New Anthropological Perspectives on Children and Youth on the Move

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Introduction to the Special Issue: New Anthropological Perspectives on Children and Youth on the Move

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This special issue of *Anthropology in Action* focuses on the intersection of two equally important, and yet unequally researched, areas of anthropological inquiry: migration and childhood. In recent years, the mediatic attention to migration has led to an increased visibility of children and youth moving through transnational contexts, often with limited access to social and economic resources. Undoubtedly, the transnational movement of young people is far from a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, historically these individuals had more chances to successfully travel long distances in search of a more fulfilled life than their older counterparts. Migration – a movement of people, associated with hopes and prospects for a better life, but also driven by fears of violence and poverty – has always had a young face.

However, it is at the beginning of the twenty-first century that the identities and itineraries of young people, especially those travelling alone, have emerged as a separate object of multidisciplinary attention (Ensor and Goździak 2010; Lems, Oester and Strasser 2019). These have increasingly been identified and debated in academic discourses, as well as in children-oriented law, public policy, humanitarian actions and international advocacy. These discourses have grown exponentially due to the institutionalisation of the children's rights regime on the global scale after the near-universal ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) in 1989. This was supposed to signify protection, self-determination and equality of treatment for all underage human beings, including those involved in transnational migration. It should be noted that Article 20 of the CRC expressly requires states to give unaccompanied children 'special protection and assistance', while Article 22 guarantees equal access to welfare for underaged citizens and refugees alike – as far as they are recognised as children (UNCRC 1989). These international developments influenced European law, and have significantly increased the mobility of children compared to their adult counterparts. Non-citizens under 18 years old are not subject to the Dublin regulations that oblige asylum seekers to claim asylum in the country of first entry, and therefore have more control over their itineraries and final destinations. As a result, being below the age of majority became not only a source of vulnerability, but also a *resource* for increased mobility and legality of status, as well as for institutional support, at least until the threshold of legally defined adulthood is reached.

One can see these legislative developments in the area of children's rights as an attempt to envision a progressive, post-national and inclusive citizenship, not bound to the concept of the nation state, that is often referred to as cosmopolitan, transnational or global citizenship (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Cosmopolitan citizenship implies that all humans should have the possibility to enjoy their rights independently of their location, whether they are in their states or outside them, and seeks to extend democracy beyond the nation state (Chandler 2003). When transposed to the system of children's rights, such a universal ideal positions underaged humans, including non-citizens, as global citizens of an imaginary 'supra-state' of childhood, where all individuals enjoy their rights freely and equally, regardless of their status. In practice, even though this policy guarantees an extension of welfare citizenship (rights to social protection) to migrant children, this inclusionary 'state of childhood' appears to be temporally bound to the subject's chronological age, and reaffirms the Eurocentric, quantifiable model of childhood.

As these young people transition to adulthood, they are affected by a radical change in legal regime: they experience the 'evaporation' of rights previously accorded to them as children, becoming undocumented and deportable young adults. What emerges is a puzzle, in which the exceptional but supposedly

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universal provisions allocate to children only a fragile and transient inscription of citizenship and legal personhood. As Benhabib (2005) has noted, transnational migration brings to the fore the constitutive dilemma at the heart of liberal democracies between sovereign self-determination claims on the one hand and adherence to universal human rights principles on the other, and between the inclusionary (social and political rights) and exclusionary (the rights to remain on the territory) facets of citizenship. This statement can be applied to the domain of young people's migration, too. As long as the allocation of citizenship or nationality creates and consolidates unequal life opportunities and unequal mobility in space, cosmopolitan citizenship for all, even when *all* are children, will remain a utopia.

Aim of this Special Issue

In this special issue, we argue that the destinies of children and young people moving through transnational contexts embody the multiple paradoxes of reasoning underlying the international regimes of human and children's rights. Specifically, these young people present a living antithesis to the aspirational horizon of cosmopolitan citizenship and enhanced mobility for all underaged human beings beyond the control of nation states. Therefore, their trajectories and narratives are worthy of particular anthropological attention, as they literally embody the dramatic clashes between protracted conflict and democracy, wealth and poverty, and North and South, as well as the perpetually concealed but no less violent opposition between international discourses and national policies, between the promises of human rights rhetoric and the reality of sovereign claims over territories and subjects, consolidated into the politically rigid system of *global apartheid* (Köhler 1995; Van Houtum 2010). Overall, the aim of this special issue is to introduce the theoretical developments, coming from critical childhood and children's rights studies, that place under scrutiny categories used to describe hypermobile and itinerant models of childhood and adolescence – such as children's vulnerability, agency and citizenship – and incorporate them into the anthropological framework, informed by the interdisciplinary studies of human migration and borders.

Developments in Anthropological Theory

In the past decade, the growing body of empirical research, including in-depth ethnographic inquiries (Coe et al. 2011; Heidbrink 2016; Oliveira 2018; Orellana 2015; Terrio 2015; Galli 2023), dedicated to children and youth migration, started to point towards a paradox: despite the global articulation of children's rights aimed at providing protection, autonomy and self-determination to all children, the condition of children and youths on the move is, perhaps more than ever, full of disillusion, political inconsistencies and traumatic events, including high rates of suicide (Bhabha 2009, 2016). Anthropologists, too, have been part of these debates. Whereas anthropological interventions have been mostly critical, arguing against the Western-inspired universality of childhood experiences (Liebel 2020) and decentring hegemonic representations of childhood (Cannella and Viruru 2004) promoted in international arenas, with time anthropologists have begun to address the complexity of the effects of globalisation on childhood, and the rhetorical strength and attractiveness of the universal rights regimes for children and adolescents themselves.

Moving away from the localised identities of 'children of isles, jungles and deserts' studied by pioneer anthropologists (Malinowski 2013; Mead 1928), and transcending the bounded realms of slums and streets inhabited by disadvantaged youth in remote and mostly rural areas (Scheper-Hughes 2001; Willis 1978), increased ethnographic attention has been paid to groups of children representing *transnational models* of childhood and adolescence (Derr and Corona 2020; Tyrrell et al. 2013). Transnational childhoods are experienced by young people who grow up as itinerant and hypermobile subjects, creating meaningful ties with multiple national contexts, as well as with the very process of being on the move (Gardner 2012). Thus far, anthropological research has conceptualised these children and adolescents as complex beings with multiple social belongings, both to the system they originate from and to the system they arrive in (Jiménez 2011). In this issue, we explore how age and citizenship, as well as the geographic trajectories of these youths, are dynamic rather than restrictive characteristics that evolve in time and space, following the development of the subjects.

Among these individuals, young people crossing borders autonomously, most often referred to as 'unaccompanied minors', are of particular salience. The reasons that these adolescents migrate to Europe are diverse, ranging from such macro-factors as armed conflict and ethnic persecution, the total absence of social guarantees and poor chances for the future in their home countries to micro-factors such as local situations of injustice, abuse and neglect. Moreover,

the conditions imposed by global capitalism on local contexts have modified the everyday practices and shaped the desires and dreams of these young people, producing yet another form of social suffering in a globalised world, which they tend to act upon by migrating to another sociopolitical context.

In their journeys, they are often driven by utopian visions of justice, promoted by the European states that self-represent as a democratically governed supranational political entity, providing fair redistribution of resources and equal recognition of identities, associated with a better life and a fuller enjoyment of rights. What they find instead are age-related suspicions, an incapacity of the state to understand and fulfil their interests, institutional confinement and mistreatment inside protection facilities, and risks of exploitation or deportation outside them. In short, they find a system of global apartheid that they were unaware of before crossing the borders.

Global Apartheid and Hypermobile Young Subjects

Despite the absence of legal segregation between the first and third world, first-world governments set conditions for citizenship, creating discrimination in movement. The rights and protections to which migrants are entitled are inevitably limited by these conditions, disproportionately affecting racialised and impoverished individuals. The articles in this special issue demonstrate how *global apartheid* appears regarding the mobility and protection of children through intrusive regulatory mechanisms, including border control, biographical interviews, court hearings, birth certificates and medical procedures of age determination. These mechanisms are deployed against the backdrop of a global proliferation of children's rights rhetoric and a trend towards more inclusive models of citizenship, such as European citizenship, on one hand, and increasingly strict migration control on the other. The study of the transnational trajectories of unaccompanied minors provides new insights for analysing the border device and understanding the effects of global apartheid as a totalising macro-phenomenon, or a 'total social fact' (Mauss).

In the face of these structural constraints imposed on them by new cultural contexts, these young individuals are left with no choice but to find a satisfactory way to become adult human beings with enough agency to act in the global world, or to develop strategies to cope with negative or unexpected outcomes of migration.

Becoming Adults While Migrating

The process of transitioning from childhood to adulthood in the context of autonomous transnational migration can be linked with the common theme of coming of age in anthropological literature, which is, conversely, entirely absent from legal texts and discourses. Historically, anthropologists have researched the symbolic processes by which an individual (or a group) is formally recognised as an adult member of a community, through rights of passage and initiation that involve three stages: separation, liminality or so-called limbo, and incorporation. During these stages the individual faces numerous trials and ordeals, leading to their inner transformation, acquisition of the new status and incorporation into the community of adults.

Some anthropologists have used this framework to interpret the role of migratory experiences in the process of coming of age, such as the journey of young Afghans to Iran as a phase of separation, the stay there as a period of liminality and the return to Afghanistan as a reincorporation, described by Monsutti (2007). However, autonomous migration of unaccompanied minors to Europe differs in that they seek inclusion in another society according to cosmopolitan and transnational logic. The prolonged stages of waiting for regularisation have been described as *liminality* and a state of *limbo*, that is, an uncertain period between childhood and adulthood, and between legality and illegality. In the classical understanding, *limbo* is the stage during which the transformative potential of the ritual is revealed, and the social status of the individual is modified, which is not the case in prolonged and alienating waiting in institutional facilities that more often than not leads nowhere. In fact, whereas even the most intrusive initiatory rites were part of a system of *inclusion* of underaged individuals into the community, what these young migrants face is a sophisticated system of unspoken *exclusion*, carried out in accordance with democratic principles of no harm. Chiara Galli (2023), writing about the judicial treatment of non-citizen minors from Latin America in the United States, calls it, metaphorically, a rite of *reverse passage*. She points out that the arguments put forward to be legitimately recognised as a child involve an infantilising narrative that erases any form of agency,

isolating a person in the form of everlasting, powerless childhood.

Not all anthropologists agree with such a negative interpretation. As the ethnographies in this special issue demonstrate, in order to pursue what they consider to be successful life itineraries, which do not always coincide with institutional expectations, these young people often freely mix formal (institutionalised or legal) and informal (extra-institutional or illegal) means to achieve more mobility and social inclusion, according to their life circumstances. As opposed to the easily quantifiable models of childhood and adulthood developed by modern states in accordance with demographic logic, the protagonists of this special issue associate their coming of age or emancipation with levels of autonomy (Wihstutz), roles they play within family structures (Sabouni), transnational mobility (Floristán Millán) and access to employment or citizenship (Marzola). It is worth noting that during their transnational journeys to the Global North, their conception of adulthood also changes; from a marriable member of society who can support a household, a more individualistic and atomised conception of the adult self emerges, associated with legal status, a new set of social obligations, independence and economic self-sufficiency (see Sabouni, Marzola).

Although much research offers a negative and oppressive view of borders, there is a growing body of work that demonstrates the creativity of migrant children within these spaces (Sur 2021; Campbell 2009; Floristán Millán, this issue). For young people located on the periphery of states, borders can offer alternative forms of life, movement and opportunities for the fulfilment of their interests. Moreover, the hypermobility of these children disrupts traditional understandings of migration as a unidirectional movement. Instead, unaccompanied migrant children provide a transnational perspective on borders, inhabited by children in a productive way. The concept of *zigzagging* – discovering multiple European countries during the migratory journey – challenges the victimising portrayal of young migrants that prevails in the humanitarian sector, which frames young mobility as solely driven by negative factors. In contrast, for these young people, migration could include positive aspects including experiencing new realities, accessing new job opportunities and exploring different places.

Broadening the Terminology, Deconstructing the Category

In view of the above, in this special issue we consciously opt for a broader terminology – that of *children and youth on the move* – in order to avoid legally entrenched categories and abbreviations, such as unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs or UAMs), young asylum seekers, separated children or children refugees, and so on. On the one hand, all these terms represent, at least partially, the realities of migrating youth. On the other hand, none of them stand the test of generalisation: not all young migrants seek asylum, not all are recognised as minors, not all are granted refugee status, or are able to keep it after reaching majority. Not all of them agree on being called 'migrant children', and not all authors agree on the reference to passive-sounding 'unaccompanied and separated' minors, since for most of these young people their itinerary was a matter of choice.

Moreover, the notion of children and youth on the move does not include – in this special issue, at least – the transnational movement of privileged children studying in boarding schools, flying internationally without parental accompaniment, or sailing across continents without structural constraints, as in Greta Thunberg's UN-endorsed transatlantic journey. How different such journeys are from the multiple attempts to cross the Mediterranean made by Afghan or Moroccan adolescents, often under the effect of fear-reducing amphetamines, described by Floristán Millán.

In this collection, we move away from homogenisation and 'methodological nationalism' with its naturalised containers of bounded nationhood and age (Heymas 2017; Vélez-Ibañez 2017) from which academic research is not exempt, wishing instead to reflect a picture of the diversity of trajectories, desires and knowledge of these children.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the heavily legalised bureaucratic and humanitarian category of 'the unaccompanied minor' cannot be entirely disregarded. The model of disadvantaged and itinerant childhood and adolescence that this category describes is overly *juridicised*, that is regulated and shaped by law. In Western liberal democracies law is one of the systems that mediates and preserves the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and plays a formative role in identity formation. For example, the legal configurations enabling facilitated transborder mobility for underaged individuals played a formative role in the constitution of *harraga* culture – a youth subculture of 'border burners' mov-

ing from the Maghreb to Southern and Western Europe, described by Floristán Millán and Marmié (this issue). In a way, the transnational trajectories, life strategies and subjective experiences of these young individuals are co-produced by the legal frameworks for the protection of children in the European Union and its member states, as well as those regulating migration flows from South to North.

As the authors of this collection demonstrate, migrant children do not constitute a determined social group outside of the biopolitical category of chronological age that seems to be of essential importance for states and border agencies. At the same time, age is often disregarded, or treated with liberty, by the subjects themselves. For example, in his ethnography of the quarantine ship for migrants arriving during the COVID-19 pandemic, Marzola describes how different groups of young migrants repeatedly modify their birth dates, following external advice, in order to be considered employable 'adults' or protectable 'children' (Marzola, this issue). Similarly, in her research article exploring the challenges of collecting the life narratives of young migrants, Marmié describes how young individuals tend to modify their stories, making them more coherent or conforming to adult expectations, as a way to accommodate themselves and simultaneously resist the 'biographical injunction' imposed on them by the hosting institutions to certify their belonging to 'childhood' and deservingness of protection (Marmié, this issue).

The individual stories, chosen by the authors as embodiments of the trends that were observed in the field, all deconstruct the rigidity of the UAM category from different standpoints:

Gianmarco Marzola's article recounts the coming-of-age story of Bilal – a Senegalese youth who arrived in Italy through Libya while underaged, but presented himself as an adult to evade institutional alienation and passivity, and to gain immediate access to the market of informal employment. He later found out that his chances to find a regular job were higher in Portugal, to which he travelled by crossing multiple European countries. In Lisbon, he ended up receiving a valid residence permit and even applied for citizenship – 'finally becoming a real man', in his own words. This research provides a fine-grained ethnography of a young person actively acting upon the similarly rigid yet still malleable boundaries between adulthood and childhood, unravelling the way that they are chronologically and discursively constructed, in order to achieve what he perceives as emancipation under the restrictive conditions of the migration regime.

In her article, Floristán Millán describes a drawing workshop conducted on a seashore in Melilla (Spain) with young individuals from Morocco trying to cross the border in order to reach Europe. Among them, some have reclaimed their minority, and have been accommodated in children-oriented facilities, but decided to exit the system of child protection consciously, while others have not even tried. All of them, despite age and gender differences, form an autonomous community of young people with similarly violent border experiences and transnational hopes and interests. They are a community in which a creative form of intra-group solidarity at the margins of the state and institutional control is being forged.

Wihstutz tells the story of Spiderman, a 6-year-old child living in a facility, whose story deconstructs the exceptionalism of the category of unaccompanied minors. She argues that accompanied minors – migrating with their families – should be researched on equal footing with their unaccompanied counterparts as subjects of global children's migration. Spiderman, whose family's request for asylum was rejected, affirms his claims to membership in German society and his right to stay through transgressive interactions that are often interpreted as antisocial behaviour. Wihstutz uses this example to reflect on the spatial and relational aspects of citizenship, developing a model of 'lived citizenship' (Fahnøe and Warming 2017) that permits the reconciliation of the contradictory aspects of citizenship (as social practices and as belonging to a state) of children and youth on the move.

Also anchored in a German context, Sabouni's article describes the complexity of family and kin relationships in transnational families of Syrian refugees. Through the detailed portrait of T., whose migratory experience is multiple, as he has been both an unaccompanied minor in a German institutional facility, and later a son in a traditional family of refugees, Sabouni provides an analysis of conflictual family dynamics. This perspective erodes the child–adult dichotomy, and emphasises the emotional cost of the multidimensional adaptations that Sabouni's subject of study was exposed to.

In her methodological article, arguing for a greater ethnographic mobility and sensitivity, while being as close as possible to the subjects being researched, Marmié delves into the process of collecting testimonies of those who, by producing different sets of narratives oriented towards different actors, influence their migratory trajectory and status. Reflecting on the reasons for these adaptations, Marmié writes, 'there are two factors guiding and shaping the juvenile nar-

ratives: the stages of their migration pathway (within or outside Europe) and, more importantly, the degree of socialisation to institutional intervention', calling for an extra-institutional ethnography that she terms 'research on the move, from and with young people'.

Methodology

Overall, this compendium considers ethnography as a broad methodology that facilitates reflections that connect concrete observations with macro-social issues. As these youth traverse borders and constantly move across various locations, both spatially and in their desires and interests, the unidirectional view of migration and the methodological nationalism that prevails in research on borders and border-crossers must be disrupted to give space to ethnographic innovation. The authors ground their theoretical frameworks in thick ethnographic descriptions of the lifeworlds of young people, highlighting understudied aspects of the condition of youths on the move to Europe. Through an intuitive approach that prioritises extra-institutional ethnography (Marmié) with hypermobile research subjects over the immobility of institutional control, the authors conduct longitudinal studies over several years, in repeated contact with their subjects under different migratory circumstances and through different means. While collaborative ethnographies are no longer considered a panacea, and have been in turn criticised for reproducing field-related inequalities, the authors in this special issue advocate for a renewed set of research tools, developed in response to the needs of their interlocutors, such as multimodal ethnography. An example of this approach are five drawings created by Floristán Millán's interlocutors that provide a visual and synthetic depiction of their condition, as well as a form of ethnographic co-authorship.

Conclusions

Whereas the authors of this issue fully acknowledge that children's transborder mobility highlights the tension between structural oppression and the agentive capacity of a human subject, we distance ourselves from the victimisation–emancipation dichotomy. Instead, we emphasise that the figure of the 'unaccompanied minor' is much more complex than yet another 'icon of stolen childhood' (Poretti et al.), victimised and instrumentalised to justify the field of humanitarian interventions, relief and philanthropy.

Political and mediatic representations of unaccompanied migrant minors occupy only a small portion of the visual representation of migration, in which the central roles are still played by more visually appealing young children, who are associated with vulnerability and distress. In contrast, mostly male and mostly non-white teenagers are used to exemplify the rampant dangers of illegal migration, informal networks of human traffickers, petty crime and substance abuse.

In academic literature, however, there is an abundance of descriptions and analyses of the journeys of isolated adolescents, with an average of 10 articles per week, and this number is continually increasing. The images of autonomous youth courageously moving across borders, as illustrated in Emmanuel Carrère's novel 'Yoga' mentioned by Marmié, seem to have a significant narrative potential for social scientists, activists and social workers.

On the one hand, this fascination can be interpreted as a performative attempt carried out by responsible citizens, an attempt to seek justice and represent, at least discursively, the most marginalised individuals who do not have access to effective democratic and legal tools. On the other hand, it may signify an inextricable cultural interest in coming-of-age narratives that prevail despite the marginalisation of ritualistic aspects of social life. These frameworks – like the 'Hero's Journey', popularised by Joseph Campbell (1949), or the emancipatory narrative arc in folk tales, revealed by Vladimir Propp (1928) – are centred around an individual who embarks on a journey of self-discovery, facing trials and challenges, ultimately emerging transformed and empowered. As opposed to the 'victimisation' narrative that previously prevailed, a new trope – that of empowerment and social inclusion – seems to emerge and develop in academic, international and humanitarian discourses.

Within interdisciplinary studies of childhood, there seems to be a silent injunction to provide an optimistic interpretation of life conditions, to avoid children's 'victimisation', which would prevent the emancipatory perspective on a given subject. While it is imperative not to represent children and young people as mere victims, it is not enough to rhetorically emphasise their 'thin' or 'ambiguous' agency under structural constraints. Rather, it is crucial to realistically portray the tragedies that these young individuals encounter during their migration, as well as the failures of their allies to support them. We, anthropologists, must avoid using the imperative of 'giving voice' as a way to exonerate ourselves from responsibility.

While acknowledging the agency of young migrants, it is essential to recognise their marginalised position. Although they may be perceived as 'victims of violence', and portrayed as such by international NGOs, these discourses tend to omit that this violence is primarily perpetrated by wealthy Western states. There is sufficient evidence that European liberal democracies deploy significant controlling efforts, including bureaucratic and legal measures, as well as medical and social interventions, to question, exclude, dispossess and ultimately deport these children back to the areas they were seeking to escape. This systemic violence is infrequently challenged and often reinforced by the current children's rights regime, which is at times too ambiguous or too restrictive, such as in the strictly temporal definition of childhood. Therefore, while it is crucial to listen to the voices of these young people and represent their perspective – which is a fundamental principle of children's rights studies, but also its uncritically reproduced 'mantra' – this should not impede a critical assessment of the underlying structures and macro-factors that affect young lives. We cannot presume that non-citizen youth can achieve significant social change through their political will and agency alone. It is imperative to emphasise that non-citizen children cannot attain the ideal-typical independence and autonomy necessary for political action that the neoliberal ideal of a free subject promotes. The echo of this powerful ideal still resonates in the UN CRC, and yet we must recognise its failures.

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Drawing Ambivalence

Moroccan Youth on the Move and the Experience of Melilla

Elisa Floristán Millán

Abstract: This article reflects on the significance of Melilla, a Spanish enclave and southern border of the European Union (EU), in the migratory experience of the Moroccan youth on the move to Europe who call themselves *harraga*. The methodology combines a multisited ethnographic approach (Marcus 2001), from Casablanca to Paris, with a multimodal one (Westmoreland 2022), collecting information through in-depth interviews, life stories, participant observations and a drawing workshop. Although the institutional violence in the governance of the mobility of this youth makes Melilla resemble a city-prison (Khosravi 2021), in my reflections I argue that this border has an ambivalent impact on the whole migratory experience of the *harraga* youth. On the one hand, frustration, everyday violence, and racism appear; on the other, friendship, autonomy and networking.

Keywords: autonomy, European Union (EU), *harraga*, Melilla, migration, Morocco, racism

August 2021 in Melilla. Sun, oppressive heat and high humidity. The clock has just struck midday. The streets are empty and most of the shops are closed, as August is the official summer holiday month in Spain. I decide to stroll through the Rastro. The Rastro is a neighbourhood near the city centre where young Moroccans who have rejected the Child Protection System or have been determined to be above the age of majority try to make a living. Some sell second-hand clothes; others sell items they have found in the rubbish. There are also some who carry shopping bags for the elderly in exchange for a few coins. Others are simply begging.

I am very tired because my fieldwork is not progressing. The boys and girls know and trust me, but they have other concerns than arranging an interview to tell me their life story. In the mornings, they are very tired because they have spent all night trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea clandestinely as stowaways on the boats that cross to the mainland, a practice they call 'risky'. In the evenings, on the other hand, they are too agitated to interview. As they prepare for 'risky', many consume drugs such as amphetamines to be able to run faster and without fear. In this state, it is impossible for them to sit and talk to me.

After strolling through the Rastro and saying hello to some young people, I enter a bazaar, where I buy some paper and coloured pencils. I think that maybe there are some young *harraga* resting on the beach who would like to do some drawing. Before I reach the beach, I run into Mustapha, Marwan, Omar and Youssef.

Mustapha is 19 years old; he arrived in Melilla from the city of Fez and swam across the border. He declared himself an adult without any interest in being categorised as an unaccompanied foreign minor (UFM). His objective was to move clandestinely to a village in France, where his family lives. He speaks very little Spanish and has never been to school, and he can neither read nor write.

Marwan is 24 years old. He was a UFM and was sheltered in a centre for child protection in Barcelona. He speaks Spanish very well and is also fluent in En-

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glish. He left the centre without being regularised due to a lack of interest on the part of the administration and some irregularities. Although he became rooted in Catalan society and even had a girlfriend for several years, he was deported to Morocco. He is now trying to cross the border again but this time as an adult.

Omar, 17 years old, is from a suburb of Casablanca. The national police arrested him at sea while he was swimming to Melilla. He was taken to the closest reception centre for minors, Fuerte La Purisima. Despite being considered a minor and, therefore, categorised as a UFM, he decided to reject the Child Protection System, due to the institutional mistreatment he suffered within it, and to try to cross clandestinely to mainland Spain. He has no clear destination and is not overly interested in defining his itinerary.

Finally, there is Youssef. He is originally from an Amazigh village near Melilla. Although he is a minor, he never wanted to stay in the reception centre. Although he wants to reach the mainland, when life in the streets gets tough, he swims back to visit his mother.

They are arguing. It turns out that they almost managed to sneak on to the boat yesterday, but one of them was late and then the port guard stopped them. Mid-argument, they see me coming and ask what I am doing with so much blank paper. They agree that drawing is a good way to kill time until lunch.

In this article I reflect on the presentation of Melilla[1] by the migratory Moroccan youth on the move to Europe, self-described as *harraga*. Using a multimodal (Westmoreland 2022) and multisited (Marcus 2001) ethnography, I want to argue that the experience of Melilla is ambivalent as it is part of a continuum of structural violence that is intensified by the spectacle of the border (Genova 2018), which has a double nature: negative and creative (Sur 2021). The negative and oppressive nature of the borders makes Melilla the first place on the migratory journey where the youth feel trapped and segregated, and they experience their subalternity due to racial hierarchies and humiliation. Meanwhile, the oppressive nature of the borders leads to a more creative aspect, whereby solidarity, autonomy and intragroup help networks arise. Although the structural violence of the city is a continuous struggle, Melilla is also a nurturing place where they experience resistance.

Multimodal Ethnography to Represent the Multidimensionality of *Harraga* Experiences

The first time I carried out fieldwork in the autonomous city of Melilla – a Spanish colonial enclave in North Africa bordering the EU – I found Moroccan children and adolescents sleeping in the streets and trying to escape[2] from the city by crossing the Mediterranean Sea as stowaways on boats.

After working extensively with these *harraga* in the city and observing that, not without difficulty, many of them did eventually manage to travel to Europe, I felt that if the boys and girls I worked with moved across borders, my research should follow them, thus becoming a multisited ethnography (Marcus 2001). I decided to follow their itineraries between Morocco, Spain and France: from Casablanca to Paris.

This article and the methodology that underpins it strive to break with research that focuses exclusively on the border space, as it argues that experiences are understood and configured in the time and space of the migratory itinerary. Just as I intend to distance myself from the spectacle of the border (Genova 2018), I distance myself from the methodological nationalism (Heyman 2017) that derives from it too. Moroccan youth on the move to Europe are much more than Moroccans, and much more than migrants. Their ways of being and existing in the world are conditioned by the legal frameworks regulating migration to Europe, but also by a set of values, ideas and practices that they develop collectively during the migratory journey. Thus, neither Morocco, nor Melilla, nor any other locality or country can be considered a 'natural container' for these young people.

It was thanks to doing fieldwork in various localities that I was able to grasp the centrality of creativity in everyday life in Melilla, and not only the negative and oppressive experiences (Sur 2021). In my research methodology, I adopted a transnational and multisited approach, which required the deconstruction of classical anthropological techniques that can be invasive and unhelpful for the participants. Initially, I conducted in-depth interviews and life histories but found that these methods were overused by professionals such as police, social workers and lawyers, and that they can often lead to a power dynamic that discourages youth from sharing their stories. Additionally, these stories can often involve difficult and traumatic experiences that are difficult to articulate in words, turning the interviews into interrogations rather than exchanges of information.

As an alternative, I turned to more participatory and open methods that involve the construction of collective knowledge. Specifically, I used multimodality, a methodology that recognises the multidimensional nature of social practices and experiences and uses a range of sensory methods, such as drawing, to generate a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of migratory experiences (Westmoreland 2022; Heidbrink 2021). Drawing workshops allowed me to reach a group of young boys who were otherwise difficult to engage with due to their limited Spanish, lack of formal education, and drug abuse.

By using drawings, I was able to tap into their visual and highly evocative ways of expression, opening a world of shared meanings and knowledge. This approach places the subjects of the research at the centre and repositions them as the true protagonists of the study.

Escaping from Melilla: Between Forced Immobility and 'Risky'

> No doubt Mustapha liked the workshop because he kept asking me for blank sheets of paper to draw on. In his last drawing, he paints the Melilla ferry. On it, people *with papers*. He points them out to me with an angry look on his face. Then he shows me the three ways of doing 'risky': climbing to the ferry with ropes, walking up a ladder or hiding under a lorry. The three ways of doing 'risky' are death – he says *Death, death and death*. (Fragments of the drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021)

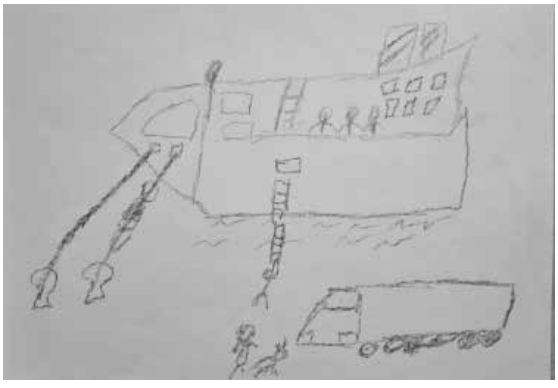

Fig.1 Anonymous. A ferry in Melilla, Drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021. Used with permission.

This picture depicts Mustapha's harrowing attempt to board a ferry from Melilla to mainland Spain as part of his 'risky' journey. It highlights the inequality in access to transborder mobility, with citizens holding papers able to travel on the ferry while those without papers, like Mustapha and his companions, attempt to access it clandestinely, risking their lives. The picture also reveals the structural oppression and social hierarchies faced by non-citizens in Melilla, with those holding documents occupying the top position on the ferry, while the undocumented – and a straw dog – are relegated to the bottom on the shore.

Like the other subjects of this article, Mustapha is a young man who migrates to Europe without an adult companion. The political, economic and social crisis in Morocco, which has severely impacted its dependency care system, has led many young people to seek a better future abroad instead of becoming adults in their own country (Jiménez Álvarez 2011). These young people contest this difficult situation by migrating to Europe clandestinely, with many crossing the land border between Nador (Beni Ensar) and Melilla, particularly those born in eastern Morocco and the Rif region.

Once in Melilla, despite their being considered possible minors under the restrictive EU migration policies and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Spanish Organic Law on Foreigners (4/2000) categorises these adolescents as economic migrants. This has created a contradictory legal situation in which they are viewed as both subjects of protection and objects of expulsion (Empez Vidal 2014; Hernández 2014; Mendoza 2017; Suárez Navaz 2004).

Furthermore, being underage does not always provide a protective framework for these young people as they do not fit into the hegemonic and colonial representations of childhood, which perceive childhood as a blank slate for future adult development (Liebel 2016). The Child Protection System, which is geared towards producing future workers for European capitalist economies, can shift from viewing these young people as children at risk to viewing them as dangerous (Candelas 2016), making them effectively unprotectable.

In this sense, I see these young migrants as trapped between two opposing legislative frameworks that, although seemingly antagonistic, function as a double form of oppression. They are viewed as undesired and unprotectable children, following in the wake of Michel Agier's (2008) concept of undesirability, and as economic migrants who are not entitled to stay in Europe. The double oppression functions through the instrumentalisation of the Child Protection System and its protocols to manage and control the mobility of these young people.

In Melilla their containment is also carried out through institutional mistreatment. This mistreat-

ment includes systematic delays in the delivery of residence permits and refusals of legal guardianship. In other words, while the boys and girls receive boarding and lodging in these centres, they do not receive guardianship, resulting in no effective institutional protection and no exercisable rights. In this way, Melilla has become a security belt whose objective is to control the passage from Africa to Europe (Floristán Millán 2022).

Navigating Oppression and Racism: *Harraga*'s Strategies for Movement

The immobilisation of young *harraga* in Melilla is navigated by them in different ways. On the one hand, there are many boys and especially girls who decide to trust that with good behaviour and by adapting to the ideals of hegemonic childhood, they will be able to obtain regularisation and escape from Melilla. On the other hand, many young people reject the Child Protection System and engage in autonomous street practices aimed at clandestine crossing, as can be seen in Mustapha's drawing.

These street practices are part of everyday life in the city and are carried out in tension with institutions. In their aim to keep moving, the youth decide to live on the margins between the street and the child protection centres, or directly on the street. They build self-managed, substandard dwellings, called *chabolas*, in which they live in groups of affinity and kinship, in order to sustain their lives in a situation of social exclusion and lack of protection. They carry out actions in a grey area between legality and illegality.

However, the real aim of all these practices of sustaining life outside institutions is to escape from Melilla and overcome the forced immobility that they are subjected to. To this end, the action that structures the daily life of these young people is 'risky'. That is what Mustapha tried to show in his drawing. 'Risky' is a practice of clandestine migration that involves hiding in the ferry that crosses the Mediterranean Sea. Although it is a practice that occurs almost daily and that especially boys attempt repeatedly, it can cause severe injuries or even death. 'Risky' is a fundamental practice that has received a great deal of attention in political, mediatic and academic discourse due to the intensity of the power relationships that occur at the border.

Nevertheless, the city of Melilla is not a significant experience exclusively because of the danger of the clandestine crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. Both during 'risky' and other practices, the daily lives of the protagonists in this article are marked by racism. For many, Morocco is the first place on their migratory itinerary that is not their country of origin, and they experience racial hierarchies in most cases for the first time. While they describe their situation in Morocco as *hogra* (humiliation in Arabic), it is not until they leave their neighbourhood, village or 'duar' that they realise how they are viewed by the EU and judged on racial criteria. This division becomes clear to young people like Marwan, who divides his blank sheet of paper in two to represent two constraining realities.

> Marwan divides a page into two asymmetrical parts. The smaller part represents his world and that of other young people like him in Melilla. He draws a sad, black sun, a boy's face marked by a scar, a policeman beating him, hands in handcuffs and a poisonous snake. On the other side, a yellow shining sun and different families shaking hands. Marwan explains that these are the racist *melillitas* who look down on them. He also draws flowers, palm trees and a swing, but includes a donkey as a symbol of the ignorance and hypocrisy of those who are unaware of their reality. Lastly, he draws a brain with one part in black, representing Moroccan children whom people consider rotten, and another part in red, representing those who live in Melilla with papers. (Fragments of a drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021)

Fig 2. Anonymous. My life in Melilla, Drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021. Used with permission.

Marwan gives great attention to the depiction of the citizens of Melilla who look down on him and his peers. The city's clientelist character, heavy State Security Forces presence and the existence of a fence around the city create a hostile environment for them. This treatment can be traced back to the legal category of UFMs, which oppresses young *harraga* as racialised foreigners. Institutional spaces like the National Police and child protection centres imprint

racism on them. The UFM label goes beyond legal status, and is often associated with criminality, marginalisation and poverty. These experiences of racism mark the young people, who understand that the *hogra* they faced at home can also have racially motivated dimensions in their migratory journey.

Gendered Immobility

Yasmin's situation is further complicated by the gender-based discrimination she faces. As a woman, she faces greater obstacles and risks when trying to occupy public spaces covertly. Despite enduring mistreatment from child protection centres and holding on to hope for regularisation, Yasmin is becoming increasingly frustrated with the slow progress.

> Two years here and I feel trapped, I swear I can't stand it any more, I've tried everything. With Moroccan nationality, things are going very slowly. The next option is to get married, but who am I going to marry? Besides, the paperwork is very slow, Elisa, in three years I haven't even got a visa. Really, Elisa, my only option is doing 'risky'. I know it's very dangerous, but what could I do if I don't have anything else? I can hold out for another year, but not much longer, I swear. (Fragments from field diary, Melilla, August 2021)

These feelings of frustration and desperation are often experienced alone, without the support of adults apart from the activists and volunteers from associations that work with young people in street situations. The regime of immobility to which these young people are subjected can lead to a sense of ruin or being in ruin, characterised by seeking conflict (*mushkila*) with peers, volunteers and adult professionals in associations, as well as self-harm or drug abuse.

> I ask where Ahmed is and the rest of his companions tell me they don't know, 'he's unbearable. He's in ruin, he's lost his passport and he says it's our fault that we stole it. He's looking for a fight all day long'. (Fragments from field diary, Melilla, August 2021)

The journey of Moroccan youth on the move to Europe is marked by racialised border violence and institutional mistreatment, resulting in frustration and humiliation.

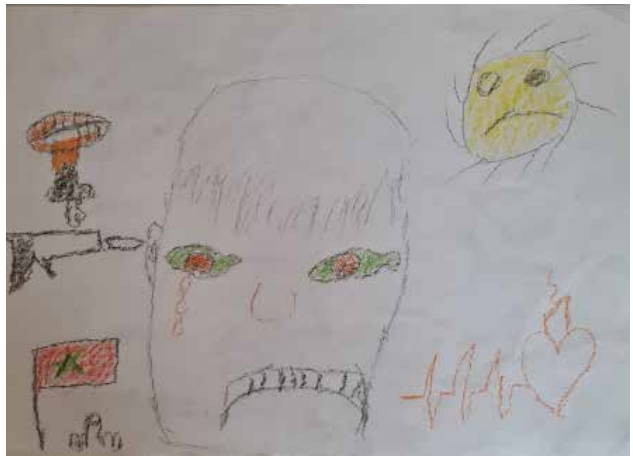

Fig 3. Anonymous. Self-portrait, Drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021. Used with permission.

> Ahmed has drawn his face and, above all, his green eyes, the most characteristic thing about him. Tears of blood come out of the red pupils. The sad mouth. The sad sun. At one end he has drawn his heart, with the heartbeat with sudden changes and fire. At the side of his head, a gun is pointed at him. Above the gun, a key. 'This key is the one that will stop me from shooting myself. I must find the key that will fix my head.' (Fragments from the drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021)

These experiences not only leave painful memories but also continue to impact the young people's situation even after they reach the mainland. The amplified violence in Melilla is not an isolated incident but rather part of a structural continuum that persists throughout the entire migratory journey.

After Melilla: Modernity, Mobility and Desires

All the young people interviewed for this article have their own dreams and goals, whether they are short-term, medium-term or long-term, that they hope to achieve once they leave Melilla. Because Melilla is, or rather should be, a short stay, a stop along the way, one cannot understand the experience of daily life in the city without all those dreams, which involve travelling, moving and getting to know Europe. In a way, it is the desire for modernity and access to a global youth culture that shapes their dreams (Rodríguez García de Cortázar and Gimeno Monterde 2018).

Some authors suggest that these young people have unrealistic expectations that are based on distorted imaginaries (Ortega Torres and Gutiérrez Sánchez 2018). However, I do not agree with this as-

sessment. Based on my research, I believe that these young people have realistic objectives that reflect their personal interests and desires. Mistaking their aspirations for distorted imaginaries is a result of what Didier Fassin (2015) terms the moral economy of the border and the assumptions about what migrants should desire. As Zacarías explains, this is what he refers to as 'zigzagging'.

> I don't know if after Melilla I'll be in a youth centre. First, I want to zigzag, you know, move around, see the world [laughs]. Then when I find a place where I want to be, I'll be in a centre. (Fragments from field diary, 2022)

The concept of zigzagging challenges the victimising portrayal of young migrants by the humanitarian sector, which tends to frame mobility as solely driven by negative factors such as impoverishment, political persecution and discrimination. In contrast, for these young people, migration holds a positive aspect that involves experiencing new realities, accessing new job opportunities and exploring different places. Omar compares his life in Melilla to that of a growing plant, with the city acting as water that will help him bloom and eventually reach his dream destination – Tlasa is a square in Frankfurt where he hopes to join friends from his neighbourhood in Casablanca. Although the border is oppressive, it is also a space of hope and possibilities (Sur 2021).

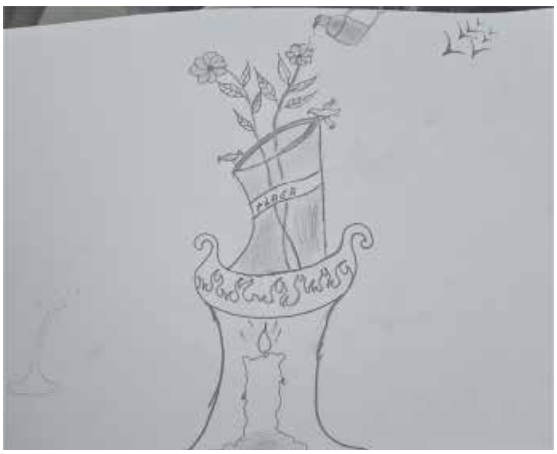

Fig 4. Anonymous. Life as a growing plant, Drawing workshop, Melilla, August 2021. Used with permission.

Networks of Solidarity and Tactical Resistance

The uncertain and intense time spent in Melilla highlights the importance of what will happen afterwards – all the dreams that will be fulfilled and the difficulties that will have to be faced. Therefore, the Melilla experience becomes a networking opportunity, a space for accelerating socialisation, where support, care and information networks are formed, which will be crucial later.

This experience is facilitated by the rejection of the Child Protection System. While I do not consider the reality of these young *harraga* on the streets of Melilla desirable, I do believe that their lack of protection leads to the construction of intense relationships of solidarity, friendship and fraternity that subsequently cross borders and are maintained throughout the migratory journey. The struggle for survival and flight from the city facilitates the creation of intense networks that are small forms of tactical resistance emerging from the lack of protection and social exclusion.

The everyday practices of street life, marked by a strong intra-group solidarity, have been debated academically along the axis between marginalisation, the naturalisation of domination, and resistance. I consider them tactics and small forms of resistance (Scott 2003) because young people themselves have come to express them in this way. Their self-organisation and the objectives they achieve through it are a source of pride. As one young man told me when we talked about his passage through Melilla a year later, with his administrative situation regularised and visiting his family in Morocco: 'I would be more ashamed to go to an association than to live in a *chabola*' (fragment from field diary, Nador, June 2022). Although some practices of Moroccan youth in Melilla can be seen as small acts of resistance, however, not all of them are intentionally resistant. The independence from adult authorities that allows for the formation of intra-group solidarity and care networks is also a result of the lack of protection for these youth. The unreliability of the minority as a resource, institutional mistreatment, the harshness of street life and ultimately the difficulties of escaping from Melilla, legally or illegally, frustrate young people.

It is important to acknowledge that the practices of these young people are situated within a complex interplay of agency and context. Categorising all their actions as practices of resistance is overly simplistic and ignores the broader context of oppression (Campbell and Heyman 2006), so eloquently described in the images produced by my interlocutors. Instead, I take a nuanced approach that recognises the agency, negotiation skills and administrative awareness of these young people, while also

acknowledging the significant impact of their decisions on their trajectories.

Conclusions

This article has reflected on the meaning of the experience of Melilla as the southern border of the EU in the overall migratory itinerary of Moroccan youth on the move. Discretionary governmentality towards these young people produces a forced immobility in this border enclave. Although these young people are categorised as UFMs and therefore subject to protection, they end up facing a double oppression as they do not fit into the hegemonic, canonical idea of childhood and because they are considered economic migrants.

In this double oppression, the Child Protection System in Melilla ends up being instrumentalised for the purpose of controlling the mobility of these young people. Child protection centres become centres of containment and institutional mistreatment that permeate the lives of these boys and girls within them. Therefore, some children, especially boys, decide to reject child protection and try to overcome forced immobility by crossing the Mediterranean Sea clandestinely.

Based on a multisited ethnography (Marcus 2001) between Morocco, Spain and France and using a multimodal approach (Westmoreland 2022) with novel techniques such as collaborative drawing workshops, I have explored the meaning of the experience of Melilla for young *harraga*. I have been able to see the significant ambivalence of Melilla in the total migratory itinerary of these young people.

On the one hand, on the oppressive side of the border (Sur 2021), young boys and girls must engage in the dangerous practice of clandestinely crossing the Mediterranean Sea due to the institutional mistreatment inside the minors' protection centres. Living on the street, 'risky' and sleeping in a *chabola* are some of these practices. In this sense, Melilla is the first place in the migratory journey where they feel segregation and subalternity because of racial hierarchies. On the other hand, on the creative side of the border (ibid.), while daily life in Melilla and the street practices they carry out as a survival tactic are hard, they make possible independent organisation, based on group solidarity and the construction of support, care and information networks. As violence becomes more explicit, young people establish stronger dynamics of solidarity and mutual support, making their passage through the city an ambivalent experience, between structural and everyday violence and autonomy and independence.

Although my first fieldwork experiences in Melilla were very harsh and I considered the social exclusion and lack of protection that young Moroccans on the move faced to be typical of the intensity of the spectacle of the border (Genova 2018), it was not until I completed the multisited fieldwork that I was able to understand that the violence in this border enclave was also accompanied by an acceleration of socialisation and a greater intensity of solidarity and mutual support. Consequently, I consider it to be an ambivalent experience, the result of the continuum of structural violence that runs through the entire migratory itinerary.

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Notes

1. The reflections in this article arise from fieldwork carried out during 2021, prior to the approval of the New Regulation on Foreigners (Royal Decree 220/2022) and following the ruling passed by the Supreme Court in July 2020 in favour of freedom of movement through Spanish territory for asylum seekers in Ceuta and Melilla.
2. I use the verbs 'flee' and 'escape' because I consider that Moroccan youth on the move to Europe find themselves in forced immobility in Melilla. During my fieldwork, there were more than a few occasions when their situation in the city was compared to that of a prison (Khosravi 2021).

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Bilal's Journey, a Story of Emancipation

Age and Labour in the Lived Experiences of Migrant Youths across Europe

Gianmarco Marzola

Abstract: Bilal's story traces the journey of migrant youths who abandon European reception projects while remaining undocumented. Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and inquiry into Bilal's lived experience, evidence is presented on how the Italian reception system fails to address the migrants' needs and vulnerabilities. Labour is a central element in the life stories of migrant youths, although access to the labour market is constrained by laws on protection of minors and asylum bureaucracies. This fact collides with the youths' aspirations, in which mobility and economic independence are seen as fundamental elements of 'adulthood'. Against this backdrop, steps should be made in both legal and humanitarian approaches to youth migration to promote a regular and dignifying access to labour as a possible form of emancipation and citizenship.

Keywords: humanitarianism, labour, life stories, migration and asylum, youth on the move

The phenomenon of 'unaccompanied migrant children' who disappear from institutional housing and integration projects without a trace represents one of the most alarming scenarios within the patterns of youth migration to Europe. Between 2018 and 2020 alone about 18,292 minors disappeared from institutional projects, remaining undocumented and irregular (Lost in Europe 2021). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), European States place unaccompanied or separated migrant children under state care and the legal custody of a guardian. While these measures are enacted in order to safeguard what is considered to be the children's 'best interest' (Allsopp and Chase 2019), institutional projects may collide with the youth's autonomy, restricting spatial mobility and the ability to work. While cases have been reported of migrants that have allegedly 'cheated on age' in order to resist deportation and eventually access housing and integration projects (Silverman 2016; McLaughlin 2018; Lems, Oester and Strasser 2020), it is still unclear why children abandon these projects, revealing a research gap in the scholarship about youth and migration to Europe.

However, it is not only minors who disappear from institutional facilities. The phenomenon of adult asylum seekers and refugees who abandon the reception projects, trying to reach other European countries, is also recognised – mostly in Mediterranean Europe, where labour conditions are more precarious, and welfare systems are weaker. Neologisms such as *dublinanti* in Italy and *retomados* in Portugal have been coined to describe child and adult migrants apprehended by police in other European countries, while holding an Italian or Portuguese residence permit, who have been escorted by the police back to the 'country of first arrival', as an enforcement of the Dublin Regulation[1] (Coppola and Santucci 2015; Moleiro 2017). This phenomenon has already been analysed by anthropologists and political scientists who have convincingly demonstrated how reception and integration projects for migrants function as means of spatial containment (Tazzioli 2018, 2020). More generally, scholars have interpreted the European border regime as a set of barriers, regulations and legal mechanisms that are aimed at restricting the mobility of less privileged undocumented migrants, compelling them to accept a subal-

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tern, precarious and often irregular working position in the European labour market (Balibar and Wallerstein 1988; Mezzadra 2001; Corrado and De Castro 2016; De Genova 2016; Vacchiano 2018; Finotelli and Ponzo 2018).

In this article, I focus on migration at a micro-level, inquiring into the life story of Bilal (a fictional name), a 'presumed minor' from West Africa who escaped from the Italian apartment project where he was being hosted in 2017, and whom I met again in Portugal five years later, this time as an 'adult'.

This article is based on intensive fieldwork carried out while working in reception projects for asylum seekers in north-east Italy (2017–2020) and participating in humanitarian operations in the Mediterranean on board quarantine ships for incoming migrants during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (2020–2021). An anthropological inquiry into the lifeworlds of migrant youths is of vital importance for future humanitarian action. I argue that a detailed report on how migration is experienced by young migrants like Bilal can potentially help frame more effective reception and integration projects and amend the legal framework around migration and youth in Europe.

Bilal's Journey

In early 2017, a Senegalese youth arrived on the Italian shores undocumented. During the registration at the police office he was asked about his age. The boy took some time to reply: 'I told them that I did not know. I was feeling confused because of the journey.' In order to assess his actual age, the cultural mediator asked the youth whether he remembered his date of birth. He replied that he was born in 1999, then, after a few seconds, he said he had miscalculated and declared more firmly that he was born in 1998:

> I didn't know the actual date of birth. I was feeling confused, and I was unsure about the day and month to declare. Then I remembered that a guy who was travelling with me had told me that, if asked, he would have said that he was born in 1998 so that he could surely pass as an adult. 'Otherwise, they won't let me work', he said.

The boy then declared that he intended to present an asylum claim, and was later relocated to northern Italy with other migrants in the same condition. After a couple of days spent in a big regional hub on the outskirts of Bologna, the young Senegalese was taken for a medical examination. A doctor measured the circumferences of his limbs and chest, and took an X-ray of his wrist. 'They wanted to know if I was lying about my age. That's why they took me to the doctor with some other boys who also looked younger.' An X-ray of the wrist and hand bones can be ordered by the Italian judicial authority in cases of well-founded doubts about the age declared by a suspected unaccompanied minor – though the procedure is known for having a wide margin of error. 'There were many migrants coming in those days. They didn't take too long, and they just let us go.'

He was then taken to a semi-autonomous apartment project for adult asylum seekers in Ferrara, a small town in north-east Italy. I met him upon his arrival, as I was working as an educator for the social cooperative that was managing the apartment project. The young boy could not speak any other language than Wolof and some other West African dialects. His flatmates, also young boys from Senegal and Guinea, would facilitate communication, translating his words into French. As a joke, they would call him *Bambino*, 'kid' in Italian.

Bambino disappeared from the reception project in the late summer of the same year. His flatmates told me that he was probably headed towards France – a general tendency among asylum seekers coming from French-speaking countries – but the young Senegalese did not speak French. Five years later, while pursuing my PhD in Lisbon, his former flatmates, who were now all living independently in rented apartments, told me he was in Portugal: 'Do you remember Bambino? The small guy from Senegal? He is now in Lisbon!' They gave me his Portuguese telephone number, and, as I spoke to him, I noticed he had forgotten Italian, a language that he was never really eager to learn. Eventually he was able to speak some Portuguese. We met again in Lisbon in summer 2021.

In this article I recount his story and call him Bilal, a fictional name that I have chosen carefully after consulting several people with a similar migratory experience. Bilal – an important character in Islam – was an 'African slave and early convert to Islam who was freed and chosen to be the first person to call people to prayer' (Campo 2009: 101). My research interlocutors and I have chosen this name to recount a story representative of young men who abandon institutional centres for the sake of autonomous mobility. Even if the Bilal of this story was never enslaved, in his own view he was nonetheless able to emancipate himself from the restrictions and limitations imposed on him by European asylum regulations, in a pursuit of freedom through spatial disruption and racialised insubordination (Roberts 2015). Bilal's emancipation came through exploitative forms of la-

bour that he underwent willingly: he worked under extremely precarious conditions in Libya to pay for his 'trip to Italy'. In Italy, as well as in other European countries, he engaged in short-term informal work to make quick money for his journey.

While moving irregularly through Europe's inner frontiers, he combined formal means with informal strategies, such as, for example, using his personal Italian document, even if it had no validity abroad, or assuming other migrants' identities to buy train and bus tickets at shelters around Europe. After visiting Switzerland, France and Spain, Bilal chose to settle in Portugal, where he got a regular work contract and then, through legal claims presented at the Immigration and Borders Service,[2] a valid residence permit. He is currently waiting for the European passport that he will receive for residing and working in Portugal for five years: 'I am paying for my own room now. I pay taxes. I have my work and my documents. In a few years I will be able to register for a passport.' Portuguese citizenship represents for Bilal the token of his emancipation. It will allow him to travel to his family in Senegal and come back to Portugal regularly and without restrictions, defeating the regime of containment and immobility. 'Finally', he said, 'my family will see the return of a real man!'

Bilal's story is representative of those of many migrant youths whom I have encountered during my fieldwork carried out on NGO boats at the European Mediterranean border during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their age set spans from 15 to 25 years, and their migration stories differ slightly according to the country of origin and the expectations they had of Europe. In some cases, young migrants may falsify their age, passing as 'minors' in order to resist deportation, mostly if coming from a 'safe country of origin'[3] like Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco and, therefore, unlikely to have their asylum claim recognised or have access to welfare guaranteed. Yet others, like Bilal, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, have chosen to fabricate their own identity and present themselves as 'adults' in order to gain more freedom of movement and to augment the chance of finding a job in both formal and informal economies. These young men, whose age was uncertain, would modify their year of birth while staying on board the boats during their quarantine, switching between 'minor' and 'adult' ages continually during private meetings with psychologists and legal experts. For many migrants, their age became fixed in chronological terms and in the day-month-year-of-birth format only upon their registration with the police once disembarked in Europe. Most likely, in many of these cases, their 'true age' was created at this point. While some modified their birth date intentionally, many did not know when exactly they were born, and others simply did not concern themselves with the accuracy of this detail.

The day Bilal left the apartment project, he was holding an Italian residence permit for asylum seekers. In those years, due to a large number of arrivals, the final decision for asylum cases would come only after five to six years or even more. At present (spring 2023), a small group of migrants who arrived in 2017 are still holding the same residence permits and their asylum cases are still pending. The Italian residence permit for asylum seekers has a validity of six months, at the end of which it must be consigned at the police office for renewal, a procedure that can last one or two months, during which asylum seekers are almost invisible to public offices, work agencies and possible employers. As a matter of fact, while the residence permit is held for renewal, asylum seekers can access healthcare only in emergencies and cannot sign a working contract. Scholars have demonstrated how these forms of bureaucratic and temporal control jeopardise the autonomy and restrict the mobility of asylum seekers across the European territory (Cabot 2012; Khosravi 2018; Bhatia and Canning 2021). Yet, for some youths in this project, this precarity has also served as a driving force to leave, as Bilal did, remaining undocumented in search of an income.

As we were sitting in my apartment in Lisbon, Bilal told me that life in Italy made no sense to him: 'I couldn't stay there any more, just sleeping and eating and having no chance at finding a job. And the school was also too hard for me. Why should I start learning Italian if Italy does not give me a job?!' Abandoning the housing project and remaining undocumented was described by Bilal simply as an alternative form of precarity to the one offered by the bureaucracy of the Italian asylum system. '*Dormire, mangiare*', Italian for 'sleeping, eating', are the two words that many asylum seekers still use to describe their life in the reception and integration projects. More importantly, for many youths such as Bilal, the precarity of this condition is a challenge to their identity as young men and adults. In migrant parlance, '*dormire, mangiare*' is also the formula that describes the fate of minors who are 'detected' and hosted in protected reception centres. According to Italian law[4] unaccompanied or separated migrant minors are entitled to a residence permit for minor age, which lasts until their eighteenth birthday. For those whose asylum claim has not been assessed before that date, the

maze of the asylum system starts with the reaching of majority, with fear of deportation and expulsion orders overshadowing the future for nationals of safe countries of origin. It is in these circumstances that for many young migrants, running away before their eighteenth birthday is seen as the best option.

During another meeting with Bilal, he told me again about the distress he suffered while being hosted in the apartment project: 'I was tired of waiting. The time that I had to wait was too much, and my head started giving me problems.' Bilal then threw an accusation towards the Italian reception system: 'I know what authorities do in Italy. They keep migrants in th e projects and make it impossible for them to work so that they will stay there like children. And the organisations hosting them earn the money that Europe is giving for the migrants!' Bilal was surely upset at that moment. Yet he did not intend to insult me or my colleagues: 'I know that you were all doing a great job, working a lot, even at night for us. But you were paid for that job, and you could quit any moment you liked. But we … We could not decide. We could only sleep and eat, "*dormire, mangiare*", so that the money that Europe is paying for migrants will be given to the associations hosting us!'

If analysed critically, Bilal's argument was much more subtle than a conspiracy theory that the Italian asylum system and its institutions exploit migrants for monetary gain. What Bilal was describing instead was his vision of alienation and unequal redistribution of resources between institutions and their beneficiaries. He was also not arguing that European money should be given directly to migrants. Yet, while Bilal acknowledged the work carried out by social workers and institutions, he clearly described his feelings of alienation and how the reception project in Italy was affecting him. He saw his identity being impacted by the precarity of short-term residence permits, the constant and intricate renewal of which was an obstacle that kept migrants from working, and the infantilisation that made them dependent on state bureaucrats and social workers ('so that they will stay there like children').

Against the precarity and bureaucratised (in)activity that Bilal was facing in Italy as an asylum seeker, he found redemption in Portugal: the fact that he managed to stabilise his situation with a residence permit for work is, for Bilal, a clear sign of emancipation. This also explains why, for him, it is worth working in a country where wages are among the lowest in Europe: 'I know that some of my former flatmates in Italy are doing the same job that I do. And I know that in Portugal the money is less. But look at them. They are still holding the six-month permit!' We then started a video call with his former flatmates. As they saw him, they called him 'Bambino' again. He then replied, 'No. I am not a "*bambino*" any more. I am now *un uomo grande*! [a big man!].'

Bilal's Emancipation

Bilal's journey is the story of a successful emancipation. Nevertheless, in my analysis, I reject the dichotomous approach that overemphasises and essentialises the 'agency' of migrant subjects (minors and adults alike), as opposed to the 'structural oppression' enacted by such things as 'society' or 'institutions'. From the phenomenological angle that I adopt, agency does not exist as a quality of the subject, it must rather be conceived of as something that is lived, experienced and embodied by migrants through actions, practices and choices in an intersubjective dimension (Vigh 2006; Zigon 2009; Jackson 2012; Fabian 2014; Pina-Cabral 2016). Against the excessive stress put on the agency of migrants, often depicted in literature as resisting state power by moving through 'underground routes' and residing in autonomous informal settlements (Gambino 2017; Palmas and Rahola 2020), my fieldwork interlocutors and I generally agreed on the fact that informality frequently hides labour exploitation and physical abuse, a risk that is much higher for children and women in migration.

In their autonomous routes throughout Europe, minor and adult migrants alike combine formal and institutional ways of moving and working with informal ones. On the one hand, they assume fabricated identities by declaring falsified ages or buying other migrants' documents in order to work in less exploitable forms and to access, if needed, public health and social services. On the other hand, they might prefer to remain undocumented, becoming more mobile and more exploitable as an informal labour force, finding a way to traverse frontiers and make money for limited segments of their journey. These two dimensions of migration should not be seen in conflict, since their dynamic interplay composes the lifeworlds of many whom I have met during my fieldwork.

Bilal refers to his journey as an 'adventure', which is a highly recurrent narrative *topos* in West African cultural production, found in many folk tales, literature and film (Bredeloup 2008; Sarró 2009). Besides its narrative and aesthetic value, it also conveys

meanings for interpreting the migratory experience, whereby migrant youths are bestowed with a 'positive social value' (Koenig 2005: 78) by way of a 'magical efficacy' that transforms their personhood in terms of symbolic capital (Newell 2005: 170). The point that I want to highlight is that, in Bilal's words, their 'adventure' is considered a coming-of-age story, marking his passage into 'adulthood'. This is expressed vividly in the reply that Bilal gave when called 'Bambino' again: 'I am not a "*bambino*" any more. I am now *un uomo grande*!'

Another important element in Bilal's emancipation is the autonomy and the economic independence that he gained through legal work: 'I am paying for my own room now. I pay taxes. I have my work and my documents', these all being elements that make him appear in the eyes of his friends and relatives to be 'a real man!' This echoes what has been largely documented in non-European contexts, that adulthood is more likely to be understood in matters of mobility and socio-economic independence (Englund 2002; Thorsen 2006; Vigh 2006; Punch 2007; Farrugia 2016) rather than chronological or demographic objective data. Furthermore, scholars have pointed out that the impossibility of producing wealth undermines the social acknowledgement of 'adulthood' (Kleinman 2016) and of 'manhood' (Vigh 2016) among West African migrants in Europe.

On the contrary, according to humanitarian European institutions, age is understood as a chronological and demographic variable that is automatically linked to vulnerabilities and legal frameworks that categorise and differentiate migrant subjects. The category of age is the separator between 'unaccompanied migrant children' and adult 'asylum seekers', 'economic' or 'irregular migrants'. Yet what is legally enforced as a matter of protection, like not allowing minor migrants to work, can be experienced by migrants themselves as the denial of a fundamental part of their identity, like, paradoxically, 'adulthood' intended in a performative praxis. Similarly, the bureaucratic maze of the Italian asylum procedures jeopardises the possibility for migrants to work regularly and keeps them in a childish ('like children') '*dormire, mangiare*' (in)activity.

The bureaucracies and the temporal control exerted by the asylum regime impact deeply the way that migrants experience temporality (Khosravi 2018; Bhatia and Canning 2021). From a phenomenological perspective, relying on Heideggerian (2006) insight on ecstatic temporality, the way in which the human subject normally experiences past, present and future is disrupted by the asylum system, which constrains enormously the experience of freedom as a projection of the subject into future possibilities, resulting for example in the inhibition of attaining adulthood. Time is suspended as restrictions placed on the body and its mobility are experienced. Against this backdrop the urge for self-management calls for a break of temporal control, in order to reinstate life in its desired temporality. This has happened, in the case of Bilal, with the relinquishment of the nickname 'Bambino' as the turning point of his 'adventure'.

Finally, it is the limitations and constraints imposed by the asylum reception system, as a mechanism of the European border regime, that many young migrants try to avoid by engaging in illegal working activities or embarking on life-threatening journeys such as 'adventures', 'burnings' (Pandolfo 2007; Vacchiano 2021) or other 'agonistic performances' (Andersson 2014) against European borders and their containment measures.

The need that many migrant youths have for economic resources is additionally intensified by the need to pay for their 'trip to Europe'. In many cases, it is the family that contracted this debt as a form of investment, bestowing on young migrants who 'made it to Europe' the responsibility of paying it back.

While this need is surely of prime importance, the (in)activity and the precarity induced by the asylum system as part of the border regime must not be understood as a secondary factor. I argue that the Marxian notion of 'labour' as an activity in which value is produced and whereby the human subject is defined, projecting otherness onto both objects and social relations (Marx 1910, 1973, 2017), can help elucidate the impact of (in)activity and precarity on the life of migrants. This interpretation of labour has been further elaborated by Hannah Arendt (1958), who made a distinction between what she called 'labour', 'work' and 'action'.

According to Arendt, labour is carried out for the subject's subsistence, while work is a process of production in which value is then reified in an object. Through work, value is alienated from woking subjects and is reified into something that is not always usable by them. Arendt's conceptualisation of work is similar to the Marxian understanding of the alienation that workers undergo while producing objects that they cannot use. Paradoxically, the '*dormire, mangiare*' (in)activity that Bilal described also resonates with Marxian alienation and with Arendt's definition of work: in the case of migrants' (in)activity, the value generated by their presence in these facilities is transformed into capital accumulated for the benefit of state institutions and social

workers, but that reaches migrants only by objectifying them as recipients of the provided services.

Moreover, migrants suffer the alienation of not being able to interact with these services themselves due to the continuous mediation of social workers and intricate bureaucracies. In Arendt's model, both labour and work are opposed to 'action' – a process implying that the value produced through labour is embodied in the labourer's body, becoming fundamental to the subject's identity and social relations: 'In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world' (Arendt 1958: 179). From this insight we can see how the quality of 'adulthood' and 'manhood' is produced through legal or illegal work, or through life-threatening journeys and confrontations with the European border regime. These are 'actions' carried out in order to re-establish a connection with the world, a connection that is denied by the border regime and the (in)activity induced by the asylum system. It is striking that in Arendt's (1951) interpretation of totalitarianism, the public space where people could perform their action in terms of self-defining activities was denied by totalitarian power. In this sense, the system of global apartheid (Tchermalykh and Floristán-Millán, introduction) that young migrants face can be perceived as an emanation of totalitarian power, carried out by liberal states through seemingly democratic procedures, endorsed by the system of human rights.

Conclusions

Bilal's journey exemplified how the phenomenon of 'unaccompanied minor migrants' who abandon hosting facilities while remaining undocumented must not be understood as a separate issue from that of adult asylum seekers escaping from reception and integration projects in order to pursue their migration journeys. Observed in a wider framework, adult and underaged refugees alike make an agentive and rational choice in view of their emancipation through labour (understood not as Marxian 'alienation', but as a form Arendtian 'action'), while acting within the structural constraints of the highly bureaucratised and segregated migration system of European states.

While facing the challenge of containment and infantilisation in the hosting facilities designed for asylum seekers, these young people choose to fabricate an adult identity in order to find economic resources to pursue their migratory journeys. Here, age is not merely chronological or demographic information that automatically determines the vulnerability and legal status of migrant individuals, but rather a complex factor shaped by various social and institutional dynamics that migrant subjects choose to act upon according to their conditions. The coming of age of these individuals is not associated with a temporal threshold; as Bilal's case demonstrates, his new masculine identity – that of an adult able to support himself and his family in a legal way – is a result of an interplay between his adventurous journey from Senegal through several European countries and his choice to combine formal and informal means to navigate the European labour market in view of the acquisition of citizenship within the European polity, which Bilal perceives as an ultimate form of emancipation, associated with free North–South circulation and equal and durable work opportunities. Bilal's choice of labour over protection and education, however, should not be perceived as a uniquely positive experience or a call for action. Moreover, his extra-institutional path can be perceived as a form of institutional critique of the reception facilities, formulated *in praxis*.

Against this backdrop, the need to restructure European reception and integration mechanisms is urgent. Projects should be designed and built around migrant subjectivities, understanding their needs and aspirations: while being hosted, migrants should be given the responsibility and ability to build their own horizon of meaning as active protagonists of their lives. To reach this aim, the issuing and renewal processes for documents should be made easier and should not expose migrants to vulnerability and precarity. Migrants should be given the possibility to easily manage these procedures themselves, avoiding the continuous mediation of state bureaucrats and social workers. The same can be said about any service provided for them that sees them as passive beneficiaries and not proactive protagonists of their migration journeys.

Moreover, instead of enforcing spatial containment and temporal control, reception projects should be mindful of the Heideggerian (2006) insight on ecstatic temporalities, according to which human existence is defined by our ability to transcend the present and project ourselves into the future while being influenced by our past. Excessive temporal control can lock the future out of migrants' possibilities, augmenting alienation and frustration together with the dependence on the reception project. An excessive bureaucratisation of the asylum procedure jeopardises the correct development of social projects,

turning beneficiaries into passive and addicted recipients of services.

Another step should be the reformation of public education that would see programmes designed to educate and accompany youths in European schools, both locals and foreigners, in the labour market, acknowledging their dignity as labourers by giving them a form of wage – short-term internships and protected positions for minors have failed in this sense. In 1975, in an article for the *Corriere della Sera*, Pier Paolo Pasolini called for the abolition of television and mandatory education after the fifth grade. In his view, mandatory education would reiterate class subordination, creating a frustrated proletariat able only to learn about social limitations while being taken away from labour and from life. If, in 1975, Pasolini was concerned about the creation of a 'frustrated proletariat', almost half a century later, I share with him the same concern. Furthermore, due to new circumstances dictated by globalisation and neoliberalism, I also feel concern about a progressively racialised working class, fostering social inequality and injustice. Against this grim prophecy, education devoted to labour as a positive modality of willingly being-in-the-world is possibly the only solution left. I conclude, therefore, my contribution to this issue by quoting Pasolini's words: 'Work, then, in these circumstances, would take on another meaning, aiming at unifying once and for all, by self-determination, standards of living and life itself.'

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Notes

1. The Dublin III Regulation determines which European member state is responsible for examining an asylum application from a third-country national or stateless person. While aiming to prevent multiple asylum claims and ensure a clear definition of responsibility for the examination of asylum claims under the Common European Asylum System, the treaties have frequently been the object of controversies between Northern and Mediterranean states, the latter being most impacted by irregular entrance from the sea, and therefore, as 'countries of first arrival', having to absorb a higher load of asylum applicants.
2. The Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF) was put into force by the Portuguese Decree-Law no. 252 of 2000. It regulates immigration and border control. The SEF also examines asylum applications and issues passports and identification documents to foreign nationals. According to the Portuguese immigration law (Law no. 23 of 2007, also amended by Law no. 29 of 2012 and, lastly, Law no. 102 of 2017), a residence permit for employment purposes can be granted to third-country nationals who have a legal employment contract.
3. Countries considered 'safe' in terms of political and economic stability according to the directives of the European Parliament and the European Council, no. 58 of 2005 and no. 56 of 2013.
4. The Zampa Law no. 47 of 2017 established a complete prohibition of refoulement and accelerated access to reception centres, education, health and other services for unaccompanied migrant children. For each minor, a legal guardian is appointed by the state while parental investigations are carried out. As a new measure introduced by this law, minors can start an asylum claim without being represented by a legal guardian.

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The Cost of Belonging

Stories of Unaccompanied Young Syrian Refugees in Germany

Shaden Sabouni

Abstract: How are family and broader social ties of young people on the move to Europe impacted by their refugee experience? This article reflects on this question through a detailed case study of a Syrian adolescent growing up in Germany. Syrian youth carry the weight of separation from their families, enduring the challenges of a dangerous migratory journey. After reaching Europe, some are obliged to take a leading role in preparing the path for their families to follow. With an ethnographic perspective, this article sheds light on the circumstances they face, and identifies the new forms of relationships they construct with their families and the surrounding society. I stress the variable factors influencing their development and integration in Europe and highlight the challenges stemming from the experience of family separation, engaging in a reflective exploration of the deformed image of family in the aftermath of separation among young refugees in Germany.

Keywords: family dynamics, family reunification, family separation, refugees, Syrian refugees, unaccompanied minors.

I will always remember the first day I met Taha, another teenager facing conflict with his family. A few weeks earlier, his mother had posted a request on a Facebook group for Syrian mothers seeking support. I contacted her immediately and we agreed on a meeting at their place. And here I was, sitting in her living room, looking at the worn-out sofa and listening to her story. This was my first research visit to a family of Syrian refugees whose children came to Germany as unaccompanied minors and were then joined by their parents. My intention was twofold: as a researcher, I wanted to gather their story for my work, and, as a volunteer social worker involved in refugee aid, I aimed to provide some support and family guidance.

However, as I found out later, for Taha's mother receiving organisational assistance was unacceptable: she did not want external entities involved in her family affairs, as she wanted to preserve the social image of the family at all costs. Her reluctance stemmed from a fear of potential consequences, such as losing custody of her children or facing accusations of mistreatment from authorities. All she hoped for was someone whom she could confide in about her concerns and who shared with her the same difficulties. As a Syrian refugee who is a mother and has children at school, I was the perfect match for her expectations.

After my initial visit, word quickly spread and other mothers started contacting me. They were concerned about the behaviour of their children – alcohol abuse and drug addiction, intrafamilial violence, abusive behaviour, lack of respect towards family values, criminal activities – which they considered inappropriate, and their inability to control the situation. Those visits transformed my perspective on unaccompanied Syrian minor refugees in Germany. The generational divide between them and their fam-

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ilies was no longer an abstract concept that I intuited but rather a tangible phenomenon that needed to be taken seriously in order to be understood. Each encounter provided me with a deeper insight into the complex nature of the growing tension in familial relationships during and after migration. The more families I studied, the more I realised how much there was to discover and write about them.

From Separation to Reunion: The Impact of Migration on Young Refugees and Their Families

Teenagers growing up in conflict zones are compelled to leave their homes to escape war and political or religious unrest (Lustig et al. 2004). In their home countries, they face numerous traumatic experiences, including witnessing, enduring and being forced to participate in extreme violence and conflicts. Additionally, they endure losses of family, security and property, and suffer from poor humanitarian conditions (Ahsan Ullah 2018; Hopkins and Hill 2008). Furthermore, the risks faced by these minors are not limited to their experiences in their home countries; they also extend throughout the extensive migration journey and post-migration phases, presenting various threats at different stages (Von Werthern et al. 2019). In the countries of destination, they are also forced to deal with displacement, precarious status, integrational difficulties and resettlement all on their own without a caregiver's support (Johnson et al. 2013). Their quotidian struggles include complex bureaucracy, social alienation, new school systems, language barriers and the effects of family separation.

One aspect often disregarded in migration studies particularly regarding young refugees are the dynamics associated with family reunification following the solitary migration journey of young people. This dynamic was notably evident in the Syrian migration of 2015, when families could only join their children years later, as part of the politics of family reunification. Here, a question arises: How does the experience of displacement impact familial ties among Syrian minor refugees in Germany, and how are these changes reflected in the family? How do young refugees navigate the complex family dynamics, which include a prolonged separation from their families and a subsequent family reunion in which each member might acquire a new status? Which new family roles emerge as a result of the migratory experience? What are the effects of these transformations on the young people's well-being and integration?

While substantial research has been conducted on the mental health of refugee children, focusing on psychological distress, depression and other potential risks (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Crowley, 2009; Fazel et al., 2012; Huemer et al., 2009; Rousseau 1998), this article addresses a gap in understanding the effects of family separation and reunification as significant elements in their trajectories. Specifically, it examines their influence on the dynamics between teenagers and their parents and extended families – an area that has received limited attention in existing studies – as well as on the transformation of family roles due to migration. In this article, I use an ethnographic approach to gain insight into the lives of unaccompanied young refugees, with a particular emphasis on changes in their attitudes towards their families.

Methodology: The Role of Personal Refugee Experience in Participant-Guided Ethnographic Research

The research is based on a participant-guided ethnographic study conducted between December 2021 and October 2023. The primary data collection methods involved 27 face-to-face interviews with Syrian refugees (both adults and children) and six focus groups with Syrian families.

The fieldwork extended beyond the traditional interview setting, integrating participant observation derived from visiting these families at home and immersing myself in their daily lives. Discussions included 10 mothers aged between 24 and 53, three fathers, and 14 youths aged 14 to 24, who arrived in Germany while still under 18. Within this group, four individuals had left their families in Syria and lived alone in Germany, five arrived with their parents as teenagers and were still living with them, while five others had been reunited with their parents after a long period of separation.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the homes of the participants, except when I met with the teenagers separately, as they preferred having the freedom to talk without the presence of their parents; separate meetings were arranged in cafes, parks or during long walks.

In this participant-guided ethnographic study, teenage refugees are positioned at the forefront as storytellers, steering the direction of the research and allowing for a deeper insight into the complexities of

familial ties, social changes and the consequences of separation.

While conducting this study my positionality as a researcher, a mother of two teenagers, and a fellow refugee played a vital role in establishing a relationship for engaging with the participants. Drawing upon my own displacement experience allowed me to relate to their journeys, creating an encouraging environment for open discussions. Additionally, I volunteered in a refugee camp, carrying out vocational training to support Syrian refugees in their daily lives. This multifaceted role allowed me to approach the participants from several angles, fostering a sense of solidarity built on common interests and experiences.

I received warm welcomes into many homes where people were longing for someone to give voice to their stories, which appeared to be endless. This article is part of a larger ongoing project that explores family dynamics among Syrian refugees, with a specific focus on the attitudes of teenagers.

Behind Closed Doors: An Ethnographic Account of a Syrian Refugee Household

I arrived at Taha's house at 11 o'clock as agreed with his mother after we chatted via WhatsApp. Taha is an 18-year-old Syrian refugee who arrived in Germany in 2014. Everyone was still asleep. Taha's mother was waiting for me with a tray of coffee at the table in the living room. I did not need to make any effort to encourage her to talk; she went directly into the story as if she had been waiting for this moment for a long time. She did not ask me anything, not about my research, or with whom I worked. I tried to share some background information to create an atmosphere of familiarity, but she seemed uninterested. It looked like she wanted to make use of every moment of my presence in her home to tell me more about her daily miseries. In a low voice and with suspicious looks at the closed door, she started telling me about her children, starting from the war in Syria, up to the day they had to call the police to take her son Taha out of the house. I was watching her worried looks towards the door. She was taking long silent pauses to check for any movement from behind the door. At around 13:30 Taha entered the room. A young teenager in his 18's. He greeted us without making any eye contact and sneaked slowly to the corner. I was unable to see his face; he was partially covering his head with his hoodie, bending it down towards the floor. I greeted him as he sat down next to the chimney with his phone in his hand. Quiet and peaceful: this was my first impression of this young boy.

The mother was telling me about her daily struggles; but as Taha entered the room, she shifted the topic to talk about him. Still trying to be invisible, he kept listening to his mother as she suddenly decided to tell bad stories about him. Looking directly at him, she told me that he was the source of all her pains. I noticed that her voice got louder; she was no longer worried about any movement from behind the door.

His mother started describing all the pain he caused her: the bad friends he had, his illegal affairs and his addiction to drugs and alcohol. She told me that one day he broke the door of the living room because his father asked him to translate governmental letters. She said a lot of negative things about him, while he was still withdrawn in his corner, not moving or reacting no matter how dishonourable the image his mother painted was becoming, ignoring all the stories his mother was telling. I wondered how he was able to control his temper as his mother chose to reveal more embarrassing incidents about him. He was nodding his head occasionally and then giving his mother a quick sad look, with a sarcastic smile.

> It was the day when he hit his sister, everything has changed since then. The bed was broken into two parts, can you imagine? They share one bedroom. He came back home late; he was drunk and high. I ran to their room as I heard the loud screaming. He hit her; he broke her teeth. My husband called the police because he was not acting normal, he was shouting like a monster at all of us and I was scared. We couldn't control him. The neighbours came out to his noise. The police arrived and they took him away. I told them not to bring him back. A few days later my daughter shaved her hair to zero, she became bald. She said she doesn't want to go out at all and not to see anyone. She stayed in her room for around four months. (2022, W.S., mother of Taha, Syrian refugee in Germany since 2017)

The more stories his mother told, the more oppressive the atmosphere became, and the more vulnerable Taha seemed to me as he listened. As I was leaving, Taha followed me to the doorstep and asked to have my phone number; he texted me asking to meet outside his home. And here is where the story begins.

The Story of a Lost Generation

In the rest of this article, I will focus on the story of Taha who arrived alone in Germany in 2014, as a central case study that I utilise as an illustrative fo-

cal point, allowing for a comprehensive portrayal of the experiences of unaccompanied minor refugees in Germany. The selection of Taha as a central case study is not intended to spotlight his individual journey, but to provide a symbol encapsulating the collective experiences of numerous unaccompanied minor refugees.

Taha's narrative is strategically chosen to reflect common threads and shared changes within this demographic. Through Taha's story, this article aims to provide an in-depth exploration and comprehensive portrayal of the experiences of unaccompanied minor refugees in Germany. By utilising Taha's narrative, the intention is to offer a detailed description that mirrors the diverse range of narratives gathered from extensive qualitative research. His experiences resonate as representative, shedding light on shared struggles, aspirations and familial dynamics among unaccompanied minors.

Like Taha, all other examples in this article are young men who have spent the most vulnerable years of their lives in war-torn circumstances, who crossed borders alone in search of a better future for themselves and for their families, but who still lack emotional and institutional support in their daily lives.

Taha arrived in Europe at the age of 11 to claim asylum in the hope of bringing his family later. His mother is 44 years old; his father is 50 and he has one younger sister of 13. He arrived in Germany three years before his parents. During those three years, he stayed in a refugee camp where he learned a lot and changed a lot. He went through countless struggles in which he had to stand on his feet while he was only 11 years old. Today, he is determined to become a part of German society and to overcome the familial ties that, from his perspective, have hindered his ability to achieve his goals.

Striving to Belong

It was Christmas time. As I arrived at our meeting place, the cold rainy weather made me shiver. Taha was waiting for me, leaning against the wall with a cigarette in his hand. He looked handsome, peaceful and quiet, wearing a thick silver necklace, a white T-shirt, baggy jeans and a black leather jacket covered in safety pins. The smell of his perfume was stronger than the smell of his cigarette. His hair was arranged with small black curls rolling down his forehead, covering parts of his eyes. With a long puff of his cigarette, he greeted me and asked if I could wait until he finished smoking. After meeting Taha's mother, I was eager to learn more about him. Our first meeting lasted for seven hours, during which he shared many stories about his chaotic life full of contradictions, drugs, girlfriends, depression, isolation and frustration.

Research has shown that social support is a crucial factor in helping individuals cope with life's challenges. This support often comes from strong connections with family, close friends, and members of one's ethnic group, providing both emotional and practical assistance to manage and deal with life's challenges (van Meeteren et al., 2009).

> As I arrived here, I needed my mother more than any other time. I wanted to live with a family, but they put me in a refugee camp because my half-brother was with me, he was 21 years old. So, they said that he could take care of me, but he didn't. He started taking drugs the moment we arrived in Germany. We were in a camp full of men, I was less than half their age. They used to gather in our room to smoke weed as I watched them. They used to make fun of me because I was small. I remember one of them asked me to show him my body, and I refused, but my half-brother hit me on the head and obliged me to take off my T-shirt and to walk around the room, and they all laughed.

Like thousands of other refugees, those teenagers were unprepared to deal with the difficulties of the journey to Europe – a journey that can only be survived by dissociating from distressing memories of being exposed to direct threats, death or kidnap (Goodman 2004). The distressing memories of those who make it to Europe may cause severe mental damage for the rest of their lives (Huemer et al.2009). Moreover, the resettlement journey often leads to lasting social isolation, discrimination and loss of identity in the search for acceptance and a new home in what McCormack and Tapp (2019, p.170) have termed 'an unsupportive and unsympathetic post-migration resettlement environment'.

> We were five or six people together when we left Syria. Only three of us arrived. Some of them were arrested in Hungary, maybe some of them arrived after us, I really don't know. I can't remember.

In Taha's case, his new identity involved facing several dilemmas: getting recognition in his new surroundings and becoming an agent for the integration of his own family, who were relying on his support. This has led to numerous inner conflicts. His identity had to incorporate these new experiences, and thus, becoming full of turbulence and inner conflict, he struggled profoundly and lost sight of his true self.

Reunification or Alienation?

Developmental psychologists and sociologists alike stress that feeling included in their surroundings is what shapes an individual's relationship with a group (Levine et al. 2005). Undoubtedly, growing up around caring individuals who provide for children's essential needs and support them until they become independent is crucial. However, for many child refugees, this sense of security is suddenly replaced by the struggle for survival in a hostile environment due to forced displacement and separation (Van Meeteren et al. 2009).

Taha was born in Syria into a conservative family. In Germany he was socialised into a different lifestyle, which he cannot tell his parents about. He was able to settle in Germany according to the facilitated procedures for unaccompanied minors but had to wait for three years until he was able to bring his family through the procedure of family reunification. Meanwhile, he managed to obtain greater control over his life, and afterwards, over his family as well. This reunion cost him a lot of bureaucratic procedures during which he built up dreams of a happier life and expected compensation for all the hardships he experienced. However, when they arrived, his parents depended on him in all their correspondence with the official authorities and in other daily chores, and instead of fulfilling his need for support, they were always accusing him of neglecting their needs. This accusation placed an extra burden on his shoulders, and instead of regaining his position as a child who has a family to care for him, and having his efforts appreciated, he ended up taking care of them, becoming an agent of their integration – a role that he was not able to fulfil.

With all the conflicts he was facing, Taha's feelings of alienation, guilt and resentment became a part of his new life – a life that he started alone in a refugee camp, with hundreds of new faces around him, new rules to adapt to and a new family routine that he had no choice but to accept:

> They sacrificed me instead of sacrificing for me. All parents are supposed to care for their children, but they did nothing for me. I am the one who has been taking care of myself and them since the day they decided to send me here. They are using me as their cane. They don't love me. I lost hope in them, I was waiting for them to come and help me, but now I don't need them anymore. I have my own life now and I don't need them to be part of it. I just go home because there is no other place to go. To be honest, I hate them. Sometimes, my mother cries on the phone to urge me to come back home, and when I come back, I see a pile of letters waiting for me at the table, then I know that the real reason was to respond to the letters and not because she was missing me.

In the face of immense frustration, Taha sought refuge in education, setting his sights on a singular goal: obtaining a university degree. He started studying German the day he was settled at the camp, ignoring all the confusion around him. It was a weapon to keep him optimistic at that time. However, the school system in Germany did not match his expectations.

> I wanted to go to school immediately. I asked a man in the camp to help me. After a few months, I could make it to school. I was very mad to see my cousins there. We arrived in Germany together, but they were immediately assigned to a foster family. They come to school with clean clothes, but I was always messy. They had lunch boxes, but I was always hungry and had no money to buy any food. They were able to speak fluent German, but I was sitting in the class like an idiot unable to understand or say a word. We used to be friends back in Syria, but when I saw them at school, I felt that I hated them for everything they had and for everything I didn't have.

After multiple failed attempts to transfer to grammar school, he gave up and decided to skip school. He retreated to his room for six months and started using drugs.

> I asked my teacher to take me out of the camp because I wanted to have a family. A few weeks later, he found me a family, and I moved there. I was so happy to start over, but things were not as I expected. They expected me to sleep early, make my bed, take out the garbage and clean my room. What was even worse, they cooked very bad food, and I was always hungry. I felt more like a servant rather than a child. One night, I packed my stuff and left without telling anyone. I was at the youth camp. I stayed there for nine months. It is where I started taking drugs, everyone there takes drugs. At the youth welfare office, they give us very little money, so I had to find a way to survive. So, I started working with drug dealers to earn money. I even started sending money to my parents. I was so proud that I was able to support them. I became the man of the family.

Too many overwhelming events were going on around him and he neither had control over them nor understood their consequences. With very limited options, Taha found himself torn between chasing his dreams of a better education or being a hero in his family's eyes and supporting them, who had invested financial resources to send him to Europe. In

other words, Taha was facing a dilemma: to pursue integration through the standard avenue of education, offered to unaccompanied minors in Germany despite numerous challenges, such as complete isolation, economic deprivation, infantilisation and lack of choice ('I felt more like a servant than a child'), or to seek prompt economic independence and emancipation through informal economic networks, while counting on family support ('I became the man of the family'). He opted for the second choice, but in Taha's case it turned out to be an illusionary way out. Later, he confessed: 'To be honest when my parents came it was even more difficult. I was struggling to accept and realise what was happening to me here in Germany, and then my parents came here too, so things got more complicated for me. We used to fight a lot, me and them I mean.'

Falling Apart

As I listened to the recordings and transcribed our conversation, I could see the multitude of dilemmas, uncertainties and disappointments that Taha, and other teenagers, had to endure. The flood of emotions expressed in our meetings could not be easily put into words.

After experiencing various hardships, Taha decided to shield himself in a way that no one could penetrate. 'I am only passive now. Now I can't go along with my parents. I can never accept the way they treat me; yesterday we fought. I almost hit my father. It is impossible to accept the way he treats me now, impossible.' As Taha waited for someone to help him, disappointment after disappointment eroded his hope until he reached a point of deep desperation. He stopped hoping for any change and felt that the help he needed would never come.

Despite finding new ways to adapt and ignoring the increasing fear of failure, these teenagers become more vulnerable while trying to escape reality (Walther et al. 2020). Their ability to prove themselves in such circumstances is very little. They cannot successfully and continuously maintain strong relationships either with their families or with society.

Finally, Taha sought companionship in a secret affair with an older woman, as loneliness consumed him. His failing dreams, secret relationship, illegal job and emotional instability were all sources of frustration, leaving him feeling like he was falling apart.

The Inversion of Family Roles and Transformation of Family Models

The experience of isolated autonomous migration of children to Europe often leads to a significant shift in family dynamics and roles, particularly for teenagers who are forced to take on the role of caretaker for their incoming families. Due to the parents' lack of ability to support their children's educational needs and navigate the school system in the host country, many children are left to navigate their future alone, despite the presence of their families, who often struggle to find work.

For many, the time spent away from home has taught them to be independent and make their own way in the world, shaping their identities in ways that are often vastly different from their families.

This lack of support and guidance can result in children feeling isolated and disconnected as they attempt to pursue opportunities for their future amid a maze of conflicting pathways. This may lead to dropping out of school or taking on shorter-term, lower-paying jobs to support their families. Even after being reunited with their families, many teenagers struggle to establish a sense of familiarity and kinship that fits their new life. The period of being alone in a foreign country pushes them to forge an identity that matches their current environment, but at the same time, disconnects them from their family values.

The shift from being a protected child within a traditional family model to becoming an independent and self-sufficient being, and then supporting one's family of origin, may result in a sense of alienation and isolation. In some cases, the bond with the family may take on a new emotional character, becoming an obligatory tie with only a financial or social obligation:

> When they talk to me, I just listen like a robot. I wait till they finish talking while I have something else in my mind. I usually sing so I don't concentrate on what they are saying. I have no feelings for them anymore. They didn't feel my pain, so I don't feel theirs now. It is not my fault.

In Taha's case, his experience of reunification with his family left him feeling weakened rather than empowered. For him, the only mechanism to defend his newly acquired identity was to isolate himself by spending more time away from home and engaging in risky behaviour. He tried not to think about reality anymore, and his perception of his family became more and more negative: 'My father can't offer me

anything. I have seen other people who are in worse situations than he is, but still offering better to their children, but it is because of who he is, let me tell you that: my father doesn't love me, yes, this is the real reason.'

As for many other young Syrian immigrants, for Taha the shift from being a dependent child to becoming the provider and caretaker of the family has had a profound impact. By examining the significant changes that have occurred in his life over the past eight years, one can begin to understand his current attitudes and behaviours.

Conclusions

The experience of migration from Syria to Germany has had significant impacts on intrafamilial relationships as families navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture and environment.

While refugee parents believed they were making a positive choice to send their children to Europe in advance to guarantee them a better future, their children, on the contrary, consider their parents to have sacrificed them to guarantee a better future for themselves. In exploring how the new roles imposed on these teenagers impact their sense of belonging and integration, we find a strong contrast between their initial expectations and the reality they face. Family support, as a crucial foundation for belonging, growth and the feeling of being loved (Luster et al. 2009), undergoes a complex twist for these young people. Their emotional needs accumulated prior to the arrival of their families. To their surprise, instead of getting the care they were longing for, they found themselves enduring duties, and instead of removing the burden from their shoulders, their parents became for them an additional responsibility. The parent–child relationship has been severely disturbed and deformed due to the reversals in roles whereby children became the primary supporters and cultural navigators for their parents, alongside the parents' inability to learn and integrate as fast as their children. This shift in roles has directly affected the children's sense of belonging at home, and their ability to integrate to their new life.

To conclude, Taha's narrative reveals not only personal confrontations, psychological challenges and identity disturbance; it also explores further implications on familial dynamics and their reflections on broader society. As we delve into the complexities of refugee experiences, it becomes clear that uncovering young people's journeys of transformation is essential to understand the intrafamilial challenges they face, which play a major role in any individual's ability to achieve successful integration into the host community.

This article stresses the impacts of family separation and the severe effects on all family members. Resettlement procedures and refugee camps should provide more adequate support to these vulnerable groups, as the responsibility of care put on these young people to support their families is too heavy. This aspect of their lives is often overlooked by authorities who usually intervene only in cases of household violence (Lewig et al. 2010). Taking an honest look at the challenges they have had to undergo when arriving in Europe, unaccompanied by their families, can contribute a great deal to their growth and maturity. My ethnographic study with 14 teenagers revealed that these minors strive to establish stability amid the overwhelming challenges they have to face.

Despite their efforts to reconcile their new identities with societal demands and their families, they face challenges and do not succeed. A glimpse into the future reveals a society in which an increasing number of children are at risk of losing their life's purpose (Luster et al. 2009), substituting their aspirations for inclusion and protection with the harsh reality of a lack of belonging.

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Citizenship and Political Identities of Children in Transnational Migration

Anne Wihstutz

Abstract: This article expounds on the relationship between children's rights and asylum discourse as pertaining to the figure of the non-citizen child. Key for the understanding of the political identity of the asylum-seeking child, who is depicted as trapped between paternalistic concepts of childhood and restrictive asylum law on the one hand, and empowering children's rights discourse on the other, is an antagonism in the logic underlying human rights and citizenship discourse. Ethnographic findings with accompanied asylum-seeking children in Germany substantiate the argument, from the perspective of 'new' childhood sociology. The concept of citizenship is elucidated as practice lived in the everyday in children's action against exclusionary effects in refugee centres.

Keywords: human rights, lived citizenship, refugee children, enacting citizenship, children's rights, migration, Hannah Arendt

Transnational migration is one of the most significant human phenomena of the twenty-first century, affecting millions of adults and children across the globe. The relationship of children in migration with the hosting nation state is far from natural or automatic. Political identities of children involved in transnational migration are subjected to antagonistic discursive struggles between children's rights discourse on the one hand and refugee and asylum discourse on the other. Vitus and Lidén (2010) describe these discourses as contradictory: on the one hand a clearly political discourse of deservingness of being included in a nation state, which distinguishes between 'genuine' and 'bogus' asylum seekers; and on the other, the idea of the child as a vulnerable being with the right to protection. At the point where these antagonistic discourses intersect emerges a new, highly ambivalent identity of 'other children' (ibid.: 78), a category that is not absorbed into the two clearly defined political identities of 'asylum seeker' and 'child'. This subaltern political identity has an unclear legal reference and a direct impact on the everyday life of these children. Being the 'other child' creates a situation in which children are neither granted the rights guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child nor independent asylum rights as human beings. As Jo Boyden and Jason Hart (2007: 237) point out, '[t]he direct experience of conflict-induced migration constitutes the very antithesis of the ideal of childhood as a period of safety and continuity, free of onerous responsibility that has long formed the bedrock of European-American thinking'.

In this article, I propose a conceptual framework to interpret the citizenship of refugee children that draws together the critiques of the Eurocentric conception of vulnerable childhood, the understanding of citizenship as an emancipatory praxis, carried out by marginalised groups, and the exercise of children's rights in the context of transnational migration. In the first part I critically discuss the classical understanding of citizenship as a relationship between individuals and nation states that occurs under the influence of transnational migration, refugeehood and universal human rights regimes, and describe a conceptual shift towards the understanding of *citizenship as an everyday practice*. Drawing insights from children's rights, feminist and poverty scholars, I introduce the concept of 'lived citizenship', informed by an understanding of children as social actors (James, Jenks and Prout 1998) that exercise a form of *relational agency* (Esser et al. 2016). In the second part, I introduce three empiri-

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cal examples demonstrating citizenship practices of young children living in mass accommodations with their families, and discuss the processual nature of these manifestations. By investigating these citizenship practices, I contribute to a nuanced exploration of these children's political identities, rights and migration dynamics, interwoven in the intricate tapestry of their everyday social experiences.

Shifting Paradigms: Redefining Citizenship in the Context of Global Migration

A classical understanding of citizenship is twofold. First, it implies belonging to a nation state acquired mainly by place of birth (*ius soli*) or inheritance (*ius sanguinis*), which is bureaucratically captured in such documents as birth certificates, family record books or passports. Second, it involves a sense of belonging to a society through a set of legal, political and economic rights, cultural practices and obligations like taxpaying. This complex relationship implies an interplay between rights, duties, participation and identity (Turner 1993: 2). Both of these understandings are still valid and yet are insufficient in the modern globalised world. As Pinson et al. (2010: 14) have demonstrated, migration 'disrupts modern regimes of rights upon which notions of national citizenship are based'. Transnational migration raises issues of the membership, identity and rights of those who cannot claim national citizenship but who nevertheless seek protection in host societies. Refugees with a pending asylum application as well as displaced persons 'are outside the national community of law, but they are present within the national borders of the state' (Meints-Stender 2017: 64; translation by the author). How can one understand the citizenship of those who have exited their communities of birth but have not yet integrated into other polities?

The Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention of Refugees' Rights might provide some answers – however, they lack a structural focus: the responsibility of a polity to provide the guaranteed rights. While states enforce social rights, there is no uniform sovereign to enforce human rights at a global level. Arendt (1986) termed this contradiction the 'aporia of human rights'. In this regard, Giorgio Agamben posits that the logic of human rights, 'the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man', is inconceivable within the logic of the nation state. Within the political order of the nation state 'the status of the refugee is [– even in the best of cases –] always considered a temporary condition that should lead either to naturalisation or to repatriation' (Agamben 1995: 116). One way to lead out of this logic-dilemma, as Arendt (1949) proposes, is the decoupling of the concept of the state from that of the nation, and the constitution of a transnational citizenship that guarantees everyone the right to belong to a political community. Against this background, Seyla Benhabib (1999) suggests that citizenship be grounded only on participation in a political community and in everyday life, and not on the territorial nor on the descent principle (Meints-Stender 2017).

Citizenship as Praxis: A Struggle for Justice and Recognition

From a sociological perspective, citizenship is viewed as a more comprehensive relationship that goes beyond the individual–state connection. In other words, in a holistic understanding of citizenship that implies identity, cultural practices and a sense of belonging to a community, the focus shifts towards norms, practices, meanings and identities, rather than solely legal rules and regulations defined by nation states. Similar ideas are advanced by feminist scholars, who point to the praxis of citizenship as an active participatory struggle *and* as a set of rights, which are the object of the struggle. Poverty scholars advance an 'actor-oriented perspective' of citizenship, based 'on the recognition that rights are shaped through actual struggles informed by people's own understandings of what they are justly entitled to (Nyamu-Musembi 2005: 31). Attentive to the negative effects of social exclusion, these theories emphasise the emancipatory potential of citizenship as a social practice, and define it as a 'momentum concept'. This means that citizenship-as-practice is meaningful only if activated in time: only by continuously reworking it is it possible to reveal its 'egalitarian and anti-hierarchical potential' (Hoffman 2004: 138), and to provide the tools for marginalised groups struggling for social justice (Lister 2007a).

Claims for social justice and citizenship formulated by excluded groups 'from below' are rooted in four fundamental values that converge, despite the diverse contexts in which these groups shape their understanding of citizenship. These are justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity (Lister 2007a: 50). The claim for justice is related to fairness: to be treated the same when it is fair, and when it is fair, to be treated differently; recognition relates to the worth of all human beings and recognition and

respect for their differences; the capacity to exercise a degree of self-control over their lives is often termed 'self-determination'; and the term solidarity refers to 'the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them in their claims for justice and recognition' (Kabeer 2005: 7). A grounding in these four values is common to what has been named *inclusive citizenship*, as an approach by 'outsiders', marginalised people and those who do not belong to the polity by birth: the non-citizens.

The Complex Landscape of Children's Citizenship

Throughout the twentieth century, children as a group were invisible in citizenship studies (Lister 2007a). At best children figured as 'citizens of the future'. They were considered not-yet-adults, with the competences associated with citizenship, such as rationality and independence, as evolving only (Larkins 2014). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) children are rights holders, but in terms of citizenship, while they are given some rights, responsibilities and opportunities for participation, they are clearly denied others. In modern liberal democracies children do not hold office (create law), do not vote (validate law, or elect others to create new law) and only rarely bring cases to court (action existing law in their interests) (Tchermalykh 2023). This normative pattern, which explicitly understands children's specialness and vulnerability as worthy of protection and justifies their separation from the adult world, became hegemonic in the modern Euro-American world and globally. The categorisation of children as not-yet-citizens determines their social positioning on the edge, with limited access to society's resources and opportunities.

In reaction to the globalisation of these views, in the realm of childhood studies there has been a shift towards a 'new paradigm' in which scholars challenge the traditional distinctions between childhood and adulthood concerning competence, dependence and vulnerability (Lee 2001; Prout 2005; for an overview see Larkins 2014). Cath Larkins (ibid.) notes that not all children are inherently more vulnerable than all adults. Rather vulnerability and dependency are inherent to human beings. Informed by children's movements especially in the Global South, Stasiulis (2002: 507) discusses children as 'empowered, knowledgeable, compassionate and global citizens'. In this literature, children are portrayed as social actors who enact and reclaim their citizenship as a way of participation in the social world in their own ways. As Lister (2007a: 54) notes, rightly 'children's citizenship practices could be said to constitute them as *de facto* citizens even if they do not enjoy all the rights of full *de jure* citizens'.

Yet this understanding of children's agency raises questions about how to define children's citizenship, without concealing their intentional exclusion from the polity and from the body of the nation as migrants (Tchermalykh and Floristán Millán, this issue). In this regard, the question of the citizenship of children in transnational migration appears even more puzzling.

To illustrate my conceptualisation of refugee children's citizenship as a practice embedded in everyday life, and as a constant struggle for self-determination and recognition, I introduce three ethnographic examples deriving from my research project 'Everyday Life of Young Children in Refugee Mass Accommodation Centres', which I led in Berlin in 2016–2017. The field observations were made by Sarah Fichtner, Hoa Mai Trần , Penny Scott and Thi Huyen Trang Le. In substantiating my argument, I draw upon the theoretical framework of 'lived citizenship' (Warming and Fahnøe 2017; Lister 2007b), which moves beyond a static legal status, embodying an ongoing, evolving process shaped by individuals' interactions, relationships and encounters within their social and political environment.

Lived Citizenship in Action: Following Spiderman

Let me introduce Spiderman (a pseudonym of his choice) – a rebellious 6-year-old boy from Iraq who came to Germany alongside his family, and whom my research group encountered in a mass accommodation centre.

> Spiderman is eager to guide my colleagues Sarah and Mai around the centre and share his favourite places, displaying a strong sense of agency and independence. He distances himself from the childcare on the grounds that 'this is only for babies'. To mark his point of not accepting the house rules, he chases around the building and deliberately enters the common room which is off-limits for children his age, staging this border crossing verbally and by sticking out his tongue. He wants to enrol in school, his mother says, but his German language skills need to improve before he can be admitted.

> Because of the explosions and bombings he saw in Iraq, Spiderman is scared. He would not leave their flat out of fear of witnessing death and loss. Spiderman recounts how he loves Germany but in Iraq, he says, 'there is only killing'. To emphasise his emotion, he gestures a rifle shooting. No longer can he talk in German, it is the interpreter who helps him say what he has to tell Sarah and Mai. 'If we have to leave, are pushed out, I will kill them – the policemen', he says. He does not want to accept that there is nothing the family or he could do against deportation. In this view he also disagrees with his father who tries to pitch a return to Iraq to his son. Spiderman is convinced, Germany is better than Iraq. 'I can't do anything in Iraq. You know? Papa is lying. What Papa says: You have to go back immediately … but I do not want to leave. I do not go. I must not go.' (Fichtner and Trần 2019, 127)

Spiderman's assertive statements highlight his desire to stay in Germany, to attend classes in school, which can be interpreted as claims to self-determination that are not institutionally heard. To these structurally imposed limitations, Spiderman reacts by deliberately entering off-limits areas and challenging established social rules. His rebellious behaviour sheds light on the many levels of contradictions of his living conditions: in the centre for refugees, there are many regulations that limit his possibilities to act while there is no reliable authority that protects him from deportation to Iraq. If this occurs, he can count only on himself, and Spiderman is ready to fight the German police. The boy is motivated by his desire to be granted the right to education, to participate in what he recognises as normal childhood by locals, that is to say citizen-children. When these claims are not heard he reacts by revolt, against his family and against the institutional rules – and against the hosting society, exemplified by the police. Spiderman's subversive ways of pointing out injustice demonstrate that his subjective dimension of citizenship encompasses feelings of (not) belonging, of (not) being valued, of (limited) participation and competences.

Spiderman's story serves as an example of the complex and nuanced experiences of young children living in challenging circumstances (for further details, see Fichtner and Trần 2019), and it highlights the importance of understanding their agency and citizenship actions, which are exercised in a meaningful way, despite external constraints and pressures induced by restrictive migration regimes (Wihstutz 2020).

Empowering through Recognition: A 'Children's Revolution' as a Catalyst for Citizen Participation

Stretching existing institutional boundaries and power relations can produce a shift in rights and responsibilities, contribute to new distributions of resources or even provide a new political status (Larkins 2014). In our research in one accommodation centre for refugees, children mounted an uprising, which the management of the centre called the 'children's revolution'. On this occasion several 9-year-olds led a group of 20 children claiming to dismiss a childcare worker whom they considered too strict and disrespectful. Here is how the manager recalls it, laughing:

> 'The situation was really extraordinary! In fact in the early evening there was a knock at my door, and then there were at first a handful of boys, and then more and more turned up. A few younger ones joined in, looking on. I personally think it was great. Of course, I was surprised, but I took them all seriously. We sat down at the round table in my meeting room. And they were very, very disciplined, they really did a great job in explaining what they were concerned about, giving reasons for their concern. I listened to what they had to say. Of course, I had to lend my ear to the other party as well. By coincidence, the person concerned came to my office at that very moment. [laughs] … It was my intention to find a mutual agreement on how to deal with the specific accusations in negotiations. That was not successful. Of course, this was due to the adult, who always justified why he reacted the way he did, but in the end, it was also due to the children. Maybe because they were exhausted and the tension was too much. They didn't want any more negotiations. They stormed out of my office arm in arm, shouting "He's got to go! He has to go!" I thought that was a pity, because the approach itself was great. But well … He was untrustworthy in their eyes.'
>
> Reflecting on the experience she recalls: 'The older ones and the boys had the floor. And then they always reported like at school, lifting their hand when they wanted to say something, and it was really very civilised at the beginning. The younger children could hardly reach the table, looking on in amazement [laughs], fascinated to be part of this situation' (field notes, Fichtner and Trần)[1]

Through their cohesive and decisive action the children demonstrated in this particular case control over their own lives. Centre management recognised this small-scale children's revolution as an act of empowerment (Schulz-Algie 2019). In the context of

this case, all four foundational values were present: the pursuit of justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity – elements constitutive of lived citizenship (Lister 2007a). Gerard Delanty (2003) suggests the concept of citizenship as a *learning process* that takes place in everyday life, involving affective and emotional dimensions, and not just an awareness of rights and obligations (Warming and Fahnøe 2017).

In contrast to the 'adultist' perspective of adult-led child involvement, the case of a children-led 'revolution', where children actively and diligently expressed their views, serves as an illustration of their gradual acquisition of democratic participation skills, not exempt from affective and emotional dimensions of amazement and fascination with the very process of collective decision-making.

Defying Spatial and Temporal Boundaries: Practices of Lived Citizenship

As mentioned previously, the conception of lived citizenship problematises the traditional association of citizenship with the nation state and highlights citizenship *as a struggle played out in multiple spaces*. According to Warming and Fahnøe (2017), space is not simply a place where things happen but rather a situation of social action where material and discursive relations are interwoven. This attribute of space gains particular relevance in the following ethnographic example observed by Fichtner and Trân.

> One day, a new announcement appears in the glass showcase, located in the refugee accommodation. In an official tone it reads: 'Parents' duty to supervise their underage children.' The announcement explains: 'parents have the duty of supervision at all times, i.e. they must look after their children. Past 6 p.m., children below the age of 12 years are not allowed to stay on ground floor nor in other parts of the building, without parental supervision. After this hour security will not allow children to leave the building. During school holidays for children up to 12 years of age, the exception is extended to 8 p.m. From 10 p.m. children and adults have to observe the nightly silence on the entire premises (outside on the terrace as well as inside the house)! Parents are liable for their children (in case of financial and material costs)!' (Field notes, 23 May 2017).

Similar announcements are placed in other accommodations, often in the major languages spoken by residents (Farsi, Arabic, English) and in German.

These short notices can be perceived as a material trope exemplifying in a succinct form the living conditions and strict rules faced by refugee children and their families in refugee accommodations. However, against these temporal and age-specific restrictions, children engage in inventive acts of disobedience, acted out on a daily basis. They play secretly in the long corridors, making use of their parents' distractedness and lapses in supervision. Disregarding the time and age constraints, which are based on a logic of governance and safety (Scott and Le 2019: 149), groups of children hang out in the open space of the reception area, taking advantage of the absence of security. These spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991; Scott and Le 2019) contribute to their expression of lived citizenship, intimately intertwined with their individual life stories, their past and present encounters with forced migration, and their current status as refugees.

Building on Hannah Arendt's understanding of citizenship, which she situates in space that 'arises out of acting and speaking together' (Arendt 1998: 198), Larkins (2014: 14) understands citizenship action 'also as a practice through which the self is created and revealed', in the negotiations of social existence. This can account not only for children's participation, as in the case of the 'children's revolution', but also for the activities that are framed as disobedience. As they actively transgress age-specific discursive rules and material limitations, children's appropriation of space through play and hanging out in groups may be considered a citizenship action that translates an inner struggle. It might be perceived as an indirect way to assert socially agreed rights that are being denied by external constraints, for example the lack of adequate housing and space for exploration and development of refugee children, or even exclusion or deportation, as in the case of Spiderman.

Invisibilisation of Discrimination Against Accompanied Refugee Children

The above quoted short notice may also be considered an illustration of the broader discrimination against refugee children living with their families that often goes unnoticed in relevant literature. Unlike the unaccompanied minors who are entitled to special protection, families with young children are placed in mass refugee accommodation that barely responds to children's developmental needs (Lewek and Naber 2017; World Vision and Hoffnungstraeger Stiftung 2016: 49; Seeberg et al. 2009). Moreover, German asylum law explicitly exempts these refugee centres from Child and Youth Welfare Act quality

standards. To access adequate living standards, children therefore depend on their parents' capacity to apply for the welfare benefits of the Child and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII), which they often lack due to linguistic and social limitations. To complicate the situation, there are no uniform standards with regard to the well-being and safety of children in mass refugee accommodation either at the national level or the European level (Save the Children n.d.).

Based on their analysis of the legal and ethical aspects of refugee children's well-being, Lars Hillmann and Annette Dufner (2017) raise the provocative question of whether refugee children in Germany would be better off if they were unaccompanied. This is because unaccompanied minors' living conditions are addressed under the Children and Youth Welfare Act, which applies equally to nationals and unaccompanied minors and grants them the same rights of protection, provision and participation. This question is indeed provocative, as it could imply on the one hand that state institutions are better prepared than refugee parents to raise children. This assumption challenges the Western understanding of parenting, which implies that parents are the only ones originally and genuinely responsible for childcare – as is also clearly exemplified in the above announcement on 'Parents' duty to supervise their underage children'. However, if migrant children hosted with their families in state institutions are not provided for according to German standards, migrant families run the risk of being held responsible for these circumstances: 'Parents are liable for their children in case of financial and material costs!' Asylum and migration family policies that only address parents concerning the provision for and care of children contribute to the invisibility of discrimination processes against accompanied refugee children. This contributes to their double victimisation, as they are discriminated against both as refugees and as children, whose parents – and not the host states – are blamed to have failed to protect them.

Conclusions

In this article I have explored social practices in the everyday life of marginalised social groups such as refugee children and their families living in refugee accommodations in Germany. To discuss these, I have introduced the concept of lived citizenship, used as a framework for analysis and reflection on how intersecting structures affect refugee children's agency, life conditions and well-being. This analysis is complemented by a spatial perspective, acknowledging the entanglement of material and discursive dimensions in the construction of social practices constitutive of citizenship.

I conclude that children practise 'citizenship' both as naturalised citizens and as so-called non-citizens, blurring the distinction between nationality and status in their activities. Despite their exclusion from formal political spaces as 'children', they share the common experience of struggling for justice and membership in a polity body. One first step towards empowerment of children's citizenship could be to recognise the value and meaning of children's agency, also in border crossings and refusals of deportation. As Hannah Arendt writes, people should be judged by their actions and opinions and not by ascriptive constructions of difference of an essentialist nature. This is all the more true for refugee children.

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Note

1. This excerpt is from field notes taken by Fichtner and Trân on 23 May 2017. It was translated from German by the author and edited for clarity. Regrettably, there is no first-hand account from the children regarding the occasion.

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Taking their Word(s)

Biographical Violence and Dilemmas of Collecting Narratives from Young People on the Move

Cléo Marmié

Abstract: Various adults seeking migratory testimonies actively pressure young people 'on the move' to Europe, categorised as 'unaccompanied minors' (UAMs), to 'open up' and share their stories. The suspicion that hangs over their minority and over the credibility of their stories can cause the adolescents to modify their biographies, to conceal, alter or invent elements. How can the researcher bond with them and produce reliable qualitative data without reproducing forms of 'biographical violence'? Based on a multisited ethnography 'on the move' in Morocco, Spain and France, this article invites exploration of young people's shifting biographies throughout their journey to Europe. It supports the idea that the scientific and ethical challenges of collecting the voices of young people can also constitute levers of scientific knowledge.

Keywords: age, children on the move, Europe, institutional norms, Morocco, multisited ethnography, narratives, sensitive fields

Introduction: A Snatched Voice

In one of his latest novels, Emmanuel Carrère (2020) recounts his encounters with young asylum seekers during a workshop in 'creative writing' that he co-organised with Erica, a retired woman, volunteering in a 'hotspot' in Greece. Sitting at the terrace of a café, Atiq, a 17-year-old Afghan teenager, recalls his long journey to Greece, while answering Carrère's questions. Atiq shares his own concerns:

> As we rest […] after three hours of debriefing, Atiq asks me what I plan to do with it. […] The answer is: I don't know. […] Atiq is under the impression that he is being fooled. Erica, for her part, is worried about an email she has just received from a humanitarian association concerned about her methods: shouldn't she take the advice of a psychologist for her writing workshop? […] The fact is that the kind of wild therapy we subject these boys to is disturbing them. […] we have the greatest difficulty in getting them to come […]. As for Atiq, […] he says he doesn't want to talk about the past anymore because it hurts too much. (ibid.: 344–345)

This excerpt highlights the many complexities involved in collecting the accounts of young people on the move. First, a multiplicity of adults compete to access these juvenile stories – researchers, administrative agents, childcare professionals, humanitarians, psychologists, writers, journalists, activists, volunteers – and their obsession with the past of these young people and their 'experiences of departure and loss' (ibid.: 348). Then, the unequal power dynamics and social positions intersecting class, gender, race and age at play in such interactions, the pain that the reactivation of these memories provokes in the young respondents and their reluctance to share their stories. Ultimately, it raises another painful question: how can we differentiate between a privileged, wealthy adult who seeks to utilise for the sake of his art the biographical material of vulnerable and marginalised adolescents, and the approach taken by social scientists 'rushing to the field to "hear the voices" of refugee children' (Kaukko et al. 2017: 20)?

This article explores the scientific and ethical challenges of collecting the voices of young people on the

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move. Its contributions are threefold. First, I argue that researchers can contribute, in many respects, to what I propose to read as a biographical violence to which these young people are invasively and repeatedly exposed throughout their journey to Europe. Second, I call for further recognition of shifting juvenile biographies. I defend the idea that it is not the role of the researcher to disentangle the 'real' from the 'transformed real' in juvenile biographical accounts. Rather, the researcher may try to understand what leads these young people to feel the need to adjust their narratives in the context of their migratory, administrative and institutional experiences. Third, to avoid forms of data extractivism and imagine caring ways of conducting research with young people 'on the move', I advocate for research 'on the move', anchored in multisited ethnography and combined and alternative biographical methods, to be as close as possible to their daily social experiences, tactics and aspirations.

The Paradoxes of an Inaudible, Unspeakable and Over-Solicited Voice

Navigating the Labyrinth of Shifting Biographies

In the spring of 2022, I interviewed Salim, a young Moroccan I met a few months previously, on a terrace in Madrid. Salim arrived in Spain three years ago without any family reference or legal guardian, which made him fall under the administrative category of 'unaccompanied minor' (UAM) due to his threefold condition of minority, foreign status and lack of parental guardianship. When I asked him why he agreed to tell me his story, he replied: 'Because I knew you could understand me, you had spoken to me in Arabic, you know the "risky", you know what Morocco is like, you were in Melilla, I know that you can understand everything I tell you, that you can imagine, that you won't judge me.' What counted for him, therefore, was ultimately my circulation between the places he himself had crossed, my knowledge of migratory vocabulary, actors, places and practices – in short, a form of 'transnational knowledge' that allowed for a common universe of reference.

At the beginning of our interview, he told me he was 18 years old. During the interview, he put out his cigarette with a sudden gesture and interrupted himself: 'Well, I'll tell you the truth. I haven't told anyone here. The truth is that I'm 16, but I didn't want to stay too long in a child protection centre … It's tough there, you know … When I arrived in Spain, I said I was 15, but in reality, I was 13. But now, in my mind and heart, I'm 18. It's become my real age, forever. I don't even think about it any more.'

Salim transformed some of his biographical data in order to adapt to the administrative environments in which he would have to evolve. These changes of the presentation of self (Goffman 1959) were so strongly internalised by Salim that they ended up 'melting' into his personal history. What kind of story could I have collected if I hadn't met him outside of the institutions he attends in his daily life and if I hadn't been able to reassure him of my familiarity with the places and thus the contradictory administrative universes he had travelled through? Probably the institutional version of his story, with poor scientific value, and no basis to understand the biographical tactics that young people on the move are compelled to invent. But even so, his will to re-establish his 'biographical truth' is the result of a sudden decision on his part over which the researcher has little or no control. And where is a hypothetical 'truth' to be found, now that his new age has now become, in his eyes and according to the administration, his new and irreversible truth? Salim's tactic shows how age is above all a social artefact, arbitrary, unstable and fabricated: it is less a biological reality than an administrative recognition and registration. In the face of those young people travelling without official documentation, the instability and fragility of Western age identification systems are exposed. Moreover, the struggles to determine age and to legitimate the access to or exclusion from social categories such as 'children' or 'minors' are far from new. From the colonial empires where racialised juvenile bodies were subjected to public surveillance and medical and social expertise (Stoler 2002; Saada 2012) to the aftermath of the Second World War when resettlement was conditioned by age determination of young refugees (Burgard 2021), from French adolescents lying about their age and crossing the Spanish border in secret to fight against Franco's forces (Sill 2011) to 'indigenous' adolescents leaving their families in Algeria to reach the French metropole alone before the war of independence (Gardet and Mokrane 2010), the embarrassment of adults and nation states in the face of the 'unchildlike children' (Zahra 2009: 53) is a historical constant. These struggles are part of a long genealogy of juvenile tactics for navigating childhood and adulthood and negotiating age norms and, simultaneously, of administrative suspicion about the age claimed and the extension of techniques to reduce age-related uncertainty.

In France, I met up with Madi, whom I had followed on his journey from Morocco to Spain and then to France for months. 'So how are you doing?', 'How was Spain?', 'How's your work going?', 'What about Otmane, have you got any news?', 'How's your injury?' We caught up quickly as he had to attend a school support course. After exchanging memories and giving each other news, we took a photo together, and he left on his bike. The next day, I received a message: 'Please don't use my photo if you are going to use everything I told you about my life.' It turned out that at this time, Madi was going through a minority assessment procedure at the Aide Sociale à l'Enfance (ASE). The story he gave to the institution is slightly different from the journey I know: he smoothed, polished and transformed certain elements. The complex and opaque bureaucratic machinery of child protection and migration control in France has made him unsure of what to say and when to keep silent, and he got lost in the labyrinth of his biographical transformations. Distressed by the contradictory advice he received from friends and associations, he feared being excluded from the status of 'UAM' and developed a narrative that would not be prejudicial to him. I met him a week later and tried then to conduct an in-depth interview with him. He told me contradictory things that did not match with the events I had witnessed in Marrakesh. I realised that he did not remember what he had told me back in the past, and I could see in his eyes and his anxious and sudden gestures that he was under high stress levels because of my questions. I then decided to interrupt the interview and return to a more banal and 'harmless' discussion to soothe him. If in Morocco he was willing to share his story with me, it turned out that since he has had to face European administrative obstacles, he experiences my questions as microaggressions to the energy he has put into recreating a biographical coherence in line with his history and the institutional expectations he is now facing.

Solicited by a plurality of adults in search of narratives, young people on the move are caught in an injunction to 'open up' and 'tell' themselves. The suspicion that hangs over their minority and the narrative credibility of their journey (Bricaud 2006; Sigona 2014; Kumin 2014) can provoke a tendency among young interviewees to modify their stories, to evade or invent elements, which weakens the validity of the data collected. Inaudible because they are confined to the closed worlds of migration control and child protection, unspeakable because they are full of violence and distressing memories, the words of young people on the move have become a legal and political issue in determining the legitimacy of their access to protection. At the heart of the institutional biographical injunction (Duvoux 2009) to 'recount' themselves and to transform an intimate narrative into a civil one (Astier 1995), a test of narrative credibility (Kobelinsky 2007) is played out for young people, giving rise to a social sanction and selection that operates a logic of sorting out 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' young people (Perrot 2019; Paté 2023). It is therefore a matter of the young person mastering their narrative, transforming it and making it, sometimes artificially, 'coherent' in order to correspond to the tacit expectations of adults (Carayon et al. 2018). This is precisely what happened to Madi, and what made him suddenly regret confiding in a researcher for fear of possible institutional sanctions.

Enjoyment and Pride in Being Researched

Facing Solitude, Building Trust: Insights from Youth Crossing Borders in Morocco

Bashir, a teenager of Guinean origin, vigorously cuts his chocolate pancake; it's all over his mouth, and he bursts out laughing as he wipes it with a tissue. He leans over my phone: 'Is it recording, are you sure? No, check it, check it, what if it's not recording?' Once reassured, he takes a deep breath : 'Let's go!' His undisguised enjoyment, his excitement at granting me an interview, draws my attention, whereas the surveying of young people involved in transnational migration journeys generally comes up against silences, mistrust and ellipses (Kohli 2006).

To my question of why he agreed to grant me such a 'formal' interview, he replies, amused: 'Because you already know almost everything! I'm so happy to help you with your thesis, so happy really, you can ask me anything you want, you're going to do the best thesis!' Bashir's enthusiasm highlights the complicity that unites us and the confidence he has in my understanding of his experiences, built over several months of repeated meetings. He feels valued in his role as an interviewee and is enthusiastic about the idea of participating in my research, partly because he sees it as a way of thanking me for the support I have given him in moments of loneliness. Additionally, since he left Guinea, he has had very few opportunities to tell his story – the 'real one' as he says: 'I know I can tell you my real story, I know you are on my side.' To Becker's (1967) famous question about social scientists' commitment, 'whose side are we on?', Bashir gave his own answer.

We are joined by Kyle, an adolescent from Cameroon, whom I met a year earlier in the north of Morocco and who now also lives in Rabat.

> When I met you, phewwww [amused]. It wasn't a good time for me, it was too hard. I agreed to meet you because it was Aimé who told me I could trust you, and Aimé is like a big brother to me, if he says something I believe it. I explained everything to you, how it was going for me. Afterwards when I left, it was strange, I felt a bit lighter, I don't know how to say, I had no one to tell all that to […] the others I was staying with, who were trying to cross [the Straits of Gibraltar], all that we live, how we suffer and everything, they already know it, they live it too, I'm not going to tell them again! And after telling you, I don't know how to say it, I felt a bit lighter.

Kyle's testimony shows that he was pleased, and even relieved, to be able to confide in someone. It also highlights the isolation that often characterises the experiences of young people attempting to cross borders in Morocco, and the strength and importance of individuals who act as guarantors of trust.

Beyond Biographical Violence

What is the difference between Bashir and Kyle, who are enthusiastic and confident in their desire to confide in researchers and tell their stories, and Salim and Madi, whose more chaotic accounts are marked by the fear of revealing themselves and by the confusion between their 'official' and 'intimate' biographies? One of the possible explanations is that Bashir and Kyle are still far from aid institutions, whereas Salim and Madi are already entrenched in institutional work and its biographical issues. I suggest that young people on the move gradually learn institutional norms and their biographical injunctions as they are socialised into humanitarian and social intervention, and that the situation of investigation is radically affected by this. Those who have been exposed to the organisations of international cooperation in Morocco are already familiar with institutional work, the expectations of adults and the 'vulnerability criteria' that are central for the 'UAM' status. Once they arrive in Europe, they are confronted with the European administrative regimes of migration control and child protection, which radically alter their narratives. Therefore, there are two factors guiding and shaping the juvenile narratives: the stages of their migration pathway (within or outside Europe) and, more importantly, the degree of socialisation to institutional intervention. These factors have decisive implications for social science surveys and must be considered by researchers operating in so-called 'sensitive' fields.

'Sensitive' fields can be defined as fields that deal with 'illegal or informal practices, individuals who are subject to strong stigmatisation and situations marked by violence, danger and/or suffering' (Bouillon et al. 2005: 13–14). These characteristics 'imply abandoning an excessively canonical survey protocol, as the ethnographer must put his methods to the test in order to invent new ways of doing things, with a constant concern for rigour' (ibid.: 14–15). The difficulty of accessing migration fields, in a context of increasing politicisation of migration issues, is notably linked to specific spatiotemporal and statutory configurations (social, residential and legal-administrative precariousness, hypermobility and informal networks) that contribute to weakening the survey relationship. Child and youth care facilities are also 'closed-door' environments, isolated from public life, with strict access restrictions justified by the legal minority status of those in care.

Furthermore, investigative relations in 'sensitive' fields tend to have to accommodate the recurrent interference of third parties. One of the major challenges of surveying young people in mobility is thus 'the lengthy and time-consuming process of negotiating access to young people categorised as underage through gatekeepers' (Chase et al. 2019: 459). These gatekeepers (Broadhead et al. 1976) are the adults who, evolving around the young people, control, allow or block the researcher's access according to their own definitions of the young person's 'best interest' (Hanson et al. 2012). The research is thus often marked by the impossibility of engaging in direct contact without the mediation of an adult through whom the conditions of the survey must be negotiated. Indeed, 'gaining the trust of children means managing to create a relationship with them "despite" the other adults who would like to organise the interaction, and "despite" the researcher's adult status' (Danic et al. 2006 105).

Ethics in research with young people on the move is receiving more and more specific attention, offering reflective scholarly work (Hopkins 2008; Vervliet et al. 2015; Kaukko et al. 2017; Chase et al. 2019; Senovilla-Hernández 2021; Lønning et al. 2022 ; Shahrokh 2023). When faced with the young people's refusal or reluctance to collaborate, researchers try to elaborate new ways of meeting them, for instance by proposing co-creation workshops or legal information sessions to defend a retributive stance and participatory methodologies. But meeting young people through

institutions and administrations makes it difficult to evacuate the researchers' proximity to social and administrative agents, with whom they may share certain social properties, such as class, race, age or gender – always with the risk of collecting an institutionally oriented account. Moreover, sometimes some of these investigative strategies, when carried out inside institutions and when they seek to explore the migratory pathways of the adolescents, ultimately aim to 'crack the varnish', to break down the resistance of young people, whose silence is nevertheless a protection of the territory of the self (Paté 2023: 220). Of course, intra-institutional approaches are often the only possible way in and enable passionate and important research about a wide range of subjects, especially about their current experiences and future aspirations. But I would like to go further and stress their limitations when they seek to explore these young people's pasts and the depth of their juvenile migratory journeys. Biographical transformations are intertwined like threads in a tapestry: one lie implies another to preserve the overall coherence, and revealing one implies revealing others, threatening to undermine the fragile biographical architecture that can fissure and within which young people can get lost when they are subjected to contradictory injunctions or invasive and repeated solicitations. Indeed, I support the idea that the obsession with the pasts of these adolescents, whether from researchers, journalists or social workers, even varnished with goodwill and active listening, can be analysed as a biographical violence against the energy deployed by young people to create meaning and coherence between an often painful intimate history and a civil narrative whose destabilisation could entail irreversible institutional sanctions. The repeated solicitations reactivate anxieties and plunge the adolescents into a permanent state of *qui vive*. Researchers have to avoid reproducing those forms of biographical violence, either by collecting the stories in spaces and times where this speech is possible or, when the intra-institutional approach is the only entry possible or when the adolescent is caught in a narrative vice, by giving up access to this past, dislocated by a specific and excluding administrative regime, in order to invest other research themes by detaching themselves from obsession with biographical stories and migratory journeys. This is all the more necessary as this obsession with the pasts of young people contributes to reifying their identity on the basis of their migratory stigma and to reproducing institutional classifications and relegations (Payet 2020), while many research topics about youth experiences remain blind spots in the social sciences.

Towards Extra-Institutional Ethnography 'on the Move': Being at Their Side, Being on Their Side

After spending several months following adolescents' journeys from Morocco to Spain and France, journeys that they managed to carry out despite sophisticated migration control and the (im)mobility effects of the health crisis (Gazzotti 2023), I thus advocate for research 'on the move' as one of the ways to establish an early relationship of trust and follow adolescents intimately in their pathways to and through Europe. This approach is reminiscent of Marcus's (1995, 1998, 2008) multisited ethnography that aims to embrace a social phenomenon from a multiplicity of spaces, following connections and associations among these dislocated sites. It implies a conceptualisation of mobility that is perceived not only as a method or a factor to be studied, but as a constitutive element of the field itself. This mobility should be anchored in an ethnography as close as possible to the adolescents' daily lives, allowing a more empathetic and contextually grounded understanding of young people's experiences (Cantwell and Luby 1994; Lewis Aptekar 1994). By systematically meeting the adolescents outside institutions (on the street and/or through links and pledges of trust) and accompanying them actively throughout their journeys, the researcher avoids having to 'convince' them of their trustworthiness by being *at their side* and, as Bashir highlights, by being *on their side* – which implies engaging both physically and emotionally in the field, sharing the emotions of fear and joy, celebrating the victories and supporting in the trials and, most importantly, suspending judgements derived from the hegemonic norms of childhood and transnational (im)mobility. The careful and respectful positioning of the researcher, whose trust and reliability are never taken for granted and could be revoked at any moment by the adolescents, is then an ethical and ethnographic responsibility in a universe of constraint, hostility and criminalisation of mobility.

To that extent, the use of social networks enables researchers to establish and maintain long-term relationships of trust with adolescents, thanks to repeated contact and virtual 'small talk' despite geographical distance. These exchanges open up a level of intimacy with the young people, allowing for a certain degree of reciprocity within the multiple and ever-present asymmetries of the investigative rela-

tionship. This allows the researchers to capture everyday practices of meaning-making and to meet the adolescents where they are after they have travelled or crossed a frontier. It also allows them to be situated outside of the pressing but short-lived requests of humanitarians, institutional agents and journalists and to avoid reproducing the symbolic violence of institutional interviews (Mekdjian 2016: 156). The fieldwork situation extends beyond the moment of the interview, expanding in space and time. And the interview itself can take many biographical forms to avoid registers that break away from 'ordinary communication' (Althabe 1990). It can take the form of traditional in-depth interviews and life stories (Bertaux 1997) when the context and the trust bond allow it, but also conversational interviews, remote interviews, phone and video calls or even voice notes… These alternative biographical methods provide young people with greater control over the interaction and take account of the variability of contexts and constraints they experience, but constitute above all, in the end, a myriad of 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou 2006) that are particularly valuable for investigating 'youth in vulnerable situations' (Lavaud 2017).

Most importantly, this transnational long-term relation allows the researchers to truly accompany the adolescents and to conduct observations at different administrative or geographical stages of their journeys. Researchers can thus witness *in situ* the 'biographical transformations' that occur progressively, by documenting the repetitions, ellipses and modifications that are made as the adolescents interact with institutional agents and penetrate heterogeneous administrative universes.

However, these methodologies should not result in romanticising fieldwork that is saturated with violence and characterised by extreme asymmetries of privilege and vulnerability, and the biographical violence researchers may contribute to produce and reproduce is never definitively resolved, as Madi's concern pointed out. It is also noteworthy that researchers themselves are not exempt from institutional control. The social sciences now operate in a context where research is subject to institutionalised ethical regulations and bureaucratic requirements, which Johanna Siméant-Germanos (2022) refers to as the 'bureaucratisation of scientific virtue'. It should be noted that these rules – established to protect the respondents in the first place – can be difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee when working with these adolescents categorised as 'UAMs'. How can we work within the legal framework of age and minority when chronological, civil and biological age frontiers are blurred and porous? Sometimes, the adolescents do not even know their exact date of birth. As Slow, a Guinean adolescent crossing from Morocco, arrived in the Canary Islands and was bombarded with questions about his civil status and his age, he called me on WhatsApp: 'I don't know what to tell them, I don't know, it has never been important before', he explained anxiously. Besides, many of them are often not in contact with their parents or legal guardians. Obtaining parental authorisation or signed informed consent forms can be, by definition, especially challenging for young 'UAMs'. And how can the researcher obtain signed consent when signing a document is also perceived as a breach of trust and can reignite the symbolic violence of the survey relationship, especially with those who may have low literacy skills? In Rabat in March 2022, some young people who had previously received donated food and clothing packages turned against the volunteers when asked to sign against the withdrawal of the baskets. 'They want us to sign, what does that mean? The European Union gives them money, they make it look like they're giving it to us because they show our signatures, but look at our bags, they don't give anything. The signature is proof that they're lying to us.' Additionally, administrative norms that constrain researchers may clash with the scientific imperatives of the study: how can the researcher plan the coming months in detail or request mission orders from attached institutions when the specificity of the multisited approach is to be able to follow the unpredictability of juvenile trajectories? The researcher must therefore continually negotiate these ethical, legal and administrative constraints and move between heterogeneous and sometimes competing scientific and legal imperatives.

Conclusions: From and with Young People, for a Research 'on the Move'

This article highlighted how scientific solicitations about juvenile migratory journeys can, despite the good will, precautions and enthusiasm of researchers, contribute to forms of biographical violence. I have reflected on my own fieldwork in Morocco, Spain and France to understand how border regimes (and specifically here the enclosure of Europe) intertwine with children rights norms. These norms establish age as a threshold that divide the social world and as a criterion of vulnerability, compelling young people to develop biographical tactics to navigate

this singular and restrictive context. Shifting biographies constitute then a way to protect their intimacy as well as their social and administrative survival. In synergy with Thea Shahrokh invitation to imagine caring methodologies while conducting research with young people on the move (Shahrokh 2023), I proposed some paths for reflection to explore. The methodological and ethical stance that I defended aims to resist both the pathologisation of youth mobility and the confinement of these young people in passive and victimising roles, which are recurrent in scientific literature as well as in institutional and humanitarian actions carried out with them. These paradigms, emphasising the intrinsic vulnerability of these young people and the social anomaly of juvenile transnational journeys, tend to reaffirm hegemonic and globalised norms of childhood (Nieuwenhuys 1998) by which children and adolescents are assigned to social and geographical immobility and to parental and/or institutional guardianship. These norms thus imply regimes of 'captivity' of childhood, as well as the adult and institutional 'appropriation' of children and adolescents and their infantilisation (Gardet and Nigget 2012; Liebel 2019; Bonnardel 2015). By situating juvenile mobility within the broader context of children's circulation (Lallemand 1993; Leinaweaver 2008; Roux 2015) and considering that sedentarinessis a situated norm of childhood, my aim is to show that the risks and dangers of juvenile migration are not consubstantial with the transnationalisation of their paths (which is socially valued when it comes to privileged young people), but rather with the effects and consequences of migration policies and the necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) of borders, which criminalise the social existence of these young people.

Breaking away from methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003), the multisited approach helps to dismantle the territorialisation of child protection, a common focus in social science research that analyses a specific national or local protection universe. This 'overflow' also provides an opportunity to denaturalise the 'UAM' category in the social sciences, which is still frequently used as a socio-anthropological category, reproducing normative regulation logics of 'normal' and therefore 'desirable' childhood (e.g. a sedentary childhood, under parental and/or institutional guardianship) (Peraldi 2013). Detaching ourselves from the normative implications of this administrative category allows us to document the extent to which minority is above all a Western and Eurocentric obsession and how it affects youth experiences, leading to more and more sophisticated administrative investigations. The risk of contributing to biographical violence, which is often dismissed by various adults in search of juvenile migratory testimonials, as shown in the extract from the novel by Carrère, should, on the contrary, be at the heart of social scientists' preoccupations. The researcher can thus take 'side roads' to explore the complexity of juvenile migration experiences and their institutional and humanitarian treatment, considering these methodological challenges not only as obstacles but also as opportunities for knowledge production.

Given the power dynamics at play in collecting the perspectives of young people on the move, effective and caring fieldwork requires long-term ethnographic immersion that closely follows the social experiences of young people at different stages of their transnational journeys, while also being attuned to the constraints that shape their biographical narratives. Without such a deep temporal, emotional, reflexive and ethical commitment from researchers, , the research risks resorting to forms of 'extractivism' that strip young people's words of their context, collect data of poor scientific value and/or reproduce the symbolic violence of administrative procedures. I advocate moving away from intra-institutional ethnography and from Eurocentric norms about childhood and transnational mobility to be able to analyse the evolution of young people's narratives (in space and time) through an approach as close as possible to their daily and transnational social experiences. This means in particular taking into account the unspeakable parts of their migratory journeys and the universe of specific constraints in which they evolve. This also means, sometimes, waiving the collection of certain data for ethical reasons and never forcing the adolescents to 'open up'. Ethnography 'on the move' and the extended and committed presence of the researcher 'at' their side and 'on' their side thus allow exploration of how young people perceive and understand the institutions and their institutional experiences, rather than trying to understand them from the institutions' standpoint.

This longitudinal approach also enables researchers to follow adolescents through different stages of their journeys and observe patterns, shifts and ellipses in the narrative. This methodological reversal does not aim to 'produce' or 'encourage' the narrative (and even less to 'crack the varnish') but to be present if and when they express the desire to share it. By following the thread of the young people's narrative elaboration, questioning its specificities and conditions of production, and accepting the impossibility

of controlling what is said and what is not said, researchers no longer have to reproduce the logics of institutional investigation and disentangle the true from the false. Instead, they must question the bundle of conditions that lead young people to shape and protect the thickness of their biographical paths and bifurcations – without exacerbating, as researchers, the constant state of alert and *qui-vive* produced by the interlacing of restrictive border regimes and hegemonic norms of childhood.

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