.3 *Daniel*

Daniel, 19, is the eldest of three children in a Romanian Roma family in Oltenia. His father, who was 14 when Daniel was born, emigrated to Milan in 2002, whilst his wife and children joined him in Italy in 2009. Upon reaching Italy, the family initially lived in the slums of Milan, suffering the effects of multiple evictions. During one of these operations, the family was intercepted by the volunteers of a third-sector association, setting out on an accompanied path towards housing autonomy. The nucleus thus manages to access a mother-child refuge facility then a house with subsidised rent and finally, a home under social housing. This path begins thanks to the relationships that Daniel's family builds with associations and citizens following the movement born from the evacuation of Via Rubattino in 2009 (Pasta 2019), about which we briefly wrote in the first chapter of this text. The social capital that flows from these relationships offers access to a range of pertinent support

operations – a scholarship to aid the path of schooling, participation in extracurricular activities, the opportunity to take summer holidays, being part of unifying moments in which Roma and Gagè share in communal activities focused on Daniel and his siblings and parents. Additionally, his father was also hired as a Social Keeper for a condominium throughout the period. After finishing high school, Daniel decided to enrol in a three-year vocational training school, which he successfully completed. The employer offering the internship ended up presenting Daniel with a three-year apprenticeship contract, which the lad accepted and – following the advice received from the school – also enrolled in the optional fourth year which, with an apprenticeship contract, offers an alternation of lessons and work.

In addition to going to the gym and attending driving school, Daniel had been regularly engaged for some years in volunteer activities with a youth movement in which he felt a sense of belonging. Other Roma children were part of this group, even though the experience is not ethnically characterised given that several non-Roma youths were also involved. Daniel visits elderly people at a council-run care residence, for example, and during the COVID-19 Emergency, he was one of several young protagonists in a solidarity initiative focused on the elderly to promote overcoming a model of care based on institutionalisation in large structures.

What's more, Daniel occasionally goes on weekend trips with his classmates and laments not having been selected for a trip to New York offered as a reward by his school. During the summer, he returned to Romania with his family, an experience he holds dear and greatly enjoyed.

His sister, a year younger, did not appear to have the same freedom of movement as Daniel, her relationships were not so easy and there were occasions when Daniel was quite controlling over her. In one occasion, Daniel happened to mention to his parents that some of his peers were interested in her, as if to warn them. On a charity holiday during which both were volunteers, another Roma lad – also a volunteer – showed interest in his sister. Daniel phoned their mother, who in turn called both the daughter and the operator who then chaperoned the youths to ensure that they were better supervised.

At the time of writing, Daniel was single. He did have a relationship with a girl but it ended after three months. He knows that his family would like to see him get married but he says, "*I prefer to be free and to focus on work.*" Daniel is very close to a step-cousin that has lived with his family for a year. He admires him and appreciates the fact that he grew up in the capital of Romania, has graduated from the University of Bucharest, lived

in England for a period to learn English and married only after having reached 28 years of age – exactly double the age at which Daniel's parents were wed.

3.3.1 *Daniel's adolescence: relationships, places and role models*

The first part of Daniel's story takes place in Italy, upon reaching at the slums of Milan and the years of forced evacuations, events that were extremely significant and impactful on the life of a child his age (Pasta 2017). What happens afterwards was a positive change in direction regarding his experience of migration. Just like the other children, there were two encounters that determined this turning point – one being with the volunteers of the Sant'Egidio community and one with the schools in the Rubattino district. As emerges from Daniel's narration of his story, the theme of schooling arises as an aspect on which to reflect only to the extent that it is considered one of several components that comprise his situation. Daniel did not immediately start going to school upon his arrival in Italy, not being in a position to do so due to the repressive policies implemented by local administration vis-à-vis Roma groups (Daniele, Pasta and Persico 2018), at the time also incorrectly referred to as "nomads" (Pasta 2020). Years of continuous evictions and life in the slums (De Vito, Ciniero, Bravi and Pasta 2018 and 2019) were the roadblocks to accessing the path of schooling (Sarcinelli 2015). By way of example, Daniel's cousin suffered twenty evictions in 2010 alone, whilst the daughter of his neighbours in Romania had to change schools eight times in three years due to a "cycle of evictions" (Vitale 2008), not likely in respect of the legal framework (Neri 2011). Yet the dynamics changed once – after several months had passed – a third player took over facilitating the relations between the families in the settlement and the schools, via associationism. Daniel was granted access washing facilities at the schools, with the teachers being informed about the families and their living conditions. Last but not least, the teachers were able to gain an understanding of the policies (and their relative consequences on the conditions of their pupils), with which the public administration managed the presence and the settlement of Roma families in the town. Thus, for Daniel, the turning point was not so much access to school but the progressive change in the relations within the school context, an evolution that occurred thanks to the mediation of a third player that managed to raise reciprocal awareness and understanding between the family and the school. In making this change, the school seemed to proceed without any particular difficulty, also given that there were two other factors that support the path of social mobility for the whole family. The first was

the family's emergence from the marginal and deprived context of the slums and the consequent access to suitable housing solutions; the second concerns the path to stabile work for the father, who could finally provide the entire family with a certain economic consolidation.

As we have seen, this all comes as the result of a path of accompaniment offered by the third sector, in particular by the community of Sant-Egidio and the network mobilised following the evacuation of Rubattino, which will continue to represent a fundamental resource for both Daniel and his family. At this point, having reached a condition in life that could be defined, with due caution, as stable, this the period of adolescence opens up for Daniel a time in which was able to have experiences and embark on a path of growth in many aspects similar to his non-Roma peers. Life was marked by school first and then his internship, by weekends with friends, sports and volunteer activities with other peers, by brief romances and holidays in Romania to catch-ups with friends and relatives.

For Daniel, adolescence took shape and expanded over time thanks to the multiple experiences of relationship that the boy had the opportunity to cultivate in direct contact with the Gagè universe, in particular with his peers. As mentioned, prolonged school attendance was the initial aspect to render this possible. Yet school attendance creates space for adolescence only when, as in the case of Daniel, it is accompanied by individual and family investment in relationships with the Gagè. In this way, school opens up to the multiplication of relationships and contacts. In Daniel's trajectory, we see how the school was flanked by experiences marked by the construction of meaningful relationships also in other areas of life. That is, all occasions in which it is possible to perfect one's own adolescence by adopting behaviours typical of non-Roma peers. Volunteering with the elderly or with refugees transiting to Milan in the summers of 2015-18 certainly represented such an occasion. Throughout this time, a sense of belonging to the peer group was felt along with the marked recognition by both the other volunteers and elderly as beneficiaries of the intervention. Both of these aspects render have a potentially positive impact on self-esteem (Bandura 2005), on getting through times of being victim to anti-gypsyism (Pasta and Vitale 2017) and having the motivation to pursue a civil commitment that is not to be taken for granted, which in taking up free time, feeds the processes of building positive and meaningful rapports outside the family context.

A further element that characterises Daniel's pathway was the presence of significant role models who simultaneously inspired and legitimised the new experiences. In particular we refer to the cousin, also Roma, who had

experiences and made choices that were quite uncommon amongst young Roma in view of the lad's origins. The life of his cousin testified – how it is possible to reconcile different cultural references and expectations and this was a source of inspiration for Daniel and a legitimisation of a series of innovative experiences. It is no accident that a relationship of real natural mentoring developed between the two over time (Colley 2003; Cullimore and Simmons 2010; Bereményi and Girós n.d.), with a rapport based on mutual esteem and support, in which Daniel has a positive point of reference with whom to discuss, trust in and explore his thoughts and expectations. To facilitate this relationship, the fact that the family itself accepts and respects this figure comes into play, with their welcoming the relationship established between the pair.

Daniel also had a physical and symbolic freedom of movement that is not to be overlooked. Freedom is understood as the possibility to independently determine his movements, due to being able to travel around the city to go to sports events or leisure activities with friends. Again, he left Italy to go Romania, spent summer afternoons with friends, coming and going from the family home whenever he wanted. Such elements allowed him to experience such travels in a positive way, as real holidays. This freedom was in a symbolic sense, given that the path of growth experienced allowed him to transit amongst different socio-cultural contexts, feeling at ease in all of them (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

It goes without saying that hanging out with friends in downtown Milan is very different from being in the Romanian ţigania. For Daniel, however, this meant that growing up between different social worlds became a resource rather than a hindrance – in the same way Anna Granata showed for the so called "second-generation" of migrants (non Roma) in Italy. Throughout his education – amongst formal, non-formal and informal contexts – the young man learned of processes of deconstruction/construction, adaptation and interpretation. This required a continuous reduction in divergences and dissonances encountered along the way and a peculiar ability in playing on differences. In this case, staying within the codes and forms of the Gagè peer relationships does not seem to be reducible to the strategies of camouflage given that such experiences appear to allow the opposition between assimilation and rejection to be overcome through solutions that are original and different, discovered through approximation, trial and error (Premoli and Pasta 2015).

Daniel's own liberty is particularly striking when comparing his life with that of his sister who, as a female, is subject to much more marked forms of control and limitations. In many situations, it was Daniel himself who took

on a controlling role towards his sister, as emerged from the example given in the previous paragraph. It is as if all the openness he enjoys, constructed within the continuous relationship with his non-Roma peers, is lacking in the conditions imposed on his sister. We will further assess from a gender perspective the different means of freedom for Roma and youths through the analysis of the subsequent stories.

3.4 *Cristina, Steluţa and Daniela*

Cristina, Steluţa and Daniela are three Romanian Roma girls aged 20, 19 and 18 years who have been close friends since childhood, all having emigrating from Oltenia to Milan. In Romania, they lived in the same *tigania*, in families with many similar traits – take for example the fact that their parents are illiterate or only have a few years of schooling behind them. Their migration path is also similar. They reached Milan around 2008-09, at the age of 8-9 years, joining their fathers who had emigrated some years prior, during which time their mothers alternated periods in Italy and periods in Romania (Pontrandolfo and Piasere 2016).

Arriving in Milan, they settled in various Milanese slums, directly experiencing repeated evictions as well as the solidarity and civic activism that followed the slums of Via Rubattino in Milan being evacuated as of 2009 (Pasta 2019).

From here, their lives took divergent paths.

Cristina's adolescence ended almost before it began. Following the evictions and a return to Romania for a few months, at 13 years of age she married a boy from her own village who was only a year older. The pair knew each other but it was mostly their parents who pushed for the arrangement. Already throughout the months prior to the wedding, the girl's school attendance was occasional. Indeed, Cristina finished the fifth year but marriage excluded any possibility of continuing along the school path. Her husband Alex, rather, regularly attended school until reaching the eighth year but also in his case, marriage marked the interruption of his scholastic career. As planned by the family organisation, the young couple went to live with Alex's parents as a result of the marriage. Cristina helped her mother-in-law with household chores and with caring for her siblings-in-law who were a little younger than her. A year later, when Cristina was 14, their first child was born. Only two years after the birth of the baby, Alex and Cristina decided to separate. She left the in-laws' house but the baby remained.

About a year after parting, they both married again.

Steluţa and Daniela had a very similar adolescence. Although they had to face many difficulties as a result of the continuous evictions, both families managed to find social housing, improving their socio-economic condition. Daniela's family was able to access community housing when she was 15 years old. The two girls regularly attended school and were experiencing substantial integration with their classmates. They were also part of sporting and other groups, mostly composed of non-Roma peers. Initially, both families were wary of these new contexts, just as they were in turn to anyone unfamiliar with them and coming into direct contact with "Roma" for the first time. Volunteers of an association who knew the families well and whom they trusted facilitated these relationships, especially at an early stage. Daniela forged a special friendship with the family of a schoolmate – for four summers, she went on holiday with them to various Italian regions and during the year, often hung out at her friend's house.

Both Daniela and Steluţa benefited from a scholarship offered by an association.

After completing the first year of secondary school, Steluţa chose to complete a three-year vocational training course at the end of which she decided to continue with the optional fourth year of higher education. At the time of writing, she was undecided as to whether or not to complete the fifth year of schooling, also being optional, or to accept a job offering received through the school. As to free time, she had been in a volleyball team for a number of years and was completing a theatre course. She was an entertainer at youth summer camps operated by the Catholic church within the neighbourhood in which she had lived for two years and took part in the activities of a volunteering association, along with studying for her driver's license, giving a hand around the home and, for the last two years, also worked in a restaurant on the weekends. Throughout these years, Steluţa fell in love on a number of occasions and had three relationships that she considers the most significant. The first was with an Italian boy, to whom she revealed being Roma only after 5 months together. It was Steluţa to call things off, due to the resentment arising from this matter. Then there was a summer fling with a Roma guy from Romania who she met on a family vacation in Romania. For about a year, she was in a relationship with a 25-year-old Romanian who had emigrated to Italy before her. Steluţa recounts having met him during an internship offered by the school – he also enthusiastically shares that they went on a vacation to France together last summer. From Steluţa's stories, it emerges that each of the three relationships – albeit for different reasons – was a source of tension

with the family. Yet what also emerges is how she managed to find a way that would render it possible to continue, with a blend of compromise and insistence.

Many aspects of Steluţa's biography are similar to those of her friend Daniela.

At the end of secondary school, Daniela decided to enrol in a Higher Education Institute offering a five-year school programme, unlike the three-year vocational courses. She was the first girl from the Romanian-Roma group in her city – almost all having emigrated to Milan – to make this choice. She also had many experiences in non-ethnically connoted contexts, along with her non-Roma peers. She fitted in well with her classmates, volunteering at a Summer Camp and participating in volunteer activities of the same association frequented by Steluţa. Daniela had a brief fling with a Romanian-Roma peer who, like her, was going to high school. However, the relationship soon ended.

When Daniela turned 12, her parents decided not to return to Romania in the summer out of fear – they declare – that she would be kidnapped and married off. Moreover, they explicitly refused certain marriage proposals received from acquaintances. When Daniela turned 16, however, the family returned to their homeland during the month of August as her grandparents are elderly and the family wanted to see each other and spend time together. The girl was asked not to leave the house of her enlarged family so as to avoid attracting attention. This choice to spend part of the summer in Romania was repeated following year. Upon returning to Milan in September, Daniela suddenly declared that she was not going to complete the third year of her studies. "*I don't feel like it anymore*", she repeated without any additional explanation to her Gagè friends at the association and the family of her friend (with whom, only two months before, she had been on holiday in Sicily). "*I want to do what the other Roma girls do. I don't care about school anymore. If I can, I want to work,*" she explains, referring to her cousins of the same age, who were already married or had left school a few years prior. Her mother tried to convince her to return to school but, given her daughter's conviction, ultimately accepted the decision. Meanwhile, Daniela had gotten engaged to Liviu, a Roma lad who was two years older and from her own village, having emigrated to Milan just one ago. The wedding was set for March but the boy declared that he would not deny Daniela the opportunity to continue her schooling. "*I'm no longer interested,*" she said. The COVID-19 emergency meant the wedding was postponed; however, the young couple went to live with Liviu's aunties and uncles. The young couple lived in the house

with 7 other people, which often created tension also due to the restrictions of movement related to the lockdown. Tensions were so high that they evaluated the possibility of emigrating to England. Meanwhile, upon the easing of the lockdown measures adopted due to the ongoing pandemic, a video was published in regards to the celebrations for the wedding on the Facebook page of Daniela's brother, who is currently in his second year of high school.

3.4.1 *Three friends, one childhood, three different and non-linear stories of growth*

We have chosen to present the stories of Cristina, Steluţa and Daniela together for two reasons, being – in our opinion – quite significant. The first reason has to do with the fact that the three trajectories share a several-year period. We could compare the three girls to three branches that start from the same trunk – the girls and their families come from the same place and, at the outset, have in common their socio-economic status, housing conditions, school experiences, social life and daily life. These similarities also extend to their parents' migration experience and subsequently that of the girls themselves upon reaching Italy. Although it would be foolish to believe that similar experiences during childhood should necessarily result in the same path of growth, aligning the three stories allows us to consider certain factors that help to account for the complex framework of variables that can intervene in the growth pathways for young Roma girls.

The second reason why we dealt with these three stories in parallel has to do with the non-linearity of the transition to adult life that emerges in each and becomes even more evident in comparing the three cases.

Starting from where the pathways set out, what we note in Cristina's history is the total absence of that period which in the previous chapter we defined as being "adolescence", according to the "traditional" model that we have seen in the description of certain Roma authors. Cristina's transition occurred with a certain rapidity, passing directly from childhood in Romania to adulthood. In between came her migration to Italy and arrival in Milan during the period of evictions and insecurity dictated by the life in the slums, marking an uncertain outset along an increasingly bumpy path of schooling that ended with early leaving.

In Daniela's case, it is possible to detect a different trend in her trajectory. She seized the opportunity to have prolonged and significant experiences with her non-Roma peers, had a privileged relationship with

the family of a friend of the same age, enjoyed over a prolonged period of time during which took form her adolescence that, at a certain point, ended with an outcome we can define as being as unexpected as it was traditional: marriage.

For Steluţa, the path was different yet again – she went through adolescence, conquering one battleground at a time, obtaining one victory after another, starting with school then her free time, through to her romantic relationships. Steluţa appeared to make her own choices, being revised on several occasions, to extend the period of adolescence in order not to exclude the possibilities of growth, discovery and affirmation of the self as they gradually open up and present themselves. Like Daniela for a certain period, and even more so than Daniel, Steluţa had all the experiences that a non-Roma teenager her age would have. Unlike Daniela, however, it did not appear as if she were in a position to want to make further transitions to adulthood. These initial considerations, added to what has already been noted in Daniel's story, allow us to begin focusing on certain and specific aspects.

The question of time seems to be central. For Cristina, as the eldest of the three, the range of opportunities for relating with the world external to the family came too late. The young woman was already on the path to marriage when her family was finally able to leave the slums for a proper housing solution. Similarly, inclusion at school came too far down the road and establishing rapports with Gagè as both equals in and outside the school and with other adults of reference had no value along her trajectory. The compression of adolescence resulted in a loss of a number of occasions for relationships that allowed the two other friends to receive positive points of reference, the support and stimulus of self-esteem, as well as in respect of personal identity other than being Roma, references to alternative stigmatising messages of repressive and securitarian policies, to which all the three girls were subjected during childhood. The importance of the time factor, of the timing, in the individual trajectories also emerges by looking at the lack of impact of the institutional players who intervene at the wrong points in time. That is, too late in respect of their path of growth and the evolution of their needs. The first delay can be found upon dropping out of school given that, as the specialised literature has unfortunately broadly demonstrated, in the case of Cristina – as for many other young Roma – this type of reporting rarely results in effective interventions by the institutions.

Following came the interventions supporting the residents of the slum on Via Rubattino, also being quite late. Christina's family managed to

make contacts within law enforcement first then with social services but only once the girl had already become a mother. At the same time, the family were able to liaise with the volunteer associations operating in that area when the young woman was already out of the parental home. One can only imagine what could have been if such institutions involved (public administration, law enforcement and school) had acted differently (Persico 2015).

The stories told so far allow us to confirm the importance not only of the quantity but above all the quality of the relationships established both within in-school and out-of-school contexts. Steluţa and Daniela – as we saw happen in Daniel's story – had the time and contexts in which to cultivate close working relationships, within which to experiment various roles. These include Roma and non-Roma friends, volunteers, activists and of course, as daughters, sisters and active parties along a path of social emancipation and affirmation, not only personal but also in regards to the family.

From these experiences, the transitions to adulthood concluded in extremely different ways for each of the three young women.

As mentioned, Steluţa managed to prolong the period of adolescence and, unlike the other two friends, seemed to mark the end of this phase only upon entering into the world of work. Having a job responds to the need to occupy a defined social position, in addition to the desire to earn money for one's family and for oneself. In Steluţa's story, this expectation is realised with differing intensities, to the point of potentially becoming a turning point. If the years of education are enough for her to find a weekend job, receiving a more organic job offering through the entity that organised the school internship represents the first real questioning of her training and growth. The dilemma is whether to remain in adolescence or to make the transition to adulthood, cease studying and enter the world of work.

For Cristina and Daniela, however, the change of status occurs "traditionally", ergo through marriage.

The two young women reached this step at different times and via different ways but both had to deal with the concern of the risk of abduction, an aspect that we have seen play a central and recurring role in the stories of many girls encountered during field work. We have emphasised this element in Daniela's story, have seen it with Daniel's sister and we shall encounter it again even further on. Whether it is in the village in Romania, at the nomads' camp, in the streets of Milan or at school, it can happen at the hands of distant relatives, other Roma families or Gagè boys. From

the parents' viewpoint, Roma girls live in a constant state of insecurity. This fear defines a fundamental distinction in the possible adolescence of young Roma, because whilst the males live in a condition of relative freedom, the girls are limited and controlled not only in their relationships and encounters but even in their movements within the ţzigania, or nomad camp.

Although in the long term, the outcome for Cristina and Daniela is the same – that is, marriage – the two events allow us to see two other important aspects through which to consider adolescence. The first concerns the central role of the parents. In Cristina's case, both her parents and those of her future husband approve and support the union. In Daniela's case, rather, it was the parents themselves who for some years, prevented the creation of what they considered to be the conditions in which Daniela was more at risk in respect of a marriage. They considered it premature and preferred to support Daniela in her studies, until something changed in the girl's position on the matter. The parents' attitude, also generated by a range of variables that we cannot address here, must thus be recognised as one of the most important elements that come into play in defining transitions to adulthood.

The second element concerns the path leading to marriage. We mentioned the compression of Cristina's life that almost instantly passes from daughter to wife and then mother. If it is true that her friend Daniela also became an adult upon marriage, it is equally true that she did so after completing three years of high school, after having extremely stimulating experiences that allowed her experience other contexts beside her own context of origin. If we consider her choice from a procedural viewpoint such as that proposed and, in certain aspects, due to the research conducted starting from the biographical studies (Bonica and Cardano 2008), we must recognise that the matrimonial mooring is of value to her at that specific point along her trajectory, being within a still-uncompleted phase of the formative experience and in the particular condition of control that the young woman was experiencing. Her choice thus harks back to the trajectories of the lives of certain Roma youths in the nomad camps who are experiencing adolescence within school contexts on the one hand, without however being able to draw enough resources from this experience to be able to start a career and, on the other, feeling increasingly as if they grew up surrounded by their parents' fear of being snatched away, with the consequent multiplication of the forms of control and limitation of freedom. In this context, marriage appears paradoxically as one of the few ways out of this dual stronghold comprised of traditional fears and impossible transformations.

Finally, we believe that it is important to consider Daniela's trajectory (as well as that of Steluţa) within a more general framework, namely the stories of the Roma girls and boys migrating from the province of Olt to Milan from the 2000s to today. Expanding the viewpoint to the totality of this migratory flow, we can say that trajectories such as that of Daniela (and clearly also that of Steluţa), signal an ongoing process of raising educational levels (Pasta 2019). This represents an improvement that, for a number of reasons presented in the opening of the first chapter, remains totally hidden from statistical surveys.

3.5 *Nadia*

Nadia is a 20-year-old girl, born in Genoa to Roma parents from Montenegro who moved to a tolerated settlement in Milan when she was just 6 months of age.[1] Her extended family is involved in criminal circuits – the two older brothers, for example, spent a period under house arrest in Italy and Spain respectively. Nadia's parents separated and moved away, leaving their children behind, when she was about one year old. The mother moved to Holland whilst her father entered into a new relationship with a Gagè woman in Genoa, to where he returned once more. Nadia grew up with her grandparents and her seven siblings in the tolerated camp, until an eviction was announced for this site too. The grandparents and her three siblings were placed in a shelter managed by an association together with the municipality. The four older siblings no longer lived with their grandparents – after the eviction, one moved to Spain, one of her sisters went to Montenegro and two remained in Milan after finding autonomous housing solutions. Nadia, her three younger siblings and grandparents remained at the shelter for four years. The girl, who had attended primary school and the first year of high school whilst at the tolerated camp, ending up two years behind due to problems pertaining to attendance. Yet she finished high school and then completed two years at a regional training school. We can identify a series of teenage experiences taking placed during the time spent at the shelter

1 The tolerated settlement, in the city of Milan, means a camp that has long been present, whose inhabitants have stable rapports with the district of reference and due to such, the municipal administration has not taken steps towards eviction for some time. It is in all respects a spontaneous settlement but due to its history, is treated almost like a municipal nomadic camp, except for not having access to a series of services provided to the municipal nomadic camps.

spanning from 2014 to 2018. Firstly, is her school attendance which, in her case, was also accompanied by participation in a series of social and recreational activities in contexts that see many non-Roma peers taking part. In addition, Nadia had been gradually moving towards a group of Roma activists in recent years, not only consisting of young people, giving life to an organisation engaged in solidarity activities and political initiatives. It was during this period that Nadia experienced situations and relationships that were unprecedented for previous generations and impossible for many of her peers. Nadia recast these experiences and openly expressed her desire for a different life. Most times, even in public contexts, the young woman claimed that she would not be "*like all the other Roma girls*" and criticised "*the old tradition*", accusing her siblings of being too submissive to their grandparents.

In 2018, Nadia turned 18. She had never left Italy yet is not an Italian citizen and did not have a residence permit. Despite being housed in a shelter run by the council, she experienced the paradoxical condition of a person illegally living in the only country she has ever lived throughout her entire life. This was certainly the consequence of the backwardness of the Italian law regarding citizenship but also of a series of legalisation opportunities missed by her parents. The condition of being an illegal 'immigrant' – without official papers – led to Nadia's strong sense of insecurity with respect to her future which had immediate practical implications. She could not access grants for educational aid (such as, for example, the 'school allowance') or welfare (her two siblings, with legal status, were granted accommodation in a social housing complex in a matter of a few years). She could not complete an internship upon finishing school and had to turn down a summer job offered by the school tutors due to the impossibility of entering into a contract. As if that were not enough, she could not even theoretically complete the two years of training following the first grade of secondary school due to the rules governing the mechanism of vocational training accreditation in the Lombardy region. Thanks to the mediation of the association that managed the refuge where Nadia lived, the school agreed to avail of a loophole to resolve the issue. At the age of 18, in seeking to obtain the proper documents, Nadia had to apply for a Montenegro passport. However, the consulate in Milan informed her that the only way to obtain such was to go to Montenegro and apply from there. Faced with this idea, the girl was concerned that her "homeland" relatives, closely connected with the family members in Milan, could "kidnap her and force her to marry".

The only document she had was a passport that expired years ago and which was held by her grandparents who implicitly used it as a deterrent to prevent the girl from running away.

Ever since Nadia's 15th birthday, tension had begun to arise between the girl and her grandparents with regard to her prospects. The grandparents wanted the girl to study but also to plan her future marriage with a family of the same Roma group and as a virgin – a condition that would guarantee full payment of a dowry. Nadia, meanwhile, was the centre of attention amongst her classmates and eventually fell in love. Through a classmate, she had an initial relationship with a Gagè boy then with an Italian Roma residing in Milan and who was the cousin of a girl belonging to another Roma group living in the same refuge as Nadia. Both relationships were discovered and thwarted by the grandparents, whilst the two siblings living with Nadia alternated forms of solidarity with the sister, hiding the relationships from their grandparents, with the defence of the positions of the family and asking for help from the instructors at the shelter. Whilst all this was going on in Milan, other dynamics were established elsewhere. The involvement of her uncles, her older siblings who had moved away and even her father, with whom Nadia had not spoken for years yet who oversaw what was going on from a distance, resulted in calls from Spain and the other Italian cities for her to "*respect tradition*" and threats to come by in a van "*to grab the girl and take her to Montenegro*".

To further complicate the situation, two other families became involved – one from Belgium, the other from Genoa – who along with Nadia's grandfather, were looking into a possible marriage.

Tensions rose as the weeks passed. After one quarrel, Nadia went to the police station to report her grandfather for having slapped and threatened her. She was offered a way to join a protected community that she did not accept.

After the summer of 2018, along with the lack of legal papers for citizenship and being forced to renounce the internship mentioned prior, Nadia ran away with a boy from her own Roma group, who was still living in the tolerated camp from which she had been evicted. She returned to her grandparents' home after three months and told them and her siblings that she was pushed to carry out illegal activities related to the world of micro-crime. Two more months went by. Nadia fled with another boy from her own Roma group, who also lived in the tolerated camp in which they had found refuge. Her grandparents' reaction was as negative as it was desperate, rejecting any agreement with the family of the young lad and cursing the school that had given the girl the strength to disobey

tradition and dishonour the family. Ten days after having taken off and thanks to certain relatives stepping in to mediate, the two families came to an agreement that made the marriage official. After another two months, Nadia and her husband illegally moved to Spain, where they currently live, surviving on petty crime. Her siblings and grandparents ended their direct relationship with the girl but continue to be informed about her movements through intermediaries. After more than two years, the date approached for the first hearing of the trial resulting from the complaint the girl filed against her grandfather. She was also summoned but, not being contactable, was not informed.

3.5.1 *The elusive future: desires, constraints, compromises and transnationalism*

Nadia's life unfolded amidst a multiplicity of intense and sometimes dramatic events. If up to a certain point, her story seemed oriented towards a horizon of innovation and transformation compared to the more classical plots of the life trajectories of many young Roma, from a certain point on, various elements contributed to ensuring that the adolescent transition came to an abrupt end.

Along this trajectory, several aspects emerged that help in understanding the possibilities and forms of adolescence in the Roma universe. Firstly, was Nadia's marked ability to move about in substantial solitude and to transverse – both physically and symbolically – different contexts of life. She passed from the tolerated camp, school and then the refuge, within various contexts of interaction both with non-Roma peers and Roma of various ages having heterogeneous experiences of migration and settlement. Nadia managed to reconcile all these affiliations and to experience them with a significant autonomy. Sure, there were moments of conflict and friction with her grandparents, who were the only figures of authority to whom to refer, but the young woman managed to handle these moments without compromising her freedom in what she does. Thanks to this ability, Nadia even managed to have romantic relationships with young non-Roma, finding temporary allies in her siblings. Even the choice of marriage, in representing a total rethinking of life prospects, was adopted by the young woman in substantial autonomy, in being able to choose with whom and in what form this should take place, and dissociating herself from the various sources of pressure, including at a transnational level.

We can perhaps speculate that this ability of self-determination developed also thanks to the intensity of the experiences that the young woman was

able to have beyond the family context – attending school for a significant amount of time, as well as adhering to the diverse association pathways, appearing to be contexts that gave Nadia the possibility to create spaces in which to define her identity or to be given the chance and power to choose her own future. For an extensive period in her life, whilst experiencing an adolescence that was partly similar to that of her non-Roma peers, Nadia proudly stated that she wanted to choose something other than "tradition". Then, just as she was coming of age, these projects disappeared with a certain ease in the face of certain objective problems, with the social capital accumulated by Nadia over the years evaporating in a relatively short time.

There are three elements that contributed to a reversal in direction, to a change in strategy that we could call "regressive", if compared with her initial projects.

The first concerns the impossibility of obtaining documents that legalise her status in Italy. In Nadia's case, it is not merely a question of emerging from being in the country illegally but actually of being recognised as a citizen of the only country in which she has ever lived. The impossibility of legalising her administrative status rendered pursuing her educational and professional projects impossible. Indeed, she was good enough to earn a decent education thanks to which she was offered a job that she could not accept. A legal constraint thus presents her with a dilemma – having to go to Montenegro to apply for a passport. Nadia perceived this sole way of moving forward in legal terms as being extremely dangerous. The fear of being kidnapped was combined with an awareness that the project of her marriage is, if not actively being pursued, at least expected and foreseen as taking place in the near future also by her entire family, leaving Nadia extremely vulnerable and alone. The constraints of the Italian legislation on immigration and citizenship were added to the wedding offers that others presented to her and we can argue that the sum of these two concrete factors reduced the young woman's capacity to think freely and independently about her own future.

The second aspect thus regards the relational capital accumulated throughout the years at school, her friendships, volunteering and her relationships with the Gagè world. We have said that the network of rapports constructed throughout her adolescence, both with peers and adults, was a critical resource that created her period of adolescence and filled this period with new and significant experiences. Nonetheless, this extensive capital can in no way be of value in the moment in which Nadia must face her main turning point, being in view of the limitations imposed by legislation. Here, we clearly see how the State plays a central role in defining and configuring

transitions to adulthood, especially for young migrants. In Nadia's case, the State's power plays a twofold role – it establishes the formal calendar from which the threshold of legal age descends and, for young foreigners, it attaches a particularly restrictive value to this threshold.

The third aspect, rather, concerns the positioning of her own nuclear family, with the conflicting messages received from her closest family members. On some occasions, her siblings supported her whilst on others, they exposed her to the judgment and control of their grandparents. The latter declared their intention to continue pushing her along the scholastic pathway (which we have seen she cannot fully do in any case) yet could not seem to implement particular strategies to actually do so. At the same time, their expectations were oriented towards traditional marriage, as were those of her extended family. Whilst the network linked to life outside the family context was broken, the links of the family network tightened – both that of the cohabitants and that split between at least two other European countries. This network was capable of exerting a power that was largely invisible to the Gagè around Nadia.

Throughout this entire process, which happened extremely quickly and impacted on her everyday life, it seemed as if Nadia were aware of the variables at stake. She saw many possibilities open up thanks to the experiences she had and saw them disappear with great ease or felt it was not appropriate to seize the opportunities (for example, inclusion in a protected community). In other words, the young woman seemed to have a sufficiently clear view of the general picture within which her own growth path was etched, the tensions by which it was determined, the possible consequences and – once again – the temporal dimension marking its progression.

In addition, we do not consider it an exaggeration to say that Nadia was left to her own devices even in regards to the complaint filed with the police. As has already occurred under various circumstances in Cristina's story, the timing of the institutional measures – in this case legal – travelled at different speeds when closing in on the girls' lives.

It is no coincidence that – having excluded the possibility of obtaining the necessary papers and simultaneously accepting a job offer, as well as given the pressure on her to wed – Nadia developed what we have defined at the beginning of the paragraph as a possible "regressive" strategy (when compared with the plans she declared having) to escape from the standstill in which she found herself. The elements distinguishing the two attempts were indicative of Nadia's resources, as she independently chose the people with whom to make her escape. In the first case, which eventually proved to be unsuccessful, she escaped then returned to her grandparents'

home, whilst in the second case, she managed to escape in a manner that was perhaps less sensational yet more protected, given that she took refuge in the home of her companion's relatives. It is in this passage that the ambiguity of the position of the grandparents in relation to the Nadia's schooling manifested with greater force given that, faced with a marriage that was "traditional" yet autonomously managed by the young woman, the grandparents ended up blaming the school and all the experiences Nadia had during adolescence as the causes of her disobedience. The initial disapproval of her running away does not prevent the two families from reaching an agreement whereby the marriage is considered effective. Having to give up their own projects and not wanting to fully adhere to the projects that her grandparents and family had planned for her, Nadia seemed to choose a third direction, of which certain aspects may seem to be as a compromise through which the girl could nonetheless protect at least part of her self-determination.

3.6 *Alexandra and Kristian*

Alexandra is a Romanian Roma girl from Oltenia, a rural region of southern Romania, who emigrated to Milan with her family when she was 10 years old. Kristian is a Serbian Roma, born and raised in the Lombard capital.

The pair met as adolescents in the shelter where their families were welcomed following evictions, respectively, from a slum and a tolerated camp. When 14-year-old Kristian arrives at the shelter, he had already dropped out of school. However, the following year, he managed to obtain a high-school diploma from the CPIA.[2] Yet, for him, this goal also meant the end of the educational career he had resumed thanks to the social work of the instructors at the shelter given that, without a legal residence permit, he could not attend a subsequent professional course. He dreamed of taking a bartender course but this proved to be impossible since the boy was "a foreigner in his own home" and moreover illegally present, in the only country in which he had ever lived.[3] School was precluded but the search

2 The Centro Provinciale Istruzioni Adulti (CPIA – the Provincial Centre for Adult Education) may be frequented from the age of 16 but, in special cases of youths leaving school, the course for obtaining a high-school diploma (at the end of the first cycle of education in Italy, after 8 years of school) can also be open to 15-year-olds.

3 Primary School plus Grade I and Grade II Secondary School in Italy all depend on the state and may be frequented by minors regardless of their legal status.

for work was also complex, since not having a residence permit means not being able to enter into a contract and thus the need to work "off the books". It was only at the age of 18, thanks to the help of a lawyer specialised in immigration law, that he achieved legal status, finally opening the door to his first employment contract.

Alexandra rather, despite the many evictions she had suffered, had a regular school pathway and, after high school, completed four years of a higher education professional course, of which 3 years were mandatory whilst the fourth year was optional. As an EU citizen and thanks to her father's work, she also had a residence permit hence her legal status was not an obstacle to schooling.

Her family had good social standing amongst the Roma in her area. Her father Valentin is sometimes called upon be a judge in the *judecata* (Weyrauch 2001, Engebriegsten 2007, Persico 2015) that take place in Milan, often around marriage issues, matters between couples and a "lack of respect" for tradition and other nuclear families. He is considered to be a wise man, that is, "who knows well and respects tradition", hence why he is even called to return to his homeland once a year for similar events that take place in his native country. The families who appoint him as a judge share the cost of the trip for any *judecata* that is considered to be particularly challenging.

Alexandra's family received more than one marriage proposal from other Roma from the same Romanian village, where the nuclear family returned each summer. However, since the girl had reiterated her will to study, the requests were rejected. Still, as far as her father was concerned, the only viable prospect was that of marrying a Romanian Roma boy from his own village or at least from the same region. Other Romanian Roma groups who "have a different tradition" are considered by their parents as "dangerous". But hanging out in the courtyard of the refuge, Alexandra falls in love with Kristian, who is Serbian Roma – his tradition becomes "exceedingly different" for Alexandra's parents. Kristian's relatives also declared as much before adding, with a laugh, "But this mattered to our grandparents; our cousin in France even married a Pakistani."

The two had already 'met' through social media before finding themselves in the same refuge. However, even on this virtual dimension, Alexandra was constantly monitored by her brother, who checked on her new contacts and

Several vocational training courses, usually lasting three years, are also offered by regionally-accredited bodies. Yet the Regions base payment of student tuition on accreditation that requires residence (and therefore a residence permit for non-European citizens).

the material they shared. Once they were in the same refuge and then in the same courtyard, hiding their friendship became increasingly difficult. First to notice the relationship was one of Alexandra's brothers, then a cousin and some neighbours, before even mother Anca noticed. After initially being angry and quarrelling with her daughter, Anca decided to ignore the relationship, without revealing it to her husband. Indeed, Kristian – although poor and without his parents (he lived with some aunts and uncles) – was a very kind and friendly lad who was well liked by Anca.

As the months passed, however, Valentin came to find out about the relationship and forbade his daughter from leaving the house alone and from seeing Kristian. To be sure, even her mobile phone was seized. The father claimed to be concerned above all for the good of his daughter but evidently his reputation amongst the other Roma was also at stake.

In protest, Alexandra stole medication from a cousin to invoke a suicide attempt. Almost resigned and fearing that his daughter would lose her virginity, the father screamed at Kristian and his aunts and uncles that the least they could do was have a wedding that was "true gypsy" (with the "true" tradition, being that of the Romanian Roma), with famous singers and a high price tag (borne by the groom's family) along with the payment of the dowry. Otherwise, he explained to Kristian's aunts and uncles, if his demands were not met, he would offer Alexandra's hand in marriage to others.

The love affair between the two youths was no longer a private matter. Not least of all, it was a matter of "honour" that must be resolved with an agreement between the families. It was Alexandra and her mother to involve some Gagè friends to resolve the problem. These friends were members of a Pentecostal church attended by the family and volunteers of an association that had helped both groups. The Gagè friends were concerned that the situation would degenerate into conflict but also wanted to keep the girl in school. In agreement with Anca, they organised a meeting at the main hall of the Pentecostal Church with the two youths, Alexandra's parents, one of Kristian's uncles and four Gagè, with the Pentecostal pastor, a man skilled in mediation, presiding over the meeting, which began with a prayer. After giving Valentin space to vent his anger and following extensive mediation, they managed to find an agreement. The two youths, following a short "presentation" ceremony in the Pentecostal church attended by various Roma, were allowed to date without having sex for the next year. Alexandra had to complete the fourth year of school and then the couple could tie the knot officially. Throughout the year, Kristian rather was tasked with finding money to pay the dowry, otherwise Valentin would give his daughter's hand in marriage to a Romanian Roma.

A year later, the situation was: Alexandra achieved her diploma, whilst Kristian did not gather the necessary sums (saving just under half) due to an interruption in his work. Yet, he did obtain social housing in which the pair could live. Time helped Alexandra's father accept the union, coming to increasingly appreciate his future son-in-law. Finally, the wedding party was organised according to Romanian-Roma customs and – this rather was unusual – it was the girl's family who took care of the organisation, the expenses of which were then covered by contributions from the 300-or-so guests. There were only a dozen Serbian Roma who attended, seated at a table with 5 Gagè.

As the wedding day approached, however, Kristian and Alexandra (21 and 18 years old respectively) were faced with a real dilemma. Per tradition, the following day they would have sexual intercourse, which would end with the blood-stained sheet being displayed to attest to the rupture of the girl's hymen and thus her virginity. Experienced women – relatives of the girl – would even inspect the cloth.

The issue was that the pair had already had sexual intercourse for the first time before the meeting at the Pentecostal church. Kristian consulted with a Gagè friend he had grown to know quite well. After a few days of irresolution, they came up with a way forward: a common acquaintance who worked in a testing laboratory would take three vials of blood and hand them over to Kristian shortly before the wedding. The following day, the sheet was stained and experienced women were able to confirm the honourability of Alexandra's family. Haven resolved this issue, Kristian decided to see his Gagè friend to thank him and praise the way he understood "the problem" right from the outset without too much explanation: "*You really know us Roma well,*" he told him, "*to have immediately understood our culture and customs that you Gagè do not have.*" Kristian remained open-mouthed when his friend explained that it is not an "*exclusively Roma*" custom but that to the contrary, many Italians – many decades ago – had the same "problem", along with a lot of "stratagems" for resolving it.

3.6.1 *Romantic love: valuing social capital to find solutions without causing damage*

Kristian's experience was very similar to that of Nadia – both trajectories were marked by the impossibility of obtaining legal status despite the fact that they were both born and raised in Italy. The boy earned his high-school diploma but could not continue further and found himself having to take a

different path – only upon becoming of legal age was he able to resolve this issue but by that time, his education had been interrupted.

Paradoxically, the story of Alexandra, who was not born in Italy but arrived in the country at the age of ten, began with the inauguration of an extensive educational journey. She finished Primary School and then Grade I Secondary School, with the years following corresponding to the time of her adolescence. This period offered the girl an opportunity to try new things and have new experiences, created and then expanded also thanks to the negotiation of her own path with the family of origin. The years of schooling, specifically those of her adolescence, were a time during which family expectations were questioned and, in some cases, even disregarded. Indeed, it was during this period that Alexandra came to know and secretly start to date Kristian, regarding whom she argued with her mother, quarrelled with her father and made attempts to commit suicide in protest. As per the adolescence of so many of her peers, adolescence was thus the time of doing new things, deception, compromise, negotiation and efforts that led to distancing from the family, to the "betrayal" of their expectations and plans, along with the formation of her own idea of adult life.

Their common project was based on a central element that brought them even closer to their peers – the love from which arise their ventures, the romantic love of the Western tradition that is totally based on individual choice. The pair choose each other out of love and a desire to be together, with there being no other elements that determine their will to build a relationship. It is a 'normal' love story that, in any case, must face the opposition of both families, more interested in tradition and honour than feelings.

Initially, the fact of living in the same shelter worked in their favour because the two were not strangers to their respective families, who knew them and could appreciate their behaviours and characters. Nonetheless, friction with the adult Roma figures of reference gradually emerged, between her parents and his aunts and uncles.

In this critical passage, Alexandra and Kristian's tale of romance took a different turn than that of many other Roma peers. We know that many young Roma people experience loving relationships established independently of their families and managed by being hidden from their siblings and cousins. In many cases, such as in the love stories of Nadia and Daniela that we have shared, these relationships are sacrificed by the young people themselves or are terminated upon the intervention of the families. Alexandra and Kristian managed to persist and to keep their love hidden but they decided for themselves to find a way to make their union acceptable in the eyes of their families. For these two young people, marriage was not

the step that signalled a return to family projects and strategies but to the contrary, it was the project of a couple that the two defended in spite of the families. It is thus interesting to consider the strategies adopted by the pair and to consider the reactions of their families, to understand what allowed their affair to have a positive outcome.

If with other stories, we have focused more on the actions and role played by institutions, this case reveals much about the relations between young Roma, the third sector and the world of associationism and volunteering in the religious field. On two extremely delicate occasions, the pair managed to capitalise on the knowledge acquired throughout time within the Gagè world: first, the meeting in which all stakeholders convened in order to find an agreement that would reconcile the different expectations without the two having to give up their relationship and second the point of verifying the bride's good repute through showing evidence of her virginity. The negotiating meeting – if we can define it so – is in itself quite a significant innovation. With the mediation of Alexandra's mother, Anca, the families agree to resort to an unusual instrument of discussion that practically replaces the more easily diffused instrument of the *Kriss* o *Judecata* managed entirely by Roma. Both Roma and non-Roma people took part in the meeting, having been selected by virtue of the significant and trusting relationships binding all stakeholders. This rendered it possible to take into consideration different aspects besides those more closely related to the classical premarital agreements between Roma families, such as the theme of dowry. Indeed, there is an explicit focus on the importance of Alexandra's schooling, shared by both her parents and all of those present, that is fully taken into account in the final agreements. The girl's father did not formally assume responsibility for the conclusion (and the risk it entailed) – he merely presented it to his social circle as something to which he had to resign yet in actuality, he accepted, supported and facilitated its success. Another interesting aspect is that of time. In many of the stories we have analysed, time – in the most cogent moments of passage – often undergoes rapid acceleration yet in this case, the decision is made to postpone, to delay and wait, jointly sharing a way forward with clear objectives for all.

The second situation in which Kristian calls upon a non-Roma friend for help allowed the pieces of a delicate jigsaw puzzle to be held together (concerning the bride's virginity and the reliability of his family), forming the very traditional background and the bearer of a process of transformation (a young couple marrying for love, living in autonomy and in which the woman has completed extensive education). The ways in which the wedding

was organised also reveal further elements of transformation – the dowry was renegotiated also due to the enhancement of other resources available to the groom (the housing) and the money to organise the wedding was advanced by the family of the bride rather than that of the groom.

What is most striking, in the sequence of events concerning Alexandra and Kristian, was thus their ability to activate individual, joint or external resources in order to solve the various problems that arise as they reveal their relationship. The two managed to realise their project by shifting the issue to a broader context, not merely that of families and "tradition". In this unprecedented scenario, all players cooperated to formulate solutions that did not involve a clear break with their own context of origin and the expectations it bears, with the Gagè world in which they grew up and from which they drew models and openings, nor with their own desires and projects. In this sense, the final passage of the story, where Kristian discovers that even Gagè newlyweds long had to deal with the issue of intercourse before marriage, seems to really allude to the possibility of a joint process of recognising and evolving all traditions.

3.7 *Conclusions*

In concluding this paper, we shall try to draw a balance that, although partial and not definitive, allows us to reconstruct the reasoning formulated thus far and to identify further avenues of work.

With the exception of Cristina's story, it is possible to identify a period characterised as adolescence in all the accounts. We thus consider it reasonable to state at least the possibility of the existence of adolescence in the Roma universe. Within this possibility, of course, there are events that are developed and accomplished differently. If we have seen that in many of the trajectories considered, the outcome is that of marriage (entered into at an age still, on average, younger than their peers), we have also had the opportunity to highlight how what happens before this occasion can be punctuated by a series of events, negotiations and equilibriums that are partly similar and partly specific to each of the individual youths. So, what are the causes and conditions for adolescence to occur?

The stories have highlighted the significant role played by the opportunities that young people can grasp, their individual resources, family relationships and the socio-economic trajectories of the latter along with the network of the extensive family, the transnational dynamics as well as local policies or interventions (effectuated or lacking) on the part of the

institutions and the third sector. This extremely varied and ever-changing range of elements and forces, in continuous play and in constant tension, is also found in previous research on this topic (Piemontese, Bereményi and Carrasco 2018). The variables are as numerous as the possible effects resulting from their combinations, without this leading to a predetermined destiny. Of course, there are more discontinuous pathways paved with periods of acceleration and standstill, moments of great momentum and change, turning points heading to conditions that appear to be more limited.

In the heterogeneity of the stories, we shall seek to identify certain elements of continuity.

The first has to do with opening up to other contexts, frequented and experienced in particular by non-Roma peers and adults alike (see also Daniele 2013). Here, we refer especially to the school. Obviously, it is necessary to point out how the paths of education can be highly significant or rather ineffective in determining the individual trajectories but it is also true that a prolonged time spent in school system is characterised as an undeniable premise, both in terms of the educational value that it represents and the opportunities for dialogue and rapports that it opens. As part of the school experience, it is thus equally necessary that "other" happens – being other than attendance and other than learning. And here comes the second element. In fact, it takes a certain intensity in the relationships, as well as a variety of experiences to enable the young person to find a space/time of possibility and experimentation throughout the years of adolescence, as we have defined it. Here, therefore, the entire dimension of relationships and extra-curricular activities manifests its importance, alongside the schooling. Sports, leisure activities, associations and voluntary groups, social or civil commitments but also friendships during free time or holidays become amplifiers of the rapports and strengthen their intensity. Research shows how these paths produce effects of change on all peers who can be personally involved within a process that is dynamic and rich in reciprocity, without anyone having to unilaterally adapt to others (Pasta, Vitale 2017).

Subsequently, we will identify a third element, being the individual abilities, developed by Roma boys and girls in order to recognise, traverse and enhance the various social environments and their codes of behaviour. The experiences of adolescence are possible and indeed facilitate an accumulation of social and cultural capital. This capital become a resource if and when that these young people are able to manage the multiplicity, they know how to recognise the different interlocutors and are able to recognise the rules of the game within each environment. Moreover, these youths manage to build their own singularity precisely by navigating this

multiplicity, moving through it. The detachment from the family context, testing other modes of interaction, can represent a challenge or struggle because they can provoke simultaneous feelings of being liberated from the weight of family expectations yet devoid of clear references (Berry 1997) but, as per the socio-anthropology literature, the young migrant children fail in many instances to make the most of their being in-between and their ability to cross and to construct their own identity throughout such navigations.

In fact, the outlined transitions to adulthood take place, as we have said, within even broader changes, such as those of the respective families, which in turn occur within transformations of the policies and practices of the third sector subjects.

So here we come to another element that determines – along with others – the possibility of the existence of adolescence. That is, the family transitions here understood as processes of social mobility, in which the housing conditions, work and socio-economic dimensions concerned all play a part.

Field work shows us that it is precisely as the framework of the family conditions changes that we see the transitional structure opening up. It is easier for a Roma youth to go through the teenage years if and when their own nuclear family is also travelling along a path that leads to an improvement in the sense of housing and economic stability. Two other factors come into play here, which we shall mention briefly. Firstly is the timing of the transformation of the family of origin and even more specifically, the timing of the procedural and institutional interventions. The stories recounted herein of family developments could have led to other individual changes due to being put into gear at the right moment along the trajectories of the adolescents. At the same time, however, we have seen the disastrous consequences of interventions and aid that come along too late, when the individual trajectory had taken on a certain physiognomy. A second aspect is the presence of role models regarded as positive by both the young people and their parents. In Daniel's journey, we saw how a role model who was known to and appreciated by the family functions as an essential resource to free up the young man's trajectory but also to support him when faced with unprecedented challenges and steps.

Finally comes one last but still important element in which the family plays an essential role, being the divergent attitude parents have towards their sons and daughters.

The stories we have told clearly show that families can define the extent of possible teenage experiences and influence their outcome. Teenage

experiences like that of Daniel and many of his peers are characterised by an enormous freedom of movement and relationships. The young man can travel about and operate however he wants without any preclusions on the people he meets and with whom he spends his time. Even his aesthetic choices, the codes with which he enters into rapports with non-Roma peers, are entirely unrestrained. The situation is different for girls, even for those we discussed, who experience adolescence in way that is unlike many of their peers. Their freedom is however limited by forms of direct and indirect control. The most simple and widespread is the presence of their relatives or acquaintances, who are asked to pay attention both to the girls' behaviour and the people they meet. It is also common to punish by depriving the girls of their mobile phone whilst in the story of Nadia, we even find her legal documents being confiscated.

Daniela's story shows us that the need to limit girls' movements can become even more compelling for families in Romania than for those in Milan, when amongst families belonging to the same community. This element makes us understand how the representation of young women as potential prey that families must protect has nothing to do with the experience of contact and relationship with non-Roma, as Nadia's grandparents instrumentally affirm, but refers to the patriarchal structure in which the young men – together with their families – are called to play the role of potential predators. This arrangement of relationships between the genders based on the logic of honour and shame appears as a central feature of the so-called "traditional" model of the Roma whilst also recalling many Mediterranean societies (Herzfeld 1980).

In this sense, young Daniel experiences the freedom of adolescence on the one hand but on the other, assumes the role of controller over his sisters' behaviour, telling us that the structure of gender roles, the asymmetries in power between women and men is an element that is not necessarily overcome, nor questioned, in these Romani adolescences.

The ambiguity of Daniel's attitude basically reaffirms the patriarchal order and warps adolescent as an experience exclusive to male Roma. Yet, we can actually juxtapose the various solutions enacted by Alexandra and Kristian. In displaying a sheet deceptively soiled with blood, the two confirm the expectations and rules of tradition but their deceit, orchestrated with a Gagè, is able to legitimise an outcome that is decidedly not traditional, being a union of Roma from different groups, sanctioned through recourse to the authorities and brokers who are external to both groups, in which the power balance is much more equal, if not even to Alexandra's benefit to a certain extent.

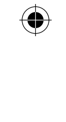
From here, we can further develop our reasoning regarding adolescence in the Roma world. If we exclude Daniel's story, not by chance due to his being a young male, all the transitions that we have shared and analysed are resolved with the marriage taking place in any case at a relatively early age. This should not, however, overshadow the fact that the girls in particular become adults through marriage, bringing with them a broad range of experiences and knowledge that they have acquired through events taking place during the period of adolescence. In our opinion, this knowledge is a fundamental resource that increases not only the freedom but also the power to decide on one's own future. We have obvious traces of this not only in the stories and their outcomes that were previously unheard of, such as that of Steluţa, but also in the stories of Daniela and Nadia. Both young women resolve the transition to adulthood with marriage after creating and waging a battle with their family figures in authority, returning by formulating a personal choice that – as we have seen – takes many other factors into account. The generational conflict with the family authorities is resolved by not refusing marriage but in choosing who, when and how to wed. In this, we find significant signs of freedom and power over their lives that these young people have experienced during adolescence.

However, the matrimonial resolution of these transitions can bring about various changes, even with a broader and unexpected scope.

The story of Alexandra and Kristian, which we consider as being exceptional despite knowing they are not unique, shows us that the changes grafted with the teenage experiences can germinate on various levels, almost to the extent of openly challenging the authorities and the rules of tradition. The marriage agreement is in fact formulated through the mediation of subjects outside the families and Roma groups in the discussions they have together. In one way, these subjects are called upon to reproduce – outside the Roma context – a dynamic that is substantially similar to that of the Kriss or Judicata but the families have chosen to attribute the role of authority to other non-Roma. They are individuals who enjoy significant elements of authority, such as the credibility of the religious authorities and the constant and selfless commitment to supporting Roma families. These individuals replace the elders, those considered as the depositaries of the "*tradiţia*", as figures of authority. Even Alexandra's father – himself often called upon as Judicator – agrees to turn to other authorities. Negotiation is then taken to an external space where relatively traditional forms of interaction between participants are repeated. Yet here, a change occurs also in the authoritative persons called to mediate change, meaning also the codes of reference, the priorities and values on which the outcome is inspired. And so, we

see the romantic love between the two young people accepted along with the importance of the girl's schooling and the possibility for the pair to have a period of official engagement. Then there are the more "traditional" elements of the agreement – the price of the bride to be paid and proof of virginity that are eventually reformulated in practical terms, thanks to the mutual agreement and recognition of the various players. The father of the bride recognises and appreciates the bridegroom's earnestness, the bridegroom comes to understand that these difficulties are not exclusively of young Roma after asking for help from his Gagè friend.

The romantic wedding as the outcome of Alexandra and Kristian's transition to adulthood reveals yet another level on which the changes brought about by the opportunity for the Roma adolescence take place. This concerns the level on which new authority figures and new rules of authority can be found, through which the codes and values of the groups concerned can be called into question. Fundamentally, this is the level on which transformation can be enacted in cultures and societies, and this is exactly the role that many Roma teenagers are starting to play.



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CASE-STUDY: A STORY_S REFLECTION FROM SPAĪN

Introduction

The low rate of young Roma in Spanish higher education institutions is an enduring fact. While no official figures exist, enrolment figures for this group in higher education are still very low, rising from between 1-2% in 2013 (Laparra 2011; FSG and CEET 2013) to 3.2% in 2018 (de la Rica and others 2018).

Other data regarding compulsory education are also alarming: the enrolment rate in the final year of compulsory schooling in Spain, the fourth year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education), is 57% (FSG and CEET 2013). Furthermore, post-compulsory stage education statistics show that the early leaving rate (young people between 18 and 24 who have not continued in education after completing ESO) stands at 63.7% for Roma, compared to 21.9% in the general population (2013). There are several reasons for this, with institutional discrimination and segregation playing a fundamental role. Other factors, such as the socio-economic and educational level of families, the relatively low trust in education as a driver of social mobility, beliefs regarding the weakening of family and community ties, the difficult negotiation of social roles and obligations, the lack of support structures and the hidden costs of social mobility (Bereményi 2018) should all be taken into account (Bereményi and Carrasco 2017).

That said, other research has examined the factors that have led to young male and female Roma following successful and continued educational paths in Spain (Abajo and Carrasco 2004; Gamella 2012; Bereményi and Carrasco 2015). These factors coincide with those of other 'involuntary minorities' (Ogbu 1978), where research has highlighted the benefits of mentoring. The contributions of Bernadette Sánchez and others (Hurd, Sánchez and Caldwell 2012; Sánchez, Pinkston, Cooper, Luna and Wyatt 2018) show the central role of mentoring, and particularly the quality of the human relationship, in the positive development of young people from

minorities, in this case Latinos and Afro-Americans in the USA. Gloria and Robinson-Kurpius (2001) showed that Native American students in the USA felt that being mentored was the most important factor in their decision to continue in education, while Villalpando (2003) concluded that peer mentoring increased the academic success of members of the inter-ethnic group by encouraging a raised critical cultural awareness that had its roots in their shared condition of racialized students.

The *Springboard to Roma Youth Success* (Story_S)[1] project, aware of the sociological problem examined in this research and its results, was conceived with the aim of providing support to male and female Roma young people who wished to continue their post-compulsory education. To meet this aim, Story_S set out to use a participative methodology involving these young people in three kinds of actions: peer mentoring; workshops to raise awareness of anti-discrimination; and participation in citizen action activities.

This article will focus on the first of these actions, *peer mentoring*, and specifically on the work carried out in Catalonia (Spain) between the Autonomous University of Barcelona (EMIGRA-CER Migraciones) and the Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (FAGIC). Using the data obtained, our aim was to identify the potential of Intra-ethnic Natural Mentoring and examine the benefits for mentees in the accumulation of positive capital that results from the de-individualization processes experienced. In doing so, our intention was to shed light on the individual and group tactics and actions that have mobilized mentors and mentees throughout this process. At the same time, we have also questioned the effects of the experience in the context of analysing inter-ethnic relations, and inter and intra-ethnic social structures that the project forms part of, with the aim of promoting educational continuity in post-compulsory stages, in particular in the transition to higher education.

1 *Springboard to Roma Youth Success* (Story_S) was a two-year project funded under the framework of the European Union's Rights, Equality, and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). It was implemented in four countries simultaneously: Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, and Spain. It involved two public universities – the University of Bergamo (Italy), and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (EMIGRA-CER Migraciones, Spain), and five tertiary sector entities, Associazione Bambini in Romania (BIR), Italy; Carusel, Rumania; the Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (FAGIC), Spain; Health and Social Development Foundation (HESED); and the Bulgarian Youth Forum (BYF), Bulgaria.

The Story_S Project in Catalonia (Spain)

The Story_S Project was implemented in two areas of Catalonia (Spain) with high Roma populations throughout 2018-19: three low-income neighbourhoods in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB); and in the largest city in Central Catalonia, located 65 km from Barcelona.

Through FAGIC, young male and female Roma university students from these areas were asked to become mentors and identify young people in their circles (neighbours, friends, younger members of their extended families, members of the Evangelical Church of Philadelphia, among others) who wished to resume their education; these then became the mentees on the Story_S Project. It should be underlined that these mentoring relationships were thus based on pre-established trust, taking advantage of the varied benefits of 'natural mentoring' (Negrete and others 2018).

Intervention methodology: intra-ethnic mentoring

On the project, 12 Roma mentors (seven men, and five women) provided socio-educational support to 27 young Roma, with whom they already had some kind of close tie. The mentees were all at a critical stage of their education path, whether moving into post-compulsory education, returning to education by preparing for the University Access Exam for Students over 25, or obtaining their Secondary Education Certificate (GESO).

Mentoring took place in person individually and in groups, through a series of social activities; and virtually, through remote monitoring via WhatsApp and mobile phones. A total of 129 individual mentoring sessions, 66 group mentoring sessions, 25 group activities, and 24 meetings with the families took place. With an overall attendance rate of 90%, these actions permitted the mentors to provide various kinds of support at all stages of the meetings with mentees that went beyond the purely academic – including emotional support, assessment and orientation, tangible assistance, and social participation (Barrera and Bonds 2005).

Although there is no consensus as to the merits of intra-ethnic mentoring itself (Sánchez and Colón 2005), in stigmatized minorities the shared experiences of discrimination and adaptive community responses (Ogbu and Simons 1998) may lead to a significant degree of complicity. On formulating the intervention, beyond ethnicity, we highlighted the cultural norms and values of the local community, community-religious practices, and the episodes of educational success experienced by the

mentors themselves. Similar stories experienced by the co-ethnic mentors guaranteed their empathy and understanding of beliefs or 'folk theories' about how the world works, as well as of the pressures, limitations, and obligations facing the young mentees. We understood the intra-ethnic relationship in itself to be insufficient for successful mentoring. It is the intersection of the shared experiences of social class, ethnicity, gender, and linguistic identity that provide the optimal conditions for efficiency in the mentor-mentee tandem.

Reviewing the concepts: natural mentoring and de-individualization

Kochan defined *mentoring* as 'two or more individuals voluntarily forming a mutually respectful, trusting relationship based on goals that foster the potential of the mentee, while considering the needs of the mentor and the context in which they both must function' (Kochan 2002: 284). It is a process that goes beyond close friendship, in which the mentor, who is presented as a guide and counsellor, establishes actions that promote the mentee's personal and professional development (Rhodes 2008). That said, it is also about recognizing the bi-directional character of a technique – mentoring – the effect of which results from the ability to create a high-quality, sustainable link between mentor and mentee.

The studies and assessment of social mentoring between peers have highlighted the positive aspects of the presence of support figures in the psycho-social, cognitive, academic, and behavioural development of young people (Coyne-Foresi and others 2019; Rhodes 2005). If we assume that there are at least four kinds of support provided by the young person's support network (emotional support and stimulus, information, tangible help and assistance, and support for self-esteem) (Cutrona and Russell 1987), the natural intra-ethnic mentoring that we have developed on the project and discuss in this article should successfully provide the young people with these benefits.

Natural mentoring is also known as traditional, informal, or unplanned (Ponce Ceballos and others 2018). As opposed to formal programmes, there is no time limit set in this kind of mentoring, and, among others, it can involve relatives, teachers, and older siblings; it can also be intra or inter-ethnic (Ponce Ceballos and others 2018). In natural mentoring, the mentor is generally chosen from the network of non-parental adults from whom the young person receives support outside any programme that is designed to these ends. Mutual choice thus becomes central in the relationship between

mentor and mentee; this choice is generally made before mentoring begins (Raposa & Hurd, 2018; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer and Behrendt, 2005). Given that mentor and mentee share a social circle, these ties are lasting, and meetings take place more frequently. Negrete, Griffith & Hurd (2018) note this frequency as a factor in the success of mentoring.

Natural mentoring is characterized by the establishment of strong ties (Granovetter 1973) between mentor and mentee, that are closer than the contacts and kinds of information to which both have access. This does not preclude the young person from forming other, weaker, ties with institutional agents, and establishing a network of people who can provide different kinds of support at various times in the transition through educational stages and institutions.

In their review of published research on mentoring, Kent, Cochan and Green (2013) showed that any person involved in such a relationship should seek to be culturally aware and sensitive (Gokturk and Arslan 2010; Kochan and Pascarelli 2012); this is more likely to be the case in intra-ethnic mentoring as mentees more easily identify with their mentors, and see them as role models, thus leading to changes in their identities and social roles (Rhodes 2005).

It is worth considering the introduction of a new element, the benefit of groupwork through natural group intra-ethnic mentoring. This means not only de-individualizing actions, but also offering mentees greater possibilities to accumulate positive social capital; to become more group aware; to increase their self-esteem; and to have the tools and strategies to cross cultural and political limits and boundaries between groups (Erickson 1987). According to Dunn and Moody (1995), these programmes help to keep students in education by fomenting their loyalty and generating a feeling of belonging; they may also help them to create networks, and socialize in academic and social activities. Furthermore, the relationship with their mentors may promote resilience in adolescents of minorities at academic risk by fostering a more positive ethno-racial identity, and strengthening their beliefs regarding the importance of education (Sánchez and others 2008; Hurd and others 2012). Authors such as Putnam (2015) note the importance of nurturing support networks in young people who form part of vulnerable groups. Along the same lines, Barrett, Mazerolle and Nottingham (2017) studied the creation of social networks that favour university access of young people from minorities. Reservations have, however, been expressed about such intra-ethnic mentoring processes due to their possible segregationary consequences (Sánchez and Colón 2005).

Methodology

The project lasted for two years (2018-2019). The mentoring process was monitored from the very first actions (the selection, training, and selection of mentors and mentees), through the processes, and to the end of the project. The researchers attended group activities and meetings, and carried out interviews with mentors (6) and mentees (10) at various stages of access to, transition to, and incorporation in post-compulsory education stages. Each mentor compiled a diary of activities carried out with the mentees and their families, to which the researchers have had access.

The research involved extensive monitoring of the different cases. Special focus was placed on the description of the group mentoring processes, and how they may have led to changes in the pathways that young people take towards education. The resulting categorization was applied to the data analysis, which shows the appropriations, dilemmas and social processes involved in implementing the mentoring. Although this technique is theoretically neutral, we observed that development is socially located. Such an approach helps us understand the effect of the actions aimed at inclusion from the complex meaning given by the actors themselves. It is an approach that intents to provide the research with the pluralism necessary to make the actions aimed at promoting the access of young Roma to higher education more strategic (Padilla-Carmona and others 2020).

Results

The research reveals a range of conditions necessary for the mentoring to be effective. Among these is the mentor's ability to construct a large enough relational space to include the young person's initiative; this space also needs to be sufficiently well-structured to orient their transformation (Herrera and others 2000). The relationship is one of influence, with pre-established targets for change. The results presented in this article sustain this.

Introducing 'the studies' in community spaces

Natural mentoring results from pre-existing personal ties between mentor and mentee, and thus does not require the building of trust. A similar

process happens in natural mentoring at the group level: it does not require the construction of artificial meeting spaces, as the group itself already has such spaces, where leisure activities and a shared socio-community life take place.

In Story_S, the mentor-mentee relationship was developed through continuity in terms of times and spaces with regard to meeting places. Having a coffee, going to the cinema, taking part in sport, visiting a shopping centre, and, above all, attending religious worship, are all activities in which previous topics of conversation were substituted by talk about studies and going to university. As Manuel comments, this happened within the stable framework of a friendship that has lasted since early childhood:

> [with the mentor] we went to nursery school together, my father and his were friends from when they were 16. Paco's father is my godfather. (…) We're friends, we used to talk about football, and now we talk about studies. We've changed what we talk about, and we also get together more often. If we had an exam to study for, we'd meet every day. […] He's been studying all his life, and we'd drifted apart. We've never talked about studies before, and now it's unusual if we don't talk about studying. [Manuel, 26, mentee]

Women have created their own spaces. These are separate and largely, but not exclusively, linked to childcare, in the children's playground, for example. As Carol, a mother of 3, says:

> I get together with them to do homework, as I've got some to do, we go to the park, the other girl also has 4 children. While we're in the park, we meet up and do homework together, and it's a help if I have to take notes. [Carol, 24, mentor]

A reconversion of the natural spaces and mechanics of sociability results in the mentees' projection of their new identities. This is seen in specific social contexts, in which the mentor's function superimposes, negotiates, and legitimizes other status roles, such as those of pastor or teacher.

> Academically, I try to be their mentor. I'm their spiritual mentor, because I'm always keeping an eye on them, advising them. That's for the Church. Economically, it's 'Get down to work! You don't want to work as a Payo [non-Roma], right? Well save some money and start your own business'. I'm always there, because they're younger then I am, and because of the roles that work among the Roma, there's this idea that I'm always watching out for them. Then the role of mentor, here in Manresa, is 100% natural for me, it's not something extra that I have to do. [Adán, 26, 2nd year Sociology degree, mentor]

The merging of roles is based on the sustainability of known cultural norms, and there is full awareness of the limits that would compromise the relationship. These are limits between the sacred and the profane, respect for the hierarchical structure, competently recognizing who to aim every message at, and how to use the discourse of change in front of an audience of 'more old-fashioned' Roma:

> I make the most of being a mentor because I'm always testifying. God is with me always. I told the girl I've got (mentee) 'Come to the Church'. And to those of the Church I also say 'you've got to study'. I don't say this to the women, because they're more closed-minded, they're older than I am […] I want my children to want to go to university, and be able to get there. [Carol, 24, mentor]

These community spaces have seen strong, close ties develop between mentor and mentee. As each mentee has had contact with other mentors and peers, support has become de-individualized, but has also arisen from a second circle of relationships. This has only been possible due to the characteristics of natural intra-ethnic mentoring itself, and the access to community spaces. It should be added that, while mentoring attracts the attention of peers within the community, the fact that it is linked to a 'university project' undoubtedly gives it legitimacy, and brings prestige to mentors and mentees alike.

However, as the research has shown, not all mentees have met the initial goals that were set and passed the University Access Exam for Students over 25, or obtained their Secondary Education Certificate. Nonetheless, they still meet their mentors and the rest of the group at religious worship, football, and in community spaces. This contributes to them continuing in education and not ceasing in their desire to study. Indeed, the group itself has drawn up an *emic* definition of 'success' that, rather than focusing on passing the exam, is not abandoning studies.

> Try it, and if not, then it doesn't matter if it's next year. The same thing happened to the other girl as me, she's got four children, she has to work, and she can't do everything… Then, well, it's 'Gloria, don't worry if it's not this year, we'll go together just the same, and if you can't manage, then I will.' If she's got a job, then I can look after the children for a while [Carol, 24, mentor]

This appropriation of the definitions of success and failure allows those people who have greatest difficulty in balancing studies, family, and work (working women) not to give up on preparing for exams. Mentees that

have passed the exam become their closest models on a motivational (demonstrating that the step to post-compulsory education is always feasible) and instrumental level (taking on the role of teacher themselves if necessary):

> Josué has taken advantage of the technological science part of the Secondary Education Certificate, which, as the Roma say, we're jinxed in, and flown through it. In fact, we're carrying on with the course right now as there are exams again in November, and Emilio will be [this group's] Technological Science teacher. [Adán and Josué, presentation Story_S UAB]

Those young people who abandoned the programme had no family ties with the mentors, shared no community or workspace, and did not attend religious worship on a daily basis. In these cases, it is notable that even if a friendship predating the mentoring project did exist, this link was not supported by multiple ties, as it was in the other cases.

Becoming a role model: the collective sense of individual action

For some mentees, studying became more than a merely personal challenge, and acquired meaning related to the group, family and community. Isaac, 25, who was on the first year of a History degree, stated that 'I'm not studying for myself, but for my children', meaning his aim is to become a role model for them. In Adán's case, being able to help his son with his homework was a fundamental driver for him, so that his son might become more academically engaged and successful and continue his studies.

> In the end, we don't do this just for ourselves, but also for our children's benefit. I don't want my son to do ESO and then say 'that's it, I'm getting married, and am off to work in the market'. I'd like my children to be smarter than I was. One of the few that started was this guy. We all did ESO together, and then, after that, went on to do a mid-level IT course, and we stopped going after a few months. [Isaac, 25, 1st year History degree, mentee]

Studying goes further than this, though, to also become a community issue. On the one hand, some people's academic experience inspires 'more Roma to study'. On the other hand, studying goes beyond individual worth and turns subjects into ethno-cultural representatives, due to the prestige that they represent for 'the Roma people', and the debt and forms of payback that are considered to be due to this ethnic community:

> That thing about improving our lives, we know that this is more important for the Roma, and the fact that we study motivates other Roma to do the same. [Isaac, 25, 1st year History degree, mentee]

There is also a social debt that highlights the demand to normalize a situation of exclusion in prestigious academic entities, such as the university, which have traditionally been off limits to the Roma. Adán believes that 'Roma-izing' university means normalizing an anomalous situation.

> Roma men and women, we've got to get to university, and we've got to be successful. That happens if the Roma receive backing, through affirmative action, and I think this began years ago. […] What do I mean by 'Roma-ize' university? That a Roma at university is not seen as being aliens, that the university respects Roma culture, that there are Roma faculty members, as until now there have been very few Roma in class, so things need to be normalized. [Adán, 26, 2nd year Sociology degree, mentor]

Being a role model in the community is not merely a matter of educational level, but also of reputation and family line; recognition varies depending on the position the family occupies in the intra-community hierarchy.

Turning community cultural wealth into cultural capital for success

Social support is found in a number of facets, among them collective study strategies. This is not only in the sense of accumulating the knowledge needed to pass an exam, but is also related to the tactics necessary for success.

Given the problems in passing a foreign language exam for the University Access Exam for Students over 25, and difficulties in learning English, a mentee of Portuguese descent suggested that their group studied Portuguese instead; he was much more familiar with the language as 'he has heard it all his life'. The use of a collective tactic overcame their lack of cultural capital in learning English, and the economic capital needed to pay for refresher classes:

> We changed to Portuguese, it helped my grade average. English was harder than Portuguese. I've heard Portuguese all my life, when I saw the English exam, I didn't understand a word of it… and so I said to them 'look, read it…, we can understand almost everything…' and it turned out very well for us. I downloaded and read the newspaper in Portuguese every day. [Manuel, 26, 1st year Law degree, mentee]

Similarly, football, an activity that integrates young people into the community, was not merely a pretext for meeting regularly, but became a didactic resource to explain the relationships between people and historic events.

> Well, it's not been a change, as Pedro's always been a friend and mentor, more a friend really. The meetings weren't like 'I'm your mentor, I'm going to help you'. He helped me because he was my friend. The good memories that I have are of us all getting together and being able to talk about our studies, the laughs we've had, the struggle to understand concepts, comparisons we've made so we can understand things. For example, we were talking about the Russian Revolution, and, to understand it we compared it to football. Lenin's like this guy, you've seen how Ronaldinho… Comparisons like that, well, we've split our sides laughing. Those are good times we've had. [Antonio, 25, mentee]

For many decades, the Roma community in Spain has widely valued the intellectual activity involved in Bible studies and training candidates, particularly men, to become Evangelical Pastors. While the Evangelical Church of Philadelphia (or 'Roma religion') has not explicitly or unanimously supported educational continuity for Roma men and women (Cantón and others 2004), the practice of Bible reading and interpretation has raised interest in other subjects, such as sociology, medicine, or psychology. As the intensive dedication of the pastor takes place outside productive activities, studies – even for an adult with children – do not seem so unacceptable.

> Well, let's see, I, even though I've not studied, I didn't carry on in secondary school; being a Christian, I've studied the Bible a lot, and we're very used to reading, studying Theology on my own. And as I've got so many study habits like that, it wasn't hard for me to read something else. [Manuel, 26, mentee]

However, although collectivizing support does not necessarily mean there is no difference in mentees' educational pathways, it does generate challenges and dilemmas for mentors. In one case, one of the mentors, Pedro, managed to change what was a criterion for university access to a differentiated criterion of his own interest after recommending this action to his mentee. He demonstrated his sensitivity in responding to the dilemma regarding how far to support the 'project of self' or the 'project of others' (Devos 2004), but he could not solve that of how to maintain the

collective process with diverging interests, in the face of which, the mentor lacks resources.

> We're going to study teaching, and then you're not on your own in the course. There are more doors open to us to work in schools. And I said 'Come on, let's do it', and speaking with Paco, he says 'Where are you going to study teaching? Didn't you always want to study Law? If you really want to study Law, you've got lots of opportunities to do what you want when you finish. You do that.' I've decided to do Law because of him. [Manuel, 26, mentee]

It should be added that with the incorporation of some parents into university access education there has been a slight change to what published research calls 'folk theory of how they can make it in the face of economic discrimination' (Ogbu and Simons 1998: 161). Due, in some cases to public policies aimed at the Roma population in Catalonia, and in others, the closing of previously lucrative professional niches, access to basic qualifications, or secondary and higher education, has become a viable alternative way to improve working conditions, both for adults and young people. In these conditions, formal studies have lost value as a cultural marker for Roma and non-Roma people.

Going to university: overcoming barriers by making ethnic belonging visible

Collective tactics for success that were applied in preparation for university access have been perpetuated for the public university, where a mutual support platform has been created (Campus Rom) with the backing of the public administration. Roma students access this to find the support they do not find in other spheres (family, neighbourhood, church), and it helps them decipher the messages found in new surroundings, both perpetuating and mobilizing the minority's ethnic capital. The students thus aid each other, lend notes, share tasks, create spaces in which to resolve their questions, have access to job offers, information regarding grants, or the support that a private tutor can provide. Thus, academic, linguistic, and emotional barriers, and the initial fears on arriving in the new university surroundings, are overcome. These are actions that go beyond economic funding.

> When Campus Rom have placed a mentor, they've been very successful. Sometimes a person doesn't need to do anything; they simply call you and ask how everything's going. That 'Is everything alright?' is in itself an injection of

> energy. And I've realized that when we've done this, we've been successful. […] the problem comes when I go to the university and it feels like I'm alone, but when they call you from the Campus once a week […] it really works […] There's one who's a mentor at the UAB [university] and mentors the 8 or 9 that are there. [Adán 26, 2nd year Sociology degree, mentor]

But what happens when collective support cannot be accessed, and the educational path has to be taken alone? In this situation, we note that the mentees have two experiences; one is of discrimination, and, in the words of Isaac, 'a little bit of contempt', particularly when one 'looks like a Roma, is darker skinned', and it is impossible go unnoticed and 'whiten' oneself:

> Well, I think it's going a little worse for him than for me. Above all, because he's a Roma, he looks more Roma than I do, his skin's darker. And I've heard that he's had to put up with some disrespect. Maybe in groupwork, because other people don't want to work with him, or lend him their notes. […]. And I think he's having a bit of a bad time, I haven't spoken directly with him. [Isaac, 25, 1st year History degree, mentee]

The other experience is the raising of the ethnic mobilization discourse. As we see, the presence of these young people in public university still causes surprise; it is here that the *mirror effect* is most clearly seen. The surprise at their presence in surroundings that are not seen to be 'the right ones for a Roma' is mixed with the pride felt at being a 'representative of the community', which, in turn, is self-attributed. Asserting one's presence and becoming a representative of a minority bolsters the ethnic discourse. Isaac himself stated that 'It's in my interest for them to know that I'm a Roma'. Pedro tells his mentee 'Introduce yourself to all the professors and tell them that you're a Roma from La Mina'.

> For me, of course it's in my interest that they know I'm a Roma and at university, so everyone who sees me in class says 'there's a Roma at the university', and whenever they talk about the Roma at home or wherever, they can say 'I've got a Roma friend at university'. (…) I've never had problems in groupwork, or with notes.
>
> Because I've had tutorials with all the professors that Paco [mentor] has recommended. They told me it was important for the professors to meet you. He told me 'When you see an exam, show them who you are. Have a tutorial just to introduce yourself. If you've got problems doing some work later on, then ask for another one. But you ask for one to introduce yourself'. That's what Paco recommended, and so I did it. [Isaac, 25, 1st year History degree, mentee]

The project's importance becomes clear in the reinforcement of the various tactics by which ethnic capital is mobilized in academic contexts when dealing with professors and fellow students.

The limits to collective support: being somewhere you do not belong

Collective support tactics do have their limitations, however. In a private elite university, gaining the instrumental support of the group was not possible for Esther, a scholarship student of 19. The lending of notes between students is a condition of academic success, but becoming part of this network of favours is not an automatic process. When Esther went to ESADE, a private university, from a state school in a working class area on the other side of the city she knew nobody, and soon realized that not only did most of other students know each other, but they had gone to the same private schools, lived in the same neighbourhoods, shared leisure activities, had mutual friends, and in some cases were even couples. The monitoring reports include the observations of Paco (Esther's mentor, and an ex-scholarship student of the same university):

> There was a 'critical' moment when Esther wanted to give up. She didn't go to class for two days, and then couldn't find anyone to lend her their notes. She interpreted this as a rejection, but Paco explained that nobody wanted to lend notes until they'd been tidied up, put into pdfs, and the like, because that damaged the image that others had of them as a student. He told her that this kind of group can often take a year to form, until finally someone opens a WhatsApp group, a Dropbox to share notes and so on. People are afraid that you think they're stupid until the institution itself places you based on your results. […] Everything depends on results. Maybe she wouldn't have made friends, but she should have become a classmate, and had her friends outside university (Facilitator, monitoring report, 2018)

Paco made her understand that finding other students willing to lend her their notes should be enough, while she should look for emotional support (friendships) away from the university among old school friends. He recommended that she apply to join an ESADE students' association, and take on a position of responsibility, where it would be easier to find people who wanted to help her and professors who would support her. Such advice, however, did not open the doors of these much more selective institutions. According to Paco, Esther had no problems with language studies, or in meeting the academic demands of these new surroundings, but she did

have to spend many hours there, with the feeling that 'you're out of your depth here, you're a foreign element'. This does not happen in 'protected' surroundings such as the public university with its support network, where familiarity with the group facilitates the construction of a student identity over time, alongside others who share similar backgrounds. At ESADE, the peer group could not supply the strength needed to continue, and Esther ended up leaving both the university and the mentoring programme.

Esther's experience highlights the fact that not all surroundings favour academic success and continuity. Some involve too great a challenge, and intra-ethnic capital and mobilization strategies do not work. When one is in such contexts, seen to be far removed from the practices of the minority group, the limitations to intra-ethnic tutoring become evident. When faced with constant messages of non-belonging and classism, one's own aspirations and intra-ethnic messages become worthless.

It is fundamental to determine the distance and speed of social mobility that the project's young people find themselves in. Their social status is located at the meeting point of conditions and factors of inequality. They are not 'only' members of a stigmatized social minority, but also come from the most vulnerable working classes, with fewer socio-cultural resources than their socio-urban surroundings. The perception of the social and cultural distance that divides them from their fellow university students happens on at least three inter-related levels: the stigma of being Roma; of living in a poor 'Roma' neighbourhood; and having studied in a poor school. While it seems that the public university and, particularly, the study of humanities and social sciences, is home to a more socially and ethnically varied student body, and where there are greater opportunities to identify common experiences, elite surroundings hinder the establishment of bridges to close the gap.

Conclusions

Over recent decades, mentoring has become an important tool in the field of education and social inclusion, often targeting populations described as disengaged, vulnerable or *at risk* of social exclusion (DuBois and others 2011; Sulimani-Aidan 2019). It is often considered as a 'quick fix', fit-for-all, 'magic solution' (Freedman 1999 in Colley 2003). While several positive effects on mentees have been reported by research (Rhodes 2008), a series of limitations of mentoring have also been highlighted (Colley 2003; DuBois and others 2011).

Research has shown the central role of the human mentoring relationship in reaching the desired development. While mentoring projects show good short-term results, the challenge is their sustainability. It is at times of transition, or when important decisions have to be made that we see the greatest impact, and clearest importance, of such projects. A natural mentoring relationship based on trust ensures its sustainability. However, as we have seen, the young mentees whose links to their mentors were only 'by project', and where human ties were weaker, became distanced from the natural mentoring formula, and, over time, abandoned the mentoring more easily.

Overcoming these limits implies replacing the dualist approach to mentoring processes, whether individual or social, with the use of a more complex theory that helps a fuller understanding and deals with the various forms of accumulation of social capital among intra-ethnic peers and their limitations in the range of social spaces.

As has been explained above, the integration of a cultural approach to mentoring processes leads to their improvement, and is of great practical value. Nonetheless, incorporating cultural elements in an essentialist way may have the opposite result (Sánchez and Colón 2005). The benefit of natural intra-ethnic mentoring is that it is based not only on shared ethnic culture, but also on social class, and gender experience, all framed within a local socio-cultural context with its own hierarchy, values, and beliefs.

The Story_S Project does not create mentoring relationships, but enhances companionship networks where the mentor is just one of a number of agents, and mentees still exercise their agency, but more consciously. Viewed in this way, mentoring facilitates the mobilization of available resources. The various support elements – emotional, instrumental, referential – are not concentrated in the mentor, but, rather, are present, decentralized, between peers, relatives, members of the ethnic community, neighbours, professionals, volunteers and researchers, all of whom have different degrees of implication. The project makes it possible for the mentees to sustain the central role of studies as the principal tool in social success. Through this, elements of folk theories (Ogbu and Simons 1998) as to how to achieve success in life can be negotiated. Based largely on 'community cultural wealth' (Yosso 2005), or a wide range of capitals that the ethnic community itself has (navigational, aspirational, social, linguistic, family, and even resistance), mentees feel strengthened in their ability to actively negotiate their meaning (Harris and others 2018). As we have seen, mentoring provides the young people with mobility in surroundings that are outside the local community. It also enables them to meet new

people, whether Roma or not; discover new institutions and structures; and rethink their goals and communicate them outwards. Through it, they have also been involved in debates, tensions, dilemmas, and changes within the community; in processes of negotiation towards the legitimization and valuing of post-compulsory education, and its connection with beliefs regarding 'good work', accessible for Roma people.

The mentoring in Story_S is a tool that has facilitated the transition from a protected environment (local school, community peers, working with relatives, and so on) to one that is unknown and generally unwelcoming, that of higher education. Indeed, research agrees that transitions (school-school, school-work, return to school, etc.) are the key processes in mentoring. The results of Story_S show how ethnic capital functions in this transition, and what role the pre-transition support network plays. However, we have also seen how the process mobilizes other capitals that are less-closely tied to the ethnic group. This reminds us of what Bourdieu (1979) said about the changing position of people in a specific field. What we see here is precisely a process of adaptation of the mentees' *habitus*, the change of their *schemata,* disposition and tastes that embody their position in the social structure.

Nonetheless, assessing natural intra-ethnic mentoring would also mean taking into account potential, and prevention, in the face of instrumentalizing human relations and conditioning them depending on the success achieved, through an exam that provides access to a new academic sphere, and what the achievement of pre-established goals means.

Mentors and mentees develop tactics to respond to expectations and improve their employability; but we should ask ourselves whether this goes hand in hand with the development of any kind of social criticism (Dahlstedt and Tesfahuney 2010); if they are able to understand the dilemmas intrinsic to a process that, leaving to one side the poor working of institutions, suggests compensatory actions aimed at 'vulnerable, unmotivated, dissatisfied, passive' individuals (Gulam and Zulfiqar 2007; Colley 2003; Bereményi and Girós [n.d.]). They learn a normative discourse of anti-discrimination, and take advantage of the resources and possibilities the project has given them, but it is hard to know how this learning leads to an understanding of its structural causes. The change seen in Story_S is individual, although the effects of mentoring are collectivized and group support is enacted. Awareness of the barriers that arise precisely when an attempt is made to change things is still measured through individual effort. Intervention is focused on problematic citizens and groups (minorities, Roma, the poor), and goes beyond the responsibility to repair the structural

inequality that the community itself suffers through what Rose (1999) calls self-responsabilization. Van Baar (2012) described such interventions as varieties of a neoliberal minority governance (2012: 1292). According to van Baar, individualist approaches separate individual social mobility from the historic processes of the margination of minority groups, so that the intervention itself produces de-politicizing effects.

This leads us to conclude that a mentoring intervention with no critical element sets out to compensate the negative effects of inequality reproduced by the education system. From this standpoint, we find ourselves facing a loop that feeds a kind of social patch, enhancing the poor functioning of the social structure without developing real processes of change. Colley highlighted the need to 'think outside the box' (2003: XV) and see mentoring from a wider perspective, focusing on the dilemmas presented by interventions that talk about empowerment but in fact serve as tools of social control (2003: 139).

While we celebrate the changes achieved in the lives of these and other young people, and the processes that have begun thanks to occasional intervention, the sustainability of these pilot projects is still fragile and in doubt. To this end, two considerations should be posited. The first is that the Story_S project has been developed outside any affirmative policy, and is not tied to those who make policy decisions; neither has it counted on a sustained structure or budget. Nonetheless, it has counted on part of the pre-existing structures, such as the CampusRom network (created and sustained between the Comprehensive Plan of the Roma People in Catalonia, and young Roma volunteers) and the FAGiC network, which have increased the possibilities of negotiation in the field. Both structures work within the logic of public administrations and have emancipating possibilities in their structure, while not setting out to change these structures.

The results of this research lead us to consider the incorporation of the intra-ethnic criteria in the mentoring programme to be highly positive. Based on the recommendations of European institutions (for example, the European Commission, 2012; European Parliament, 2006), it is necessary to increase the direct participation of ethnic minorities, in particular those at risk of social exclusion, in the setting up and implementation of public policy. We are also in favour of private sector organizations forming strategic alliances with schools, for example, with the aim of improving the relationship between school and minority group families, leading to greater social cohesion and integration (Lopez, Kreider and Coffman, 2005). Nonetheless, we would like to highlight that this brings to light a series of dilemmas and questions that need answering in order

to have a complete and informed position regarding the final balance of the assessment. The possible instrumentalization of Roma mentors to effectively transmit domination values is a dilemma also mentioned by some mentors (Bereményi and Girós [n.d.]). The possibility of reproducing inequalities (prestige, rivalries, socio-economic situation, etc.) through selective access to mentoring within highly homogenous local ethnic communities is another. The lack of continuity in such resources in more intercultural interventions runs the risk of a possible ethnic fencing-in. Finally, we have noted that, although Roma mentors have studied a range of degree courses, and are qualified in a number of areas of knowledge, there is a predominance of the social sciences and humanities. Without the incorporation of other non-Roma mentors, there will be little promotion of the sciences.

Story_S has shown how natural group intra-ethnic mentoring provides young Roma with the accumulation of positive social capital, enabling them to move towards contexts of greater academic recognition that young minorities have traditionally been denied. Access to these does not only mean reversing a historically anomalous situation, but is also a firm commitment to social justice on the individual and community level. This, in turn, means highlighting public policies that, far from disrupting a profoundly unfair social structure, pass responsibilities and commitment towards equity on to the social intervention programmes themselves.

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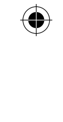
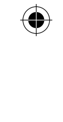
Jordi Pàmies Rovira is PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Currently, he's a professor in the Department of Theories of Education and Social Pedagogy in the Faculty of Education in the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Spain. And member of EMIGRA-CER Migracions Research Group.

Stefano Pasta is a post doc research fellow in Education at the Catholic University of Milan, where he works at the Research Center on Media Education, information and Education Technology (CREMIT) and at the Center for Research on Intercultural Relations. Pasta is an expert in the area of contrasting hate speech online and racism in the digital environment and he participates in European programs of research about the Roma and Sinti in contemporary societies.

Greta Persico is a post doc researcher in Sociology of Communication and Cultural Processes at the Department of Human and Social Sciences of the University of Bergamo; her main research interests are related to vulnerable groups, minorities and migration. She also researches on epistemology of social work, analysis of professional trajectories in educational and care contexts.





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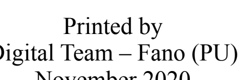

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