Article

The Twisting Path to Adulthood: Roma/Cigano Youth in Urban Portugal

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Abstract

While there is a growing body of research on Ciganos/Roma in Portugal, little is known about how Cigano youth transition into adulthood. In this article, we address this gap by drawing on a qualitative study on the transitions of young Ciganos living in Cascais, a coastal municipality in the Lisbon district. Using a multi-method approach, we explore the life course trajectories of Cigano youth within the areas of education, livelihoods, and marriage, and how these areas shape their transition experiences. The empirical material shows that the transition into adulthood of Cigano youth is influenced by broader structural and socio-cultural factors. Processes of socialization, ethnicity, and gender restrict young Ciganos' participation in education and formal labor markets, which increases their vulnerability to marginalization and exclusion in society. Cigano youth, however, initiate different pathways in their life trajectories to achieve adulthood. By focusing on the voices of Cigano youth, we challenge the homogenization of their lives in Portugal and highlight how social age and linked lives shape their transitions into adulthood.

Keywords

Cigano/Roma; education; linked lives; marriage; social age; youth transition

1. Introduction

Despite the European Union and Portugal's concern with inequalities and citizenship of Ciganos/Roma, poverty, illiteracy, marginalization, and social exclusion continue to be prevalent within this population (ERRC/NÚMENA, 2007; FRA, 2017; Magano & Mendes, 2021). Portuguese Ciganos are generally perceived as a homogenous group, stereotypically depicted as "nomads," free from commitments and bonds except blood ties (Mendes, 2007), living in social housing alongside other Cigano families (Magano, 2017). These generalizations, however, dismiss the individual diversity and cultural plurality of Cigano life paths and fail to cover the complexity of their social realities (Magano, 2017, 2022). Cigano culture in Portugal is commonly based on customs and the value attributed to age and experience, shaping

their notions of status, gender roles, family relations, and distancing them from non-Ciganos (e.g., Magano, 2010; Mendes, 2007). While groups may "claim to own culture" for the sake of group identity, "not everyone inside a group [of Cigano culture] shares the same beliefs and norms" (Anderson-Levitt, 2012, pp. 444–445). Hence, being a Cigano is connected to experiences and processes of socialization that individuals acquire within their own ethnic group by sharing moral values (e.g., respect, honor, shame) and traditions and customs expressed through rites of passage (Magano, 2010), which are regarded as pillars for group cohesion and identity (Hogg et al., 2017). In the Portuguese context, the word for Roma individuals is *ciganos*. We use the term in Portuguese, capitalized, because it is recognized and used by Portuguese Ciganos themselves (see Magano, 2017).

While there has been an increase in research on Portuguese Ciganos in general, there is a paucity of research on how Cigano youth experience transitions into adulthood. In any socio-economic context, youth is considered a life-changing period in which young people acquire and develop educational and training skills that are crucial components in achieving adulthood (World Bank, 2006). However, studies have shown that there are many ways in which young people live and experience such transitions, varying within and across ethnicity, social class, gender, and geographical environment (e.g., Arnett, 2007; Ursin & Abebe, 2017; van Blerk, 2008). Structural and socio-cultural factors allow us to understand the diverse contexts that impinge upon the transitions of young Ciganos, as they share and initiate different stages in different dimensions of their life trajectories (Magano, 2017). In this article, we draw on an ethnographic and a multi-method study to explore the complexities of transitions through education, work, and marriage of Ciganos coming of age in Cascais, Portugal, and to show the importance of "social age" (Laz, 1998) and "linked lives" (Heinz, 2009) in their transition experiences.

The study aims to explore how both Cigano and mainstream Portuguese culture influence Ciganos' transitions to adulthood. We start with an overview of the theoretical and conceptual framework and previous research on youth transitions, followed by a contextualization of young Ciganos regarding education, employment, and social policies in Portugal and a provision of some key features of contemporary Cigano society. In the methodology section, we discuss the study's research design and ethical considerations. Then we present the empirical material, exploring the interconnected themes of schooling, livelihoods, and marriage before discussing the data in relation to previous research and chosen conceptual framework. At last, we offer a brief conclusion.

2. Conceptualizing Youth Transitions

In the mainstream culture of the Global North, youth transitions have commonly been seen as moving from dependency to independency. Inspired by developmental psychology and analyses of post-war generations, youth studies in the 1980s and early 1990s detected three main pathways of becoming a "successful adult": school-to-work transition, domestic (family) transition, and housing transition (Coles, 1995). Although researchers have documented that youth transitions of the 1950s and 1960s were more heterogeneous than previously assumed (see Galland, 2007), it remains the "golden standard" of growing up. Hence, the acquisition of higher education, entry into the formal labor market, and subsequent economic independence are perceived as essential transition markers by leading international organizations (see UNICEF, 2011; World Bank, 2006). Youths who fail to comply with the golden standard have been labeled "deviant" (Jones, 1995) or having transitions that are "delayed, broken, highly frag-

mented and blocked" (Chisholm, 1993, as cited in Wyn & White, 1997, p. 95). Furthermore, the golden standard promotes a normative understanding of youth and adulthood, rendering early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and school dropouts as "social problems." The applicability and universality of the golden standard have been criticized as more diverse accounts of young people's biographies are increasingly informing theorizations (Furlong et al., 2011; Robertson et al., 2018; Ursin & Abebe, 2017; van Blerk, 2008).

Youth is rooted in socio-temporal spaces where social categories are experienced and interpreted differently. Bearing in mind that "youth" is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 2000), its existence as a distinct category of life is neither biologically determined nor universal but differs across space and time. According to Berger and Luckmann (2000), social constructionism is advantageous as an analytical tool when exploring interpretations, in this case questioning the "taken-for-granted-ness" of how youth transitions unfold. Here we would add that while the period of youth as a social phenomenon has been extensively analyzed within the social sciences, there is a need to unravel the social construction of adulthood as it is often rendered self-explanatory, permanent, and universal within transition studies (Horton & Kraftl, 2005). As some studies have demonstrated, (young) adulthood may also be transitory, multiple, ambiguous, and complex (Langevang, 2008; Ursin & Abebe, 2017).

We are inspired by theorizations concerning social age as opposed to chronological age, where the social interpretation of age is ascribed meaning contextually, determined by historical, political, biological, cultural, and social conditions (Clark-Kazak, 2013; see also Laz, 1998; Sørsveen & Ursin, 2021). Laz (1998) suggests that the way age is "done" is shaped by normative understandings and expectations around how we are supposed to "act our age." She describes how experiences and expectations of aging, as well as life course transitions (i.e., education, marriage, childbearing, and work), are patterned by—and work in interplay with—ethnicity, class, and gender in addition to political and economic forces that give rise to the institutions, practices, and policies that create and reinforce these patterns. However, whilst our culture provides us with resources for "doing age," individuals draw on and give meaning to these (see Sørsveen & Ursin, 2021). While we often conform to prevailing norms and conceptualizations, we might also question these in the process of creating and maintaining our selves, roles, and identities (Laz, 1998). Transitions thus occur at the intersection of personal choice, and rejection, and adaption to cultural, bureaucratic, institutional, and structural factors.

As Huijsmans (2013) asserts, a relational approach to age is beneficial, as it is attentive to agency while appreciating how relations of age are tied into structural processes. To make sense of life courses, it is important to emphasize highly relational aspects, varying

by class, ethnicity, gender, and other social variables. Walther (2006), for example, defines southern European countries as sub-protective transition regimes characterized by a low percentage of formal employment and a high rate of unprotected living conditions, resulting in youth transitions that are marked by informal work and high dependency on extended family. He dismisses what he perceives as "a diagnosis of ongoing de-standardization, individualization, and fragmentation of transitions" (Walther, 2006, p. 120) in the European context. Following this, Jeffrey (2010) challenges the assumption that people move from dependence to independence, arguing that adulthood is more about states of interdependence rather than autonomy in many societies (see Ursin et al., 2022). Aligned with the relational approach, Heinz (2009) notes that while we have succeeded in documenting young people's agency in transitions, we know little about how "linked lives" (i.e., their relationships) contribute to the outcomes of transitions. Similarly, while transition points and markers such as school-to-work provides insights into life trajectories, Wyn et al. (2019) argue that such focus ignores the fact that young people's relationships enable these transitions. In the same vein, others have argued that youth transition pathways should not be perceived simply as a means of securing education and employment but should also be acknowledged as new spaces of identification and belonging (Robertson et al., 2018; Wyn et al., 2019).

Although few studies focus specifically on youth transitions among Portuguese Ciganos, some studies explore education, work, and marriage, documenting great cultural heterogeneity and variation in social and spatial integration (Magano, 2010; Mendes, 2007; Nicolau, 2010), particularly between those who live a Cigano life from those who live a non-Cigano life, with several differences in terms of lifestyles (Magano, 2010). Recent studies reveal changes within the Cigano communities in terms of increased educational level, stronger ties to formal employment, and weakened traditions of early, arranged marriages (Magano, 2017, 2022; Mendes & Magano, 2016). However, the tradition of the Cigano marriage remains a tenet of the Cigano culture and a rite of passage to the adult Cigano world (Magano, 2017, p. 50). Marriage functions as an affirmation of Cigano culture through the valorization of endogamic marriages carried out at a very young age, especially for girls upon reaching the age of puberty (Magano, 2017; Mendes & Magano, 2016). This current study draws on valuable findings from previous research and adds a novel focus on life course transitions among young Ciganos with an emphasis on their relationalities—their so-called "linked lives." In the following sections, the current situation of young Ciganos will be described further.

3. Cigano Youth, Education, and Social Policies

Ciganos are the poorest ethnic group with the worst housing conditions in Portugal (Mendes & Magano,

2016). Many Portuguese Ciganos are illiterate and do not complete any level of schooling, including compulsory schooling (12 years of schooling; see Magano, 2022; Mendes et al., 2014). Drop-out rates and school failure continue to be common among Cigano children even before the completion of the second cycle of the Portuguese school system (6th grade; Mendes et al., 2014). Girls leave school between the ages of 11–14 and boys between 16–18 years of age (Mendes & Magano, 2016). A survey carried out in public schools by the Ministry of Education showed that the number of Ciganos enrolled in schools decreases as the level of education advances, and this is more noticeable for girls (Direção Geral de Estatísticas de Educação e Ciência, 2020).

In a national study about Cigano communities, Mendes et al. (2014) found that 57% of Ciganos were unemployed, looking for a job, or had never been employed. Those who reported being unemployed said that they took on traditional, low-skilled activities within the informal sector (e.g., street vending, agriculture, cleaning, and construction) and did not recognize these activities as work. According to Mendes et al. (2019), there is a strong presence of Ciganos in informal jobs, but a growing insertion of Ciganos (sometimes having to hide their ethnic identity) in the formal labor market is also noticeable. In the job market as in the rest of society, Ciganos are often subject to systematic racism and discrimination (Magano, 2017; Mendes & Magano, 2016).

In an attempt to improve the situation of the Roma people at a national and European level, the European Union prosed that member states define national strategies for integration (European Parliament, 2011). The Portuguese National Strategy for Integration of Ciganos (ACIDI, 2013) is based on four main goals, including access to health, education, housing, and employment/vocational training. This strategy was reviewed in 2018 by acknowledging that, despite considerable social changes in the past years, many Ciganos still face discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion (Mendes et al., 2014). This review sought to improve Ciganos' integration and general well-being as well as deconstruct stereotypes between Ciganos and non-Ciganos (Mendes & Magano, 2021). Recent changes were made in the definition of the strategy, specifically in terms of clarification and implementation of the measures, and the prioritization of interventions regarding gender equality, knowledge about Cigano individuals, and their participation in the implementation of this strategy (ENICC, 2018).

Several social policies have been implemented in Portugal to increase the educational level and vocational training of the Portuguese population, such as the Educational Territories of Priority Intervention, the Social Insertion Income (RSI), and the New Opportunities Program, to name a few. The Operational Program for the Promotion of Education, awarding scholarships to Cigano students, and the Educa program to support Cigano students in primary and secondary education

were recently developed (Magano, 2022). Much effort has also been put into promoting equal work opportunities for, and integration of, Cigano youth in the formal job market. Of relevance to the following analysis, the Municipal Mediators Pilot Project, launched in 2009, employs Ciganos as mediators to liaise between Ciganos and mainstream society and improve Ciganos' access to local services (Castro et al., 2010).

4. Conducting Research With Cigano Youth: The Methodology

This study draws on data from two-month fieldwork carried out by the first author with young Ciganos in a neighborhood in Cascais. The overall aim of the study was to explore Cigano youths' transitions to adulthood. The first author was familiar with the participants' culture and fluent in the local language. Purpose sampling strategy was used for the selection of the research site, and we also relied on snowball sampling to find Ciganos who wanted to participate in the research. It proved difficult to recruit girls, perhaps because they depend on parents' and husbands' consent, as per cultural customs. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight youths of 17 to 24 years of age with similar social origins: Five boys and one girl whose parents were both Ciganos, and two female siblings (Ines and Katia) whose mother was Cigano but whose father was not. The sample size allowed for an in-depth approach to a novel analytical insight and generate rich data (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' statutes regarding education, work, marriage, and parenthood. Most participants' parents had low schooling levels (one being illiterate). All participants lived in social housing.

The data was collected between June and August 2015. The study was inspired by a rights-based approach, ensuring participants' rights throughout the research process (Ennew et al., 2009); it had a multi-method approach that included participant observation and informal dialogue, focus group discussion, semi-structured interviews, and used the life-grid method. Contextual information about young people's everyday lives was obtained through participant observation and informal dialogues in community spaces, such as cafes, supermarkets, sidewalks, and bars. This enabled development and redefinition of research themes and contextualization of empirical data gathered through other methods (Ennew et al., 2009).

Six participants participated in two gender-segregated focus groups: One group with three girls and one group with three boys (see Table 2). Examples of general themes discussed are: when is one considered an adult; what does it mean to be an adult; similarities and differences between Cigano and Portuguese culture; relationships with non-Ciganos.

Examples of questions in the individual interviews are: How is/was your life at school? How do you make a living? What culture do you think influences you the most? For participants who found it difficult to recall events or who showed difficulties in expressing themselves verbally, the life-grid method was employed. This tool and the visual overview of their life histories functioned as a good aide to memories (Bell, 2005). The life events written on the grid mostly concerned age/event, including work, family, and culture, facilitating further discussion.

Focus groups were tape-recorded and lasted approximately one hour each. The individual interviews were also tape-recorded (except one, for which notes were made manually as this participant felt uncomfortable

Table 1. Biographical overview of participants.

Name	Age	Schooling level	Given reasons for school dropout	Occupation	Marital/ parental status
Bruno	19	5th grade	Did not learn anything about Cigano history, culture, and customs	School mediator	Single/no children
David	22	5th grade	Did not learn useful knowledge	School mediator/ Drug dealer	Married/no children
Fabio	19	12th grade	Not relevant	Student	Single/no children
Gabi	17	8th grade	Forced by father	Domestic work	Married/with children
Ines	24	Higher education	Not relevant	Unemployed	Single/no children
Katia	19	4th grade	Finds education unnecessary to make a living	Domestic work (vending)	Married/with children
Miguel	22	5th grade	Felt stigmatized and excluded in the classroom by his teacher and colleagues	Drug dealer	Married/ wife pregnant
Rui	22	5th grade	Did not receive support and encouragement from home	School mediator	Single/no children

Table 2. Overview of participants' gender, age, and involvement in research tools.

Name	Age	Gender	Research tools
Bruno	19	Boy	Focus group/Individual interview
David	22	Boy	Focus group/Life-grid
Fabio	19	Boy	Individual interview
Gabi	17	Girl	Focus group/Life-grid/Individual interview
Ines	24	Girl	Focus group/Individual interview
Katia	19	Girl	Focus group/Life-grid
Miguel	22	Boy	Focus group/Individual interview
Rui	22	Boy	Individual interview

being recorded) and lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. All tape recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author. In analyzing the transcripts, we engaged in a community of interpretation and validation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). Key themes were identified according to the study's aim and organized according to descriptive and analytic codes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Recurrent themes were school experiences, livelihood opportunities, and preparation for marriage, which structures the following analysis. We chose excerpts describing young Ciganos' sensemaking of their pathways to adulthood, explored literature and theories to better understand the complexity of these paths, and discussed and validated analytical points.

The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. Participants provided both written and verbal consent before the study started. They were assured that their privacy and anonymity would be secured and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing any reason. The young participants decided on the venue for the interviews and focus groups, suggesting the Youth Club as it was convenient and comfortable, being local yet providing privacy to talk freely.

5. Results

In the following, we explore our main themes: (a) young Ciganos' gendered encounters with the school system; (b) childhood and adolescence as preparation for marriage; and (c) finding livelihood possibilities at the margins of society. The themes are closely interrelated, affecting one another, as the following will demonstrate.

5.1. Young Ciganos' Gendered Encounters With the School System

5.1.1. Male Experiences of Discrimination and Lack of Recognition

For many Cigano boys, school life was marked by discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice by teachers who "othered" them based on their ethnic background. Miguel recalled: "My teachers used to put me in a corner by myself and would only talk to me when other students didn't need her." Rui and Fabio were favored by their teachers for having minimal Cigano physical traits. Rui reported that his teacher considered him a smart boy, who responded "perfectly for his age mentality." However, this changed radically when the teachers discovered his Cigano ethnicity and started to ignore him. Like Rui, Fabio said that not having typical Cigano traits was to his benefit at school, and he would consciously hide his ethnicity.

In addition to ethnic discrimination as a form of othering Cigano boys at school, they also expressed a lack of relevance of formal schooling. While some boys criticized the lack of Cigano history, culture, and customs in Portuguese national curriculum, others felt the culture of schooling is incompatible with Cigano culture. For example, Bruno stated: "Schools should also include *our* history and music." David acknowledged that schooling was necessary to learn to read and write, which they needed "to get a driving license" and "deal with government bureaucracies," suggesting the very practical reasons why one would attend school. He complained that schooling should be "more orientated to practical life." Similarly, Miguel did not see schooling as a means to achieve a livelihood in his future: "I won't get money from books." Bruno reasoned that he "didn't have a head to be at school" and that Ciganos "don't go far in school." Overall, the boys confirmed a belief that schooling is not only irrelevant but also incongruous with Cigano social life and identity.

5.1.2. Female Experiences of Gendered Expectations

The girls' school experiences differed somewhat from the boys', as they did not raise the issue of discrimination or othering in school. Rather, cultural expectations regarding girls' position in the Cigano society marked their transition narratives. Gabi explained that she was forced by her father to leave school in 8th grade to marry (at age 16). She described her father's gendered upbringing as the following:

For him, I [should have] stopped at 5th grade. He thinks that being able to read, write, and count is good enough for a girl. But with my brother, he was different. He supported him and encouraged him to finish secondary school.

Gabi expressed disappointment in leaving school and wished that she had been able to continue her studies. She also connected her dropout to an abrupt end to childhood: "I wished I could have been a teenager….I went from childhood to adulthood."

Contrary to Gabi, Katia said: "I hated school, but I kept going to keep the state benefits." She talked about how embarrassed she felt being 16 years old and studying with younger children. Katia perceived early school departure as the right thing to do. She asserted: "I don't want my baby girl to continue to study beyond 9th grade. I want my child to have the same destiny as me," meaning leaving school to marry. For Katia, the more time a girl spends in school, the more likely it is that she will be sexually active outside marriage. She explained that this is not tolerated; a woman must be a virgin when she marries. In addition, in her mind, school attendance increases the chances of a girl encountering a non-Cigano adolescent, also strongly discouraged by the Cigano community. According to Bruno, his parents reasoned in similar ways, as his sisters were not allowed to continue education when reaching 16: "At 16 girls have to be with their parents, so they won't bring a bad reputation and shame to the family."

Ines, however, followed a different educational trajectory, more in line with mainstream culture and values. Ines considered herself *paya*—an outcast—for acquiring certain habits and customs that are in line with non-Ciganos, such as continuing studying and interacting mostly with non-Ciganos. Ines believed this is atypical in Cigano communities. Her decision to continue her studies instead of marrying brought disappointment to her family, she explained, being accused by her mother and grandparents of disrespecting Cigano traditions. Despite being encouraged to quit schooling, she began to explore other social realities beyond Cigano communities in 5th grade: "I got to know other people who weren't Ciganos, I started to read…things that I hadn't read before." She continued: "I started to interact more with teachers, and they influenced my way of thinking, and they somehow made me wonder: Why shouldn't I continue to study? That there isn't any harm in doing so."

5.2. Childhood and Adolescence as Preparation for Marriage

As seen concerning education, preparation for marriage was a vital component in a girl's upbringing. Both Gabi and Katia described learning different household activities from early on to avoid problems with their future husband and in-laws. Katia, who married at the age of 14, said this preparation allowed her to become a "good woman, good mother, and a good daughter-in-law." Raising a daughter herself, Katia stated that she wants her daughter to leave school early to marry, continuing: "But instead of marrying at the age of 14, I want her to marry when she is 17."

Ines, however, refused to follow the path taken by her younger sister and other family members who married at the age of 14 or 15. She anticipated being constrained when getting married: "As long as I am in my mother's house, I can do and live as I like….I can't have *paya* habits when I go to my in-laws….I must listen and obey." In her view, having been raised by a single mother (her father left when she was 10 years old) allowed her a certain degree of independence and *paya* lifestyle. Ines spoke about attempts at negotiating her future, as she said she neither wants to marry nor leave her mother's house. This seems to have allowed her to continue her studies.

The gendered expectations towards Cigano boys in adolescence were also connected to preparation for marriage, however with a different focus. The boys' upbringing concentrated on learning how to support their future family and become breadwinners. In the focus group discussion, the boys described being taught by the elders in the family collective how to negotiate and exchange goods from an early age. Rui said that at the age of 11 to 12 they were expected to help with their father's business, as a way of learning "the malice of life's cruel ways," referring to the development of survival strategies.

The gendered expectations regarding preparation for adulthood and marriage were deeply entwined with the socio-spatial radius of girls and boys in their adolescence. While the girls were prepared for domestic tasks and roles, the boys learned how to navigate public space socially as well as spatially. As Bruno said: "For Ciganos it is worse to be a girl than a boy because a girl can't go out as a boy does. If she does, she will bring a bad reputation." Since public space is perceived as threatening to girls' virginity ("purity"), at the time of marriage, they have, according to Bruno, "to stay at home" and, in the words of Rui, be "in charge of the house."

Restricting the socio-spatial radius of girls circumscribed their social lives and reduced their chances of meeting a non-Cigano partner, in the same manner as leaving school early, as mentioned above. The participants explained that they are expected to have intra-ethnic marriage and find a spouse within their own community. If not, the family is looked down upon and loses respect in the community. As Katia reflected: "If my baby girl ends up marrying someone with a different ethnic background, I will kick her out of the house."

5.3. Finding Livelihood Possibilities at the Margins of Society

The young participants expressed a sense of economic responsibility towards their families and revealed creativity regarding how to get by. Katia occasionally participated in informal vending activities. Although she

initially wanted to work in a nursery, Katia reasoned that her educational background prevented her from securing such a job. However, she complained that her vending revenue combined with child benefits and RSI was not enough to provide for herself, her husband, and their daughter. Thus, she depended on financial help from her mother and mother-in-law. Gabi did not receive any family allowance or child benefits and thus aspired to complement her domestic work with formal work. Despite lacking experience in income-generating activities, she reasoned that she might find a job as a cleaner. She expressed disappointment that neither her father nor husband allowed her to work, indicating strong gendered roles, responsibilities, and power hierarchies within the family.

Despite having a bachelor's degree in social work, Ines explained that securing a job turned out to be difficult: "I graduated last year and since then I began looking for a job [as a social worker], but all my applications have been unsuccessful. I haven't even been called for an interview in any place I applied." Due to family obligations and having to support her mother who had health issues, she sought temporary employment as a hotel housekeeper: "I had to consider any kind of job because my mother isn't very well. I can't sit back and wait for the job I really want." Ines remained optimistic and anticipated that continuing her studies and completing a master's degree would make her "more attractive to the labor market."

For the boys in the study, livelihood prospects were somewhat different. Some of them were employed as mediators, a job relatively common among Ciganos, liaising between the Cigano communities and mainstream society. For Rui, the job as a mediator was seen as an opportunity that allowed him to develop valuable skills and experiences and finish high school. He wanted "to be somebody in life" and dreamt of "becoming a banker." Some expressed that despite securing a mediator position, where their ethnic background was found valuable, they still experienced prejudice. Bruno, for instance, explained: "The problem is when we tell them how to deal with the kids [Cigano children], they ignore what we say. They don't listen to us. But we know how Cigano kids work, they don't."

With a low level of education, difficulties in accessing the formal job market, and money problems, Miguel and David searched for income possibilities at the illegal margins of society, reporting to engage in drug trade. Miguel described how he had to financially support his pregnant wife, grandmother, and father who was recently released from jail. He dreamt of investing his income in a business or buying a house but reasoned that "the money…from selling drugs is only enough for food and accommodation."

6. Discussion

The empirical material provides insight into how transitions to adulthood may unfold in contemporary Cigano communities in urban Portugal. The study reveals a series of school experiences and perceptions, heavily influenced by the youths' ethnic identity and gender. The boys experienced being "othered" in two ways, both by being discriminated by teachers and by not finding relevance in formal schooling, which follows the study of Smith (1997). In addition to an aversion to the level of theorization of contemporary schooling, they also found that their culture and history were made invisible and insignificant in the curricular activities. Despite this, the boys completed more schooling than the girls, supporting findings in previous studies with young Ciganos in Portugal (Magano, 2010, 2017; Mendes & Magano, 2016; Mendes et al., 2014). Magano (2017) also found that Cigano men provide different reasons for not completing compulsory education, often stressing personal choice rather than a parental decision.

In the girls' transition narratives, a diversity of mindsets concerning education emerged. In Gabi's case, she not only wished to continue schooling but also perceived attending formal education as a crucial part of adolescence. Having been denied this opportunity by her family, she reckoned that she had "lost" her youth. This social construction of youth rests upon a normative understanding aligned with mainstream society, where continued schooling is seen to provide breathing space between childhood and adulthood, prolonging the period without heavy family responsibilities. Ines, who was able to continue studying, perceived the school venue as a place to expand her social, educational, and cultural horizons—a place where she could explore and develop her *paya* identity.

Katia, on the other hand, regarded schooling as dreadful, as a necessary evil to obtain state benefits. Her viewpoints aligned with traditional Cigano values and worldview, where the school arena increases the risk of girls encountering non-Cigano boys, seen as a threat to the preservation of female virginity. The girls' educational trajectories were heavily influenced by gendered expectations concerning family obligations and marriage, seen as a key transition to adulthood by most of the participants. This is in line with previous research, stating that when young Cigano girls reach puberty, the family becomes more protective (Magano, 2022). The socio-spatial and temporal freedom is seen as contagious and dangerous, threatening the "purity" of girls who spend time with non-Ciganos (Magano, 2022; Mendes et al., 2014). In Magano's (2022, p. 4) words, "the goal of preserving virginity until marriage makes her a hostage to the family, preventing her from prolonged schooling or professional undertakings outside of the domestic sphere."

How girls and boys were socialized into—and prepared for—their future roles as husbands and wives were highly gendered and anchored in Cigano cultural norms and customs. While the girls learned about domestic tasks and trained to be "good" wives, mothers, and in-laws, the boys were taught how to economically

sustain the family by seizing monetary opportunities available in society. This echoes Magano's (2022) findings that the Cigano family has a crucial role in preserving gender-based traditions regarding marital commitments, even if this conflicts with schooling. Magano reminds us that family pressure makes it hard to reject Cigano values and expectations. Bearing in mind the patriarchal nature of Cigano culture, the absence of Ines' father seems to have provided her more leeway in choosing her life trajectory.

Their gendered roles also had a great impact on their livelihood trajectories. Earning a living entailed drawing on whatever resources available, ranging from social benefits to formal employment whilst barriers encountered included internal cultural and gendered perceptions and structural discrimination in both the educational system and the job market (see also Magano, 2017). Many participants expressed being challenged by needing formal education and skill training to find work due to the growing social division of the labor market in contemporary Portugal. All the girls expressed a wish to contribute to the family economy, yet their options varied. Although Cigano female labor force is of utmost importance to the survival of the family (Mendes et al., 2014), their role remains tied to—and valorized for—tasks conducted in the domestic realm (Magano, 2022). This often results in a situation where the women are overburdened (Mendes & Magano, 2016). In this study, both Katia and Gabi had extensive domestic tasks. While Katia sometimes also took part in vending activities, Gabi's family denied her access to income-generating activities. Cigano women's obedience to male authority is not often questioned, and it is internalized from an early age as necessary for group cohesion and harmony (Lopes, 2008). Women questioning or rejecting traditional roles risk family conflict or being cut off entirely (Magano, 2010), such as seen in the case of Ines, who studied and participated in the formal job market despite her family's disapproval.

With limited school and work opportunities, three boys in this study viewed their job as mediators as the most feasible gateway to formal employment. Although Cigano mediators are seen as important to bridge the gap between Cigano communities and mainstream society (Magano & Mendes, 2021), some of the young mediators reported experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Two boys also engaged in livelihoods that are deemed "immoral" by society. As such, this study differs from the findings of Mendes and Magano (2016) in that not all Cigano participants worked in the formal labor market. Being involved in the drug trade, Miguel and David were acutely aware that livelihood choices are not neutral but engender processes of inclusion and exclusion. Their unconventional livelihood choice conflicted with mainstream society, reinforcing their positions as socially excluded (see Ursin & Abebe, 2017). Rather than perceiving certain livelihoods as marginalized, these livelihoods must be seen as emerging in marginalized con-

texts, acknowledging the socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical conditions that keep some Cigano youth at the margin. Although most literature and policymaking deem involvement in unconventional livelihoods as failed or unfulfilled transitions, it is necessary to decouple the link between adulthood and the formal labor market (van Blerk, 2008) and recognize it as alternative transitions to adulthood (Ursin & Abebe, 2017).

The empirical material suggests that the socially constructed character of both education and work should be renegotiated and reconstructed. Rather than taking for granted that education equalizes formal schooling, this study suggests that informal education and intergenerational transfer of skills and values among Ciganos are important for success in entering adulthood. Furthermore, informal education—in relation to involvement in both domestic tasks and vending—is difficult to discern from contributions to informal work. At the same time, formal schooling is seen, in the case of Katia, as work, earning state benefits due to her school attendance.

The transition narratives of these youths stand in contrast to normative understandings of youth and young adulthood, and their transitions are often rendered "deviant" by normative understandings. For instance, while early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and school dropout are commonly perceived as "social problems," several of the participants see these as both necessary and normal in order to enter adulthood. Furthermore, research and policy on youth transitions in the Global North have tended to conceptualize the school-to-work transition as consisting of two chronologically separated domains, based on the assumption that young people do not work while they study and that schooling results in relevant employment. For the Cigano youth in this study, this dichotomy is problematic as all participants had been working since childhood, combining schooling with domestic or remunerated activities. Hence, the engagement in (renumerated) work does not function as a definite "marker" of adulthood. In addition, the imagined move from dependence to independence, either relationally or economically, does not materialize for most young Cigano adults, as their social life and culture rest upon a deep state of intergenerational interdependence. This is seen in how young people depend on their parents and in-laws, and the other way around, in the case of Ines' sick mother.

Within transition studies, marriage is seen as having lost its key function as a marker of adult status (Arnett, 2007), yet among many of these Ciganos marriage was perceived as a cornerstone in becoming an adult (see also Magano, 2022). In fact, great parts of their childhoods and youth revolved around preparation for married life when they are expected to work, take care of each other, and raise children of their own. This also highlights the longitudinal character of transitions and shows that vital transitions occur throughout the life course of most Ciganos, in their childhood, present being, and

future becomings (Elder et al., 2002). Commenting on the appropriation of normative ideals of what constitute a "normal" youth transition, Valentine and Skelton (2007, p. 105) highlighted that "not all young people either aspire to all of these 'norms,' or achieve them in a form that can be measured or acknowledge in conventional ways." Many young Ciganos living in Portugal will neither achieve nor should be expected to achieve adulthood based on linear and normative notions, as their lives underscore the importance of a "multiplicity of futures" in grasping the complexity and diversity of transitions (Jeffrey, 2010).

The empirical material supports the idea of social age, where age is produced by normative age-based assumptions on how to behave along the life course (Laz, 1998). The study brings to the surface the importance of both ethnicity and gender in the making of social age, where age-based expectations of the Portuguese mainstream society and policymaking often differ from those of the local Cigano community regarding schooling, work obligations, marriage, and childbearing. Most of the participants conformed to Cigano norms, reproducing the "Cigano way of life" (Magano, 2022). However, some questioned prevailing norms, most visibly Ines. In many ways, Ines' life trajectory is aligned with, and adapted to, mainstream values and political objectives, taking higher education and postponing marriage and pregnancy. Overall, the study thus confirms previous research findings that the degree of importance given to Cigano customs and traditions varies among the young generation of Ciganos (Magano, 2022; Mendes & Magano, 2016).

In relation to this, the importance of young people's linked lives (Heinz, 2009) in molding their transition experiences also becomes apparent. The relationships in which their lives are embedded provide strong expectations, structural benefits and barriers, and degrees of leeway to their own agentic behavior, ranging from feeling in charge of major life decisions to being subject to social pressure. This is, for instance, seen in the case of formal education, where Gabi wished she had continued studying while Ines remained in school despite her family's disapproval. In most cases, family and community seem to form the basis of their linked lives, being the dominant force in the life choices of youth. This concurs with previous studies on Cigano communities, documenting strong intra-ethnic sociability and solidarity where the family is the keystone (Mendes & Magano, 2016). However, Ines' trajectory shows how her scope of agency is enacted through resistance to her ethnic background while facilitated by her out-of-community interpersonal relationships. Connecting with supportive teachers motivated her to study within an intercultural social environment that surpassed the Cigano communities. Her trajectory differs greatly from that of her sister, Katia, who remained loyal to the Cigano gendered roles and values, wishing likewise for her daughter. By drawing attention to the formations of linked lives, we recog-nize the importance of both self-identification (as Cigano or *paya*) and sense of belonging (in the Cigano or the mainstream community) as part of their navigations into young adulthood (cf. Robertson et al., 2018; Wyn et al., 2019).

7. Conclusion

Following recent developments in critical youth studies, this study shows the need to focus on individual voices and experiences in unraveling the complexity of the transition experiences of Cigano youth in Portugal. The findings have shown that predominant and normative ideas, values, and norms that tend to focus on one specific transition need to be protracted in order for us to understand their cultural-specific context. Furthermore, the study suggested some of the ways in which gender and ethnicity shape the multiple transitions to adulthood of young Ciganos. We argue that the socially constructed character of youth transitions, including the school-to-work model, should be acknowledged. In addition, both research and policies concerning youth transitions should be more flexible, taking into consideration the different realities and embodied experiences of contemporary youth and embracing social realities and cultures that remain marginalized.

To make sense of local and global policies on increasing school enrolment and its impact on Cigano/Roma youth, it is necessary to balance attention not only to the relevance of learning and suitability of skills for work opportunities but also to young people's constrained choices, especially for Cigano/Roma girls. Yet, the heterogeneous character of the ways Cigano/Roma youth navigate into adulthood might render it difficult to create valid solutions. To cater for the diversity of youth trajectories witnessed in this study, we suggest that policymakers' initiatives should be highly context-sensitive and individually tailored, rejecting the idea of "one-size-fits-all." In addition, policy initiatives need to be wary of cultural conditions as both a resource and a potential barrier in young people's lives. We propose encouraging Cigano/Roma children and youth to integrate into the formal educational system, thereby enhancing their future chances in the formal labor market, at the same time as they should be encouraged to maintain their cultural heritage. It is crucial for schools to be more inclusive and representative, enhancing a sense of belonging among Cigano/Roma students. This includes having Cigano/Roma history, culture, and music on the curriculum as well as raising teachers' consciousness about Cigano/Roma culture and the detrimental effects of ethnic discrimination and marginalization.

Acknowledgments

that we hope may arise awareness about the lives of Cigano/Roma youth and their life trajectories in Europe.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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