

**The Romanian Roma as EU Citizens:
From Ontological Insecurity to the Good Life.**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
School of Geography

November, 2020

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Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to all the people who took part in this study sharing their experiences and worldviews.

I benefitted greatly from the feedback and encouragement of my supervisors, Deirdre Conlon, Majella Kilkey, and Nichola Wood and appreciate their patience to ensure I stayed on track throughout this journey.

I would also like to acknowledge the other members of my Research Support Group, Paul Waley and Adrian Favell, for their invaluable input and suggestions.

I am pleased to have shared my academic interests with Lynzi Duncan and Alice Welsh and for their friendly companionship as members of the White Rose Network.

A number of friends have helped me to make this possible. Particular thanks go to Rakesh, Asib, Yi-min, and Yannis “the prisoner” who were kind enough to participate in my pilot interviews, and to Megan who kindly helped me with the ethical approval procedure.

I am immensely glad to have shared the PhD journey with León, Samadhi, Oğuzhan as friends and colleagues from my research cluster, but also generally I have found great friendships in fellow students and housemates, Joey, Lamprini, Jen, Brenda, Marie, Chico, Julia, Zora, Lili, Yunxia, Kamla, Ariska, Jun Woo and all those who I may forget.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family—to my parents Raffaele and Anna, my brother Gaetano and his wife Djana, my beloved Nikée, and my uncle Mimmo and aunt Rosaria who are both missed very much.

Abstract

During the process of EU enlargement to the East, the “Roma problem” has increasingly gained a central position in the EU citizenship discourse. Despite the centrality of the Roma issues, however, the Roma themselves are still understood and conceptualised as outsiders. Their reality of being and becoming EU citizens has remained marginal to definitions of what the EU citizenship is or should be.

This thesis explores the potential of the EU citizenship in improving the lives of marginal citizens such as the Roma. Firstly, through a phenomenological and existentialist approach, it investigates the EU citizenship as a Roma reality. Secondly, from an Aristotelian perspective, it considers how the Roma envision, pursue, and practice their ideas of the good life as marginal EU citizens.

Drawing from the analysis of eighteen semi-structured interviews (conducted among Romanian Roma migrants living in a big city in Northern England) and supplementary ethnographic data, this thesis indicates that the reality of the EU citizenship, for the participants of this study, is a complex and conflictual process of becoming, which is poorly addressed by current conceptual and political structures.

By proposing the notion of the “flourishing EU citizen” this thesis attempts to fill this gap, at least conceptually. Additionally, it makes an empirical contribution to debates on the EU citizenship and Roma migration by providing a holistic view of the experiences of the Roma in this context.

Finally, it indicates two priorities. Firstly, it proposes further research exploring the spaces and places in which conflictual ideas of the good life are recognised and resolved. Secondly, it suggests that the EU citizenship needs to be understood as responsibility and in terms of shared vulnerability in order to accommodate the diversity and complexity of these ideas.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The EU Citizenship and the “Roma Problem”

Since the EU citizenship was introduced—after the Maastricht Treaty of 1992—it has generated an exponential amount of questions and problems. Perhaps more than any other form of polity, the EU has managed to challenge conventional understandings of citizenship. In fact, unlike national citizenship, the EU citizenship is not constituted as a balanced combination of rights and duties that binds the individual to his or her community (Isin, 1997). Rather, it functions alongside national citizenship, most importantly, by allowing the so-called four freedoms—the free circulation of goods, services, capital and people within the EU territory. Additionally, it endows citizens of the Member States with the right to vote for the European elections and grants them further legal protection through the EU law (Bellamy *et al.*, 2006).

Arguably, the EU citizenship is activated more fully (and as a unique construction in the world) when citizens of the Member States move, work, and settle across the EU territory. This right—named “Freedom of Movement”—introduces EU citizens to further entitlements in the context of a foreign country. These entitlements consist of the right of being treated equally with nationals of the host Member State and include equal access to the labour market and welfare system but also the right to vote and stand in the local elections of their municipality of residence (*ibid.*). However, the EU citizenship exists in a contested legal, political, and conceptual space; there are very different and often conflicting perspectives on what this citizenship is or should become.

In attempting to clarify the nature of the EU citizenship, scholars have identified two main problems. Firstly, there is the issue of whether the EU should be understood as an economic and regulatory entity, a rights-based political union, a value-based community, or incorporate elements of all these dimensions. Secondly, hand-in-hand with this debate, there is the

problem of membership—of who are (or should be) the EU citizens and of what kind of relationship is established between them and the EU.

What seems clear, however, is that the EU citizenship cannot be understood as a static construction. As a matter of fact, the process of EU enlargement—and generally the redefinition of the EU geo-political boundaries—continuously reiterate the problems just mentioned. At least since 2004, when the so-called A8 countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia) joined the EU¹, this process has taken a clear eastern direction. Shortly after these accessions, in fact, also Romania and Bulgaria (A2 countries) became Member States in 2007. In less than four years, more than a hundred million of people have become new EU citizens² (Eurostat, 2020) and this has led scholars to reconsider the EU citizenship, both in terms of its function and membership criteria.

In this regard, the accession of Romania, in particular, presents additional challenges. In fact, with an estimated population of about 1.85 million of Roma (European Commission, 2020)—the biggest and perhaps most marginalised minority in Europe (Crețan and Turnock, 2008)—Romania is now the Member State with the highest numbers of this ethnic group. In the EU context, however, the Roma are not an entirely new subject. Their heterogeneous population—for some a “non-territorial nation” (Goodwin, 2004)—is dispersed everywhere around all the Member States. As some have noticed, before the EU enlargement to the East their problems of exclusion and poverty have been hardly visible to EU policymakers (Rat, 2005; Vermeersch, 2012). After 2004, however, the ambiguous “Roma problem” became of special concern for the EU.

I say ambiguous, because in the political discourse the “Roma problem” is ambivalent and can be read from two coexisting perspectives. On the one

¹ Together with Malta and Cyprus.

² It is important to note that, for the new EU citizens, there have been initial limitations to the practice of Freedom of Movement. After the A2 accessions in 2007, in particular, Member States were permitted to maintain these restrictions for a maximum period of seven years (Gower and Hawkins, 2013). Romanian and Bulgarian citizens could not fully access the British labour market until the 1st of January 2014 (*ibid.*).

hand, it refers to the issues of inclusion faced by the Roma as a minority group (for example, access to employment, health services, education, and housing) (Scullion and Brown, 2016); on the other, it is a matter of public order and security—the problem of uncontrolled migration, in which the Roma are cast as scapegoats. As Balibar puts it, in fact, “the Roma are like a *nation in excess* in Europe, which is singled out for hate not only because it is spread across borders, but because it incarnates the archetype of a *stateless people*, resisting the norms of territorialisation and cultural normalisation” (2009, p. xi).

From both these perspectives, the “Roma problem” gained centrality in the EU political agenda. For the EU, in fact, the commitment to minority protection became an important strategy to maintain political stability and a central point for negotiating accessions (Vermeersch, 2012). In this sense, the new Member States were compelled to adopt internal policies for Roma inclusion, firstly because the case for enlargement was initially made in terms of “common values” (Guglielmo and Waters, 2005) and secondly as an attempt to reduce the push factors of a mass migration toward the West (Vermeersch, 2012). However, it soon became clear that this ambivalent strategy was too reliant on the agency of the Member States. Freedom of Movement had in fact challenged the idea that the “Roma problem” was only a matter of the new accessions; and soon after the EU citizenship was extended to Romania and Bulgaria, France and Italy started enforcing mass expulsions of Roma migrants on the grounds of national security (Sigona and Trehan, 2009; O’Nions, 2011).

After these events, the need for a “common” and “communitarian” approach increasingly became evident and acknowledged by the EU institutions (Balibar, 2009, p. viii; Sigona and Trehan, 2009). The Roma Summit 2008—held by the European Commission—was the first institutional conference discussing the problem of Roma inclusion at the EU level (Guy, 2009). More recently, a coordinated policy framework defined four crucial priorities for the inclusion of Roma populations, namely access to employment, housing, health, and education (European Commission, 2011). In these terms, the “Roma problem” is a shared matter of concern and—for some scholars—an opportunity to build a common citizenship (Balibar, 2009).

From this last perspective, the commitment of the EU to the problems of Roma inclusion is not only a matter of *ad hoc* policies, but it also shapes

the ways in which the EU citizenship is debated and conceptualised. In this regard, the responsibility toward Roma inclusion poses questions for any possible understanding of the EU citizenship. Firstly, from an economic perspective, one might ask whether it is beneficial, for a disadvantaged community such as the Roma, to join a labour market that might end up taking advantage of their impoverished position. As a matter of fact, some have argued that the process of EU enlargement—rather than globalization—might be responsible for a growing “political economy of inequality” in the EU (Beckfield, 2006; Lickic-Brboric, 2011). Secondly, from a political right-based standpoint, there is the question of how the entitlements to travel, work, and reside anywhere in the EU are accessed and practised by the Roma, particularly with regards to the right of non-discrimination among citizens of different Member States. Last but not least, the Roma have historically been considered a threat to Europeanness—the idealised and elitist value that underpins current visions of a European community (Powell and Lever, 2017). As such, their centrality in Europe as EU citizens inevitably diverts this aspiration elsewhere—perhaps most urgently, toward a reconsideration of the EU’s foundational values.

1.2 The Roma as EU Citizens

Despite these concerns—which are both concerns about Roma inclusion and EU citizenship as such—there have been very few attempts to understand the EU citizenship as a Roma reality. As a matter of fact, this minority group has historically been considered as an “outsider” to any European socio-political construction (Powell and Lever, 2017). Only recently, some attempts have been made to frame the Roma as EU citizens rather than a non-territorial and uprooted minority (Aradau *et al.*, 2013; Sardelić, 2017; Sardelić, 2019). It has also been acknowledged that accounts of “marginal” citizenship are central to understand what the limits of the EU citizenship are (Sardelić, 2019). However, much of this research—fairly preoccupied with the urgency of endowing the Roma with political agency—tends to collapse the ‘thick’ reality of the EU citizenship into claims of intrinsic political value.

In this sense, by looking at the margins of the EU citizenship in terms of the “unexpected” and “unauthorised” acts that challenge the *status quo* (Isin

and Saward, 2013) scholars have privileged the loud, highly visible and momentary events—such as street demonstrations (Aradau *et al.*, 2013)—over the more silent and routinized practices and of the everyday life (for example, caring, work, and religious activities). Furthermore, even when the latter are acknowledged, these are immediately raised as citizenship claims (Sardelić, 2017) but remain nonetheless decoupled from the universe of conflicting ideas of the good life that underpins them. As a result, in such approaches “citizenship itself emerges as an unequivocally ‘good’ concept” and “the problem of the articulation between ‘acts’ and processes of subject formation” remains obscured (Mezzadra 2015, p.133).

Put simply, the Roma are still studied in isolation from their everyday reality of being and becoming EU citizens. This means, for the Roma, the risk is that their ideas of the good life could eventually detach from their citizenship claims, and, for the EU citizenship, the disengagement from the more fundamental question of whether the reality of being and becoming EU citizens constitutes an improvement to the human condition.

1.3 Being-in-the-world as EU Citizens

This thesis contributes to address these two problems, by examining the ontological experience of the Roma as EU citizens. For this purpose, it does not privilege any particular understanding of the EU citizenship—essentially—because the terms under which the Roma are (or become) EU citizens are currently unclear. Perhaps less than other EU citizens—who at least enjoy participation in democratic processes at a national level—the Roma had no voice in choosing the EU citizenship as a status. Moreover, with regards to how their EU citizenship is practised, there is still disagreement on whether their mobility in the EU should be understood as driven by poverty and discrimination, as shaped by social relations, or as a nomadic lifestyle (Pantea, 2013).

For these reasons, this thesis rather starts from the more fundamental everyday experience of being-in-the-world (from the fact that subjects and their lived reality exist as inseparable and as mutually constituting each other) and explores the various ways in which the Roma themselves make sense of their being EU citizens. From such a perspective, the different logics of the EU citizenship manifest as intertwined and indistinct. In this sense, as a relationship between the Roma and the EU, the EU citizenship

does not appear as inherently oriented toward economic, political or social processes. Rather, it functions as a tool that assists (or hinders) the realisation of individual and collective ideas of the good life, which only at an analytical level may (or may not) overlap with the different EU agendas. In this regard, this thesis offers an alternative approach to accounts that brackets—perhaps too quickly—the everyday coping strategies of the Roma as political claims (Isin and Saward, 2013; Sardelić, 2017; Van Baar, 2017).

As I have touched upon before, citizenship claims do not exist in a vacuum; they rather arise out of a competition between different views of the good life. Such a relationship—between citizenship and the good life—has been acknowledged and studied since Greek antiquity. Aristotle, for example, placed the latter on a more fundamental level. In book VII of the *Politics*, in fact, he begins by insisting that we should first reach an agreement on what the good life is before asking which regime works the best (Reeve, 1998, p.191). This thesis follows a similar direction and considers the EU citizenship rather as a matter of how ideas of the good life are formed, pursued, actualised, and eventually formalised. So far, such concerns have been articulated only in part at an EU level, arguably, because it is assumed that the nation-state should provide the appropriate framework to address them. However, as I have explained, for the Roma (and similarly for other groups and individuals) this has not always been the case. Therefore, it is necessary to shift the attention outside the context of the nation-state and to explore the potential of the EU citizenship *vis-à-vis* the pursuit of different and conflicting conceptions of the good life.

1.4 The Subject and Context of Research

Perhaps more than any other Roma group, the Romanian Roma, especially those living in the UK after the Brexit referendum, were deemed the appropriate focus for this study. Firstly—as an ethnic and migrant group—the majority of Romanian Roma lack any sense of belonging provided by their national identity. As it has been suggested, in fact, their Romanian national citizenship remains, at best, only a formal dimension (Balibar, 2009; Szeman, 2017; Sardelić, 2017; Sardelić, 2019). In the context of the EU citizenship, this problem exacerbates in a “battle over identity” between “Romanians” and “Roma” that estranges the latter even more from their national identity (Mădroane, 2012; Kaneva and Popescu, 2014; Briggs and

Dorbe, 2014). Through Freedom of Movement this “hierarchy of othering” is perhaps emphasised, since Romanian nationals themselves face challenges (for example, employment and language insecurities, discrimination, etc.) that redefine their sense of belonging and personal identity (Marcu, 2015).

Besides the conflictual relationship with the Romanian nationality, the “Roma” identity itself involves complex and unstable forms of belonging. Due to a rooted history of discrimination, segregation, and exclusion, many individuals carry their identity as a stigma that needs to be hidden to others (Csepeli and Simon, 2004; Achim, 2013). Moreover, in collective terms, the Roma identity does not have a clear definition; it consists of a contested political-expert construct, and it is applied to groups “that are not bounded by a common language, religion, cultural practice, geographic location, occupation, physical appearance or lifestyle” (McGarry, 2014; Surdu and Kovats, 2015, p.5).

In addition to these problems, the socio-political, national context in which the participants of this research live—the UK after the Brexit referendum—adds further complexity to the experience of being a (Romanian Roma) EU citizen. The aftermath of the Brexit referendum is in fact a period characterised by a widespread sense of uncertainty. During this time, many have expressed concerns about a dramatic loss of EU citizenship rights (Shaw, 2016; Kochenov, 2017). In the UK context, a sudden loss of the right to reside would transform all EU citizens into third country nationals, substantially redefining their status and experience of being EU citizens. The Roma in particular—who are constrained in precarious housing arrangements and informal economic activities (Scullion and Brown, 2016)—might encounter further obstacles in claiming their right to settled status. Due to this unique context of marginality, exclusion, uncertainty, and conceptual confusion, the reality of being-in-the-world of the Romanian Roma living in the UK cannot be taken for granted.

1.5 Research Aims and Questions

In this research, through the experiences of a small sample of eighteen Romanian Roma living in a big city in Northern England, I seek to explore the potential of the EU citizenship in bringing marginal EU citizens closer to

their visions of the good life. In order to achieve this aim, I pose the following research questions:

- What is the reality of the Romanian Roma as EU citizens and how this reality shapes their subjectivity?
- How is marginality experienced in the context of the EU citizenship?
- How do the Romanian Roma attempt to envision, pursue, and practice their ideas of the good life as marginal EU citizens?
- What is the relationship between the EU citizenship and these attempts?

1.6 Academic Contribution

By studying the EU citizenship as a fundamental experience of being-in-the-world, this research starts from the ontological and epistemological assumptions of phenomenology and existentialism and draws from an interdisciplinary body of literature that is also informed by this philosophical tradition. Additionally, it considers the reality of the Roma *vis-à-vis* the vast literature in philosophy, psychology and geography that attempts to answer the question what is the good life.

This thesis aims to make an original contribution to conceptual debates around EU citizenship and migration by opening up spaces that allow including, firstly, the experience of being-in-the-world of marginal EU citizens such as the Roma, and secondly the ideas of the good life that stem from such a reality. By acknowledging this fundamental reality, I argue, scholars can better understand processes of subject formation.

In this regard, it gives a couple of indications for further research. Firstly, it highlights the need to explore—in the context of the EU citizenship—the spaces and places in which conflictual ideas of the good life are recognised and resolved. Secondly, it suggests that the EU citizenship needs to be understood as responsibility and in terms of shared vulnerability in order to accommodate the diversity and complexity of these ideas.

Finally, this work does not contain a list of practicable recommendations for policymakers, NGOs, or Roma activists. However, more in a humanistic

vein, it might influence these practitioners essentially by eliciting “an expansive view of what the human person is and can do” (Tuan, 1976, p. 266). In this sense, since it explores the participants’ most fundamental reality as well as their ideas of the good life, it provides a holistic view of who they are.

1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis provides a study on the reality of being EU citizens as experienced by eighteen Romanian Roma migrants living in the UK. The structure of this work is outlined below:

Chapter Two: Literature Review.

In this chapter, I discuss the key literature and concepts used throughout this thesis. Firstly, I start from providing a review of the different theoretical and normative approaches on the EU citizenship, especially considering how they answer the question of who is the EU citizen and of what is his or her experiential reality. In abstract terms, I summarise four answers to this question, which vary depending on the different rationales for EU integration and membership criteria. With the last of these ontological models—the “flourishing citizen”—I propose an original framework that will allow to understand the Roma’s aspirations and processes of becoming in the context of the EU citizenship.

Secondly, I situate the subject of research in its cultural, social, and historical context. This includes a review of studies on the Roma that attempts to provide the reader with knowledge about their social structure, customs, livelihood patterns, and so forth. I engage this literature vis-à-vis discussing the long history of marginalisation and exclusion suffered by the Roma.

Thirdly, I discuss key literature in philosophy, psychology, and geography which attempts to explain the nature of the human experience of being-in-the-world. In particular, I focus on the philosophies of phenomenology and existentialism and on the work of geographers and psychologists who—in different extents—embraced these traditions. Finally, I explore some of the vast literature on the “good life” departing from the work of Aristotle and

considering its reinterpretations in citizenship studies and positive psychology.

Chapter Three: Methodology.

In this chapter I review my methodological approach. I start from providing a reflexive account of the challenges encountered during the research design, and I discuss the process of data collection and analysis as informed by phenomenology, humanist geography, and ethnography. In different ways, all these philosophical traditions shaped the way in which interviews and observations were conducted and analysed. Moreover, I discuss how I accessed, recruited and sampled participants, accounting for the key encounters made during fieldwork and reflecting in particular on the process of building trust. Finally, I also include reflections on the use of interpreters, on my own positionality as a researcher, and on the ethical dilemmas faced during fieldwork.

Chapter Four: The Roma as Ontologically Insecure EU Citizens.

In this chapter I begin from the experience of mobile Romanian Roma in the UK by analysing their condition of “ontological insecurity” (Laing, 1990). This notion (which I will discuss more in depth in chapter two) can be loosely defined as the experience of being “unplaced” in an everyday reality (Philo, 2014), and, as I suggest, it is apt to frame the sense of being-in-the-world as marginal EU citizens.

In this sense, drawing from empirical data, I attempt to show how Roma individuals question important aspects of being-in-the-world, such as family relations—“the important cement” of their lives (Fraser, 1995:306)—and how they experience a threatening otherness, loss of autonomy, and cultural insecurities. Finally, I consider the search for economic stability in the context of the EU citizenship *vis-à-vis* the experiences of ontological insecurity.

Chapter Five: Making Sense of Ontological Insecurity

After having analysed the various forms in which participants experience ontological insecurity, in chapter five I make a further move posing the

question of how, despite the condition of ontological insecurity, marginal EU citizens can establish a vision of the good life. In order to find an answer to this question, I will examine the Roma's attempts to make sense of their condition *vis-à-vis* different existentialist perspectives and geographical understandings of place and space.

Similarly to the previous chapter, I attempt to account for the different layers of the experience of being-in-the-world, including experiences in the family domain as well as the more challenging encounters with difference. As I will suggest, the condition of ontological insecurity does not preclude the Roma from establishing different modes of relationality—for example, through religion—that allow experiencing meaning, value, and sense of place. In the context of the EU citizenship, the Roma seem to retain, at least, the capacity to envision ideas of the good life.

Chapter Six: Enacting the Good

With the participants' visions in mind, in chapter six I focus in particular on the activities through which they attempt to get closer to their values. For analytical purposes, this discussion is structured in two sections. Firstly, I consider how the Roma—through various forms of everyday doings (for example, family, work, leisure, and religious activities) which emerged from the bottom up data analysis—actively seek to establish routines, trust, and generally a sense of ontological security. Secondly, I discuss the Roma's perspectives and experiences of learning in the context of the EU citizenship. Since learning is inherently a process of becoming, the analysis of various learning experiences will allow shedding light on the potential of the EU citizenship *vis-à-vis* the ideas of the good life of the Roma.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In the final chapter, I summarise the key findings and discuss the academic contributions of this research. I contend that, in the context of the EU citizenship, the reality of the Roma needs to be understood holistically before being raised to the political. For the Roma, in fact, the pursuit of the good life as EU citizens is experienced as a chaotic path full of questions and conflicts. This needs to be acknowledged in order to understand their agency. I contribute to theoretical debates on the EU citizenship by

indicating how some conceptual space can be created in order to include the complexities that this reality entails.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores theoretical and empirical bodies of literature that are relevant to this study. In section 2.2, I consider how the debate on the EU citizenship has evolved around ideas of what this construction should be. Such discussion has been polarised between visionary constructions that attempt to go beyond the national model of citizenship and positions that are sceptical about this move. In this highly contested theoretical, political and social landscape, I explore how, from these different views, the question of who is the EU citizen can be answered. I contribute to this debate by proposing the notion of the “flourishing EU citizen” which—as I suggest—provides a normative framing that is more tailored for the study of the experiences of the Romanian Roma as EU citizens.

Besides being EU citizens, the participants of this study are first of all Romanian Roma. In section 2.3, I review literature and concepts that elucidate what this means. Firstly, this includes a discussion of the ways in which the Roma population has been defined by scholars and in the context of the EU. Secondly, this section provides a detailed account of the historical and cultural background of this population. In this discussion, I give particular attention to national contexts of Romania and the UK, since they are specific and shared by all the participants of this study.

After having discussed the historical and cultural context, I continue reviewing literature that allows understanding who the participants of this study are. The key concepts discussed in this section—drawn from the phenomenological and existentialist tradition—allow defining the Romanian Roma in terms of their experience of reality. In particular, I provide an in-depth discussion of Laing’s notion of ontological insecurity (1990) considering the relevant existentialist themes that underpin Laing’s work and that of scholars in geography. Finally, I review relevant geographical concepts, which, in connection with the phenomenological and existentialist framework, will help understand the EU citizenship as a geographical experience.

The last part of this chapter (section 2.5) explores theories and concepts that allow approaching the participants' ideas of the good life and their attempts to accomplish these visions. In particular, it provides a review of Aristotle's theory of the good life, considering how the concept of *eudaimonia* has been reinterpreted by theorists of the "capability approach" and positive psychologists. In addition to this discussion, I consider Pentecostalism as a movement that is distinctive to the Roma. In this research, Pentecostalism emerged from the data analysis as a framework in which visions of the good life are formed and pursued.

2.2 Theorising the EU citizen

The EU Citizenship Debate

In current literature, with the exception of research from legal and institutional perspectives, the EU citizenship has been treated mostly in normative terms (Olsen, 2008). Initial attempts to define it have used national citizenship as a standard for comparison and focused on addressing the tensions between the EU and Member State citizenships. In this debate, scholars took very polarised views. Some started considering the potential for a transnational EU citizenship that would address the challenges presented by globalisation, migration and multiculturalism (MacCormick, 1993; Preuss, 1996; Delanty, 1996). In this regard, some highlighted the on-going power of the nation-state and viewed the new forms of migrant membership as mere anomalies of the traditional citizenship (Brubaker 1990). While such a perspective is supported by the fact that Member States citizenship is a necessary precondition for EU citizenship, other scholars have gone further. Soysal, for example, advanced the concept of a "postnational" citizenship—a membership based on human rights that would transcend national identities and citizenship (1994). In her view, European citizenship is the "post-national membership in its most elaborate legal form" (*ibid.*, p.148). Similarly, also those who considered the possibilities of a global "cosmopolitan citizenship" imagined the EU as a federal structure operating beyond national sovereignty (Held, 1995; Bellamy, 1996; Bellamy and Castiglione, 1997).

Despite having shaped contemporary understanding of the EU citizenship, the normative approaches discussed so far are not suited for empirical research. Firstly—as it has been suggested (Smith, 2006; Olsen, 2008)—they present risks of reification. In the context of citizenship, such a problem is bidirectional: the conceptual is reified to the empirical and *vice versa*. In the first sense, as Smith suggests, reification consists in the failure of addressing citizenship in terms of how human beings should live together (2006). As such, citizenship becomes a “simulacrum” that replaces the more concrete and intersubjective human experience (*ibid.*, p.45). Although Smith discusses this as a problem of modern citizenship (*ibid.*), this critique clearly resonates in the context of the EU citizenship, which is notoriously lacking of substantive dimensions.

Secondly—from the empirical to the conceptual—reification includes the tendency to use historical realisations as generalizable models (Olsen, 2008). In the context of the EU, in fact, scholars have attempted to explain citizenship using what they know best—national citizenship—and, as a result, this has produced limited and incomplete understandings of what the EU citizenship is or should be (Bauböck, 2014).

Finally, and as a consequence of this last problem, particular dimensions of citizenship have been elevated over others. For example, liberals have emphasised rights, communitarians’ belonging, and republicans’ participation; however, none of these philosophical traditions is apt to represent EU citizenship in its full complexity (Bellamy, 2004). Given these inadequacies, some scholarship has moved away from considering this construction only in relation to national citizenship. Rather, it has emphasised its multi-layered nature and simultaneous operations at a local, national, and supranational level (Faist, 2001; Maas, 2013; Bauböck, 2014).

Who is The EU citizen?

Rather than choosing one of the above approaches to EU citizenship from the outset, here I begin from discussing the ontology of the EU citizen. This will allow, firstly, identifying some of the points of junction (and disjunction) between theory and empirical reality, and, secondly, to shed light on the conceptual space in which the reality of the Roma as EU citizens can be situated.

Throughout history and culture, the term “citizen” has carried different meanings (Isin, 1997; Ignatieff, 1997). In ancient Greece, for example, membership of the *polis* (or city-state) included military duties, participation in political life, and privileges such as the right to own a land. To be citizens meant to represent the state (*politeía*), and, given the power involved, the access to this status was carefully regulated and granted to foreigners only in rare occasions (Manville, 2014). On the other hand, in the modern tradition initiated by Hobbes and Locke, the citizen is an individual driven by a selfish nature which needs to be tamed by institutional arrangements (Ignatieff, 1997). In these terms, both men and women enter in the public sphere as ungendered equals, for instrumental purposes, and through a social contract that subjects them to the rule of the sovereign—the only one who has the power to admit or exclude them from the commonwealth (Jaede, 2016; Lloyd and Sreedhar, 2018). These are just two examples of how unstable the nature of the citizen is. In the context of the EU this instability is what has remained. The citizen is in fact a different being depending on what kind of citizenship membership we put at the fore and on what we mean by the project of European integration.

In what follows, I have developed a framework for understanding different conceptualisations of the EU citizen that begins with four possible ontological models. The first two—the “latent” and the “emancipated” citizens—are implied in debates around citizen’s membership and define the EU citizen in terms of his or her *spatial* experience. On the other hand, the other two—the “market” and “flourishing” citizens—stem from perspectives on the EU integration and put the EU citizen’s experience of *place* at the foundation of his or her ontology. In contrast with the first two, the last two add depth to the EU experience; they define the EU citizen according to the “role” he or she plays in the project of EU integration, and therefore as an actor and carrier of meaning, purposes and values.

These models are not to be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as complementing each other. In table 2.1, I have explored how the combination of different citizenship memberships and roles can generate different subjects. Secondly, these models are by no means static and definitive. In fact, since identities are dynamic processes through which both self and collectives are rewritten (Milligan, 2003) EU citizens can move across these ontologies over space and time. In this sense, EU citizens might change “who they are” through their mobility or immobility (their

spatial experience) and by remodelling their roles as EU citizens (their experience of place).

The Latent EU Citizen

This ontology can be derived from the view that Member State citizenship is the most essential requirement for EU citizenship. This perspective is often taken, for example, by those who emphasise the limitations of the latter (Closa, 1998; Nic Shuibhne, 2010; Damay and Mercenier, 2016). The EU citizen subsumed here is primarily defined as a Member State citizen. Aron's claim that "there are not such animals as European citizens [but] only French, German, or Italian citizens" uses this ontology (1974, p. 653).

This model—it could be argued—is the most solidly grounded in the economic, political and social reality of the EU. It is in fact applicable to the majority of the EU population which can be seen in turn as constituted by "latent" EU citizens. These citizens are "latent" because they are endowed with EU citizenship as a *status*, but do not practice it at its full experiential potential. To be an EU citizen is for them a marginal or unreflective experience. Even if they exercise the right of Freedom of Movement, this practice does not produce any "meaningful" encounter, and their system of values remains unchanged. Clearly, this model flattens the experiential diversity of the EU citizens and neglects any possibility for *becoming* and *belonging* outside the boundaries of the Member States.

The Emancipated EU Citizen

This last limitation brings me to examine a second model, the one implied by those who emphasise EU citizenship as the practice of freedom of movement and see this right at its "core" (de Witte, 2019). The EU citizen is, from this perspective, a mobile and autonomous individual who is emancipated from the nation state. By effect of the liberation from cultural and social norms, he or she is endowed with the potential of becoming someone else and belonging somewhere else. This model also has its own limitations—for example, the fact that experiences of Freedom of Movement are diverse and complex, they vary across individuals and are not generalizable. Most importantly, it opens up the individual to a new landscape of possibilities but it does not provide clarity on what these

possibilities are. As a result, the ontology of this EU citizen is fundamentally uncertain.

The EU Market Citizen

This third ontological model is probably the most criticised by scholars who oppose—or aim to overcome—the view of the EU integration intended as simply the creation of a single market (Bercusson *et al.*, 1997; Faist, 2001; Kostakopoulou, 2005; O’Brien, 2013). In these critiques, this model is often used in conjunction with the emancipated citizen in order to expose the dehumanising side of the EU citizenship (O’Brien, 2013). That is, the potential to produce a self-interested and atomised individual, who is emancipated from the Member State and yet incapable of belonging anywhere else. Such an individual is left with no other option than to fully embody the role of the *homo economicus* and espouse the values of a free market economy.

However, to be a market citizen does not necessarily mean acting as a dehumanised being. Market citizenship could be also seen as a legitimate mode of integration among citizens of the Member States. This view is assumed, for example, by those who still regard the EU citizenship as fundamentally a market citizenship (Everson, 1995; Vink, 2005; Nic Shuibhne, 2010). The underlying idea, from this perspective, is that the EU citizen—as a market citizen—can be held back in his or her human nature by the substantive dimensions of the national citizenship and serve the interests of his own community. When this is the case, the EU market citizenship remains subsidiary to national citizenship.

The Flourishing EU Citizen

Finally, I propose here the ontological model of the “flourishing EU citizen”, that is, the EU citizen who realises and actualises his or her conception of the “good life” through the experience of the EU citizenship. This ontological model can be seen as an original reformulation of the “union citizen” (the economically inactive EU citizen) which is subsumed by those who attempt strengthening the social dimension of EU integration (Bercusson *et al.*, 1997; Ferrera, 2019; Kostakopoulou, 2019). This reformulation is perhaps needed since the concept of the union citizen is undefined in the legal

discourse and makes sense only in opposition to the market citizen (Everson, 1995). As such, this citizen does not have political or social relevance within the EU and exists without any allegiance to a community (*ibid.*). With respect to a “European” sense of belonging—that would hypothetically trigger the process of political and social integration—the union citizen rather plays a passive role. He or she is at the centre of this project, and yet merely dependent on it. In other words, the union citizen reflects a Europe that—as Weiler puts it—is “devoid of ideals” and becomes “an end in itself [...] no longer a means for a higher human end” (1994, p.204-214).

On the other hand, the idea of the flourishing EU citizen attempts to fill this void by building on the work of scholars who share the Aristotelian view that social forms of organisation should ultimately serve the human aspiration toward the good life (Nussbaum, 1988; Sen, 1990; Honneth 2007). At the same time, however, it acknowledges that the individual is capable of pursuing such an aspiration only if embedded in a community to which he or she belongs, and that there are a variety of cultural contexts in which ideas of the good life are formed and practised differently. In this sense, the concept of the flourishing EU citizen entails an attempt to understand “how cultural systems, as combinations of norms, dispositions, practices, and histories, frame the good life as a landscape of discernable ends and of practical paths to the achievement of these ends” (Appadurai, 2013, p.292).

Table 2.1: Ontological Models of the EU citizen³

		<i>EU citizenship as a spatial experience</i>	
		Latent EU Citizen	Emancipated EU Citizen
<i>EU citizenship as a place experience</i>	EU Market Citizen	<p>Membership: Substantively a Member State citizen. Belongs to a national community.</p> <p>Role: Economically productive for his or her own national community.</p>	<p>Membership: Atomised individual. Belongs to nowhere.</p> <p>Role: Self-interested consumer. Economically productive for the market.</p>
	Flourishing EU Citizen	<p>Membership: Substantively a Member State citizen. Belongs to a national community.</p> <p>Role: Flourishing citizen in a Member State community.</p>	<p>Membership: Individual open to becoming. Embraces new forms of belonging.</p> <p>Role: Flourishing citizen as EU citizen.</p>

As previously mentioned, the ontologies presented above are derived from theoretical standpoints in the literature on EU citizenship. As such, they set the limits of the ontological possibilities and serve as analytical starting points. However, as mere abstractions, they do not account for the more complex experiential realities of the EU citizenship.

³ Formally, all of these EU citizens are both Member State citizens and EU citizens. This table refers to the substantive experience of being an EU citizen.

Psychologists have in fact acknowledged that the self is not a monophonic entity, but it is rather constituted by a dialogic relationship among many coexisting voices, which can be dominant, subordinate or suppressed (Hermans and Kempen, 1993). From this perspective, the four EU citizens models are perhaps better understood, in similar terms, as coexisting in the same person and as voices of an internal dialogue.

As a result, in the lived reality, one's role and membership as an EU citizen can be embodied and performed differently across time and space. For instance, during the course of his or her life, a latent EU citizen might move to another EU country, experience a temporary sense of emancipation, and then come back to embrace the norms and rules of his or her community. Such a resolution is relatively straightforward, since the EU citizen finds, eventually, a path toward flourishing in the cultural context of his or her Member State. More problematic, however, is the case in which the EU citizen lacks or loses the substantive dimensions of the Member State citizenship (i.e. sense of belonging and participation) and remains dependent on the EU citizenship for the constitution and realisation of his or her idea of the good life. This latter case—which, in abstract terms, consists of a shift from the ontological model of the “emancipated” EU citizen to the “flourishing” one—allows to better investigate the limits and potentials of the EU citizenship in constituting itself as an experience of being-in-the-world—that is, both as a fundamental reality and as a process of subject formation. The case of the Romanian Roma migrants living in the UK, for the reasons given in section 1.4, constitutes the closest approximation to this abstract research scenario.

2.3 The Roma as a Subject of Research

Who Are The Roma?

The reframing of the Roma within the European Union has renewed the need of defining who the Roma are. In a EU context, the word Roma is used by the Council of Europe as an umbrella term to include “Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, [...] Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies” (2012, p.4). This

official definition—as well as many other political attempts to bracket these populations—is problematic as it refers to communities which might not even know what the word Roma means (Mariushiakova and Popov, 2016). In this sense, it encompasses groups which are very different from each other and does not provide clarity on who should be the target of policymakers (*ibid.*).

For Mariushiakova and Popov, the question of “who the Roma are” is ultimately a problem of what discourse—political or academic—we choose to prioritize (2016). Since the former has dominated over the latter, the (politically correct) designation “Roma” has simply replaced the equally incorrect (and for some derogative) term “Gypsies” without bringing clarity on the reality at stake (*ibid.*). For this reason, this thesis rather adopts the more nuanced distinction between “Roma” and other “Romanies” (Hancock, 2002). In this sense, contrary to the designation used by the Council of Europe, the term Roma excludes other groups such as Travellers, Sinti, Kale, etc., and rather refers to a specific ethnic group living in Eastern Europe.

In Romania, this ethnic group are collectively known as *țigani* and include different clans such as *căldărari*, *rudari*, *ursari*, *gabori*, etc. who are named after their traditional craft (Achim, 2013). Although each of these subgroups has its own linguistic, cultural, religious, and lifestyle specificities, today these clan identities are getting left behind. Most of the Roma have in fact left their traditional occupations, and at least a third of them no longer have any consciousness of clan belonging (*ibid.*). Rather, they prefer to identify themselves as “Roma” or “Gypsies” (Burtea, 1994; Achim, 2013).

It is important to mention, however, that the term “Gypsy” is an inadequate translation for the Romanian *țigani* (Mariushiakova and Popov, 2016). In fact, with this word, two distinct (but overlapping) types of population are merged together: on the one hand, the “social phenomenon of communities of peripatetics or commercial nomads, irrespective of origins or language”, on the other, an ethnic community who share, with various degrees of awareness, Romani language and common origins (Matras, 2004, p.54). Due to the overlap between these two different kinds of “Gypsies”, the history of the Roma and their claims of recognitions have rather been contested.

A Contested History

The Roma identity is a recent construct. However, long before gaining centrality in the EU agenda, it has been topic of an intense debate. In this regard, there are linguists and Romani intellectuals who emphasise linguistic similarities, common beliefs, traditions, and “sense of historical fate” in order to study it as an ethnic-national identity (Margalit and Matras, 2007, p.104). Drawing from genetic, anthropological, or linguistic evidence, these scholars suggest that the origins of the European Roma might be traced from India (Hancock, 2000; Liebich, 2007; Mendizabal *et al.*, 2011). From this perspective, the Roma can be considered as a nation only if the question of the historical origins (ethnogenesis)—a fundamental one in any national historiography—is addressed (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016). The nationalist framework is in this sense necessary to safeguard the interests of all the Roma, since it allows legitimizing claims of political recognition on the basis of their equality to those of other national populations (Mudure 2012; Marushiakova and Popov, 2016).

On the other hand, some other scholars—most notably Okely (1983; 2011) and Willems (1997)—are sceptical about this approach. According to them, the Gypsies (including the Roma) are an indigenous Western population—“a motley rabble of diverse origins” whose identity has been produced by nineteenth century’s orientalism (Hayes, 2009, p.14). As such, the appearance of this population is an entirely European phenomenon which was caused by the breakdown of the feudal structure and displacement of dispossessed peasants (Sandland, 1996). In this view, Roma nationalism, as well as any other attempt to “own” the Roma identity, rather reproduces the orientalist tradition (Okely, 2011, p.38) and increases the disparity between a “Roma elite” and other more disadvantaged Roma people (Mudure, 2012).

Slavery, Genocide, and Socioeconomic Exclusion

Such debates (and so the development of the interdisciplinary field of Romani studies) have gained the attention of academics and politicians only in the last decades. Before the seventies, in fact, the Roma were mostly subjects of rogue literature and depicted as social outcasts, scapegoats, or romantic outsiders (Mayall, 2004; Vermeersch, 2017). In Europe—and especially in Romania—the Roma have long remained

outside official historical accounts (Powell and Lever, 2017; Achim, 2013). The fact that the *Porrajmos*—the genocide suffered by the Romani people during the Second World War (Bauer, 2002; Weiss-Wendt, 2013)—did not become a collective European memory as the *Shoah* is perhaps indicative of this absence.

Nonetheless, the history of the Roma is now hardly ignored by contemporary research. Despite being contested, it arguably provides the best explanation for the present socioeconomic condition of this group. Less disputed than historical origins is in fact evidence of social exclusion and discrimination, best exemplified, beside genocide, by continuity in persecutions, slavery and segregation (Mayall, 2004; Weiss-Wendt, 2013; Achim, 2013; Powell and Lever, 2017). In the Romanian context, in particular, the Roma have been kept in the state of slavery and excluded from the public sphere for four and a half centuries—a legacy that is still regarded as the main reason for the present separation from the Romanian society (Achim, 2013).

For the Romanian Roma, the emancipation from slavery occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century and only in legal terms (*ibid.*). Despite having been forcedly tied to the land, after the abolishment of slavery the Roma did not become economically and socially emancipated as agricultural workers (*ibid.*). Moreover, during the process of modernization their traditional occupations (as tinsmiths, brush-makers, horse-dealers, etc.) started disappearing due to the competition with the industrial production (*ibid.*). As a result, entire communities disintegrated, and the Roma remained a cheap and disposable labour force (Chelcea, 1944; Achim, 2013).

At least in Romania, the period between the two World Wars brought some modest social progress for the Roma. In fact, the twenties and thirties marked the birth of the first Roma societies and movements (Achim, 2013). During this time, these groups made the first attempts to sensitise the public opinion and enter the political life of the country (*ibid.*). However, this period did not last long. With the increasing influence of Nazi accounts of eugenics on Romanian nationalism, for the first time, the Roma became framed by Romanian “scientists” as a national problem (*ibid.*).

During the dictatorship of Antonescu, harsh policies aimed at establishing order in every aspect of the social life greatly affected the Roma population.

Differently from the ones targeting the Jews, these were not racial policies and their implementation was to some extent arbitrary (*ibid.*). However, they produced similar results. The nomadic Roma and those who were deemed as “dangerous” and “undesirable” faced persecution (*ibid.*, p.172). An estimated number of twenty-five thousand people were deported to Transnistria, where approximately a half of them died of starvation, cold, and epidemics (*ibid.*). Such a tragic account is of course only a small chapter of the cruelties suffered by the Roma in European countries under the Nazi influence. As a matter of fact, Romani scholars and activists estimate that the total number of Romani people who perished in the *Porrajmos* might be between half and one and a half million (Hancock, 2004).

After the overthrow of Antonescu (1944), the Roma remained ignored by Romanian authorities until the middle of the seventies (Achim, 2013). Nonetheless, during the decades of the communist regime, they experienced many social changes, including the nationalisation of the economy, industrialisation, urbanisation, and collectivisation of the agriculture (*ibid.*). For some of the Roma, these changes meant new opportunities for employment in unskilled and poorly paid occupations (such as street-cleaning, collection of recyclable materials, seasonal jobs in agriculture) which became specific to them (*ibid.*). However, not all of them adapted to the new conditions, and in the late seventies, the “Roma problem” in Romania reappeared as an issue of “integration to work” (Achim, 2013, p. 195). In this sense, it was about converting them in productive members of society.

In these years, the general attitude of the communist regime and Romanian society was to “absorb” the Roma, forcing them to give up their cultural heritage and lose their ethnic identity (*ibid.*). In this context, some assimilationist policies arguably brought improvements to the housing and employment condition of the Roma; however, overall they failed in achieving social integration. During the communist regime, the socio-economic gap between Roma and Romanians actually increased (*ibid.*).

The Romanian assimilationist policies were relatively less severe in comparison to other countries of the Eastern bloc. In Hungary, for example, children were taken from Roma families and forcibly institutionalised (*ibid.*). In a similar fashion, in Czechoslovakia authorities encouraged sterilisation for women who had more than a certain number of children (*ibid.*). In

Romania, on the other hand, the Roma population increased exponentially due to the pronatalist policies of the communist regime, which allowed Roma families to obtain some basic social allowances and survive without a job (*ibid.*). However, in the long run such a system was not beneficial for the Roma. Firstly, they became highly dependent on the welfare provisions and therefore even more excluded from the job market (Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997). Secondly, the high number of children was actually a burden for Roma families, and the practice of abandoning them in hospitals or orphanages became widespread especially among this minority group (Crowe, 2007; Achim, 2013).

Such realities became especially visible after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, with the transition from a communist to a neoliberal society, many Roma lost their economic function as a cheap labour force (Van Baar, 2012; Powell and Lever, 2017). Due to the economic difficulties, young people tended to remain with their families, exacerbating the phenomena of segregation and ghettoization (Achim, 2013; Berescu, 2011; Vince and Rat, 2013).

The Question of Nomadism

As I have mentioned, the overlap between two different “Gypsy” populations has complicated attempts to define the group in question. The issue of the nomadic lifestyle is perhaps the most disputed aspect of this conceptual and political confusion. Many scholars are resistant to constructions of the Roma as a nomadic population since it perpetuates exoticism, stereotypes, and ultimately separation between the Roma and non-Roma (Sigona, 2005; Pusca, 2010). As a matter of fact, nowadays only a small percentage of European Roma is nomadic (Liebich, 2007); and when this is the case, nomadism is rather practised due to necessity, not as a chosen lifestyle (Pusca, 2010).

Despite this factual reality, the myth of the Roma as a nomadic group persists, with little success, also as a strategy for legitimization and empowerment (Liebich, 2007). Historical accounts—more than the present condition—seem to provide some loose evidence for these narratives. From the Middle Age to the modern era, in fact, nomadism was a distinctive feature of the Roma in Romania (Achim, 2013). The transition to a sedentary lifestyle was a slow process that began when the Roma were

forced to work in the agricultural sector as slaves. When settled, the Roma worked (as inferiors) alongside Romanian peasantry and started losing their ethnic character, including language and cultural traits (*ibid.*). This trend continued through the harsh policies of assimilation of the Austrian-Hungarian authorities, which were aimed at erasing their identity (*ibid.*). From the end of the nineteenth century on, the nomadic Roma became a minority in proportion to the settled ones (*ibid.*).

In Romania, nomadism was forbidden in 1934 and only a shrinking minority of itinerant Roma—the *corturari* (tent-dwellers)—resisted to changing their lifestyle. Even when owning a house, they would use this as a stable for the horses and rather live in tents (Chelcea, 1944; Achim, 2013). Nonetheless, at least in Romania, all Roma became settled during the communist regime, when it became compulsory for local authorities to provide them with dwellings and employment (Achim, 2013).

The Roma Migration to the UK

As I have just discussed, due to a history of forced assimilation, the Roma have lost some of their cultural traits. Nowadays they can hardly be considered a population that “dwells nowhere”. While there are Roma who engage in itinerant occupations, these groups travel fixed routes seasonally and do not seek new permanent residence (Matras, 2000). As it will be later clear, the participants of this research do not fit in this category and are therefore better understood as migrants.

Roma mobility in Europe is a very recent phenomenon. According to scholars, the first flows of Roma population from Eastern to Western Europe were initiated by people who managed to escape the *Porrajmos* and by those who fled during the communist era between 1950 and 1989 (Horton and Grayson, 2008). Although in very small numbers, these migrations established the basis for future migrations and family reconstitutions (*ibid.*).

A relatively more substantial wave (but nonetheless proportional to that of other non-Roma populations) occurred during the nineties, when the Soviet Union collapsed (Matras, 2000). The push factors, as I have mentioned, include the loss of the means of subsistence and generally the worsening of the living conditions, but also social conflict with the non-Roma population, experiences of discrimination and police violence (Matras, 2000; Stevens,

2003). Particularly in the Romanian context, both NGOs and governmental agencies have documented ethnic tensions (Helsinki Watch, 1991; Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1994). Such hostile environment has been replicated in the Western context. The arrival of the Roma in the UK—either as asylum seekers or irregularly, before the EU enlargement to the East—created frictions in some local communities (Matras, 2000).

With the accession of Romania to the EU, the Romanian Roma have formally acquired the right of Freedom of Movement, but their substantial exclusion persists in both Western and Eastern societies. Evidence for this are the many and well-documented accounts of differential treatment, group expulsions, racism, and general hostility in the countries of arrival (Sigona and Trehan, 2009; O’Nions, 2011; Clark and Rice, 2012). Moreover, the push factors of their migration seem to have remained the same. In fact, in the Eastern countries, the EU’s pressure toward the adoption of policies of inclusion at the local and national levels has produced little results (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Kostka, 2018). Secondly, with the practice of Freedom of Movement, the Roma’s confinement in low-qualified and low-income occupations has also remained (Fremlová, 2009; Van Baar, 2012).

The number of migrant Roma who are now living in the UK is difficult to estimate. This is due to poor contacts with local authorities, continuous internal and transnational movements, and reluctance to disclose ethnic identity (Fremlová, 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2013). With these limitations in mind, however, some scholars have suggested that there might be an increasing population of about 200—300 thousands migrant Roma living in the UK (Brown *et al.*, 2013). This last study also indicates that the Roma are concentrated predominantly in urban and multi-ethnic areas such as London and North West England, but also in Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands and West Midlands (*ibid.*). Their settlement patterns are determined by family networks, cheap accommodation, and relatively low experiences of discrimination (Fremlová, 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2013).

2.4 The Study of the Human Experience

So far I have dealt with the questions of who is the EU citizen and of who are the Roma. For both of these questions, there have been contested and

“top-down” answers which are not free from the risks of reification. The theoretical framework introduced in this section is primarily aimed at addressing this problem. The philosophical tradition of phenomenology, in particular, allows understanding the EU citizenship from the more immediate perspective of the human experience. While the ontological and epistemological assumption of such a perspective will be discussed more explicitly in the next chapter, in this section I will introduce the phenomenological literature and concepts that are essential for the purpose of this study.

What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology can be defined as the study of the “structures of experience or consciousness” (Smith, 2018). In a literal sense, it explores the appearance of phenomena, how they appear to our consciousness, and how we experience them with meaning (*ibid.*). Generally speaking, it is concerned with understanding “perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity” (*ibid.*).

The notion of “intentionality”—firstly introduced by Husserl (2012)—constitutes the beginning of the phenomenological inquiry. This concept refers to the directedness of our experience toward its content—the fact that we, as conscious subjects, are always conscious of something (*ibid.*). As such, For Husserl, the content of our experience could be “bracketed” and analysed as relation between subject and objects (*ibid.*). Such an approach—also known as “transcendental” phenomenology—attempts to describe how phenomena appear in consciousness, disregarding of their relationship with the natural world (Smith, 2018).

This approach was challenged by Heidegger in his book *Being and Time* (1996). Contrary to Husserl, for Heidegger our most fundamental experience of the world is not underpinned by a subject-to-objects relation (*ibid.*). Rather, it is one of “being-in-the-world”—of being embedded in a pre-conceptual and taken-for-granted unity with it. This unity is for Heidegger a situated activity which he calls “*Dasein*” (*ibid.*). Differently from the “pure” phenomenology of Husserl (2012), for Heidegger we cannot separate the content of our consciousness from the world we experience, since these two are mutually constitutive (1996).

In philosophy, Heidegger's most important contribution is arguably the use of phenomenology as a method to answer the question of being—his claim that “ontology is possible only as phenomenology” (1996, p. 31). In this sense, rather than describing (as Husserl did) the *objects* of experience, from a Heideggerian perspective one seeks to understand how the subject experiences himself and his concrete reality (Laing, 1990; Smith, 2018). This approach—known as “existential phenomenology” (*ibid.*)—has significantly informed much of the psychoanalytical and geographical concepts that will be discussed next, as well as my attempt to understand the EU citizenship as a reality of the Romanian Roma.

The Concept of Ontological Insecurity

The concept of ontological insecurity (or security) was firstly put forward by the psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1990) as an attempt to understand the condition of his schizophrenic patients. In his best known work, *The Divided Self*, Laing describes the ontologically insecure individual as having the following traits (1990, p.42):

The individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literary sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body.

As Laing suggests, such an experience of the self inevitably affects the way the individual relates with others and with the world. From this perspective, in fact, relationality is experienced through the constant preoccupation for preservation (*ibid.*). In this sense, the ontologically insecure individual is fully absorbed in preventing “himself losing his self”, since he (or she) cannot take their sense of being for granted (*ibid.* p.42-43). As a result, he or she may give existential weight to events of the everyday life which are rather insignificant for the majority of people (for instance, ordinary conversations or even the presence of the sky) (*ibid.*). As these circumstances are often perceived as an existential threat, in some cases

the ontologically insecure individuals may “withdraw” themselves from the external events or show indifference (*ibid.*). As Laing suggests, however, this behaviour is not a sign of insusceptibility to the external world. On the contrary, ontologically insecure individuals are affected so intensely by it that their experience of reality might become one that they can no longer share with others (*ibid.* p.42-43).

In *The Divided Self* Laing goes on describing three main forms of anxieties afflicting the ontologically insecure individual. He calls these anxieties engulfment, implosion, and petrification (or depersonalisation) (1990, p.39-61). With the word “engulfment” Laing refers to the fear of relatedness—the felt risk of losing one’s sense of being by complete absorption into another person or the external world. As a response to engulfment, the ontological insecure individual attempts a retreat in isolation, which—however lonely and painful—guarantees a certain degree of existential safety. Secondly, by implosion, Laing refers to the experience of internal emptiness and self-identification with that void. Any contact with reality, from this point of view, is perceived as dreadful and persecutory. Finally, Laing calls petrification (or depersonalisation) the sense of losing the own subjectivity and existence as a person. In this sense, the ontologically insecure individual is constantly afraid of being turned into a stone, a robot or an automaton—into an “it” which has no feelings and own autonomy (*ibid.* p.43-46).

Understood as such, the concept of ontological insecurity serves Laing’s wider project of recasting his patients within their own worlds through existential phenomenology—a discipline which, as discussed before, attempts “to characterise the nature of a person’s experience of his world and himself” (*ibid.* p.17). Laing, in fact, rejects the formal clinical practices of his time, the sharp divide between sanity and insanity, and the study of the patient in complete isolation. Rather, he proposes a more intersubjective relationship between the psychiatrist and the patient. In his view, the former is required to understand—not only intellectually, but also with love and empathy—the existential position of the latter (*ibid.*).

Ontological Insecurity after Laing

After Laing’s work, the concept of ontological insecurity was adopted by Giddens (1991) and travelled across disciplines mainly through his sociological lenses. Giddens, in fact, used it to describe the

interconnections between two extremes of modernity—the globalising influences on the one hand, and the personal dispositions on the other (1991). More specifically—and perhaps complementing Laing’s exclusive focus on the self—Giddens brings the topic of ontological security at a societal level, taking into account how the institutions of modernity shape (and are shaped by) self-identity (*ibid.*).

In geography, scholars used the concept of ontological security drawing—quite loosely—from Giddens’s sociological understanding. In general, they tend to define it as the embodied feeling of being “unplaced” in an everyday reality (Philo, 2014). However, depending on the different research needs and contexts, geographers have emphasised different aspects of the concept. In these terms, ontological insecurity was employed to study, for example, security in relation to housing (Colic-Peisker and Johnson, 2010; Dupuis and Thorns, 1998), the experience of agoraphobia (Davidson, 2000), and the “hyper-precarious” condition of refugees and asylum seekers (Waite *et al.*, 2014). A few geographers have attempted to maintain, through reflections on their own personal experiences, the psychoanalytic underpinning of the concept (Valentine 1998; Bondi, 2014). Among the last two, only the latter (Bondi, 2014) has privileged Laing’s formulation.

Arguably, rather than being used to describe the experience of selected individuals, the concept of ontological insecurity is now employed to understand a variety of human contexts and experiences. Even in the field of psychology, in fact, Laing’s formulation has been criticised for not being consistent with existentialist thought (van Deurzen, 2009). The main point of this critique is that ontological insecurity might be a fundamental core of the human condition, one that can be experienced by any human being and not just by schizophrenic individuals (*ibid.*). In geography, such a criticism is echoed by the words of Bondi, for whom “ontological security and ontological insecurity [are] a continuum along which we all necessarily move, sometimes with great speed, rather than as a binary distinction that locates and fixes each of us within one of two discrete categories” (2014, p. 334).

Ontological Insecurity in this Thesis

Perhaps in contrast to the main trend in geography, in this thesis ontological insecurity is primarily understood through the tradition of existential phenomenology and in line with Laing's wider project. In fact, as I have already mentioned, my intention is to understand the ontological position of subjects who, similarly to Laing's patients, have normally been studied in isolation—as "exceptions" to the right of freedom of movement rather than fully qualified EU citizens (Sardelić, 2019).

Moreover, through the existential-phenomenological framework, I seek connections with other geographers who also drew from this philosophical tradition. In fact, Laing's notion of ontological insecurity evokes—and to some extent encompasses—other concepts deployed by humanistic geographers. For example, it overlaps Relph's notion of "existential outsidership", that is, a "selfconscious and reflective uninvolvedness, an alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging" (1976, p.51), and it opens up to the "landscapes of fear" explored by Tuan—"the almost infinite manifestations of the forces for chaos", which are experienced by the individual as the fear of "an imminent collapse of his world" (1979, p.6-7).

Existentialism and the Answer to the Problem of Ontological Insecurity

Retracing the problem of ontological insecurity to its philosophical roots also allows to take into consideration ways of confronting it. In dealing with this task, existentialist thinkers such as Sartre (2001), Camus (2013), Merleau-Ponty (2002), Buber (2012), Frankl (1985), Boss (1988), and Binswanger (1969) arguably provided the most convincing responses. In order to understand their answers, however, it is necessary to explore some of the recurrent existentialist themes which overlap and underpin Laing's work.

For the existentialists—at least from Heidegger onward—the idea that individuals are "thrown" into the world constitutes the most important assumption about the human condition (Heidegger, 1996; Reynolds, 2014). In this sense, to be human is to experience, from the very outset, the fundamental arbitrariness and irrationality of living. This produces a sense of powerlessness and "alienation" from the external world, which the

individual experiences—as if from the perspective of a stranger—as unintelligible or “uncanny” (Crowell, 2017). Our primordial experience of the world, in this sense, is the one of “not being-at-home” (Heidegger, 1996, p.176).

At this point, the existentialists shift the focus to the problem of meaning. In such circumstances, in fact, the individual’s search for meaning takes place in a world that has no meaning at all. The contemplation of this paradox—which the existentialists call as “the absurd” (Reynolds, 2014)—is a key move that allows a way out from the existential anxieties.

From an existentialist perspective, in fact, the absurd is not a static and essentialising condition. On the contrary, it is strictly linked with a radical conception of freedom. For Sartre, for example, freedom is never constrained by the “facticity” of what we are (Reynolds, 2014, p. 66). In this sense, the contingencies of our existence, such as biological, cultural, social, or political barriers are never limitations to our ability to choose. In fact, for the existentialists there is always—in any given moment—room to interpret facts in different ways, create value, and aspire toward the good.

As such, the condition of ontological security is never a “given”, and it is rather defined by the choices that individuals make. The awareness of these choices and the willingness to take responsibility for them is what brings one to live “authentically” (Crowell, 2017). In this regard, existentialist accounts differ on the way in which the “other” is involved in the individuals’ choices. On one extreme, for example, Sartre famously asserts that “hell is the other people” and is concerned with the negative influence of relationality on the potentiality of the individual (Reynolds, 2014). Others—such as Buber—are very critical of the “fascism of self-autonomy” present in Western thought and stress the fact that individuals are inescapably formed through relations (Spinelli, 2007, p.16). In this regard, I will draw from the work of this latter in order to explain the ways in which individuals attempt to establish meaningful relations. For Buber, in fact, there are two main ways of relating to the world. The first type of relationality—which he calls the “I-it”—entails separation from the world. On the other hand, he defines with the word “I-Thou” a relation that is engaged intimately by equals, who are completely present to each other, and who both feel part of a greater whole. According to Buber, it is only through this latter relationship that individuals can experience creativity, spirituality, transcendence, and genuine growing and becoming (Buber, 2012).

Geographical Concepts

As I have mentioned, phenomenological and existentialist thought significantly informed much of the concepts used in geography. Most notably, the notions of space and place as defined by humanist geographers owe much to these philosophical traditions. For instance, Tuan recognises the human experience in terms of its epistemological function and defines place as “the centre of meaning constructed by experience” (Tuan, 1975, p. 152). On the other hand, he understands space as “that which allows movement” and in terms of openness and freedom (Tuan, 1977, p.6). In these terms, the geographical endeavour to understand how “people attach meaning and organise space and place” (Tuan, 1977, p.5) is an existentialist and phenomenological exercise.

Other humanist geographers have adopted even more explicitly the existentialist and phenomenological concepts. Relph, for instance, considers authenticity “as a form of existence” that “consists of a complete awareness and acceptance of responsibility for your own existence” (Relph 1976, p.78). As such, the authenticity of place is understood as the direct and fully aware experience of what a place really is (*ibid.*). However, the experience of authenticity is discontinuous and manifests with different levels of intensity (*ibid.*). To describe its highest degree, Relph draws from Buber’s idea of the I-Thou relationship. For Relph, an I-Thou relationship with place entails “a total and unselfconscious involvement in which person and place are indissociable” (*ibid.*, p. 79).

While for Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976) place is a result of our giving value to the world and is defined through a comparison with space, other approaches have drawn even more radically from the phenomenology of Heidegger. Malpas (1999) and Casey (2001a) in particular, see space and place as two different orders of reality which are often conflated unclearly. In their view, the latter has ontological primacy, and space is “given from within the structure of place” (Malpas, 2012a, p.227).

Although they do not neglect the fact that subjectivities can change places, both Malpas and Casey reject claims that “in whatever guise” place is a social construct (Harvey, 1993, p. 4). Rather, they endow place with a more fundamental function. As Malpas puts it, “place is instead that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established – place is not founded

on subjectivity, but is rather that on which subjectivity is founded” (1999, p. 35).

In other words, for Malpas the human relation with place is precisely one of being-in-the-world. In such a relation, subjectivities do not only construct places, but are more fundamentally formed through the experience of them. Consequently, both Malpas and Casey emphasise the “place-bound identity of persons” (Malpas, 1999, p.14)—the fact that who we are reflects where we are (Casey, 2001b). From such a perspective, meanings and value are rather created out of the recognition of the demands that our place makes upon us.

2.5 The Good Life

As I have mentioned in the introduction, different understandings of citizenship are underpinned by different ideas of the good life. In supporting different rationales for citizenship, traditional political philosophies have in fact advanced different ideas of “how we should live”. For instance, while liberalism proposes that citizenship should accommodate—from a perspective of neutrality—different ideas of the good life, communitarianism emphasises a shared conception of the good upon which citizenship should be moulded (Eagleton, 1996). Accordingly, citizenship dimensions such as rights and duties can be seen as formalisations of conceptions of the good life.

In Western philosophy, Aristotle was perhaps the first in making an explicit connection between citizenship and the question of the good life. He in fact proposes that the best *polis* (city-state) is the one in which citizens achieve happiness—the natural *telos* of human beings (Reeve, 1998). Since for Aristotle, human beings are by nature “political and social animals”, it is only through living in a *polis* and that they can actualise their potentials (*ibid.* p. xxv-xxvi).

Aristotle is also very aware that the term happiness means different things to different people. In both *Politics* (Reeve, 1998) and *Nicomachean Ethics* (Crisp, 2014), he extensively discusses different ideas of happiness such as the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, honour, before claiming that the good life is ultimately a life of virtue. For Aristotle, the good life can be achieved practically, through the development of moral character—by feeling and

doing the right things, at the right time, “towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (Crisp, 2014, p. 30).

As such, virtue is a situational and visceral knowledge that can only be attained through practice and experience. It is not only a means to an end—as it enables the virtuous person to achieve goals and overcome the challenges and hardships of life—but it is also an end in itself. In fact, in this latter sense, the pursuit of virtue is for Aristotle an inherently pleasant experience, it enables establishing true friendship, and generally allows living the best form of human life—a life of excellence, which Aristotle calls *eudaimonia* (Crisp, 2014).

With this concept in mind, for Aristotle, the goal of a political regime is to cultivate the virtuous character of its citizens, so that they can experience *eudaimonia* (*ibid.*). Such a perspective has been one of the most influential in social sciences. Most notably, the concept of *eudaimonia* has been reinterpreted by scholars such as Sen (1990) and Nussbaum (1988; 1992) and by positive psychologists (Waterman, 1984; Ryff, 1989; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2012). Some of this work is discussed in more detail below.

The Capability Approach

Despite the different contexts in which Aristotelian theory has been applied, the account just mentioned all share—and maintain—the understanding of the good life as an aspiration toward becoming and as an activity. In Sen’s “capability approach”, for example, these aspirations are defined as “functionings” or “doings and beings” that people value (1990, p. 43). According to Sen, the good life is the freedom to achieve these functionings and should be understood in terms of the opportunities (capabilities) to pursue these goals (*ibid.*). These opportunities are substantive and effective (not legal or formal) and allow achieving functionings because of their quality, not because of their quantity (Sen, 1992). In this sense, Sen acknowledges that too much freedom of choice might be detrimental to our ability to achieve what we value, since it forces us to spend time and energies in decisions that we would rather not have to take (*ibid.*).

When it was firstly introduced, Sen’s capability approach had an important impact in discussions around poverty, equality, and inclusion. In fact, it had the merit of opening up these debates to questions of value at a time when

welfare was primarily understood in terms of resources and utilities (Sen, 1980). It in fact recognises that there is a diversity of ideas of the good life and of activities through which people attempt to accomplish these ideas. For this reason, Sen's account is intentionally incomplete and does not provide a list of universal functionings. On the other hand, philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum attempted to fill this gap by proposing a list of essential capabilities (1992). According to Nussbaum, "without an account of the good, however vague, that we can take to be shared, we have no adequate basis for saying what is missing from the lives of the poor or marginalized, or excluded, no adequate way of justifying the claim that any deeply embedded tradition that we encounter is unjust" (*ibid.*, p. 229).

The Good Life in Positive Psychology

Aristotle's writings on *eudaimonia* have exerted enormous influence also in psychology. In particular, this is the case of scholars who attempted going beyond the traditional focus of their discipline, eventually establishing what is now known as the field of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Rather than pathologies, these scholars are driven by an urge to understand how individuals and their communities thrive (*ibid.*). They aim at studying how wellbeing is experienced, including individual traits such as "the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom" but also "civic virtues and institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic" (*ibid.*, p. 5).

In such enterprise, positive psychologists have argued for a differentiation between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Delle Fave *et al.* 2011; Huta and Ryan 2010; Kashdan *et al.* 2008; Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryff and Singer 2008; Waterman 2008). These two forms can be complementary as well as in contraposition to each other. While the former considers wellbeing in terms of pleasure attainment and everyday contentment, the latter includes "the development of a person's best potentials and their application in the fulfilment of personally expressive, self-concordant goals" (Waterman *et al.*, 2010, p. 41). In these terms, eudaimonic well-being is about "self-discovery, perceived development of one's best potentials, a sense of purpose and

meaning in life, intense involvement in activities, investment of significant effort, and enjoyment of activities as personally expressive” (*ibid.*). From this perspective, in order to produce wellbeing, aspirations need to align with one’s “*daimon*” or “true self”, which represents the excellence toward which one strives (Waterman, 2008). In turn, the pursuit of this excellence—which includes the potentialities that are shared by all human beings as well as those that distinguish one individual from another—gives meaning and direction to life (*ibid.*).

In positive psychology, different scholars emphasise different and often overlapping components of eudaimonic wellbeing. However, they all tend to consider satisfaction and positive affect as a by-product of the eudaimonic experience. For instance, Ryff and Singer mention autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (2008). Similarly, Ryan and Deci identify three fundamental psychological needs in their self-determination theory: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (2001). When satisfied, these needs produce the flourishing of the individual as a result (*ibid.*).

Pentecostalism as the Good Life

Pentecostalism is a global and heterogeneous Christian movement, which appeared in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its development is understood by scholars as in response to the changes brought by globalisation (Csordas, 1992; Fosztó, 2019). In all Europe, this movement is becoming increasingly influential. Especially among Romani communities, rates of conversion are currently outgrowing those of any other religion (Thurfjell and Marsh, 2014).

Among the Roma, this movement started spreading during the fifties, meeting the spiritual needs following the Nazi genocide (Laurent, 2014; Strand, 2014). In Romania and Bulgaria, Pentecostalism became particularly popular during the nineties (Wachsmuth, 2017). During this period—and as a result of the migration of the post-communist era—Romanian Pentecostals founded churches also in England and Germany (*ibid.*). As we shall see, for the Pentecostal participants of this study, these churches are important places of congregation, which allow individuals to establish a full connection with God and their religious community.

The study of Pentecostalism as a source of ideas of the good life allows important insights in the dynamics of Roma inclusion and exclusion. In Eastern Europe, in fact, Pentecostal churches play an important (and conflicting) role in connecting the Roma and the majority population (Thurfjell and Marsh, 2014). While these churches help the Roma accessing the labour and housing market, the adherence to Pentecostalism is also seen as a statement against the dominant national identity (*ibid.*). Moreover, in contexts where Romani rights activism is undertaken with a secular orientation, the presence of Roma Pentecostals has created some tensions (*ibid.*). Pentecostalism is in fact the only stream of Christianity in which positions of leadership are occupied by the Roma (Acton, 2014)

Some of the religious practices that characterise Pentecostalism are conversion, preaching, speaking in tongues (glossolalia), prayers and singing (Fosztó, 2019). Conversion, in particular, is at the basis of the Pentecostal faith. Rather than at birth, it is practised in the adulthood and experienced as a choice of commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus (*ibid.*). Through baptism into water, the convert receives the “gift of the Holy Spirit” and his or her past of sins is believed to be washed away (*ibid.* p.3). In this process, the convert is “born again” as a new, moral, and Christian person (*ibid.*). At the centre of this new self-identity there is an “open” hearth, which allows establishing meaningful relationships with the divine, but also with other members of the religious community in terms of brotherhood or sisterhood (*ibid.* p.5).

In these terms, the practice of conversion is inherently an aspiration toward meaningful change. Although primarily an individual transformation, for Pentecostals, born-again persons can also bring change in the community and social relations (Wachsmuth, 2017). In fact, transformed selves carry important virtues such as sincerity, modesty, reliability, which also constitute the foundation of Pentecostal leadership (Fosztó, 2019).

In the Pentecostal system of values, family responsibilities are also emphasised. Although promoting the patriarchal model of family, Pentecostalism arguably improves gender relations and the position of women, since it reinforces their role of organising and supervising the family life and it provides them with a supporting community (Podolinská, 2014; Fosztó, 2019). Moreover, violence among men is disapproved. Respect and recognition are rather gained through the models of the good provider and missionary (Fosztó, 2019).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed literature that will help understand the Romanian Roma as EU citizens. Firstly, I have discussed who is the EU citizen presenting four possible ontologies. Secondly, I have provided a discussion of what it means to be a Roma in the historical and cultural context of Romania and in a transnational context. Thirdly, I have shifted the attention on phenomenological and existentialist literature which will allow understanding the relationship between Romanian Roma and their experience of reality.

As I propose, the Romanian Roma can be understood in terms of their marginal citizenship and condition of ontological insecurity, but also as individuals who do not experience this condition passively and rather perceive and project meaning in their lived realities. Such meanings, I suggest, can also be understood as ideas of the good life that the Romanian Roma attempt to pursue.

The last section of this chapter deals precisely with these ideas, presenting two existing frameworks for their analysis—the philosophical and psychological understandings of the concept of *eudaimonia* on the one hand, and the more empirical literature on Romani Pentecostalism on the other. Although very different from each other, both these bodies of literature will allow understanding the good life as experienced by the Romanian Roma.

Chapter Three: Methodology

*“It is not the clay the potter throws,
which gives the pot its usefulness,
but the space within the shape,
from which the pot is made.” (Lao-Tzu, 1984, section 11)*

3.1 Research Challenges and Limitations:

One can perhaps read the words of the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu as an invitation to not only accept the constraints of existence, but to recognise them as a form of potential. As such, the metaphor is well-suited to elucidate the nature of research limitations. It elicits in fact a more profound appreciation, whereby these are not seen as impediments, but rather as demands for the constitution of new knowledge. It is in this spirit that I would like to describe and account for the methodological choices I have made along the study. In doing so, my aim is to ensure the credibility and integrity of my contribution.

Needless to say, research is never—as the final product suggests—a linear process. Rather, as it was pointed out, the researcher engages in a “real inner drama... with its intuitive base, its halting time-line, and its extensive recycling of concepts and perspectives” (Bargar and Duncan, 1982, p.2). My study has been no exception. I would like to recall, at this point, the research design process. It is in fact at this first stage that I had to make decisions which then proved crucial for the development of the project as well as for spawning new challenges.

Challenges in Research Design

This study is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project framed by the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre (WRDTC). Right from the start, it was focused on A2 migration. At the beginning of the project, I conducted interdisciplinary reviews of two—very broad—bodies of

literature. These reviews included theoretical accounts on citizenship (with particular attention to EU citizenship) and empirical research on migration from Romania and Bulgaria to the EU. As I became more and more interested in the relationships among meaning, citizenship, experience and migration, I decided to cast a preliminary research net. The aim at this point was to gain information that could have informed the research project by merging knowledge of what is interesting with what is accessible (Crang and Cook, 2007).

As a first step, I decided to approach a wide range of organisations working with migrants of various backgrounds. I made contact with at least ten of them. Most of these organisations were NGOs set up with the general aim of promoting social care. They provided support, for example, through free English courses, assistance with legal and financial advices or by organising cultural and informative events aimed at reaching various typologies of migrants. More specifically, however, I arranged meetings with three practitioners based in the same big city of Northern England who had experience working with A2 migrants and showed interest in my research topic. During these meetings, I had the possibility to discuss my academic interests *vis-à-vis* the experiences of those who were already “in the field”.

Although I was potentially interested in accessing Bulgarian migrants—a group that received relatively less scholarly attention—soon it became clear to me that I would have had very little possibility to access them. At least the practitioners I had met, in fact, had much more contacts with migrants from Romania, including ethnic Roma. This can be partly explained by the much higher growing trend of the Romanian population in the UK (see figure 3.1).

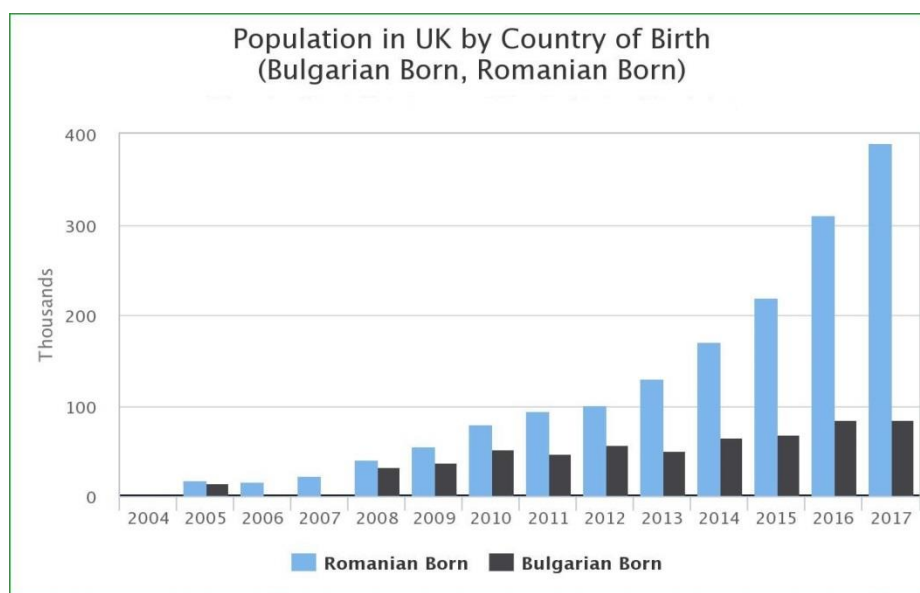


Figure 3.1: Romanian and Bulgarian Born Population in UK (Source: Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Both accessibility and rapidly growing trend, however, were not the only two reasons that led my focus toward Romanian nationals. My curiosity was particularly piqued by the complex relations between “Romanian” and “Roma” identities, an interest which also practitioners seemed to share.

There are indeed reasons for being concerned about the relations between these two groups. Firstly, as I have discussed in chapter two (section 2.3), a significant historical account of Roma exclusion and discrimination has been contextualised specifically in the Romanian society (Achim, 2013; Crețu, 2014; McDonald, 1999). Secondly, I have also mentioned (section 1.4) that since Romania joined the EU the relations between these two identities have exacerbated, and freedom of movement is seen to have produced new layers of “othering” (Mădroane, 2012; Kaneva and Popescu, 2013; Briggs and Dobre, 2014).

These considerations—which were discussed with the practitioners I had met—led me to envisage a participatory project that would have involved both Romanian and Romanian Roma participants. What emerged in these conversations was in fact a picture in which both the practitioners and I saw the urgency of “change”, and the participatory approach, in this sense, offered a promising way to go about it. Moreover, I had so far established positive contacts with people working with both groups, and access seemed not to be an insurmountable problem.

The practitioners' feedback on the idea was positive and encouraging, however, after having spent about six months on the project I had clear evidence that my research design was doomed to fail. The reasons for this failure were—in practice—essentially twofold. The first was my complete inexperience with participatory methodologies; the second was the overwhelming amount of time, financial resources and energies that such a project would have entailed. It was all too ambitious to be feasible.

In the move towards the realm of doing I had not paid attention, paradoxically, to what the practitioners were actually doing. I had in fact merely merged their interests with mine, leaving aside the practicalities of their work. At this point it was clear to me that my project needed some major amendments, both conceptual and methodological. I re-designed the project with the word “feasibility” in mind and with more awareness of my personal skills and time limitations.

These mistakes were perhaps a manifestation of a more profound moral dilemma lagging behind my consideration. My commitment to a participatory approach would have involved, in fact, a reconsideration of the *telos* of my own process of knowledge production. What values was I committed to? Was I doing research in the name of social justice or truth? Moral psychologists and some sociologists are in fact increasingly showing how these two values could be in conflict with each other (Haidt, 2012; Smith, 2014; Martin, 2016; Winegard and Winegard, 2018; Horowitz *et al.* 2018). The uncritical commitment to values such as change and equality—they argue—has resulted in the “sacralisation⁴” of vulnerable and minority groups, and consequently in hampered understandings of these realities (Haidt, 2012; Horowitz *et al.* 2018).

In line with these critiques, my decision to take a step back from a participatory approach is also a choice of clarity regarding the purposes

⁴ Drawing from Durkheim, Haidt has considered sacredness as a foundational element of his theory of morality and stressed that we have evolved as moral tribes bound by sacred symbols and rituals (2012). According to Haidt, we make moral judgements intuitively—through quick, involuntary and automatic responses—and gravitate toward our own emotive community (*ibid.*). In these terms, the “sacred” is not strictly understood as a religious phenomenon, but it is considered whenever people (in this case researchers) jointly address a matter of moral concern.

served by the knowledge produced through my research. It is a choice that reflects a deliberate commitment to a hierarchy of values which puts truth above equality and change, albeit not diminishing these other two. As it will be later clear, however, this is not a commitment to a positivist ontology (the view that we live in a world of objects and these can be objectively described). Rather, I intend truth as an embodied and enacted process. It is the continuous practice of being truthful to the way phenomena are perceived and experienced, as well as the commitment to take responsibility for the way they are described.

3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings — A Humanist Approach

With these last considerations in mind my new research design aligned more closely to humanist approaches in geography which focus on the study of meanings, values, goals and purposes (Entrikin, 1976). Here I am referring, in particular, to scholars such as Buttimer (1974), Tuan (1976), Relph (1976), and Malpas (1999) who grounded their work in the study of the human condition and share the common goal of raising society's level of consciousness (Tuan, 1976).

To better understand this perspective, perhaps a digression in the domain of philosophy is necessary. As I have mentioned, humanist geographers were largely influenced by the work of phenomenologists and existentialists such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre who sought to overcome the positivist division between subject and object. In the understanding of these philosophers, this separation led to misconceive the human condition because it implied the existence of an external world which is categorically different from ourselves. Instead, these philosophers proposed that we are never apart from the content of our consciousness, and that reality is not constituted by external objects but rather by our experience of the world (Magee, 2000).

These philosophical underpinnings endow humanist geography with a holistic vision but also—as some have argued—with a lack of a clearly defined methodology (Smith, 1984; Entrikin, 1976; Hubbard *et al.*, 2002). Most of these critiques stem from positivist perspectives which are contingent on the separation between philosophy and methodology (Harvey, 1969). Unlike positivists, however, for humanist geographers

these two branches overlap, and questions about methodology are rather seen as epistemological (Sapkota, 2017). As a result, a humanist methodology can be better understood as “an epistemology of the heart [which] concerns knowledge acquired by union or communion... founded on an intimate engagement, an intimate sensing” (Pocock, 1996: 379).

In other words, by stressing our being-in-the-world humanist geographers seek methods “of encounter” which allow to elicit “the emotional, aesthetic and symbolic ties that bound people and place” (Hubbard *et al.* 2002, p.41). Humanist methods are therefore designed to maintain the richness and variety of the lived experience, including that of the researcher. This last is never conceived as an objective observer, but rather as an embodied being never apart from the subject studied.

A Humanist Ethnography?

Ethnographic methods are particularly well suited for the purposes and concerns indicated above. They produce data as a result of a relational encounter where both the people studied and the researcher/ethnographer are given the opportunity to account for their embodied subjectivities. However, here there are clarifications that need to be made, as it is not my intention to frame this study as an ethnographic approach in the anthropological tradition.

As originally developed by anthropologists, ethnography does not simply imply a collection of methods, but also an anthropological theory of culture (Nader, 2011; Spradley, 2016). Throughout the years, however, the term ethnography has been used across disciplines in a variety of ways and has lost any standardised meaning (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Scholars have in fact moulded ethnographic practices to fit particular contexts or purposes (Marcus, 1995; Knoblauch, 2005; Pink and Morgan, 2013) or blended it with different philosophical traditions (Schutz, 1967; Masemann, 1982; Prus, 1995).

With regards to phenomenology, the sociologist Alfred Schutz (1967) is probably the most influential ethnographer. Throughout his work, he applied the *epoché*—Husserl’s method of “bracketing” the content of perception—and engaged actively with the phenomenological and existential philosophers. Humanist geographers, on the other hand, have been more interested in the category of experience and did not always engage with

other philosophical concerns (Johnston and Sidaway 1979). Moreover, they have produced only a small number of ethnographic studies documenting the attachment of people to place (Ley, 1974; Rowles, 1978; Western, 1981). These ethnographies are now considered turning points in geographical inquiry; however, they make very little use of phenomenological philosophy or methods (Cloke *et al.*, 2004).

How I Used Ethnographic Methods

It is perhaps fair to say that my approach has been—both in theory and practice—an “opportunistic ethnography”. By “opportunistic” I mean that I have practised ethnography only as long as it allowed facilitating the human encounter. Moreover, I have not espoused its theoretical and moral standpoints, unless these were clearly converging within an existential and phenomenological framework. As a result, my approach has been different from that of a traditional ethnographer in many ways.

First of all, unlike traditional ethnography, I did not spend an extended period of time in a remote cultural context. Rather, I have collected data through short-term visits in key spaces and places which felt “familiar” in many aspects. These visits included attendance to public events but also participation to everyday-life and more intimate activities such as family gatherings and dinners. Eighteen semi-structured interviews constituted the main source of data. Additionally, these interviews were enriched by fieldnotes of informal conversations, observations and personal reflections as well as by other textual data gathered during events or provided by participants.

During my fieldwork I barely went through a process of acculturation. In this sense, my aim was not specifically to learn seeing things “through the insider’s eyes”. This, in fact, does not automatically give better insights in the lived experience (Kusenbach, 2003, p.461). Accordingly, I did not embody the role of a “student-child” (Agar, 1996) or “apprentice” (Downey *et al.*, 2015) as a strategy to learn cultural behaviour. My mode of engagement with the participants was more similar to the “existentially aware geographer” pinpointed by Buttimer (1974), who is “less interested in establishing intellectual control over man through preconceived analytical methods than he is in encountering people and situations in an open, inter-subjective manner” (1974, p.24). This does not simply mean, as Agar

(1996) suggests, to surrender to the control of the situation as a way to learn how people interpret the world. Nor, does it imply a strict moral commitment—often taken by anthropologists (Kats and Csordas, 2003)—to the perspectives of the subject studied. Quite the contrary, it means acting as a “provocateur” who stimulates “consciousness raising” by helping subjects to achieve a better understanding of themselves and to realise their potential (Buttimer, 1979). In fact, my engagement through speech, actions, or simply bodily presence often caused Heideggerian “breakdowns” (Dreyfus, 1991) in the way my participants experienced the world. That is, moments in which unreflective practice—the ready-to-hand—is interrupted and aspects of the world that are normally not articulated and elude awareness are brought “into view” as present-at-hand.

3.3 Challenges in Access and Recruitment

One of the main changes in my new research design was the sharpening of the focus on only one of the two groups mentioned before. As I have discussed previously, I chose to focus on Romanians ethnic Roma living in the UK because—more than any other category of EU citizens—this group is at the centre of debates on the limits and potentials of EU citizenship. As such, this was theoretically an easy choice, but methodologically a much more challenging one.

Difficulties in accessing Roma groups are in fact widely known and documented across Europe and are generally associated with the long history of disadvantage, rejection, slavery and genocide (Mayall, 2004; Brown and Scullion, 2009; Wallengren and Mellgren, 2015; Zawacki, 2017; Powell and Lever, 2017). This condition of perennial “outsiders” has caused the Roma to mistrust the majority society and its institutions (Huber, 1993; Parekh and Rose, 2011; Wallengren and Mellgren, 2015). As a result, building trust is often highlighted as the main challenge when approaching this community (Scullion and Brown, 2013; Ofsted, 2014).

Building Trust

Despite my change of plans, I had maintained contact with the three practitioners I mentioned before. With one of them in particular—the executive director of a small NGO—my rapport continued to flourish. Since the first time we met he was genuinely interested in my research topic, and I kept him regularly informed about my progress. He was also the most enthusiastic about the initial idea of a participatory project and I had been honest with him when I had to set it aside. He understood my motivations and remained interested in the development of my project.

This practitioner, in particular, would often email me when he knew about events relevant to my interest. To some of these I would participate actively as a volunteer and as a temporary member of his NGO. My participation was beneficial for both. For his small NGO, the simple presence of a PhD student coming from another city meant showing increased impact and reach; and clearly, for me these events were an opportunity to expand my research network.

However, it was not just my participation to these events, but more importantly the trustworthy relationship I had built with this particular practitioner that proved crucial when I accessed my first gatekeeper. In fact, similarly to the experiences of other ethnographers (Agar, 1996, p.81), my reputation was passed along, and I also made friends with Claudia⁵, another practitioner and Romanian Roma activist who then became my first point of access to the Roma community.

In order to cultivate my friendship with Claudia, I did not present myself any differently than I did before. Before asking if she wanted to be interviewed, I firstly showed interest in the events she organised together with the NGO she was working for. Like other volunteers, I attended these events and tried to make myself useful by helping her in their preparation. My help consisted in simple practical tasks such as decorating a Christmas tree, arranging chairs and tables, or distributing biscuits and water to other attendees.

⁵ All participants' names have been pseudonymised. See section 3.10 for further details about the anonymisation procedure.

Claudia was a highly social and charismatic person. Since the first time I met her, she showed a clear disposition to help and solve problems. However, during the events she was always extremely busy, and it was difficult to find her available even for a chat. Nonetheless, after some time she invited me to her home, asked other Roma people to come over, and offered me a perfect location to conduct interviews. As a way to recognise her efforts I would sometimes bake a cake—which was particularly enjoyed by her three kids—or bring chocolates and sweets.

3.4 Sampling Strategies

One of the few things that remained unchanged in the new research design was my sampling strategy. Since the very first draft, in fact, I had planned to recruit participants through snowball sampling, a strategy through which participants themselves refer the researcher to other potential participants. Snowballing is generally employed when high levels of trust are required to initiate contact (i.e. hard to reach, hidden or vulnerable groups) (Atkinson and Flint, 2004), and it has been proven productive especially when recruiting among ethnic minorities (Hughes *et al.*, 1995). As such, this seemed the perfect strategy for the context and subject of my study.

It must be said, however, that at least in my case snowballing was not always applicable and succeeded only three times. In most cases participants were disinterested in allowing me access to their networks. They rather referred me back to Claudia. As a result, I had to make the most out of those participants who were helpful in expanding my network; and, in doing so, I ended up consolidating their relationships more than others.

The problems with snowballing are not finished yet. Even when it is successful, the researcher is faced with serious limitations. One problem is in fact that participants might impose their own, often unclear sampling preferences. This might restrict the variety of the accessed sample and undermine its representativeness (Atkinson and Flint, 2004). In my research, evidence of this problem is clear, for example, when Claudia openly mentions why she referred me to a specific participant:

“That's why I chose [Rodica]. Because [Rodica] has worked in an area where mens does the kind of work, and she said, "I can do it. No matter that I am not a man and I'm a woman. I can do it." She do the same things that mens do. Wash a car, move it, get the things movin' around and she's the same thing.”

Here the limitations are partly addressed because I had established enough confidence with Claudia that it never felt uncomfortable to negotiate or at least ask explanations about her choices. Moreover, the fact that her motivations—as in the excerpt above—were always clearly expressed and not “obscure” allowed me to adopt some targeted strategies of mitigation (discussed in section 3.6).

Nonetheless, Claudia seemed to understand that my aim was not simply to recruit a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, and economic status. More importantly, and in line with a humanist approach, my sample needed to include a diversity of perspectives and lived experiences. In these terms, Claudia's preference for someone who she perceives as challenging the traditional gender roles of her community can be also read as an attempt to include different ways of being-in-the-world.

As such, Claudia's active engagement with my research clearly played in my favour by stretching the variety of the sample. At the same time, however, her perceptions, values, beliefs and willingness to protect her community needed to be balanced by a different perspective. In fact, it became increasingly clear to me—and this is again exemplified in the excerpt above—that she was finding it difficult to separate her activist self from her active engagement in my research.

As way to mitigate this “gatekeeper bias” (Groger and Mayberry, 1999; Atkinson and Flint, 2001) and other problems of representativeness, I recruited new participants through another gatekeeper, Gabriel, who had a very different worldview, personality, life interests and awareness of his role.

In total, nine participants were recruited through Claudia and five through Gabriel. One participant was not accessed through these networks but unfortunately did not refer me to others. Finally, besides the cases of Claudia and Gabriel, snowballing was successful only with one other participant (see figure 3.2).

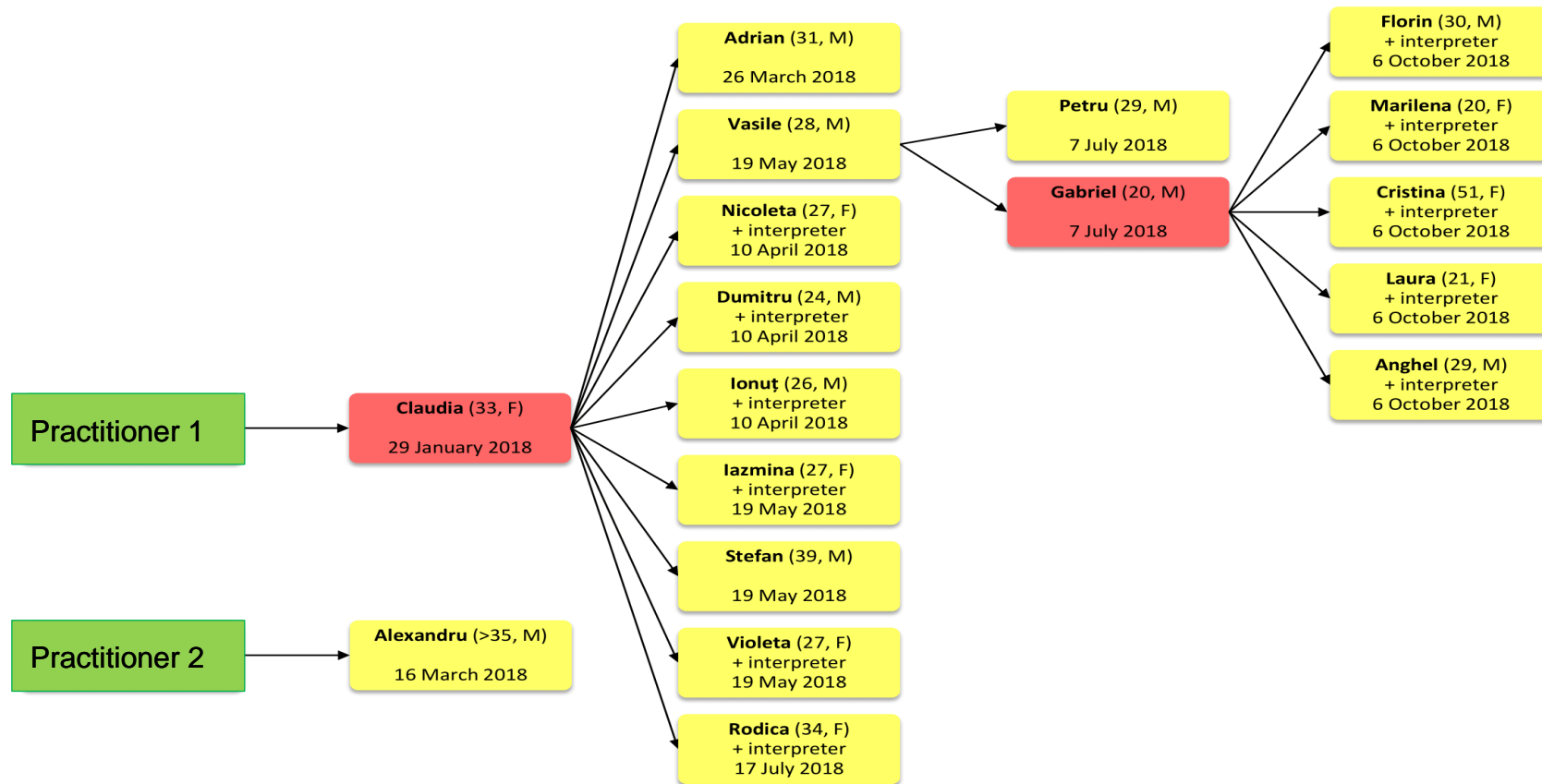


Figure 3.2: A network map of the sample. Interview dates are indicated below the pseudonyms.

Sample

All participants were adult Romanian Roma aged from twenty to fifty-one, ten men and eight women. At the time of the interview, they were all living in the same city and had been living in the UK for approximately more than one year. This last criteria was applied quite loosely⁶, and it was only meant to guarantee that participants had enough migrant lived experience to talk about.

Although a great deal of control about who to include under the term “Roma” was entrusted to the gatekeepers, I had opportunities to clarify with them the meaning of this word. In a conversation we had during an event, for example, Claudia shared some insights on her culture. In her perception, there were two kinds of Roma: those who had maintained their culture and traditions (including her) and those who had “forgotten” them. According to Claudia, the best way to distinguish one group from the other was to look at the way women dressed. One could tell the difference because women from the first group would wear long and colourful skirts, while women from second group had conformed to the western dress-code. Despite these differences, however, she insisted that all the people she had invited that day were Roma.

On the other hand, Gabriel and the participants recruited through his network not only did not identify themselves as a Roma, but rather seemed derisive of this term. When I asked if they were Roma, for example, one of them answered back sarcastically, asking if I was referring to the city of Rome. He added that his mom was *țigan* (gypsy), but also that she did not really question who she was. The word *țigan* was used seemingly with neutral connotation, however, this ethnic background was never disclosed spontaneously. Another participant—the one who was recruited through a different practitioner and the most highly educated of my sample—seemed to use the word *țigan* (gypsy) rather with a negative connotation.

⁶ At the time of the interview, all participants considered themselves as settled in the UK. Dimitru was the participant who spent the shortest time in this country (nine months) and Ionuț the longest (ten years).

3.5 Pilot Stage and Interview Design

As I previously mentioned, this study relies mainly on the data collected through semi-structured interviews. Before these interviews took place, I conducted five pilot interviews with the aim of refining the interview questions as well as my interviewing skills. At this stage I interviewed five people. Four of these were my friends or colleagues⁷ and another one was a Romanian migrant (not Roma) who was reached by snowballing personal acquaintances. During the pilot stage my questions proved effective in producing a conversational narrative and very few amendments were made.

My final interview guide (see appendix A) was quite rich of prepared questions, which however I have never followed strictly. At the moment of conducting the interviews, in fact, I rather tried to establish an intersubjective dialogue with my participants, and most of the times I was more led by their answers than by my interview guide. This conversational approach allowed me to follow participants in their interests, and—as it has been suggested (Lee, 1993)—to build more equal relationships.

Despite the flexibility, my interviews were also structured to some extent. In all the eighteen interviews data about age, occupation and length of stay in the UK were collected at the beginning through short-answer questions. Additionally, I made sure that all the interviewees had a chance to discuss four main themes. All of them, in fact, were led to reflect on their personal experiences of moving to the UK, their engagement in meaningful activities, their perceived and experienced obstacles to these activities, and finally on the differences and similarities of their way of living before and after migration.

3.6 Challenges in Interviewing – Catching the Moment

When I began interviewing I was not planning to rush participants in interviews, and I even had in mind a procedure to recruit them during the events. In fact, despite the revised research design, I was still attending these for purposes of recruitment and data collection. Ideally, I would have

⁷ Not Romanians and not Roma, chosen on the basis of their different interests and lifestyles.

approached participants spontaneously and established a genuine talk aimed at building rapport. Finally, if interested in the research topic, participants would have had agreed with me a time and location according to their convenience.

In reality, however, the things went very differently. The most successful recruitment procedure could be summarised as follows: whenever Claudia found people who were interested in being interviewed she would give me a call or send me a text. Early in the morning, she would ask me if I was available to come over to her city on the same day, which surely I was, otherwise there would have been few chances to meet these potential participants another time. Recruitment, in my research, was more a matter of “catching the moment”, by conducting interviews “on the spot”, often with more people in the same day.

Interview Settings

Three interviews were conducted in public spaces, two just after having attended an event (Claudia’s and Rodica’s) and one in a café (Alexandru’s). The rest of the participants were interviewed at their, at their friends’, or at their relatives’ homes. I have already mentioned that Claudia made her home available for me to conduct interviews, and I interviewed four participants there. Additionally, another six participants were interviewed at Vasile’s place and another five in Florin’s house. All these interviews took place in settings which were familiar to participants. The home setting—as it has been suggested—helps participants to feel more relaxed and in control of the situation (Valentine, 1997). Moreover, I personally preferred interviewing in a home environment as it generally allowed me, with less external distractions, to perform better as an interviewer and to obtain better sound quality in the recordings.

Claudia’s Interview

Claudia was the first person I interviewed. Despite the fact that I had already built a good rapport with her, this interview proved challenging for various reasons. First of all, the interview was not conducted in a quiet environment; it was during a formal event—mostly attended by members of the civil society such as NGO workers, activists, politicians—in which she was

awarded a prize for her commitment as a community worker. Secondly, she mentioned she felt sick in that moment, and although I had offered to suspend the interview she preferred to continue. Like two other interviews which were also conducted in public spaces, this one was conducted in a limited amount of time, through various interruptions and persistent background noise. Finally, her husband sat next to her, and this raised other methodological concerns.

Although it was not certainly my intention to conduct a joint interview, I was initially concerned about whether Claudia's answers could have been influenced by the presence of her husband. It is suggested, in fact, that the presence of others, especially family members, has necessarily an impact on what can be asked and responded (Weiss, 1995). This led me to consider—at least for a moment—the possibility of a joint interview.

The question of whether couples should be interviewed together or separately has been widely debated by qualitative researchers (Bennett and McAvity, 1992; Hertz, 1995). On the one hand, conducting separate interviews allows more freedom for individual views; on the other, with joint interviews the researcher can shed light on the “shared realities” of the relationship and on processes of mediation and negotiation (Valentine, 1999). As Valentine suggest, however, the latter comes also with the risk that both interviewees would try to “protect the backstage” from the view of the interviewer (*ibid.* pp. 70-71).

It soon became clear, at least in this case, that joint interviewing was not the right strategy to use. Claudia's husband started using his smartphone and looked rather disinterested in the conversation. And my apprehensions about how to conduct the interview—at least in this regard—finally disappeared when Claudia asserted quite vehemently “*I am an independent woman and I work for myself, yes!*” making clear that she wanted to be represented as having a leading role in the couple.

The situation I encountered during this first interview, however, was only an exceptional case. After I had disclosed my preference for one-to-one interviews, in fact, Claudia asserted that it would have not been possible for me to interview women without the presence of her (a trustworthy person) or their husbands, and she framed this obligation in cultural terms. Moreover, as I mentioned before, all the interviews were conducted in spaces and places in which I had no authority or control to decide who could have

accessed them. As a result, all interviews (except one) have been conducted with the presence of family members or friends, who would often enter the conversation suggesting answers or commenting on the interviewee's point of view. Following Wiess (1995), who suggests that, in these situations, the best strategy would be to include everyone else in the conversation, I did not make any particular attempt to silence these "intrusive" voices, but I rather used them to obtain further data. Moreover, in at least three cases it seemed reasonable to even recruit these voices, since they showed interest and qualified for the study.

Language and Interpreters

The challenges in accessing the Roma, I have mentioned, included the problem of establishing trust, which is regarded as a direct consequence of the Roma exclusion from society. In the context of this research, however, such a problem was also a result of a more practical language problem. Since I was not fluent enough to hold conversations in Romanian (the participants' first language), I decided to conduct interviews in English. The majority of the participants (eleven) did not speak English and required interpreting. Another four decided to be interviewed without interpreters, but occasionally had difficulties understanding some of my questions or expressing themselves. Only three of them (including Claudia and Gabriel) showed relatively exceptional fluency in English. The choice of the gatekeepers—and the fact that I had success in establishing trust especially with them—was greatly determined by this factor.

The mutually reinforcing obstacles of trust and language complicated my approach to interviewing and required me taking some risks. In particular, I am referring to the decision of recruiting my gatekeepers (Claudia and Gabriel) also as interpreters during interviews with close friends and family members—a very problematic choice.

Although some similarities with regards to sex, culture, religion, or age should be considered in order to choose the right interpreter (Edwards, 1998), the recruitment of family members for this task is generally discouraged for at least two reasons. Firstly, participants might not feel comfortable with some topics of discussion due to the fact that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed; secondly, as interpreters, family members will tend to avoid translating information that could compromise the reputation of their

family (*ibid.*). For such a role, trained interpreters and professionals are generally deemed a more appropriate choice (*ibid.*).

According to these indications, in my research, the optimal person for the job should have been a trained Romanian speaking interpreter—better if Roma—who was yet an outsider to the close social network of the participants. Due to the complicated ethnic relations between Roma and Romanians, I could not have recruited any Romanian (non-Roma) interpreter. The chances to find the right person for the job among the Roma were indeed very low. Moreover, even if I had met a qualified Roma interpreter, arranging interviews with a third person would have created further complications. As I have discussed, recruitment was already a matter of seizing the moment, and the presence of a third person could have brought even more challenges to the process of establishing trust.

Due to these issues, I decided to adopt a different strategy of mitigation. I rather attempted, to the best possible extent, to understand the subjectivities of my gatekeepers and their influence in the interpretation tasks. To some extent, knowing my gatekeepers and their motivations allowed me to identify and address their biases.

Such an approach aligns to the work of scholars who have reflected on the role of interpreters in social research (Edwards, 1998; Temple and Young, 2004). While translation is often assumed as a value-free practice—one in which the interpreter takes an unbiased and neutral position—these researchers argue that neutrality is neither possible nor desirable (Temple and Young, 2004). This is because of the relationship between language and power and the fact there is no single “correct” translation (Foucault, 1970; Derrida, 1978).

More importantly, these scholars also acknowledge that language and culture are inseparable (Edwards, 1998; Temple and Young, 2004). Since different languages also imply different ways of seeing the world, translation is not only a matter of linguistic structures, but it also involves “understanding the way language is tied to local realities, literary forms, and changing identities” (Simon, 1996, p.137-8). In these terms, interpreters are better understood as a “cultural brokers” (Temple and Young, 2004, p.171) or “key informants” (Edwards, 1998, p.203) and deserve visibility whenever they are involved in the research process.

Claudia as an Interpreter

The choice of hiring Claudia as an interpreter was convenient, as I mentioned, because I had built good friendship with her and she was fluent in English (as well as in Spanish). Additionally, she also had previous experience of collaborating in research projects as an interpreter and was not new to the duties involved in such a role. When asked to take part in the research project, Claudia accepted with a genuine spirit of friendship. She had no interest in getting paid, and I had to insist in order to get her formally hired by the University of Leeds and compensated for the task.

An agreement on the translation duties was reached with regards to three main points. Firstly, we agreed that she had to translate any verbal exchange as faithfully as possible; secondly, that she would refrain from taking an active role during the interviews; thirdly, that she would maintain the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

Despite these arrangements, Claudia's subjectivity was very present during the research and had both positive and negative effects on the data collected through the interviews. For instance, in some cases she suggested that I ask questions which were not in my interview guide or gave me further clarifications when answers were not clear. While this helped (especially when interviewees were not particularly talkative) on other occasions she was more obstructive. For instance, as a Christian—but not Pentecostal—once she felt uncomfortable translating some rather sensitive religious experiences. Although the interviewee was clearly open and eager to discuss these, I had to refrain from exploring them because of Claudia. Moreover, despite our agreement, Claudia could not always perform professionally. In one occasion—Rodica's interview, which was conducted during an event—she left in the middle of the interview as she was busy organising the event. She asked a young boy—whom I knew very little about—to momentarily take her place while she was away.

Such circumstances were difficult to foresee and required me to adopt further strategies for evaluating the accuracy and reliability of the translations. In this regard, the choice of GoTranscript⁸—a multilingual

⁸ Accessible at www.gotranscript.com.

transcription service that provided me with the transcription of both Romanian and English speech—served to clear doubts about mistranslations, hidden information, and interpreter bias. Moreover, the transcriptions in Romanian allowed me to consider comments of people who were present during the interviews and to have a clearer understanding of all the on-going interactions. The presence of “intrusive” voices in the recordings was particularly noticeable in the interviews conducted with Gabriel as an interpreter. On that occasion, five participants have been interviewed on the same day, one after another.

Throughout this thesis the excerpts in Romanian have been translated in English and presented to the reader with a different font. In order to avoid redundancy, these verbal exchanges have been included selectively—depending on their ability to provide further evidence, contextual information, or important insights in the interactions among researcher, participant, interpreter, and other intrusive voices.

Gabriel as an Interpreter

So far I have discussed the motivations for hiring Claudia as an interpreter and the challenges involved in this choice. I have also mentioned that the recruitment of Gabriel as a gatekeeper was due to the need of balancing Claudia’s impact on the research project with a very different subjectivity.

My decision to recruit him as an interpreter was driven by similar pragmatic considerations—his exceptional fluency in English. With respect to the agreement of the interpreting responsibilities, his role in the research process was no different to that of Claudia. Like her, he was formally hired through the University of Leeds and compensated for the service.

Perhaps even more than Claudia—who was rather used to interacting with researchers—Gabriel seemed to understand, on a more visceral level, the concept of fieldwork and the purpose of my research project. In fact, through excerpts taken from his interview, it will be clear that he had a genuine interest in understanding different cultures and ways of living. Such a meeting point of perspectives surely facilitated his positive involvement in my research.

Moreover, when I met Gabriel he had just returned from a volunteering experience in Africa. Through participation to this Pentecostal “mission”, he

had clearly gained consideration among his family and broader community—it was because of that experience, after all, that other participants referred me to him. This reputation of “good Christian” was not only significant with regards to his role of gatekeeper, but it also allowed me to account for views that were little explored in interviews conducted with Claudia.

3.7 Researcher’s Positionality

In the recent decades, scholars have increasingly reflected on their own position with respect to the research encounter. They have acknowledged that they do not enter the field as *tabula rasa* but that their subjectivities “become entangled in the lives of others” (Denzin, 1997, p. 27). In this sense, as the people who are studied, researchers themselves carry cultural predispositions and are entangled in relations of ethnicity, gender, class, and age (Okely, 1994; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). This complicates fixed notions of “insiders” and “outsiders” (Merton, 1972). Especially in transnational contexts, migrants do not fit neatly in these two categories (Ryan, 2010; 2015). As a result, some have argued for the concept of “multiple positionalities” in order to understand the situated and ever-shifting boundaries between positions of insider and outsider (Kilkey *et al.*, 2013a; Ryan, 2015).

From this latter perspective, the researcher is encouraged to provide a more nuanced account of his or her positionality as well as of that of others. In this regard, some of the success I had in establishing trust was indeed due to being an insider in some respects. As I have mentioned, being a NGO volunteer (however temporarily) and sharing the same interests were crucial to establish relationships with the gatekeepers. My personal experience of migration and distance from family were also something that participants would appeal in order to answer my questions:

Petru: Is normal, you know? Is a family. You don't have a family now, no?

Antonio: No, I have a family.

Petru: You have? And how is it? Is the same? You love them, yeah?

At the same time, however, I was an outsider in many ways. For Alexandru, I was a fellow academic, but not a Roma, and this probably made him hesitant, despite my insistence, in helping me further with the research project. For others, I was an outsider—less because of my ethnicity—but more due to being highly educated and relatively fluent in English. In these cases, participants tended to see me as an expert. For instance, Cristina thought that I was a psychiatrist; Claudia’s father and Ionuț assumed that I was a native British, and the latter expected me to have clear answers about the uncertainties of Brexit. Quite ironically, the range of expertise that I was attributed throughout my fieldwork would have overpowered that of the most pretentious scholar.

This fairly distorted view of my place in the field did not always facilitate the research encounter. In some cases, it created false expectations on both parts. On one hand, it pressured me to perform as an expert—perhaps subconsciously—creating the false hope that by doing so I would gain recognition and recruit new participants. On the other hand, when I failed to meet the expectations that my participants (or potential participants) had of me, it rather produced the opposite effect.

One example of this is when I failed to perform as the “confident interviewer”. As I have mentioned, Rodica’s interview was interpreted by Claudia and took place during an event which also other Roma were attending. While in progress, the interview elicited the curiosity of some of these who gathered around us listening, commenting my questions, and suggesting answers. Perhaps overwhelmed by the many people staring at us or distracted by the need of observing what was going on around, I initiated a question in a clumsy manner and eventually lost the train of thought. This resulted in some disappointment among the people around. Some laughed at me, and one of them commented, with dismissing tone, *nici nu știi ce să zici!* (You don’t even know what to say!). My expert appearance was exposed.

After that moment, Rodica would have probably taken the interview less seriously, if it was not for Claudia (the real expert on that occasion) who mediated the situation in my favour, asking others to be silent and helping the interviewee maintaining the focus on my questions. Despite the circumstances, Rodica did not seem to have problems answering my question and even talk openly about sensitive topics.

3.8 Participant Observation and Other Ethnographic Data

In traditional ethnography participant observation is one of the main ethnographic methods of data collection. Through this method, the ethnographer attempts to understand how people live their everyday life (Crang and Cook, 2007). In this sense, it involves gaining access to a community, living or working with them, taking their view of reality, and writing an account of this process (*ibid.*).

As I have previously discussed, my ethnographic approach was not conducted entirely in line with the anthropological tradition. The considerations provided in section 3.2, also apply here. In fact, I used participant observation not as a method for producing an account of culture, but more as a way to facilitate intersubjective encounters. In this sense, I understood this method—more in line with a phenomenological perspective—as “a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of the researcher” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998, p.24).

In total, I participated in nine events organised by different NGOs broadly advocating migrant rights or providing legal and social support to various migrant groups. Some events were occasions for migrants to share their personal experiences of discrimination and included the participation of some experts (usually lawyers) providing legal advice. Others were organised more in the form of workshops and discussed successful activist action. Still others were more aimed at entertaining families or dedicated at promoting cultural traditions or activities.

Claudia was one of the main organisers for five events. Although only one of these was specifically targeted at the Roma, Claudia would usually invite people from her network of friends or family in anything she would organise. Independently from the topic addressed by these events, my regular participation to these events allowed me to move from being a stranger to being a “colleague” of Claudia. As such, participant observation during the events gave me opportunities to establish conversations with potential participants, but also to start gathering data observing the political discourses to which the Roma were exposed as well as their social interactions.

Besides these public events, in a couple of occasions, I was also invited to the house of participants for dinner. On such occasions, I joined my participants in their table prayer, and had more mundane conversations during the meal. At the end of each event or home visit, I wrote fieldnotes accounting for a description of the place I had been, the interactions I had, and the activities I witnessed or experienced. Moreover, for each interview, fieldnotes also included reflections on how the interview was conducted.

Other Ethnographic Data

So far I have discussed the settings in which I became a participant observant and the process of writing fieldnotes. These, however, were not the only data that this method allowed me to gather. Especially during the events, I collected any piece of paper that representatives of various organisations and groups were distributing. These reflected the complex network of political actors and institutions surrounding the Roma as a migrant phenomenon.

Other textual data were also provided by the participants themselves. Claudia, for instance, allowed me to use a biographical account that she had produced for a previous project. This account contained many personal reflections on her family, culture, social life and experience of migration which complemented the data gained through her interview.

3.9 The Analysis Process

At any moment during fieldwork, the researcher is compelled to make important decisions that dictate what data is collected and how. Some of these decisions need to be taken very quickly—for example, choosing which thread to follow during an interview. Some others—such as that of choosing which sites to visit—may allow more time for reflection. In any case, all these decisions require an on-going process of analysis.

In this research, both data collected through interviews and participant observation went through this on-going process of analysis. Writing fieldnotes was not only a descriptive practice, but also an analytical one. The on-going analysis of the interview process allowed, firstly, a continuous

evaluation of the topic guide; secondly, the identification of some emerging themes that shaped the data collection further.

As I have discussed in section 3.7, the researcher brings his or her own baggage in the field. Besides the more hidden personal and cultural predispositions, this baggage also contains research tools such as theories, concepts, and categories that might be necessary for the orientation in the field. In this study, particularly the concept of *eudaimonia* and the theories of positive psychologists (discussed in section 2.5) have to some extent led the on-going analysis (and so data collection).

Bringing this theoretical framework in the field was necessary in order to act as a “provocateur” (Buttimer, 1979) and elicit the participants’ awareness of their values and choices. Such an approach was not only useful for purposes of data collection. As evidenced by the following reflections, it was also perceived as directly beneficial by the participants themselves:

Cristina: *Noi când am venit în Ro- um, din România aici, sorry, nu ne-am pus întrebarea de ce venim, de ce suntem, de ce-- S-a întâmplat. A fost o binecuvântare pentru mine.*

[When we came to Ro... from Romania here, sorry, we didn't ask ourselves why we came, why we are, why. It happened. It was a blessing to me.]

Gabriel (translating): *She said when she came in the UK, she never thought why she came here or... and for what. But, you know, you're like... you tell her why. Cause when you ask her, she had to give you an answer and she gave herself an answer.*

Anghel: *Îmi pare bine c-a venit la noi și ne-a dat posibilitatea să [unintelligible], cu ocazia asta, și noi am putut să aflăm ce ne poate întreba, ce întrebări sunt și ce-ai putea să răspunzi la întrebările pe care ți le-a-- ni ne-a spus.*

[I'm glad he [the researcher] came to us and gave us the opportunity to [unintelligible] on this occasion, and we were able to find out what he can ask us, what questions are there, and what you could answer to the questions he asked us.]

Gabriel (translating): *He said that he's pleased that you came here and you, with this occasion. [...] Yeah, they found answers for questions that they were never asking.*

Although the eudaimonic perspective was introduced implicitly (through questions) in the intersubjective encounter between researcher and participants, it produced some mutually enriching exchanges. These exchanges were not always straightforward and they also included moments of misunderstanding. Nonetheless, it was precisely in these moments that gaps in the theoretical framework and new directions for data collection became apparent. Some of these new directions led me to re-consider the notion of family vis-à-vis the concept of *eudaimonia* and to include the Pentecostal perspective in the theoretical framework.

Data Analysis and Coding

The recorded interviews have been transcribed verbatim by me or forwarded to a professional transcription service just after they were conducted. At the end of the fieldwork, I engaged with the thematic coding of eighteen interview transcripts. During this process I tried to combine both intuitive insights and systematic rigour (Ingersoll and Ingersoll, 1987). I began with transcripts that—after the on-going analysis—I had already identified as being particularly different from each other. Such a strategy allowed including, right from the start, a great degree of the complexity in the analysis. The coding process was done with pen and paper; it was initially “open” (Crang and Cook, 2007) and included assigning descriptive labels to chunks of textual data. The excerpt below shows an example of this process. For the sake of clarity, here I have transcribed the codes in digital format:

<p>Claudia: <i>Ehm... As I said to you, I lived in a... it is not a village, it is a very small town that it's got about eight miles... so four four... it's like... four with four it's equal eight... it's a very small small small... so I came</i></p>	<p>Moved from small town to big city</p>
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<p><i>here and I saw this and I was like... Oh! This is where I wanna be! So from very small houses to very big buildings.</i></p> <p>Antonio: <i>Ok.</i></p> <p>Claudia: <i>I'm a country girl going to the city, the usual stuff!</i></p> <p>Antonio: <i>Ok, ok. So, there is not one particular thing that attracted you about [UK city]?</i></p> <p>Claudia: <i>No, no. Just not being ever, never somewhere. [UK city] was the first thing I saw... so I was "ahhh!"</i></p> <p>Antonio: <i>What is so special for you about [UK city]?</i></p> <p>Claudia: <i>I fell in love with that. It's a million of reasons. It's the tree... One of the things it was, it was the bad weather!</i></p>	<p>Sense of wonder</p> <p>Describing own migration as "usual stuff"</p> <p>Sense of wonder</p> <p>Love for [UK city]</p>
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At the same time, on a different piece of paper, I proceeded by organising these codes into themes. When all the interviews were coded, I divided these codes into three master themes, which evolved in the discussion chapters of this thesis. The first one included experiences of ontological insecurity; the second one "ends" such as aims, aspirations, values, and meanings; and the third one "doings" or activities and experiences of engagement.

The choice of codes and themes reflected an attempt of making sense of the encounter between both "top-down" and "bottom-up" perspectives. While codes were descriptive and "open" (not pre-set and representing as close as possible the experience of participants), themes were initially chosen considering their significance in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. However, throughout the analysis process these initial themes did not remain the same, and the thematic structure was continuously remodelled until it was able to encompass all codes.

Other ethnographic data were also analysed through thematic analysis. Some of these data, such as Claudia's biography and fieldnotes documenting activities and informal conversations, were compatible with the interview data and were analysed using the same codes. Some other data—such as most of the leaflets collected during the events—were less about the direct experience of the people studied and were therefore considered separately. The analysis of these secondary data were initially focused and aimed at identifying attempts of reaching out to the Roma community and information that targeted the Roma directly. Following this first step, also these data were coded and organised thematically.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

My research was ethically approved by the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee (AREA 16-187). Before participating in public events, organisers were always informed about my intention to do research. To the people I met during these events, I also introduced myself as such, often with a brief explanation of my research project.

When people agreed to take part, I made sure that they understood the purpose of my research and the modalities of their participation. Before arranging an interview, I gave a copy of the information sheet for the participant to keep and explained verbally what my research was (see appendix B). I normally asked to sign the informed consent form (see appendix C) at the start of each interview. However, before asking participants to sign, I kindly asked to pay attention while I was reading the consent form and to interrupt me if something was not clear. When interpreters were involved, I asked them to translate, sentence by sentence, everything I was reading or saying.

Rather than ticking a box, the process of gaining consent should be understood as an on-going process of negotiation (Silverman, 2014). With this in mind, I have often reminded participant of their rights not to answer any questions while interviewing, particularly before exploring sensitive topics of discussion. At the end of each interview, I also let interviewees know that they had the opportunity to go back through the consent form, and I have reminded them of their right of withdrawal.

In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, in this thesis I have replaced their names with pseudonyms. Their personal data have been stored securely and maintained strictly confidential. The professional service used for the transcriptions also guaranteed the confidentiality of the data.

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my methodological approach accounting for the obstacles and challenges encountered during the research process. These included the redesigning of the research project due to some mistakes made at the early stages of the fieldwork, challenges in accessing the Roma community and establishing trust, problems related to snowball sampling, reflections on the process of interviewing, and the risks taken when recruiting gatekeepers as interpreter. Additionally, I have discussed—through examples taken from my fieldnotes—the positionality of the researcher as both an insider and outsider to the multi-layered realities of the participants. Finally, I have described the process of data analysis, the procedure for gaining consent, and the strategy for anonymisation used in this thesis.

While in most of these research practices I followed the indications of scholars who encountered similar challenges, in some occasions these were unsuitable to the context of this research. The strategies of mitigation adopted with regards to sampling and interpreting are an example of this. It is hoped that the reflexive accounts provided in this chapter may improve future research practice.

Chapter Four: the Roma as Ontologically Insecure EU Citizens

4.1 Introduction

In line with the approaches discussed in the literature review, in this chapter I use the notion of ontological insecurity to examine the experience of Romanian Roma migrants in the UK. Through an existential-phenomenological approach, I emphasise the fact that most of these experiences are not peculiar to the Roma but could potentially manifest to every human being, including other EU citizens. In this sense, by considering the experience of Romanian Roma migrants as the experiences of EU citizens, I join efforts to overcome the isolation around Roma issues (Sardelić, 2019). Moreover, I also join recent attempts to leave behind connotations of victimhood, neediness and pathology around the concept of vulnerability and rather understand it as an embodied human condition (Fineman, 2010; Mackenzie, 2014).

More specifically, in what follows I attempt to understand my participants' ontological position through the analysis of experiences that in one way or another undo fundamental aspects of being-in-the-world. In particular, I examine moments in which individuals question their capacity to maintain family relationships, their potential to establish meaningful encounters with difference, and the reliability of their cultural repertoire. Throughout the chapter, I pay particular attention to how these insecurities are experienced and develop through the context of Freedom of Movement. Finally, I discuss how they converge with the need for economic stability. The free market economy, I will suggest, penetrates the life of the Romanian Roma migrants by imposing its own ontology.

Ontological Insecurity as Relational Insecurity

As I have previously discussed, Laing gives exceptional importance to intersubjectivity and human relatedness, which he considers as the bedrock for ontological security (1990). He reaches this understanding mainly

through reading the work of phenomenologists, in particular Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. For these thinkers, relationality is an essential part of the ontological structure. Heidegger, in particular, was the first in proposing a unitary, relational structure in which self, others and world are interrelated (Heidegger, 1996; Hodge, 2012). In this view, relationality is understood in terms of the interactions between these dimensions of human existence (Knudsen, 2019).

In line with these perspectives, in this chapter I consider experiences of ontological insecurity as they intersect with each other. Although I will begin from the family domain—arguably where the link between ontological and relational security is stronger—the experiencing of insecure family relations also affects relationality in the cultural, social, and intrapersonal spheres and *vice versa*.

Roma Relationality

When discussing Roma relationality, scholars often use the word “invisibility” to describe the limitations of their relational spaces (Sigona, 2005; Floris 2010; Pusca, 2010). They refer, in particular, to the fact that authorities often attempt to render the Roma invisible to the rest of the population through practices of expulsion, eviction and segregation in camps (*ibid.*). On the other hand, this word is also used in reference to the strategy that the Roma themselves employ for self-protection (Matras *et al.*, 2009; Stewart, 2013). In this latter sense, invisibility includes avoiding interactions with outsiders when these are perceived as potentially harmful but also the means through which individuals evade responsibility and conflict within their group (Matras *et al.*, 2009).

Such understandings of Roma relationality are also relevant for some of the experiences described here. However, at least in this chapter, Roma invisibility is rather understood as a symptom of a deeper ontological problem. There are two reasons why I suggest this approach. Firstly—whether forced or voluntary—simply the framing of Roma relationality in mere visual terms is enough to evoke a matter of ontology. This is because of the exceptional power of sight that provides us with an immediate grip on reality. As Tuan puts it, in fact, “seeing is a discriminating and constructive activity: it creates patterns of reality adapted to human purposes” (1975, p.152). Secondly, especially through Laing’s lenses, invisibility can be read

as a response to the preoccupation for ontological preservation and to the feeling of “engulfment”—the felt risk “in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply being seen” (1990, p.44).

4.2 Insecure Families

Scholars often stress the key role of the family unit and network in forming migration decisions and as a source of social capital (Pantea, 2013; Boyd, 1989). By focusing on caregiving, for example, some have emphasised how family ties are maintained when family members are spread across multiple countries (Baldassar *et al.*, 2007). Especially for Romanian Roma migrants, the maintenance of family ties is essential for a sense of ontological security. As I have previously mentioned, in fact, this group has notoriously had limited access to society’s basic services, and, as a result, they developed their own survival strategies precisely through family networks. These latter are key in providing mutual support and feelings of confidence to the community (Matras *et al.*, 2009; Gamella *et al.*, 2015). The strength of these ties—it is often argued—results in an extraordinary capacity for resilience and thriving (Fosztó *et al.*, 2017).

As it will become clear later, the experiences that I describe here are also evidence to support these claims. However, as I will now discuss, family ties should not be assumed as fixed anchors for security. Such an assumption would in fact ignore the anxieties that arise when bonds of trust and loyalty are questioned as well as the individuals’ embodied reactions to these kinds of challenges. Efforts to maintain family ties are in fact not always successful and in some cases—such as divorce or lost children custody—they may even fail. Moreover—at least for the participants of this study—the exercise of the right of Freedom of Movement does not necessarily translate in stronger family bonds, but it rather adds another layer of relational complexity.

Insecure Marriages

As an institution, marriage is for the Romanian Roma the fulcrum of their sense of being in at least two ways. Firstly, the marital union is a life-goal that endows the individual with sense of purpose and personhood. For the

Roma, in fact, the entire nurturing process culminates with the production of “marriage-able bodies” ready for a heterosexual, permanent and reproductive relationship (Tesăr, 2012). Particularly among some groups of Romanian Roma—such as the *corturari*—marriage and procreation are the only way through which one achieves gendered identity (*ibid.*). In fact, men and women who do not engage in procreation inside the wedlock are not acknowledged maleness or femaleness and are regarded as “incomplete” persons (*ibid.*). Secondly, marriage is also a way through which the individual is given his or her place within the broader community. It is through marriage, in fact, that Roma families establish political alliances and enlarge their networks (Matras *et al.* 2009; Gamella *et al.*, 2017).

The evidence I will deploy here confirms the centrality of marriage in Romanian Roma’s sense of ontological security. However, I also suggest that experiences such as divorce and dissatisfaction with the chosen partner challenge its solidity as an ontological foothold. For some, migration often represents a consequence to these challenges. In these cases the decision to move is a sort of “escapism”—an “urge to be elsewhere in moments of stress and uncertainty” (Tuan, 1998 p.xi). On the other hand, for others, migration is rather a relationally intricate context in which marriage insecurities intensify. Generally speaking, the findings align to similar evidence found in studies on transnational families (Parreñas 2001; 2009; Kilkey *et al.*, 2013b; Shih, 2015). In line with this literature, in fact, the experiences discussed here are characterised by the lack of physical proximity among family members, by the disruption of everyday routines and traditional gender roles, and—at least in one case—by the inability to formalise legally, culturally and spiritually the marital union.

Experiences of Divorce and Remarriage

For Romanian Roma individuals, divorce and re-marriage are experienced as profoundly life-changing. They represent turning points in processes of becoming which also produce disruptive changes in the everyday practices of the individual. In Claudia’s biographical account, for example, her decision to move to the UK—and to *become* someone else—is represented, explicitly, as caused by the failure of her first marriage and by the period of depression that she experienced as a result of it. In her biographical account, she refers at her “new” *persona* in the following terms:

“She doesn’t really exist, she is an imaginary friend who goes and fights the whole planet. She appeared out of depression I fell into when my first marriage broke up, like a protective wall.”

“I came to England to get some air. I was a housewife in Romania and had a baby. I had never been to another country. But when my husband left me I fell into a deep depression. I was only 24 but I could see nothing in my life.”

After the divorce Claudia married again, moved to the UK, and had two other children with her new husband. This latter—Adrian—had the same experience of divorce as well as other kids before remarrying. When I asked questions about his parents, he also mentioned his father’s remarriage, and more broadly, the challenges of maintaining relations within his family:

“Yeah, but my mom is dead [...] my dad had a different wife. My brother inhabit a separate houses. My brother is staying [different city], around there. Yeah, is not here my family.” (Adrian)

Claudia and Adrian’s experiences of divorce and remarriage take place in Romania and are actually causing the couple to move. In Stefan’s experience, on the other hand, things are further complicated, since official procedures for divorce and remarriage need to be finalised in the context of transnational mobility. As the following excerpts show, the fact that such mobility is “free” seems to be of very little help for Stefan’s sense of security. As a Pentecostal who would like to get remarried to a Christian Orthodox woman, he rather finds himself stuck in the entanglement of cultural, religious and bureaucratic norms:

Stefan: *You know, one is not big problem, but one is... because... [asks Vasile help to explain it in English]*

Vasile: *Is because him and she... she wife, no have document for... is when one's married, need to connect together, need to go to the... married from the...*

Antonio: *The church...*

Vasile: *The church, and also to the paper, you know what I'm saying... for she name go to him name... and go together, yeah? But now he has different name, she has different name...*

Antonio: *Okay, okay... and how can you solve this problem?*

Stefan: *Need a divorce with the priest...*

Antonio: *And the priest wouldn't give you a divorce?*

Stefan: *Because she is living in France...*

Vasile: *Ex-wife she lives in France, she can't... she don't want to... give you the divorce... you see, all this...*

Stefan: *I no can't go in the church, like... this.*

As a result, Stefan does not seem to enjoy the sense of ontological security that comes with the marital union. In his view, marriage is rather a source of relational problems which he alone is not able to solve. Since his new relationship is not formally and legally recognised, he is deeply troubled at a spiritual level. In the next excerpt it is perhaps more clear how Stefan's everyday-life activities (such as singing in the church) and sense of security are affected by a sentimental situation which seems to be out of his control:

Vasile: He played for the home because he not go to the church to play because is something feeling not really okay in his heart. You know, because...

Antonio: You need to be pure?

Vasile: Yes.

Stefan: That yeah. I'm not pure. Actually my wife I'm not engaged.

Vasile: His wife is Orthodox.

Antonio: Okay, okay. So you feel that there's an obstacle?

Stefan: You know, the evil, in this moment... it has power. It has power. Yeah I have... only need is to pray with God for the... (asks in Romanian "How do you say to free?").

Antonio: Freedom?

Stefan: Clear with... Freedom! The freedom with... like... something...out. You know?

Dissatisfaction with the Chosen Partner

Evidence of relational insecurity in family relationships are not only confined to participants who divorce or wish to divorce. As a matter of fact, the marriages in focus here are not always all flowers and romance, and at least for some couples, separation is not an option, especially when children are involved. At least Laura, her brother (Gabriel), and her mother (Cristina) seem to agree on such a conclusion:

Antonio: *And, why do you think people don't listen to you?*

Gabriel: *De ce crezi că oamenii nu ascultă de tine?*

Laura: *Păi nu oamenii.* [Well, not the people]

Cristina: *(unintelligible) ...decât bărbatu ei.* [Her husband]

Gabriel: *Bărbatu tău, de ce crezi? [Your man, why do you think?]*

Laura: *De ce cred că nu m-ascultă?* [Why do I believe he doesn't listen to me?]

Gabriel: *Da.* [Yes.]

Laura: *Pentru că el vrea să facă pă șefu. Adică, nu șefu. Adică el vrea numai el să fie lucrurile lui care le spune el să- sunt perfecte și eu tre să-l ascult. El crede că este ceva mai presus.*

[Because he wants to be a boss. I mean, no boss. I mean, he just wants to be told that his things are perfect and I have to listen to him. He thinks he's something above.]

Gabriel: *All right. So, it's not people in general. In general is her husband. And, what makes her feel people doesn't listen to her... her husband doesn't listen to her cause he think... ...she thinks that he thinks he's a better person than her and what he said is always good. So, they both have the same problem. She thinks what she said is good and what he thinks, he thinks what he said he thinks is good. So, no one... no one can... let from...*

Antonio: *Yeah. And why do you think you have this... diverse opinions... different opinions?*

Gabriel: *De ce crezi că amândoi aveți diferite opinii?* [Why do you think you have different opinions?]

Antonio: *De ce cred?* [Why do you think?]

Gabriel: *Pentru că m-am grăbit să mă mărit și am ales persoana-* [Because I rushed to marry and chose the person...]

Laura: *Greșită!* [Wrong!]

Cristina: *Nepotrivită!* [Wrong!]

Gabriel: *...greșită!* [Wrong!]

Laura: *Da. Asta e sigur. E corect.* [Yes. This is for sure. It is correct.]

Cristina: *Da c-a prins-o cu copiii și ea nu mai are (unintelligible). Țsta e!* [Yes, he caught her with the kids and she no longer has... That's it!]

Gabriel: *Because she... she...she falled in love with him, but she... she didn't... she... she wasn't ready for a family, but she fall in love which didn't... she... she didn't get to know him better than she does now, and that's what makes her to... to start a family with him, cause the kids came...*

Antonio: *Yeah.*

Gabriel: *...and it connected both of them and now she sees that both of them have different opinions and there's nothing to do now cause, obviously, they got kids and... [...] you have to go through it all your life.*

In this last case, marriage seems to guarantee—at least formally—security for the sake of the kids. However, Laura's personal emotional experience suggests the opposite interpretation. In the next excerpt, she reflects on her feelings of persistent anger and anxiety which she relates primarily to the interaction with her husband:

Laura: *Da. Eu sunt- da sunt organizată, doar că vreau să spun că sunt foarte nervoasă în orice lucru. Înțelegi?* [Yes. I am organised, but I mean I'm very nervous about anything. Understand?]

Cristina: *Așa.* [That's right.]

Gabriel: *Și vrei să nu mai fii nervoasă.* [And you want to stop being nervous.]

Laura: *Și vreau să nu mai fiu nervoasă și cum aș fii să nu mai fiu nervoasă este ca (husband name) să m-asculte în orice lucru și eu sunt okay.*

[And I don't want to be nervous anymore, and how would not to be nervous is (husband name) always listening to everything I say and I will be okay].

[...]

Gabriel: *She want her husband to listen whatever she said, he to do, and that will... it will change in a good person and not angry anymore.*

Antonio: *Mm-hmm. Why do you think that you're angry?*

Gabriel: *De ce crezi că ești nervoasă?* [Why do you think that you're angry?]

Laura: *Pentru că văd eu că sunt nervoasă. Cum adică de ce cred?* [Because I see I'm nervous. What do you mean, why do I think?]

Cristina: *Ce te-aduce-n stare?* [What makes you?]

Gabriel: *Soțu ascultă, lumea din jur—* [Husband, the world around me...]

Laura: *Da. Soțu-- Da.* [Yes. Husband, Yes.]

Gabriel: *Um, she said that she- what makes her feel is angry is, um, people in- in general, even her husband. That's the worst thing. It makes her nervous. Her husband.*

In the last excerpts Laura does not explicitly refer to the effects of migration on her marital life. Nonetheless, it is in this context that she faces specific challenges and realises her dissatisfaction with her marriage. In fact, Laura

and her husband alternate themselves going back to Romania for prolonged periods of time. This not only prevents the couple from spending more time with face-to-face encounters, but it also disrupts both the traditional gender roles and the routinized activities that these entail.

As for Stefan, for Laura marriage causes more anxieties than feelings of security. These anxieties do not remain enclosed and channelled within the boundaries of the marital relationship but, as she mentions, they rather seem to bleed in the world around her. Moreover, although Laura clearly expresses the desire to have a voice and to be listened by her husband, this need is poorly articulated as a demand for a more intersubjective relationship. Rather, she seems to reproduce the same “bossy” attitude that she is trying to combat, as she suggests that her husband should listen to whatever she says. As such, her words are more a revelation of her fear of being depersonalised than a genuine attempt to improve her relationship. As Laing explains, in fact, ontologically insecure individuals “both tend to feel themselves as more or less depersonalised and tend to depersonalize others; they are constantly afraid of being depersonalised by others.” (1991, p.46)

Insecure Parenting

As previously mentioned, reproduction is the primary goal of Roma marriages; it confirms the adult status of the spouses and the union of the families (Durst, 2002; Gamella *et al.*, 2017). As Laura’s experience shows, in fact, children have the key function of maintaining relational security, at least for the sake of the family as a group. However, as for marriage, in some cases also the parent-child bond may become insecure, cause a family conflict, or even break for different reasons. As a consequence of this breakage, the individual puts his own sense of being-in-the-world into question.

Death of a Child

For both parents, the death of a child is by far one of the most devastating experience of loss. Such an accident, in fact, overturns the expected order of life events and forces to question basic existential assumptions (Wheeler, 2001). According to existent research, these mothers and fathers are more

likely to experience depression, severe anxiety, poor health, and marital disruption (Rogers *et al.*, 2008). For the parents who suffer such grief no rational explanations are ever acceptable, and yet they are left with the oppressive and shattering question of making sense of it.

Among my participants, Violeta is the only one who disclosed such experiences. In this excerpt, it is clear how this experience had a lasting impact on her being-in-the-world. Her attempt to interpret the loss through religion has given her answers, but it also opened up a landscape of fear (Tuan, 1979):

Claudia (translating Violeta): *When I had... I had a very difficult problem, and also passing from the fire. She had a difficulty in her personal life that had made her think that the style of life that she has at the moment is that one that she has to take, so that making her changing her views...*

[...]

Claudia (translating Violeta): *She said, God has been blessing me but also punished me. She has been given birth to a son who was sick, and he made her loving him so much, and then he showed her that he took her, and he showed her like he was... she going to heaven, and shown how beautiful is heaven, and then instead she was going to hell, and just because of that he showed her how much he can love her if she is on his side, and what can happen if she is not on his side.*

It has been argued how religion—and in particular Pentecostalism—could give a sense of ontological security in a world that is threatening and out of control (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). In the next chapter, I will discuss how Pentecostalism provides individuals with tools that allow endowing experiences of ontological insecurity with meaning and value. For the moment, however, I suggest focusing on the unconscious phenomena that are expressed—and exposed—through the Christian symbolic language. From this view, in fact, the two visionary and heavily polarised landscapes that Violeta describes are rather reflection of her ontological position. This

latter issue is experienced as a marked moral divide in which she has no sense of own autonomy.

Losing a Child's Custody

The traditional worldview, relational capacity, and ultimately sense of being of a Roma mother is put into question perhaps even more dramatically when—in addition to nature—human action is the cause of the separation from her children. Rodica's experience is exemplary in this respect. Firstly, the separation can be read in terms of an unfortunate and arbitrary event dictated by nature which prevents her from taking her daughter to the UK:

Antonio: *And why one kid is in Romania?*

Friend (translating): *De ce-i un copil în România?* [Why is a child in Romania?]

Rodica: *Pentru că are probleme de sănătate care aicea nu știu să umblu cu ea.* [Because she has a health problem and I don't know how to walk with her.]

Friend (translating): *She said she- the other kid has a little bit of mental problems.*

Antonio: *Right.*

Rodica: *Suport sistol- her suport sistolic la inimă.* [Systol support... Systolic support to the heart.]

Friend (translating): *Yeah, disability is like... she has to go to the hospital like every single week, he had some heart problems and that's why she didn't bring him here... cause she's scared.*

However, later in the interview Rodica discloses the more humiliating experience of losing the custody of her daughter before migrating. In the next excerpts she mentions how—after this experience of trust betrayal—her capacity to see any human goodness has been permanently undermined. Interestingly enough, it is through a Heideggerian breakdown (see section 3.2) that this experience was elicited:

Rodica: *Deocamdată nu mai respect. Spune-i că am respectat în România și nu am primit respect.*

[I do not respect anymore. Tell him I respected in Romania and I did not receive respect.]

Claudia: *She says—I have been respecting people in Romania, but I have not received respect in my heart.*

[...]

Antonio: *If you think about... a good person, how is it a good person should be for you?*

Claudia (translating): *Dacă- dacă, um, tu te gândești la o persoană bună, cum ar trebui să- cum crezi tu că ar fi trebuit să reacționezi și să fie persoana aia ca să poa să fie spusă sau chemată că e o persoană bună?*

[If, um, you think of a good person, how do you think you should react to be called a good person?]

Rodica: *Păi nu- nici nu știu ce- răspuns să-i spun.* [I don't even know what to answer.]

Friend: *E o persoană bună.* [He is a good person.]

Claudia (translating): *I don't really know what to answer to you.*

Rodica: *Păi da, pentru că nu..* [Well, yeah, because you don't...]

Antonio: *Have you ever met a good person?*

Claudia (translating): *Ai cunoscut vreodată o persoană bună?* [Have you ever met a good person?]

Friend: *Da, pe mine.* [Yes, me.]

Rodica: *Am recunoscut, dar p-urmă falsă.* [I did, but it was a false one]

Claudia (translating): *Yes, I did, but it did prove to be a fake person.*

[...]

Rodica: *Eram însărcinată cu fata.* [I was pregnant with the girl.]

Claudia (translating): *I was pregnant with my daughter.*

Rodica: *S-a pus ea să-mi fie nașă la fată.* [She put herself as godmother.]

Claudia (translating): *The person wanted to be the godmother of my daughter.*

Rodica: *Și cu timpul, a zis să las copilul, că copilul are probleme de sănătate, la ei. Și-a-ncercat ca o [unintelligible] să-mi ia copilul.*

[And with time, she said to leave the child, that the child has health problems. She tried that [unintelligible] to take my baby.]

Claudia (translating): *Okay, okay, so... Okay. She said—in two words—one person tried to help her, pretend to helping her, but her reason it was that she was pregnant, and did want to take the child that was pregnant with from her and she ended to fight that, and she said no.*

Antonio: *No, wait, that person wanted to help her?*

Claudia (translating): *Yes. Someone who want to helping her, said—I can give you a house. I can give you work.*

Antonio: *Okay.*

Claudia (translating): *But the intention it was to take that child, when they were giving birth from her.*

Antonio: *And why they wanted to take the child?*

Claudia (translating): *De ce crezi tu că vroiau să-ți ia copilul?* [Why do you think they wanted to take your baby?]

Rodica: *Păi, culmea ea spune că și la ora respectivă fata mea este acolo, că mi-au spus că m-ajută băiatul nașei ei fiind doctor că m-ajută în problemele de sănătate și că nu-mi ia copilul. A-ncercat de m-a dus la o casă de protecție, asta să dau o procură, da de unde să înfiez copilul acolo.*

Claudia (translating): *Okay. The person who I'm talking is a family with a doctor and my daughter had problems with health and they tried to bring me in... like in a house... then to a woman's, and they asked, and they wanted me to make... paperwork for them. But I saw that the paperwork was not to support me in that house, it was to give them legal right with... for my daughter.*

The Loosening of the Parent-Child Tie in the Context of Migration

The experiences of mother/child separation discussed so far are traumatic events in which the participants seem to have very little sense their own of autonomy and agency. Nonetheless, these experiences change the way they act, condition their idea of the good, and ultimately question their sense of being-in-the-world.

In some other cases, however, experiences of separation are not induced by external factors, but rather appear as a product of the participants' own actions, causing them to question their sense of autonomy. Consider, for instance, Claudia's reflections on a key moment during a short visit in Romania in which she realises that her bond with her daughter is weakening due to her decision to migrate:

"... I felt like the most horrible person in the planet because my daughter preferred to stay with my brother's girlfriend instead of me. I was trying to hold her hand but she was snatching it away and taking the hand of the other girl. I was feeling like the sky fell on me. I felt I had achieved nothing as a mum, and that was horrible. In that moment I was having regrets that I had ever left and I was also sorry that I had come back."

Differently from Violeta and Rodica, Claudia's experience of separation after migration is less traumatic but equally powerful in provoking an embodied sense of ontological insecurity. As I will show in the next section, her account of child separation is rich enough to allow an exploration of the way ontological insecurity unfolds in the migrant everyday life.

Relational Insecurity in the Everyday Life

Perhaps paradoxically, one could see some possibilities when human ties are cut neatly, or, as in Claudia's case, when relational insecurity manifests as an embodied encounter which the participant is willing to engage reflectively. In these cases, in fact, the experience is more likely to appear in consciousness as present-at-hand, making possible some sort of reflection and coming to term with the raw facts. When this happens, new landscapes may manifest to the individual's perception. As discussed before, for instance, the experience of Violeta and Claudia take precisely the form of a revelation of landscapes of both negative and positive possibilities.

However, relational insecurity is firstly encountered as a subtle everyday experience whereby the individual's sense of being is dependent to an unstable and pre-reflective perceptual limbo. As such, in fact, the experience of relational insecurity takes rather the form of an unconscious, unquestioned and normalised anxiety. This anxiety is existential because—like *Dasein*—it tends to “fall in inauthenticity” by concealing itself to conscious thought (Varga, 2014). Such a camouflage becomes noticeable, for example, in Claudia's response, when I attempted to provoke her thoughts on the insecurity of her relationships:

Antonio: *Then I have another question: What do you think would be different without the people that... you know... you have friendship and you built a relationship with?*

Claudia: *I didn't have to think of that because I am not thinking of them going yet. I built a relationship with people who will be there... hopefully... will be. You never know, but... I didn't think... you know... I didn't build a relationship with people for occasionally.*

Arguably, this last excerpt could also suggest confidence, and, in fact, Claudia's development of a proud and assertive *persona* as in response to her condition of ontological insecurity will be later a matter for analysis. However, when engaged in more profound reflections, Claudia's experience of relational insecurity emerges as developing from the everyday life in three stages. Firstly, it takes the form of an everyday worrying for her mother and daughter who are not in the UK with her:

“When [Claudia] had [daughter's name] she found peace within herself because she realised she had achieved something – her daughter, the most important thing for her. [Claudia's] most horrible fear is that her mum will die, or that something could happen to her daughter.”

Secondly—and more prominently—Claudia feels lost, her decision-making is dictated by this feeling, and she starts to question her achievements and the sense of security that these seem to provide. In particular—at least in Claudia's account—becoming a mother and finding a job are two achievements that are perceived as in conflict with each other. Her decision

to stay in the UK presents in fact a challenge not only for her family relations, but also—as it will be later discussed—for her sense of cultural belonging:

“Sometimes on the inside I feel very lost. In [city in the UK] I work day and night and while I’m proud of what I’m achieving, I also feel that something’s missing. Something was telling me to go home to Romania, see my daughter and my mum.”

Finally, these feelings become overwhelming when Claudia is faced with the reality of having to meet her daughter after a year of being away. It is in this moment that relational insecurity reveals itself, in all its embodied richness, as ontological insecurity. At this point, Claudia feels physically hurting, anxious, scared, unplaced, and unable to control her own behaviour—like “a cork floating in the ocean”, to put it in Laing’s words (1990, p. 48):

“I was feeling pain in my stomach. I was waiting for my daughter to arrive and was thinking how she would be. I was very scared, impatient. I didn’t know what I was doing, what I was saying, what reactions I would have. I felt like a stranger, I wasn’t feeling it was my house, my place.”

Roma Mothers and Migration

Claudia’s narrative of motherhood resembles that of many other “transnational mothers” who have children left behind and are caught in the same emotional insecurities of having to perform both roles of parents and breadwinners (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001; 2009). Some scholars see these mothers as capable of overcoming the belief that children should be raised by their biological mother and of redefining face-to-face caregiving in terms of long-distance breadwinning. This perspective emphasises the autonomy of these mothers in pursuing new meanings of motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997). Other scholars, however, are more concerned with the emotional difficulties and conflicts that these women and their children face, which they see as caused by the traditional, essentialist, ideologies of motherhood and gender labour division (Parreñas, 2009).

Considering the specificities of the Roma—in particular—the role of procreation as providing a life achievement, the strict division of gender roles, the importance of face-to-face physical relations, and the mutual constituency of sex and gender (Tesăr, 2012), the evidence so far discussed is inconsistent, with both these two perspectives, at least for two reasons. Firstly, the experiences described here fit uneasily with progressive constructions of motherhood. In fact, Claudia’s inability to embrace the role of “distant mother” and conflate it with that of “breadwinner” is rather evidence to suggest that, at least among Roma women, the ideology of traditional motherhood has still ontological relevance. Secondly—as I will explore more in detail in the next chapter—in most cases it is precisely through the pursuit of these sedimented ideas of motherhood and gendered labour that migrant women attempt to make up for a sense of security and actualise their ideas of good life.

Split Families and the Need for Physical Proximity

For Claudia, relational insecurity is induced to a great extent by the fear of not being able to maintain a healthy relationship with her daughter across borders. However, these kinds of worries are not enclosed within the mother/children relationship but also involve the whole extended family and network of close friends. More precisely, what participants such as Claudia, Petru, Laura, and Marilena seem to experience is a general need for family proximity. For all of them, the challenges and anxieties of distant family relationships are constant constraints shaping and defining their sense of being-in-the-world. Petru, for example, has his family members split between Romania and UK, and it is the feeling of missing their presence that causes him to spend six months in one country and other six in another:

Petru: *Uh, why I go back in Romania?*

Antonio: *Yeah...*

Petru: *Because... I want to see my family. My friends. I work there. Six months I worked there.*

[...]

Antonio: *Okay. So why did you move to the UK?*

Petru: *Uh, because... first... is my wife, it was my wife here, is coming my wife here, first with child. After, I need to come here because uh my child is missing, missing for me, you understand?*

Although for Petru the enhanced mobility is a resource that enables him to maintain connections with both parts of his family, this tool can also trigger personal anxieties and tensions within the family life. This excerpt from Laura's interview (his wife) suggests that even a temporary absence can cause problems. When asked to talk about some personal life challenges, Laura mentions a moment in which she went back to Romania leaving her parenting responsibilities. Her husband, in turn, was forced to leave his job in order to stay home and take care of the children:

Laura: *[...] Păi a fost o încercare când eu am fost în România și nimeni n-a avut grijă de copiii mei și l-am lăsat pe [husband name] acasă și ca să stea cu copii ca să pot să aibe grijă cineva de ei. [...]
Ce-am făcut eu? L-am oprit pe (husband name) de la muncă!*

[Well, it was a challenge when I was in Romania and nobody took care of my children and I left (husband name) at home to stay with children so that someone could take care of them. [...] What did I do? I stopped (husband name) from work!]

Beside showing that the lack of family proximity causes anxieties and dictates what to do and where to be, the excerpt above also suggests that Freedom of Movement—as a practice that enhances the spatial dimension of the experience—also challenges the routinization and sedimentation of family relationships. Moreover, as Kilkey *et al.* have argued, the tensions involved in the reconfiguration of gendered responsibilities in migratory contexts are also experienced by men (2013b) and this is evidenced by Petru's temporary disengagement from his role of provider.

Finally, it has been suggested that “virtual” bonds established via social media or telephone facilitate the proximity of family members (Diminescu, 2008, p.567) and, in fact, during my observations in the field I noticed an intensive use of tools such as smartphones and social media. However, the

experiences discussed before rather suggest that this enhanced connectedness does not necessarily mean an improved quality of the relationships. This last excerpt shows, in fact, an experience of “disembodied” connectedness that rather triggers feelings of sadness and disappointment. When Marilena was asked about the condition of her children in Romania this was the response she gave:

Marilena: *Este foarte greu. Sunt foarte triști. La fiecare telefon mă întreabă când mă duc să-i iau.*

[It's very hard. They're very sad. Every call they ask me when I go to get them.]

Gabriel (translating): *They're... they're upset, cause... Yeah. They called her and, they will ask... always ask her when she's coming to take them with her. They're upset. Yeah.*

4.3 Insecure Encounters

So far I have demonstrated how the most important ontological foothold of Romanian Roma—the closest family ties—are actually insecure in the context of Freedom of Movement. Whether the practice of Freedom of Movement is a cause, a consequence, or simply a marginal factor in these experiences of relational insecurity, the evidence I have so far provided shows that this right certainly does not improve family relationships but in most cases complicates them further.

Moreover, relational insecurity is not only experienced in the family domain. In this section, in fact, I will present experiences in other existential fields which also cause individuals to doubt their sense of being in the world. In particular, the focus here is on encounters with outsiders, society and its institutions, and more generally with the world at hand in the context of Freedom of Movement.

Migration and the Encounter with Difference

Within the field of geography, the notion of “encounter” has been used especially by scholars researching social diversity and urban studies

(Valentine, 2008; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011). From these perspectives, this concept is inextricably tied to that of difference, and it is considered for its potential to produce social change. Valentine, in fact, proposes the notion of “meaningful contact” in order to define specific kinds of encounter that change values and translate “beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for—rather than merely tolerance of—others” (2008, p.325).

The experience of migration is particularly relevant here, as it involves an encounter with a world that thinks and lives differently. Nonetheless, instead of meaningful contacts, here I am concerned with encounters that are actually disruptive. Rather than respect for others, in some cases these encounters produce ontological insecurity in the form of “engulfment” (Laing, 1990, p.44). The accounts I will discuss are in fact experiences of an overwhelming and all-embracing amount of difference which rarely align to the expectations of individuals. The experience in the UK, in particular, is often described in sharp opposition to the life in Romania. As Alexandru’s account shows, for example, even when this latter is remembered in positive light, moving to the UK involves a drastic reconsideration of one’s sense of being-in-the-world:

“My life in Romania was really different. I was living in a big house, I would say, with my family back then and I had everything I needed, I had a good salary, I had friends... you know... social life, and all of a sudden... well, it was a transition period in Budapest when... anyway in Budapest it was easy because I had Roma friends from other countries, [...] and everything was much more easy than in the UK. In the UK I was totally by myself alone, with no other... Roma young people... whatever... and it was the first time actually that I felt alone within my period of study.”

The sharp contrast between the two different contexts is also present in Claudia’s account. When asked about her first impression of her new city, Claudia describes an enlightened moment of wonder in which she realises that that was her place: “...so I came here and I saw this (the city), and I was like... Oh! This is where I wanna be!” At the same, however, she considers her lived experience in Romania—anything outside the family domain—as

dull and meaningless. Her condition of “existential outsidership” (Relph, 1976) with respect to her place of origin is observable in this excerpt:

Antonio: *So, there is not one particular thing that attracted you about [City in the UK]?*

Claudia: *No, no. Just not being ever, never somewhere. [City in the UK] was the first thing I saw... so I was... Ah!”*

[...]

Claudia: *Everything... I came, I discovered here. That’s why I say a lot of challenges. There I was just a country girl, who was staying outside and have fruits in the backyard, and looking at animals...*

Antonio: *You were not very happy with that?*

Claudia: *No. So it was something there that I was not suitable...*

Claudia’s perception of difference is emphasised since she moved from a small rural town to a big city. However, these perceptions are not confined only to physical landscape. Rather, as Vasile’s words suggest, they are also about human relationality:

“Wow! It’s different because... community... community is different! Also... you see, the town, is different town, you know, is different people, is different... everything is total different.” (Vasile)

From Encounters with Difference to Insecurity

Scholars of migration have increasingly emphasised the connectedness as opposed to the uprootedness of migrants. Increasingly, today’s migrants are seen as actor of dynamic a “culture of bonds” that they themselves create (Schiller *et al.*, 1995; Diminescu, 2008). Despite this increased connectedness, the evidence I discuss here rather suggests that encounters with difference, especially if this latter is perceived as overwhelming and all-embracing, foster feelings of insecurity.

Although a few cases (which I will later discuss) also provide evidence of “meaningful contact” (Valentine, 2008), migrant encounters with the new

context are generally described with mixed feelings. On the one hand, as the excerpts above show, there is a sense of wonder and surprise; on the other, individuals' encounter with place might generate anxieties and fears such as the ones described by Petru and Florin:

"...When I coming in UK, here, it was a vague impression because I don't understand the language, the people. I was in [city centre], the people was drunk, was night, yes, more girls was in the streets drunk, more cars, was traffic, big traffic, oh what! I scared, believe me..."
(Petru)

"Mai- cum să spun eu, mai fricos, mai-- Știi cum e când vii într-o țară străină." [How to say... more frightened, more... you know how it is when you come to a foreign country!]
(Florin)

Additionally, insecurities are also related to the new spatial possibilities and different modes of mobility. Nicoleta's and Claudia's encounters with the UK context, for instance, elicit an experience of existential uneasiness with the space around:

"...I didn't know where to go, how to talk, where to go with the bus, where to walk or what to do." (Nicoleta)

"I was young, I didn't know where to go [...] they told "go this way!" and I'm "why not!" (Claudia)

Language Insecurity

In some of the excerpts above—and also quite consistently across the participants of this study—feelings of insecurity arise, to some extent, as a result of the inability to communicate. In order to understand the condition of Romanian Roma migrants in the UK, here I briefly discuss a couple of ways in which linguistic insecurity is linked to ontological insecurity. Firstly,

linguistic insecurity is inherently relational insecurity, as language is the main tool through which individuals establish relations with each other. In the following excerpt, Gabriel is precisely describing making this point:

“It was a bad impression 'cause I couldn't speak English at all. None of my family could speak English, so we had to stuck into... English course, for myself, so I could speak English. It was bad at the beginning, it was really bad, yeah. [...] the language, I couldn't speak English so... obviously when you go out and you wanna buy something, and you wanna do something the main thing is that you have to communicate with people... so you have to communicate with people and if you don't know the language...”

Moreover, language is also a tool to develop meaning and interpret the world at hand. As such, it is fundamental for the construction of a sense of identity, as it allows categorizing and distinguishing things. As an ordinary experience, however, it is also a routinized activity which people usually perform effortlessly (Inkpin, 2016). In this sense, without language, individuals lose a fundamental tool for maintaining their ontological security.

Encounter as an Experience of Discrimination

In the literature review I have discussed the history of Roma discrimination and the implications this has in the context of the EU citizenship. Additionally, I have also mentioned that members of the Roma community often prefer not to disclose their ethnic identity due to the stigma associated with it. During my fieldwork, only Alexandru—the most highly educated of my participants—openly shared experiences of discrimination. Despite being the only one, however, his experiential account is rich, and it clearly conveys how discrimination is deeply unsettling for the individual's sense of being-in-the-world:

“Since my first day of school I was called “tuciuriu” which means “darker”, even by the teachers. “Hey, let's hear what tuciuriu has to say!”, or I was called “cioară” which means crow. “Hi, give me the ball crow, give me the ball”. So, all of this symbolic phrases create a

sense of frustration, a sense of disappointment. Can you imagine there were days when I was going home from school and I took this stone that you use in the bathroom for your heels, right? And I was scrubbing my skin from hands or from my face with the hope that my skin would become whiter. So that's how this racism impacted on my childhood. I was so annoyed, I was so angry. Why my skin is not as white as the other whites? Why my parents are Gypsies? Why I am Gypsy? Why I am not a Romanian like the others? So, I was so frustrated because I had this sense of powerlessness, and this shame of myself. And that shame grew and grew every day because every single day I felt on some point that they are watching me differently. All the social interactions I had, in the school and even outside the school, in my neighbourhood was based on marginalising me, so... for example if I wanted to play football with the others I was always left the last one or... you know... I was sitting there even two hours watching them, and nobody called me to play, because they didn't want me in the game. [...] And then I went to the university and it happened the same! And then I had a job, and it happened the same!"

The racism experienced by Alexandru in school, university, and other realms of the public life produces a sense of ontological insecurity which originates, firstly, as a result of an attack to his self-perception of the body. The work of Merleau-Ponty (2002) is relevant here in order to understand the ontological implication of this experience. According to Merleau-Ponty, in fact, embodied perception is a constitutive aspect of human existence which is worthy of an ontological status. Perception—in his own words—“is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background against which all acts stand out and is thus presupposed by them” (2002, xi);

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of embodiment allows—as also others have noted (Staudigl, 2012; Ngo, 2017)—to understand Alexandru's experience of racial discrimination as pre-reflective, pre-subjective, and existential in nature. As it has been argued, in fact, the bodily stress caused by the experience of racism results in a profound undoing of the sense of self, whereby the experience of one's identity is reduced to an “object for-other” (Ngo, 2017, p.61). In a similar vein, Laing has described this

experience using the concept of depersonalisation—the anxiety of being turned into an it (1990).

Perceptions of an Insecure World

Experiences of discrimination such as the ones described by Alexandru do not remain enclosed in the personal or private domain, but they also modify the individual's perception of the world, transforming opportunities for meaningful contact in experiences of confrontation with an implosive and persecutory reality. As the following excerpts show, in fact, interactions with political, institutional and even volunteering actors are experienced, respectively, through feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness and existential outsidersness.

“So even the teacher at the university level, he was calling me "oh, yeah of course you are interested about Gypsy problems because you are a Gypsy aren't you?" although there was no point of raising that in the public, isn't it? But he wanted to make me feel Roma because in his mind being a Roma it was something inferior, it was not something to be proud, so he wanted to highlight that in front of other colleagues”

“No, everything was based on hypocrisy. They want me to facilitate the relation with the Roma community only to gain votes. Only, you know, to raise...[...] capital, image or whatever... but they were only cultivating promises because in fact nothing happened... so... and then there was the other side of politicians which were actually threatening, so they were like... we have... "if those Roma will not gonna vote me, I'm gonna make their lives hell". Roma were like puppets in their hands.”

“I started being a part of an NGO, actually being a part of a group of young people, who were really angry about what is happening, then we built an NGO, then we become part of a larger broader NGO network, and then we thought, you know, we have a power, we need to do something together, we did all sorts of things, until one moment, when the whole sector started collaborating instead of challenging the system. And then I said there is no place for me here.”

In essence, in all these experiences “the individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But the emptiness is him.” (Laing 1990, p.45). This last sentence is surprisingly relevant here considering that Alexandru’s interactions with outsiders are always a confrontation with a question—who are you?—that is explicitly addressed at his sense of self:

“Although I try, you know, through the NGO and voluntary action to have a voice, I was always confronted with one question: “Who are you?” So all of this institutional representatives when it was about equality, when it was about the distribution, equal distribution, when it was about... “let’s have these children or these young people or these elders” they were saying “who are you?”” (Alexandru)

Alexandru’s hostile perceptions and encounters are a result of direct experiences of discrimination. However, racism is also experienced indirectly, for example, in the form of a contagious fear that spread among members of the household:

“We arrived here in September 2009, very late in the night, and I left a ground floor window open all the next day. One of the women from the house came to me and said: “Are you crazy, do you want to kill us?” She said people could put fire in the house and we could all die. Of course, I was creating an image in my head that was terrifying—I thought people would be killing in the street.” (Claudia)

Although not lived as in Alexandru’s case, the simple fear of racist violence is enough for Claudia to change her perception of the world. Moreover, as this last excerpt shows, this fear and sense of ontological insecurity can be passed down by long term migrants to the new arrivals.

Narratives of Separation

Perceptions of an insecure world such as the ones discussed before are not isolated individual experiences. Rather, they are engrained as cultural and

religious worldviews. These often suggest suspicion of human relationality and encourage a rigid and binary morality. In this regard, scholars have made explicit connections between the traumatic history of the Roma and the binary oppositions found in Pentecostal teachings (Thurfjell and Marsh, 2014; Laurent, 2014). In line with this scholarship, the experiences discussed below show individuals who express a desire of separation not only from the own community, but also from the larger society. Humanity, more in general, is perceived as morally corrupted. Take for example Petru's and Violeta's answer to my questions about the people attending their church:

"Is a hard question. Hard to explain. People is not good. Good is just God, is God. The people is bad, you understand? Not to believe in the people. Is no good to believe in people." (Petru)

"People sometimes use God of a way... a way of... to motivate to get connections, to get into the church, to get some help, to get something. They are not always the right intentions. So she can feel that, and she knows that, and she wants to stay away from this kind of people." (Violeta translated by Claudia)

This sense of suspicion and desire to separate oneself from the others are not only found among Pentecostal devotees, but also among the non-Pentecostal Roma, albeit with less articulation. In this sense, Pentecostalism is more as a vehicle for Roma expression than a different identity group (Acton, 2014; Laurent, 2014). Despite the less expressive possibilities, however, also for non-Pentecostals the perception of a "threatening otherness" condition their life choices. For Dumitru, in fact, otherness is explicitly linked with the decision to leave Romania. For him, migration becomes an experience of escapism from engulfment—a response to the fear of becoming something he does not want to become:

Antonio: *And in Romania you didn't have a place to stay?*

Dumitru: *Yes.*

Antonio: *And then why you didn't want to stay in Romania?*

Dumitru: *I didn't want to be like other people.*

The relation between Pentecostalism and Romani identity is perhaps better understood through Petru's words:

"I want to explain how is the people there. No more, not all people because it's more "țigani" ... gypsy. Tigani, we say "țigan", "țigan", yeah. No more is bad because he knows who is the Jesus. The gypsy is more gypsy because he knows who is the God. The people ask, that bad, bad people ask "who is that God? Ah, I don't believe Him." "Ah, leave me alone." "You are very crazy, you are crazy." "Believe in God? Ah, you are crazy." "Go to hell here. I don't want to talking to you with God". "Leave me, go outside in my yard. Now." You understand? Why? Because not all people is chosen, he chose for heaven. You understand? For God, no all people. Just people is who is chosen, you understand what I say chose? [...] The God, He have a big book and your name, maybe you are Christian and you believe in Him, your name is written there."

For Petru, Pentecostal "gypsies" are individuals who are separated from the rest of humanity. Despite being rejected from "others" they are endowed with moral worth by God, and this makes them even "more gypsies". Again, the binary opposition between "us" (good) and "them" (evil) is a recurrent theme here. Moreover—as in Violeta's and Cristina's account—it is justified and emphasised by apocalyptic visions:

"Pentru că a-- ăă, atunci când nu-l cunoști pe Dumnezeu, în tine stăpânește răutatea. Și răutatea vine-."

[Because then, when you don't know God, your wickedness reigns in you, and evil comes.] (Cristina)

Claudia (translating Violeta): *God told us and told her that she has to give the news... that earth will come to an end, the judgement will come [...]*

Claudia: *You know about what I mean, yeah? Do you want me to explain?*

Antonio: *Yeah... explain...*

Claudia: *The day that... When they say "the end" that means like... the end of the world, the day that apocalyptic will come... the day that they say fire will come from the sky, and it will rain, water will flow all over the places and all the... the end of the world will stop.. Not like happening with Noah and... in the Bible, like, Noah was all before, send with them to the people who will be coming to him they will be the ones they would be saved... I don't know if it's on a boat or an ark or somewhere this guy... so the guy will give the chance of surviving to those who will come...*

These stories are fervently believed particularly by Pentecostals (Laurent, 2014), however, also non-Pentecostal Roma such as Claudia are exposed to and internalise these worldviews. As I will discuss later, in fact, similar binary oppositions constitute the core of her sense of being-in-the-world. Moreover, in this particular excerpt it is worth noticing how Claudia actively enters the conversation as a “cultural broker” (Temple and Young, 2004, p.171).

4.4 Cultural Insecurity

So far I have discussed how culturally transmitted narratives provide individuals with the perception of an insecure world and separateness from it. To continue, in this section I will explore the cultural aspects of ontological insecurity more in detail. There is in fact a straightforward link between ontological security and culture. This latter, to use Geertz's famous metaphor, *suspends* human beings “in a web of significance” that they themselves have spun (1973, p.5). In Tuan's words, culture “conserves, stabilises; it becomes in time an environment and a routine that can be taken for granted” (1998, p.81-82). Culture—he continues—“enables us to forget that we ever sought to cover up or escape from the other; it creates an atmosphere of ease; it makes us feel that “we are fine as we are where we are” (*ibid.* p.82). Through these lenses, ontological insecurity has to do with

a system of shared taken-for-granted meanings which become questioned by individuals. Deprived of their sense of cultural security—which neither the EU citizenship is able to provide—these latter are left wondering as strangers in a world of engulfing others.

Insecurity in Acting and Behaving

The most apparent manifestation of cultural insecurity is observable in experiences of not knowing how to behave and act in an ordinary circumstance. Culture, in fact, provides individuals with “beaten tracks” that indicate how to act in the world in a meaningful manner. This taken-for-granted guidance constitutes one of the most powerful defences against anxiety (Becker, 1971).

Arguably, the climate of uncertainty brought by the Brexit referendum has heightened cultural insecurities. To some extent, these consist of anxieties about changing one’s everyday routines. For example, Ionuț is afraid of being deported just for being in the street, and this fear is accompanied by feelings of isolation and doubts about his own actions:

Antonio: *But... why are you afraid of Brexit?*

Ionuț: *Ah! They stop you in the street... “Go back, Romania!” What can you do? Who I call!?*

The insecurity that emerges from this last excerpt is in line with the analysis of some of the ethnographic data collected during the events organised by Claudia’s NGO. In particular, one of these events was targeted to any migrant group or individuals who could potentially be detained by immigration officers, including refugees and asylum seekers. Despite the broad focus of the event, some information about detention was also delivered in Romanian to target, specifically, members of the Roma community. For example, leaflets such as the ones showed below (figure 4.1) were left at each table:

CE PUTEȚI FACE DACĂ SUNTEȚI OPRIȚI DE OFIȚERI DE IMIGRAȚIE (UKBA)

Dacă Agenția de Frontieră UK (UK Border Agency) sau poliția vă oprește pe stradă și vă chestionează despre statutul dumneavoastră de imigrație:

- * NU SUNTEȚI OBLIGAȚI să răspundeți la nicio întrebare.
- * NU SUNTEȚI OBLIGAȚI să vă dați numele sau adresa.
- * Spuneți-le că nu vreți să vorbiți cu ei.
- * Fiți politicoși dar păstrați-vă cumpatul.
- * Puteți să plecați.

Ei nu au voie să vă oprească doar datorită rasei. Au voie să vă oprească doar dacă au un motiv justificat. Dacă vă opresc doar din cauza a cum arătați, sau din cauza limbii pe care o vorbiți, spuneți-le:

"Acesta e rasism". "Acest lucru e ilegal". "Voi depune o plângere".

("This is racist") ("This is illegal") ("I will make a complaint")

Dacă sunteți reținuți, sunați la

Name of the organisation has been obscured (organizație

independentă de noi): *Telephone number has been obscured*

Aceasta este o organizație independentă:

Website of the organisation has been obscured

Figure 4.1: Leaflets on Detention.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOU ARE STOPPED BY IMMIGRATION OFFICERS
(UKBA).

If the UK Border Agency stops you in the street and asks
about your immigration status:

- YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED to answer any question.
- YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED to give your name or address.
- Tell them you do not want to talk to them.
- Be polite but keep your temper.
- You can leave.

They are not allowed to stop you just because of your race. They
are only allowed to stop you for a good reason. If they stop you
just because of the way you look or because of the language you
speak, tell them:

"This is racist." "This is illegal." "I will make a complaint."

If you are detained, call our independent organisation:

[Name, telephone number, and website of the organisation]

SEE A RAID?

Don't walk by! We can resist the raids together!

MAKE SURE PEOPLE KNOW THEY DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS AND CAN LEAVE.

IF THEY WANT TO LEAVE, WALK AWAY WITH THEM.

FILM IMMIGRATION OFFICERS AND POLICE. IF SOMEONE IS BEING DETAINED, CHECK WITH THEM FIRST OR ONLY FILM OFFICERS.

CHALLENGE THE OFFICERS — WHY ARE THEY QUESTIONING SPECIFIC PEOPLE?

TELL PEOPLE AROUND YOU WHAT'S HAPPENING. CALL YOUR FRIENDS. TWEET *Organisation obscured* TO GET WORD OUT.

IF SOMEONE IS DETAINED GIVE THEM THESE NUMBERS

BAIL FOR IMMIGRATION DETAINEES Telephone number has been obscured

SOAS DETAINEE SUPPORT Telephone Number has been obscured

Figure 4.1 (continued): Leaflets on Detention.

IMMIGRATION RAIDS

If immigration officers come to your home or work...



**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO
ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS**



**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO LET
THEM IN**

THEY CAN ONLY ENTER WITH YOUR CONSENT,
A WARRANT, OR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S LETTER



**TRY TO LEAVE IF YOU ARE
NOT UNDER ARREST**



*Contact information of
the organisation has
been obscured*

DON'T STOP & TALK — JUST GO

Figure 4.1 (continued): Leaflets on Detention.

These are your rights!

Contacts for detainees

Detention Action (free)

Telephone number obscured

BID

Bail For Immigration Detainees

Tel: *Telephone number obscured*

No one is illegal!

UKBA (UK Border Agency) is frequently revising its procedures with immigrants. To see new versions of this card, or if you would like to report any changes:

Websites have been obscured

Despite all precautions, if you end up in detention, check the reverse of this card. But try and make sure you have the numbers of family and friends handy. Let them know where you are being held. Always stay calm, don't despair and ask for help. Good Luck!

If you see UKBA Officers

Keep calm and act confidently!



Don't panic!
It's **NOT** legal for immigration officers (UKBA) or the police to stop you because of the colour of your skin or the language that you speak!

Unfortunately, they do have the right to question you if they have a reasonable suspicion you have broken immigration laws

If you are stopped, exercise your rights!

(stay calm, be firm)

According to revisions made by UKBA on Chapter 31 of its Operational Enforcement Manual, Immigration Officers have to follow this procedure :

1. Identify themselves and show a warrant card
2. Give a valid reason to stop and ask you questions
3. Tell you that you are **NOT** obliged to reply to any of these questions
4. Tell you that you are **NOT** under arrest and that you are **FREE** to go if you want.

You have the right to **NOT** reply to their questions

You have the right to **NOT** show them documents

You have the right to **NOT** let them search you

Remember that it's NOT in your interest to reply to questions about your identity or migration status; this would allow them to gather evidence when they actually have nothing against you

In any case, if you feel confident enough to speak to them in english, the following box provides some sentences to use during an immigration control on the street.

I don't give my consent to speak with an immigration officer. Thank you

I don't have to reply to your questions

I know my rights!

You just stop me because of my race

This is racist!

This is not legal!

I want to make a complaint!

I don't want to answer any questions without a lawyer present

YOUR LANGUAGE

PHONETIC ENGLISH
(as it sounds in your language)

Figure 4.1 (continued): Leaflets on Detention.

This Migrant Bust Card has been created based on personal experiences. It provides minimal and necessary information to avoid detention during a immigration raid on the streets and a step by step guide on how to act promptly in the event you are detained.

If you are taken to a detention centre

- They will take away phones with camera and internet access.
- But You have the right to keep a phone without camera or a SIM card.**
- You will receive documents with reference numbers from the Home Office, or a Port Reference from the Detention Centre.
- These numbers will be required by lawyers and immigration officers
- Keep these documents handy and in order at all times!**
- Share this information with people that you trust!**
- To obtain legal help, you should register ASAP at the 'welfare office'.**
If there isn't one at your detention centre, you can do this in the library.
- You have the right to an interpreter in your language at this stage.**

There's two ways to get out

1. Bail

- You have the right to apply for this from the day of arrival at the detention centre.
- You will need two guarantors, and complete an application with the help of a lawyer or organization**
- A Judge will make a decision about your situation**

2. Temporary Admission

- You may apply for this if you have been in detention **seven days.**
- Fill in the applications at the welfare office or library. For this application **no you don't need a lawyer or guarantor, but you must provide an address or valid reasons to get out (personal relationships or children with EU citizenship.**
- You may also use **articles 3 and 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**
- Article 3 : Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.**
- Article 8 : All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.**
- The application is sent directly to UKBA officers in the detention centre where you are held.**
- Bear in mind that the address will be asked so the authorities can make sure that you have a place to go back to.
- But remember, if you think that by giving away an address **you are putting your family or community in danger you don't have to provide this information!**



Read and study the information on this card! Share it with family and friends! Exercise the sentences in english! For more information you can also visit [Website obscured](#)

Figure 4.1 (continued): Leaflets on Detention.

As these pictures show, activists seem to be very aware of this experience of everyday-life insecurity and attempt giving answers to Ionuț's questions by providing contacts and a model of "correct behaviour". This latter even includes a package of ready-made statements to be pronounced word by word. Arguably, such information would benefit non-English speakers who

experience detention directly. However, it nonetheless spreads, among Romanian Roma who lawfully practice Freedom of Movement, collective feelings of insecurity, fear, “us versus them” mentality, and a sense of separation from society and its institutions.

Secondly, such attempts to serve the interests of Romanian Roma migrants might paradoxically reproduce the same dynamics of control that have historically targeted the Roma as an anomalous group. However, rather than attempts to control practices of mobility, what is at the stake here is the more fundamental “ability to respond” to a given situation—in Frankl’s words, “the last of human’s freedoms” (1985). This gives Roma individuals a precarious sense of ontological security because it questions their own sense of autonomy: on the one hand, they lack cultural recipes for right action and behaviour; on the other, the alternative is to perform as depersonalised automatons according to a script written by others. In this sense, this last piece of evidence raises questions about whether the “enactments of EU citizenship” that many have used to endow the Roma with political agency (Isin and Saward, 2013; Sardelić, 2017) could actually be undertaken consciously and autonomously in a context of ontological insecurity.

Questioning Cultural Norms and Practices

Besides the missing cultural guidance, individuals experience cultural insecurity also through questioning the rooted norms and practices. Similarly to other experiences described before, this kind of questioning also causes separation and conflict with their own community. In fact, through the Pentecostal’s lenses, doubts about the right norms and behaviours are rather seen as evil:

“Normally, if God puts you on a try and tries your faith, is not God who is doing it, is Satan who is doing it and want me to have my faith putting it into question. So, it's Satan doing that, it never comes from God to trying you like this. So we will know that is Satan who is that person, and we always try not to obey him and stay in the same... and stay in the same thing... and not listening to that doubt, to that question... "why, why, why".” (Violeta, translated by Claudia)

In the previous sections I have mentioned the importance of marriage for the ontological insecurity of the Roma, focusing in particular on how the relationship between the spouses is disrupted. However, as I will show next, at the intersection with the context of EU citizenship, these disruptions also involve a breakage between individuals and their cultural background. For example, when Claudia reflects on her experience of arranged marriage she also questions her sense of place within the broader community. After migration, she perceives her new aspirations toward education as in conflict with the path provided by her culture:

“For Roma women, education is not the most important thing. If you’ve been to school you can read and write, but when you get married you may not know how to cook, wash and look after your children and husband. It’s a mother’s responsibility to educate her daughter. If she doesn’t know how to look after the house, the whole community will know and will blame the mother for not doing her job properly. I was 19 when I got married. I didn’t want to marry but my parents said I was old enough and arranged it for me.” (Claudia)

The practice of arranged marriages is not a new topic of discussion for Romani scholars. As many have noticed, in fact, Roma marriages in Romania are often arranged by families through dowry and occasionally involve spouses of very young age (Gamella *et al.*, 2017; Gamella *et al.*, 2015; Fleck and Rughinis, 2008). Some suggest that young people’s preferences and agency are normally taken into account (Gamella *et al.*, 2017); rather than tradition, they tend to see this practice as a result of the lack of alternatives for a better future (Fleck and Rughinis, 2008). Although sharing this last view, others are more cautious about the freedom granted by the families. Durst, for example, has shown how young women escape family oppression by using early marriage and maternity as way to gain independence and respect (2002). Especially when minors are involved, these controversies have been more pronounced and in some cases have reached public attention (Fleck and Rughinis, 2008; Timmerman, 2004).

Claudia was nineteen when her marriage was arranged, and for this reason her case might not be the most contested. Yet, her experience embodies the broader conceptual, cultural, and moral gap—that some have pointed out

(Gamella *et al.*, 2017)—about ideas of family, marriage, and gender in the EU. Partly because of this gap, in fact, Claudia’s experience of migration is conflictual with the established norms and practices of the Roma. These conflicts are particularly observable in her relationship with both her parents and the broader community, as well as in her perception of two morally opposed ways of becoming a woman:

“In England it can be hard to find clothes that I like which cover me. For a Roma woman, wearing a long skirt means I’m respectable in the eyes of my community. I may be beautiful but if I wear jeans or short skirts when I am married, people will think I’m vulgar—that’s just our tradition. I have to behave right. [...] I brought a lot of pictures to prove the work I’m doing, because I thought they [Claudia’s parents] would be proud of me. But it wasn’t useful, they weren’t interested. They said: “No, what is that, I don’t care, I don’t want to listen. The only thing I want is you back here with us.” I was envious of other women who were in that house. Like the sister of my brother in law [...]. She doesn’t have anything, and no one was criticising her. I can have a hundred times more but people wouldn’t stop criticising my choices.” (Claudia)

4.5 Ontological Insecurity and the Free Labour Market

So far I made attempts to pinpoint areas of interaction between the different experiences of ontological insecurity. In this section, in particular, I will give attention to the convergence between ontological insecurities and the context of the free EU labour market. This is because, as I will now show, financial instability is ground upon which a new ontology—the market citizen—is inoculated in the ontologically insecure individuals.

In what follows I will firstly describe how family insecurity contributes to create financial instability, and, vice versa, how this latter shapes family dynamics. Secondly, I will take a look at the encounters in the labour market and at the modes of relationality that these imply. Finally, I will discuss lived experiences of the market citizen ontology.

Insecure Families in the Labour Market

Family networks are important for Romanian Roma individuals because they provide access to the labour market. Most of the participants of this study, in fact, found employment in the UK mainly through these connections. Nonetheless, as I will now show, in the context of Freedom of Movement the economic opportunities that family networks provide are also limited and do not always consist of jobs that can guarantee long-term financial stability. In some cases, as for Rodica, these are merely backup plans to cope with unsuccessful attempts to access other employment opportunities. In her experience, the reduced family network (consisting of only a brother) adds up to the difficulties encountered in the British administrative system. Both these components limit the access to the free labour market:

Antonio: *Car wash? And how did you find this job?*

Friend: *(translates)*

Rodica: *Lucr- um, lucra fratele meu acolo.* [My brother was working there.]

[...]

Friend: *(translating Rodica)* *She said she only knew her brother 'cause her brother moved here before she moved here. So, when she moved here, she only knew her brother, no one- no one else.*

Rodica: *E greu că nu aveam familia lângă mine.* [It's hard because I didn't have a family near me.]

Friend: *And it was hard for her 'cause she didn't have the whole family next to her. She only had her brother.*

[...]

Friend: *(translating Rodica)* *Yeah, she did, but then they didn't accept her for the other jobs and so she just worked at the car wash.*

Antonio: *Okay. And if I can ask her, why they didn't want to... they didn't accept you for another job?*

Rodica: *Spune-i că de-abia azi mi-a apărut numberu, n-am avut number până acum.*

[Tell him that only today the number appeared to me, I have not had the number so far.]

Friend: *She didn't have the number of insurance. That's why, because you know all the jobs...*

[...]

Rodica: *Și de-acuma să depun și eu și beneficiaru cu copilul.*

[And from now on I will also claim for child benefits.]

Friend: *And she's... and it's hard to do 'cause she has to put her kids to school... so it will take a time to do the national insurance.*

Moreover, as this last excerpt shows, Rodica's experience of the labour market is also constrained by the difficulties of integrating parenting and work responsibilities (which I previously discussed through Claudia's experience). For Adrian, this conflict is even more pronounced. In fact, while his wife is away at work, he is forced to stay at home and look after of his child. Due to these obligations—which he undertakes unenthusiastically—Adrian suspends his job search:

Antonio: *You are not looking for a job?*

Adrian: *No, maybe after when he is going to school, the baby, I'm looking for a good job. Now I haven't... just one year and ten months [points at his child].*

[...]

Antonio: *Ok yeah, why do you like to stay with the baby?*

Adrian: *I don't like, but it's my kid! But don't know how somebody help me.*

[...]

Adrian: *Yeah... Normally I don't like staying like that... I know, every day, staying with the baby, but, it's my kids... you know... don't have somebody help me come here, staying with my family you know... just me with [wife name], but [wife name] is working and I am staying with family.*

Moreover, as this excerpt shows, Adrian shares an experience of caring in isolation—in absence of those “caring networks” that migrants often create and rely upon. The couple, in turn, adopts strategies that move away from the traditional gender roles. This move, however, is not an autonomous and negotiated choice. Rather, it is an attempt to fit the labour market for the sake of survival. As this last excerpt suggests, in fact, Claudia and Adrian have inverted their gender roles depending on the suitability of each spouse’s skills and personality to the free labour market. Claudia, on the one hand, is an assertive and highly sociable person who managed to get better employment opportunities especially because of her language skills:

“While I was selling the magazine [on the street] I got a place on an employment skills training they were doing to run for a few young Roma people who could speak English. I was then given interpreting and community work [...].”

On the other hand, Adrian lacks similar skills and his engagement in labour activities remains confined, unwillingly, to the home environment. For both, however, the inversion of gender role creates conflicts with their families and community. As discussed before, in fact, Claudia’s achievements in the labour market lack of recognition and generate emotional distress. On the other hand, Adrian is pushed to question his wife’s loyalty:

“This wasn’t easy for my husband, [husband name], though. To start with all the Roma men were laughing at him because they didn’t understand what I was doing. They said I was going to run off and marry an English man, and for a while there was a lot of tension in my house and a lot of arguments”

Claudia and Adrian are not the only couple who have reconfigured the traditional gender roles as required by the labour market. Ionuț and Nicoleta, for instance, work both part-time and alternate each other selling magazines in the street. Nonetheless, this occupation does not seem to provide a sense

of stability. As the next excerpt shows, in fact, Nicoleta's anxieties for the future of her son spring precisely from her everyday work/caring routine.

Nicoleta (translated by Claudia): *I don't have challenges, I don't have problems, but I do have worries that I have to do like going to work, coming back, managing to do something in a way that it would provide my son a better future, to provide my son every day by day means but also at the same time thinking of his future.*

This unreliable routine is a by-product of the poor stability of the means of subsistence; it weakens bonds of loyalty and ultimately results in a day by day lifestyle. In fact, as the next excerpt shows, Ionuț is unable or unwilling to think long-term. His hopes for the future are about achieving what gives him an immediate sense of satisfaction. This consists of making enough money to go back to Romania, have a barbecue, and flirt with blonde girls:

Claudia: *No... Let's say you, in ten years, do you see yourself in the UK or in Romania?*

Ionuț: *Ten years? (Laughing) Too much!*

Claudia: *Five years! Where do you see yourself?*

Ionuț: *Months, months! Make some money... go back... Barbecue! Blonde! Everything blonde, is good for me! When you go Romania, this is first!*

Encounters in the Labour Market

So far I have discussed some of the obstacles and challenges that Romanian Roma individuals experience at the junction between family relations and the free labour market. In this section, I will shift the focus on the encounters with otherness that are experienced in this latter field. As I mentioned previously, for a Romanian Roma migrant, the experience of difference could be quite overwhelming in the new context. This perception also extends to the economic opportunities experienced in the UK, which are often described as disproportionately favourable compared to those found in

Romania. Rodica and Ionuț, for example, share the same dissatisfaction with the salary conditions in their country of origin:

Friend (translating Rodica): *She said in Romania there's no works, so you can't work. [...] It is not possibly to work somewhere 'cause, you know, you get paid, highly paid here and like 40 pounds in car wash. To all the Romanian, you get paid like three pounds or a pound eight hours in a car wash. [...] So, a month she used to get paid 200 pounds, like a week in here you get 100 pounds, 200 pounds.*

Ionuț: *No, no, nothing in Romania. When you go here... here you make some money... ten, twenty pounds... you go out and you buy something for the boy... I have it. But in Romania, I can't pay this money.*

These two participants, like others, seem to show satisfaction regarding the employment conditions in the UK, and yet, their salary is way below the living wage. More importantly, the huge gap between the working experience in Romania and UK has the effect of lowering further the value of their skills in free labour market. What Florin seem to describe is in fact a depersonalising experience of “being cheap”:

Gabriel (translating Florin): *[...] in London, 'cause he had to stay in... it was a place where a lot of people from Romania came... they were going there and just try to get attention from the cars and ask them if they got work or don't... and he was doing that for a really long time. So, he was staying there, it was raining enough and he had to stop cars and ask them if they got jobs or not. [...] There were so many people that were stopping cars and asking for the job, and for him it was a challenge because he didn't speak, he couldn't speak English, as he doesn't speak English. So, it was a challenge that he... even he stopped the car and couldn't tell them what he's doing, what he needs.*

[...]

Gabriel (translating Florin): *It was for a couple hours, then back on the place that was asking. [...] Yeah. He was a lot cheaper than like a professional builder.*

[...]

Antonio: *Okay. But you asked only for builder?*

Gabriel: *Home builders, yeah. Even gardens. Even cleaning gardens.*

In this last excerpt, Florin's search for employment is dictated by the fear of not being able to find any job. In this position, his encounters with others are experienced in an undefined space, do not include any exchange in cultural value, and lack of intersubjectivity. The experience of these essential traits of human interaction are in fact subordinated to the law of supply and demand—the mode of relationality of the free-market economy.

From Ontological Insecurity to the Market Ontology

Contrary to the previous discussions of ontological insecurity, the experiences I discuss here actually provide individuals with a sense of routine. However, as in Florin's experience, these routines are based on the mode of relationality of the free-market. As such, they are at the service of the free-market economy and do not provide the individual with a sense of ontological security. Deprived of the own autonomy, this latter becomes an isolated and dehumanised automaton. The experience of Rodica, to some extent, reflects these attributes. Firstly, she works much more—and harder—in UK than in Romania (twelve hours per day). Secondly, the long working schedule is accompanied by the uneasiness of being at home, and finally, her human encounters and interactions are limited and unpleasant:

Claudia (translating Rodica): *If I stay at home I get stressed. I get quite a lot of things on my head.*

[...]

Claudia (translating): *Not friendship. I didn't have a friend. I didn't have too much friends. [...] I didn't know that it means friendship.*

[...]

Antonio: *What is the main challenge to work?*

Rodica: *Ce să spun? Că mă enervează lumea. [What I have to say? The world is annoying me.]*

[...]

Antonio: *For example?*

[...]

Claudia *(translating)*

Okay, So sometimes they brought me carpets to wash. People pay for washing the carpets at the car wash and I get pissed off and that. Why I have to do the carpets?

Also in contrast to other instances of ontological insecurity, the following experiences provide individuals with an aspiration—money for its own sake—that with no other experiences of value contributes to atomize the individual further:

Antonio: *And... do you remember any time when you do something very good... at work... and you are proud of it? You remember any good day?*

[...]

Rodica: *Nici nu știu ce să-i spun. [I don't know what to say.]*

Claudia: *Adevărul. Ai- ai sau nu ai? [The truth. Do you have it or not?]*

Rodica: *Da. [Yes.]*

Claudia: *Când? [When?]*

Rodica: *Păi acum patru luni. [Well, four months ago.]*

Claudia: *Ce-ai făcut acu patru luni? [What did you do four months ago?]*

Friend: *Ai luat mulți bani. [You made lot of money.]*

Va. 2: *Am luat muți bani. Nu, că am luat salariu.* [I made lot of money. No, because I got the salary.]

[...].

Claudia : [...] *(translating) What can I say? I said, tell what it is. “Four months ago, I have taken my salary. It was a good cash. I feel good about that”.*

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the reality of ontological insecurity as experienced by the Romanian Roma migrants in the context of Freedom of Movement. Such a reality entails disruptions in family relations and encounters with a threatening otherness. Additionally, in this condition individuals seem unable to act with own sense of autonomy nor according to the guidelines of their own culture.

This condition of ontological insecurity—I have argued—also shapes perceptions and experiences of the free labour market. This latter is accessed with limitations and provides, at best, only a temporary escape from ontological insecurity. At worst, it provides individuals with the “market ontology” which does not include intersubjective relations, openness to the world, or experiences of meaningful contact. Rather, it imposes its own modes of relationality, routinized activity and values.

Chapter Five: Making Sense of Ontological Insecurity

“What we perceive are ‘first and foremost’ not impressions of taste, tone, smell or touch, not even things or objects, but rather, meanings.” (Binswanger, 1969, p.114)

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I have attempted to describe the ontological position of the Romanian Roma as EU citizens through the analysis of their experiences of ontological insecurity. This examination consisted of a phenomenological approach aimed at providing a holistic description of the Roma’s experiential realities. Firstly, I have discussed how the family domain—for the Roma the most important ontological structure—is actually becoming questioned, conflictual, and fundamentally insecure in the context of Freedom of Movement. Secondly, I explored how—in this context—experiences of separation from the world and anxieties about the “other” may hamper the ability to establish meaningful contact with outsiders. Thirdly, I have shown how these perceptions of otherness may become cultural worldviews, and I have described experiences in which individuals are left with a cultural gap. Finally, I discussed how all these insecure ways of being make individuals vulnerable to adopting the pervasive ontology of the market citizen.

In this chapter, I will continue using existential phenomenology in order to analyse the ways in which individuals—from a position of ontological insecurity—make sense and give value to their experience of (insecurely) being-in-the-world. Despite the many contradictions involved in this process, I argue, individuals still make attempts to orientate themselves toward specific ideas of the good life.

Ontological Insecurity, Meaning, and Choice

Throughout this chapter, the problem of ontological insecurity will be examined mainly through the lenses of existentialist philosophers (Heidegger, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Sartre, 2001; Buber 2012; Camus, 2013), psychologists (Binswanger 1969; Frankl, 1985; Boss, 1988), and through the work on place by scholars who heavily draw from this tradition (Relph, 1976; Malpas, 1999; Tuan, 2003; Seamon, 2015;). Their answers to such a problem will be considered vis-à-vis the experiences and perspectives of the participants. From an existentialist perspective, in fact, endeavours to transcend the condition of ontological insecurity involve, at first, the rediscovery or the forging of new meanings. In this sense, the emphasis on freedom—inherent to the existentialist tradition—allows to consider the participants' interpretations of their experiences as attempts to move beyond ontological insecurity. In this research, some of the meanings forged by individuals can be read, through the work of Sartre (2001) or Camus (2013), as attempts to “rebel” to the condition of ontological insecurity. On the other hand, in some other experiences—better understood through the ideas of Frankl (1985), Boss (1988) or Binswanger (1969)—meaning seem to manifest as if it is something already present in the world. In fact, while for the first two, the capacity for meaning-making is essentially an exercise of the individual freedom, for the latter meaning is rather something located in the external world that the individual has to discover. Frankl, in particular, suggested that meanings do not push individual like motivations; they rather exert a pull from the front (1985).

Roma Relationality and Existentialism

As previously mentioned (in section 2.4), there are essentially two different paths that the existentialists take in order to explain human relationality. In this regard, the experiences and perspectives described here tend to align more to a view that—in contrast to Sartre's perspective (2001)—sees relationality as an essential tool to transcend the condition of ontological insecurity. This is the case especially for meanings and values that emerge from the family domain. Moreover—as I will show—individuals often seek to establish relations outside their families on the basis of family values, which they attempt to use as common grounds of interaction in order to achieve recognition.

Throughout this chapter I will also explore the different relationalities that Romanian Roma individuals establish with the world as attempts to overcome the sense of separation. In particular, I will discuss how religion provides an alternative mode of relationality that echoes Buber's concept of I-thou. Moreover, through this higher relationship with God, individuals discover meanings and values that buffer the everyday anxieties of ontological insecurity.

5.2 Meanings and Choices of Family

In the previous chapter I have framed experiences of divorce, conflicts in marriage and parenting, and gender role disruption as a problem of relational insecurity. In a similar vein, I will now depart from examining how individuals attempt to cope with these insecurities. Since for the Roma, family relations serve an ontological function, it is not surprising that the main attempts to transcend relational problems are aimed precisely at strengthening family ties. As I will discuss, these attempts do not simply involve maintaining connections among family members but also—and more importantly—endowing them with “special” meanings.

Within the context of ontological insecurity—I suggest—this “speciality” is better understood as an aspiration toward the good life and by using the notion of place intended as a centre of meaning, home, habit and practice (Tuan, 1977). It must be stressed, however, that such meaning is placed within the “absurdity” of ontological insecurity. In this sense, it is a meaning underpinned by an “unplaced” reality, and it is therefore paradoxical and contradictory. Some of these contradictions can be explored by examining how meanings of both stability and change are attached to family, or how traditional values are rediscovered precisely due to the migration experience.

The themes of stability and continuity—together with the ones of growth and progress—have been indicated by Tuan as essential components of the good life (1986). As he points out, in fact, a person's life can be seen as constituted by two fundamental realms, one set for stability and the other for expansion (*ibid.*). Drawing from this thematic dichotomy, I will now depart considering the ways in which family is valued as a place of stability. Secondly, I will address how, at the same time, family is also a place where

profound changes are experienced. As I will show, in the migration context, both meanings coexist in contradiction despite being in conflict with each other.

Family as a Stable Place

As Tuan suggests, by seeking or maintaining stability individuals hope for some sustained and reliable norms that would ultimately result in an enduring sense of peace (*ibid.*). In this sense, in the experiences described below, family can be understood as a means through which individuals approach this idea of good life. Within the time-space compression, in the context of the EU expansion, and through experiences of ontological insecurity the pursuit of an enduring peace may seem—and it probably is—a utopic and unrealistic goal. However, as I will now discuss, by endowing family relations with such a meaning, individuals are able to cope with the anxieties of the migration experience.

Marilena's account, for instance, might be useful to elucidate this point. On the one hand, as discussed before (see section 4.2), she is affected by the physical separation from her children and by the inability to communicate in English. On the other, through reliance on family members—those who are already in the UK—she is able to transcend these insecurities. In fact, when asked to share some thoughts about her perception of the UK, she belittles the disruptiveness of her migration experience and rather emphasises the stability and closeness of her family ties as well as her personal place within these relations:

Gabriel (translating Marilena): *She was expecting to be different than... than how it's at the moment. She was expecting to be more difficult to be in a different country [...] but when she arrived here, she was with us. Like... is more difficult to go on a country by your own. It's okay to be with someone else.*

A similar link between notions of family, place and experiences of ontological insecurity can also be found in Laura's account. In the previous chapter, I have discussed her feelings of persistent anxiety which she viewed as caused by a hasty marriage. However, despite this experience of conflict,

she still gives ontological importance to being married. In the next excerpt, her experience of marriage (and consequently of motherhood) is seen as an experience of being “in place” as well as a choice of value:

Laura: *Acum că m-am măritat, sunt mai la locul meu.* [Now that I got married, I’m in my place.]

Gabriel: *Ai renunțat la unele lucruri.* [You gave up some things.]

Laura: *Da. Așa. Explică-i tu.* [Yes. This. Explain to him.]

Cristina: *Dedicându-ți timpul tău pentru copiii tăi.* [Dedicating your time to your children.]

Laura: *Pentru copiii mei.* [For my children.]

As I mentioned previously, the search for stability within the context of EU migration is by definition a paradoxical pursuit—and as such, it can be explained through Iazmina’s vision of motherhood. On the one hand, in fact, she chooses to become a mother as an attempt to maintain stability—a purpose that she also associates, more generally, to home and everyday life. However, she relies on migration as a way to achieve this aim, which—similarly to previous evidence—puts her in the condition of ontological insecurity:

Iazmina (translated by Claudia): *I did think that as my time was passing like that, and I said this time I decide for me to have a child, to become a mother and have more stability.*

[...]

Iazmina (translated by Claudia): *Okay, what I do have a difficulty. At the moment is the fact that I don't have a place of mine, where I like stability, I like to where I put something to find it there, and the fact that what it hurts me now is that I don't have that stability, or own home for my own self.*

Antonio: *Okay, and... ...so you need some resources to have the stability?*

lazmina: *Yes, that's why I came here.*

These excerpts are paradoxical because individuals seem to give family meanings that bring together (and in contrast) different geographical perspectives on place. On the one hand, especially for Marilena and lazmina, family can be seen as a relational place—as a “mobile” and “situated moment” (Massey, 2005; Amin 2002) which is produced as result of the migration experience. On the other hand, this meaning is contrasted by other values that individuals see in family relations which are necessary in order to transcend the relational insecurities previously encountered. These other meanings consist of stability, specialty, peace, simplicity, and endurance; they allow family to become a good that is worth to keep from generation to generation, and they serve the function of strengthening relations among family members. Further evidence leading to this interpretation can be found in the way Claudia describes family bonds:

“We’re in my mum’s room and I’m starting to feel very happy and secure. My mum is my best friend and those two – my mum and my daughter – are my real family. No England, no husbands, no problems, no debts, [...] just a mum and a daughter, and another mum and her daughter. They are listening to what I’m saying. No more arguments. We are very close. She’s still going to be my mum and I’m still going to be her daughter, no matter how old I am and no matter who I am. My mum has never really said to me ‘I love you’ but she does a lot to prove it. She shows it in a very special way.”
(Claudia)

For Claudia, the meanings of family, home and place not only overlap, but also give rise to a vision of the good life which—although relational and experienced as a “situated moment” within the experience of EU mobility—is also peaceful and enduring, since it allows to unite across generations. At the same time, however, this idea of the good is also enclosed, gender-confined, and made possible only because of material aspects of place such as face-to-face relationality and the protective walls of a bedroom. This enclosed whole is—drawing from Malpas (1999)—a space within place in which Claudia is able to establish I-thou relationships. In this timeless

moment, in fact, she both recognises herself—and is recognised—as mother and daughter at the same time.

Although, as I have mentioned, it is through the migration experience that Claudia reflects and recognises the value of family as a place, the way this latter is envisioned and made sense of appears to be distant from progressivist perspectives. In fact, while for Massey, a retreat in a little, peaceful, and quiet place is reactionary, masculinist, and associated with nationalism and fear of the outsider (Massey, 2013; Cresswell, 2004), for Claudia this is an existential necessity that allows for the I-thou relation—a completely present experience of full intersubjectivity.

Moreover, the familiar place (and space) envisioned by Claudia is also rich of boundaries. These, are not meant primarily to exclude as some geographers would assume (Thrift, 2006; Massey, 2010). On the contrary, by allowing for an I-thou experience, they rather serve an existential function. As Malpas explains, in fact, boundaries are “properly that on which the possibility of relation is dependent” (2012a, p.238). In this sense, the ability to set boundaries gives individuals control on the ways in which they relate to the world and allows them to distinguish the different meanings of the relations that they establish.

Relationality, from this perspective, is perhaps better understood through the concept of “emergence”—which Malpas defines as “a standing or coming forth” that involves “a movement towards, into, or out of” (2012a, p. 235). Drawing from Plato, he uses the idea of the *chora* to exemplify this notion (*ibid.* p.235):

The chora involves a notion of bounded openness, but that openness is an openness that allows for something to appear within it, and as such it allows for the thing that appears to emerge in that openness. This is why the chora is characterized as matrix or womb (or as a receptacle—in that it receives): the chora is that which allows that which is contained and sheltered within it to come forth as apparent, as existing.

With this concept, Malpas provides a framework that explains not only why the people of this study see the good in a sheltered place, but also why they stand on these family values and experiences of relationality when they attempt to establish “meaningful contact” with others (Valentine, 2008). As it will be later clear, in fact, Claudia’s attempts to establish meaningfulness during encounters is precisely by seeking connection to values that, in her

experience, allow for a stable and enduring I-thou relationship. Take for instance the way her second husband is allowed to be “received in her *chora*” and granted the same aura of speciality:

“I was very pleased with [husband name] that day, he was making me happy. He was saying I could buy what I wanted for my family. Not all Roma men would be like that, supporting you to buy gifts and spend money like I was. He came with me to buy presents for my daughter and family, not for him and his family. That meant a lot to me – it showed me he cared. [...] I’m really lucky to have him, and that he was willing to trust me and let me do what I wanted” (Claudia).

There is a straightforward link between the divorce experience of Claudia (as well as that of other participants) and the condition of ontological insecurity. Additionally, I also suggested that this condition might render individuals vulnerable to adopting a “market citizen” ontology, and, as it may seem, such a risk is also noticeable in this last excerpt, where money appears as a pivot around which relationality is established. At the same time, however, Claudia attempts to make a deliberate choice about the values that underpin her second marriage, which include care, respect and trust. The insistence on these values, I suggest, can be seen as a first antidote to the condition of ontological insecurity. As Giddens suggests, in fact, trust functions as a “protective cocoon” against the potential threats and dangers of the everyday life, and it also allows for creativity, since it prompts the individual to confront the possibility of loss and take a “leap into the unknown” (1991, p.41). As a result, this allows individuals to experience I-thou relationships, a sense of place, a vision of good life, and—as I will discuss later—even meaningful encounters with others.

Family as Change

So far I have discussed how individuals attempt to cope with the condition of ontological insecurity by envisioning family as a stable, enduring, and peaceful place. However, these are not the only paradoxical values that family bonds represent. In fact, as I will now show, family is also a place where possibilities for growing and becoming are pursued. These other

meanings, as Tuan suggests (1986), can be understood considering the changing nature of human relations and space in contemporary society. For Tuan, in fact, contemporary human bonding is generally becoming “less intensive and more inclusive”, and this is due to the changes in how physical space is experienced (*ibid*, p.9).

Although I will not provide enough evidence to either support or oppose this last claim, the experiences described below suggest—in line with Tuan’s argument—that even in a condition of ontological insecurity, “a growing capacity to experience and love the world” (Tuan, 1986, p.9) is an essential component of the good life. Moreover, I suggest that, for the Roma who took part in this study, this capacity is firstly practiced within the family domain through accepting, adapting to, and more importantly by choosing change. This choice—which is exemplified by experiences of choosing religion, migration, or engagement in everyday activities—as I will show, is ultimately a choice of family. Vasile’s case is perhaps the most useful to demonstrate this last point. His experience of choosing family is ultimately a choice of love that produces an ontological upheaval:

***Vasile:** And my wife she said to me "If you want to stay to me, you need to change the religion." After that I'm thinking about... for maybe two years, is not easy for me, because I'm staying 23 years an Orthodox, and after, change the religion is... Because I made before too many... different, you know? When you change the religion is total different! When you change your life, change your brain, change everything! You know? Is my wife said to me: "If you want to stay to me, for family, make for me one family, stay together, you need to change your religion". After I'm thinking about maybe two years like this, I changed my religion.*

With this choice Vasile is required to put religion at the centre of his life, and this changes his sense of being-in-the-world in many ways. Firstly, his everyday routine and engagement in activities is now governed by the Pentecostal rules:

***Vasile:** Yeah! Is total different, is 100% different! Yeah, because before, I smoke, before I smoke, before I drink... is... go to disco, go to everywhere, you know? But now stop! Stop! I'm not smoking, about*

maybe three, three and a half years ago, stop, stop, no smoke, stop drink, stop go to disco, everywhere, only stay with my family, go to work, coming back from work, go to church, nearly every Sunday go to church, pray... is... you know... and now I play music for church! Before, different! Different music! Now is different music for me!

Secondly, Vasile's choice has also a consequence on the relationships that he establishes, and on the way he resolves conflict with others. This latter behaviour, in particular, recalls the invisibility strategy mentioned previously. Although, as discussed before, this strategy is symptomatic of the condition of ontological insecurity, here it paradoxically appears as an essential component of the Pentecostal doctrine:

Vasile: *[...] And maybe plenty friends, plenty friends for me will see I go to church, I go to do something straight, and for my religion is no allowed to make pressure, yeah? Maybe you make something for me now, and is not allowed to fight, you know? It is not allowed to say something to you "fuck off" or something like that... Is no allowed anything, only allowed to try to think for... for leave these people, you know, for no provoke, for not trying to make pressure, after fighting, after... you know?*

Antonio: *Yeah, not create conflict?*

Vasile: *No, no create conflict! No... Yeah it's exactly yeah. Plenty friends will see I changed the religion and when you see, when I go outside, try to make for me pressure, too many pressure... "Ah! Why you changed the religion? Why doing this? Why doing this? Why you make this? Why..." you know? And I said to him, "leave it, is more better to stay there, if you no understand me, is more better to stay there, leave for... for me, no try to make for me pressure, because too many people try to make for me pressure, to make this one! To make conflict! When I see this I am going, or I leave this, or I'm going different place. [...] Maybe he says something, I say something, after (clap hands) make conflict, you know, make fight, make... is more better for me to leave it. Maybe, maybe touch me, maybe say to me something, I leave it, I try to think no to make something problem, you know?*

Although there are clear limitations imposed on the autonomy of the individual, the conversion of Roma communities to Pentecostalism is generally seen in positive lights by scholars, and it is associated with social change, better education and literacy levels, decrease in crime, and improved relationships with outsiders (Wachsmuth, 2017). In addition to this evidence, Vasile's experience suggests that changes and transformations might go hand-in-hand with a choice of relationality that privileges (and strengthen) family ties over other bonds. Such a choice, however, is not an exclusive Pentecostal experience. In fact, since Pentecostalism is a vehicle for Roma expression and not a different identity group (Acton, 2014), the link between family and moral and personal growth is also found—albeit less emphatically—among non-Pentecostal Roma. For example, Ionuț describes life changes which are similar to the ones experienced by Vasile:

***Ionuț:** When my boy is coming my whole life is... another life, not the same, different.*

***Antonio:** And... What changed?*

***Ionuț:** What can I say, I go home... I'm not going in the street I'm not going with the people... with my friends drinking... no wife, no family drinking in the.. in the street.... is not that day, is not that time. Finish. [...] I'm still like... sometimes I'm still like... 12 o'clock coming home... Sometimes! Before all the times I'm going drinking, I'm going drinking everywhere people. Today no!*

Although apparently unrelated with the migration experience, these family choices also underpin the individual's degree of mobility. The choice made by Vasile, for instance, comes with the possibility of migration and better salary. By taking advantage of these opportunities, Vasile also establishes closer bonds with the family of his wife. Throughout his account, in fact, he often uses his in-laws as examples of good people who are worth trusting and following. In the next excerpt, for instance, he associates them with the quality of generosity:

"I have plenty friends like this! Is friend, is my brother-in-law, my sister-in-law, is all my family... is father-in-law, mum-in-law, all my family is like this..." (Vasile)

Vasile's relation with his in-laws and his perception of them is key to understand his sense of autonomy. In particular, his decisions to migrate and engage in certain economic activities cannot be taken apart from his family choice. It is in fact his father-in-law the person behind these moves:

Vasile: *No, when I'm coming here, is my father already here, my father-in-law [...]. My father-in-law is coming first here, and after call me, he say: "[Vasile], you need to come here because I find the job for you, and I have the job, is good wages" and he said to me "how much will be in your country, per months?" I said to him I'm working for... like £300 per month in my country and here is different money, you know? But father he said to me, if you want to come here is more better for [than] Romania, is different wage, I find for you nice job! Different life, come here! First come yourself, you work with me together, after you can find something home, you know, for renting, and after bring family here, and can stay here for long time, because here is different life! You know what I'm saying!*

Antonio: *Okay... Also your father liked the life here?*

Vasile: *Yes, also my father is here for family. My father-in-law, is not my father, my father-in-law! [...] And also my sister-in-law is here for this country... first my father-in-law coming here, you know, but after, call me, i'm coming here, after I bring my family here, after I call my brother-in-law, my brother-in-law coming here and bring the family, you know, one by one! Exactly one by one!*

As the last excerpt shows, there is a link between the meaning of family and that of migration which cannot be explained only in terms of economic motivations. In fact, although Vasile mainly describes migration as a strategy to achieve economic success, it is only through his choice of family that he is able to take advantage of this opportunity. This is not an isolated case. Stefan's choice of migration, for instance, is equally framed in terms of

economic needs; however, when asked about his first encounter with the UK, Stefan is filled up with positive feelings arising from taking responsibilities for his family:

Antonio: *And how did you feel the first time that you came to [UK city]? When you saw [UK City], how did you feel about?*

Stefan: *I'm feeling great! Yeah. I feel great. I think... I'm come from the... I do something for my life, for my family, I come for... take something good for my family, yeah.*

The Meaning of Motherhood

In the previous chapter I have discussed how traditional gender roles become questioned in the EU context. In particular, I considered how mothers experience relational insecurities and conflict. These experiences, as we have seen, can be intense and emotionally fraught, however, unlike evidence found by Orellana *et al.* (2001), Parreñas (2001) and Waters (2003), scholars have noticed that most Roma women do not protest against their traditional gender role (Pantea, 2012). Similarly, the experiences described here align more with this last finding, which Pantea explains by emphasizing women's dependence to a "gender regime" within the social structure of the Roma (2012).

In attempting to avoid simplistic interpretations that would associate the Roma cultural specificity with a system of oppression, the dependence on gender norms is here explained considering how Roma women experience meaning and choice within the constraints of their culture. In fact, for all the Roma women in this study the system of gendered norms and ideas still seem to offer a path toward ontological security by providing a role of responsibility. This sense of being responsible gives women comfort, stability, purpose and sense of place. For instance, Iazmina's choice of leaving her job in order to return to the home environment and become a stay-at-home mother, can be read in this way:

Antonio: *And what where you doing when you were not a mother?*

[...]

Claudia (translating lazmina): *At home. I was listening to music, I was watching TV. I finally found a job, was working for a period and I was feeling bored, I was leaving and then come back to... stay at home, and then again, I didn't have certain goals or aspirations.*

The gender role division adopted by the Roma also comes with specific ideas of what is motherhood and of what the qualities of a “good mother” are. In fact, for lazmina—and similarly for other participants—mothering is first of all “a natural instinct that grows and manifest on you every time” (lazmina). This idea—similarly to other research (Tesär, 2012)—shows how important is for the Roma the physical body in relation their gender constructions. Secondly, it also gives lazmina a vision of ontological security to pursue. In contrast to her work experience, in fact, motherhood is an activity through which she is able to feel love and compassion, and a way to recognise her own personal qualities (such as patience) and sense of purpose:

Antonio: *So why did you decide to have a child? How did it...*

Claudia (translating lazmina): *I really love very much children*

Antonio: *And why do you like children?*

Claudia (translating lazmina): *Because they're small and cute and I like all the children... and I have quite a lot of patience with that.*

Antonio: *And do you learn something? Well... how did your life change when you had a child?*

Claudia (translating lazmina): *I feel more stable, I feel that I needed to do something for his future, I feel that I had a goal in my life.*

Antonio: *So to look after is the goal of your life, basically?*

Claudia (translating lazmina): *Yes*

In lazmina's account, the meaning of motherhood is clearly associated with a sense of personal stability. However, as such it also carries connotations of change and becoming. In fact, although lazmina does not seem to aspire for her own personal growth, her search for stability cannot be decoupled

from the aspiration for becoming that she holds for her child. As her words suggests, these latter are rather increased through the migration experience, taking the form of aspirations for better education:

Antonio: *And what is your aspiration for your child?*

Claudia (translating lazmina): *When I came to this country my aspiration has been... becoming a bit bigger, as I want him to go to school and have a good education. To be someone in life.*

The link between the experience of migration and the goal of better education is also shared by Nicoleta. However, contrary to lazmina, this latter participant does not describe motherhood in terms of personal stability or as a complete dedication to children. She rather emphasises the positive effects of motherhood on her own personal growth, sense of becoming, and wellbeing:

Nicoleta: *It is a good fact to be a mother, the fact that I can give an education to my son. When you have a child you become more mature, you become more responsible, you are more happy person with your child.*

The Rediscovery of Meaning

As I have shown through Vasile's experience, the process by which one chooses and attaches meaning to family is not always a straightforward adoption of the dominant cultural worldviews, and it can involve periods of personal reflections and conflicts. The experience of migration, as I showed in chapter four, seems to complicate this process further adding more cultural and relational challenges.

In the evidence that I will provide next, I show how individuals find meaning in these challenges. In fact, the practice of Freedom of Movement seems to elicit moments of realisation, in which individuals acknowledge their place within their family relations and culture. Take for instance Claudia's reflections on her care-giving role after a short visit to her daughter in the home country:

“She was crying for a chocolate egg – I didn’t have the money to buy her one. On this day I discovered that she can be very spoiled. I discovered she needs a mum to tell her what is ‘yes’ and what is ‘no’ and to understand ‘I don’t have’ and ‘please wait.’”

[...]

“Going back to Romania made me very confused about a lot of things but it also reminded me of who I am and what that means. A Roma woman has rules to follow – she needs to keep her head down. Roma culture is not so open to the new ideas, the modern way. I have to be respectable and not take on the English thinking too much. I must remember where I’ve come from and that somewhere in the world there is someone very special who needs me.” (Claudia)

While, as mentioned before, all the Roma women interviewed seem to embrace their gender roles, this for Claudia has not been an easy choice. However, her discomfort with the Roma gender norms—quite apparent in this last excerpt—seems to be more a result of her personal experiences of arranged marriage and divorce. Additionally, through migration, she had intensive contact with an overwhelmingly different cultural context, especially with the liberalism of her working environment. Although all of this, as we have seen, generates conflicts with her family and culture, it never results in a definitive severing of ties or rejection of the care-giving role. Quite the contrary, the commitment to this latter seem to be more a vision through which she can find ways out of the conflict.

A similar heightened awareness of the importance of family relations is also shared by Florin. As he points out, it is precisely the experience of separation—the realization of how vulnerable human ties can be in the context of migration—that has strengthened the bond with his family:

Gabriel (translating Florin): *He learned how to... He learned how to love his family when he's closer to them. He's now, cause he's away, he understands now how to love his family more.*

The Making of Meaning

As I mentioned previously, existentialists such as Sartre (2001) and Camus (2013) have considered meaning-making as the act of an individual who attempts a rebellion against the fundamental “absurdity” of the human condition. Such a view, I suggest, is appropriate in order to understand Rodica’s experience of meaning-making.

In the previous chapter, I have discussed Rodica’s experiences of ontological insecurity as perhaps the most dramatic. More than any other participant, in fact, she seems to experience poor human relationality (with both her family and outsiders) and the constraints of economic insecurity. Nonetheless, in Rodica’s account one can still find room for self-esteem and human dignity. These values are expressed through the practice of industriousness and self-making that she opposes to the many insecurities of her life. In the next excerpts, also Claudia—as a cultural broker (Temple and Young, 2004, p.171)—seems to see similar qualities:

Claudia (translating Rodica): [...] what makes me feel good is the fact that I work and sustain myself. [...] I don't get any benefits. I don't get anything. I just survive with what I have. [...] 10 years. I was 10 years. I didn't have father, mother and I realized that my work is the only thing that could help me [...].

Claudia (commenting): And she works with a lot of mens and she’s a strong woman. She works with seven men and she’s equal. [...] [Rodica] has worked in everywhere mens does the kind of work and she said “I can do it. No matter that I am not a man and I’m a woman. I can do it.” She does the same things that mens do. Wash a car, move it, get the things movin’ around and she’s the same thing.⁹

It is important to point out, however, that—unlike Claudia—Rodica does not set herself against the traditional gender norms by choice but because of

⁹ This quote was previously used in section 3.3.

necessity. Nonetheless, through self-esteem she is able to experience a sense of self-value that in this context becomes a matter of survival. Self-esteem is in fact “an inner self-righteousness that arms the individual against anxiety” and “the very core of human adaptation” (Becker, 1971, p.67).

5.3 Making Sense of the World

So far I have described family relations in terms of the meanings that individuals attach to them. Through this process, I have argued, the participants of this study also forge or rediscover specific ideas of the good. The pursuit of these ideas, might allow them to orientate themselves within the condition of ontological insecurity.

In a similar way, in this section I will explore how individuals give different meaning to their encounters with the world and the ways through which insecurities about difference could be overcome. These experiences of sense-making, I argue, are not completely unrelated to the family domain. In fact, the values and aspirations pursued in the family domain are also sought—although in different forms—during encounters with others.

Experiencing Openness and Newness

In the previous chapter I have problematized the experience of difference showing how engulfment—rather than respect—might be the outcome of encountering the other. The relationship with this latter, is often perceived as a binary opposition or in terms of separation—mainly due to both direct and indirect experiences of discrimination. As a result—with such an “other” around—the world becomes an insecure place where existence itself is threatened. In this section, I will look instead at the ways in which individuals attempt to resist such a view.

Perhaps the first step in developing not only a positive perception of reality but also a more profound sense of ontological security is the openness toward the world. For Heidegger, in fact, openness is an *a priori* structure of existence (1996). As such, it is pre-reflective—independent from the exercise of our will—and it is necessary for the possibility of encountering other beings in particular ways—for example aesthetically, practically or theoretically (Wheeler, 2018).

Drawing from Heidegger, also humanist geographers have pointed out the ontological necessity of openness. For instance, Seamon defines openness as a vehicle for authenticity and associates it with activities—such as watching or noticing—that foster intensified or heightened encounters (2015). In his view, especially in conjunction with the experience of at-homeness, openness allows individuals to extend beyond themselves (*ibid.*).

In the next pages I will discuss how Romanian Roma individuals experience openness through their attitude toward newness. In contrast to the engulfing experience of difference, I argue, individuals also give value to what is new, and by doing this they attempt to reach an awareness of their experience of being-in-the-world. When otherness takes such a meaning—of newness, rather than being embedded in binary oppositions—not only individuals adopt a more open attitude toward it; they also seek to encounter the other actively. From this perspective, difference is viewed as potential, and as such it has the possibility to develop in meaningful contact and I-thou relationships.

Difference and Freedom of Movement

As discussed previously, for the practitioners of Freedom of Movement the making sense of the experience of difference can be a conflictual process. In line with what discussed before, in fact, the excerpt below shows that boundaries have not vanished at all:

“...when I look at this photo I notice that there are two persons reflected – representing the two sides of me. [...] I see two persons in one, someone in pieces, her two sides similar but very different. With a wall that separates those two parts. I think that wall is England.”
(Claudia)

In the context of Freedom of Movement, the regulation of the experience of difference—in great part a task of the national citizenship identity—is rescaled at the level of the individual. As such, national boundaries—and so the choice of what does and does not belong—becomes primarily an individual choice. On the one hand, for Claudia—and similarly for some other participants—this is an overwhelming experience which leaves her in a

sort of limbo. On the other hand, when newness is perceived, it produces an attitude of openness toward difference, curiosity, sense of wonder, and ultimately a mutual understanding of perspectives. When this happens the individual is able to recognise that difference has the potential to bring something of value in his or her life. For example, in the excerpt below the decision to stay in the UK—and the encounter with a new, different, and challenging place—is rather seen as a choice of personal development:

“There is a lot of reasons: young... maybe... finding a different adventure way, finding something new, more... more new, let’s say more new attractions, more challenges, all these kind of things. [...] As I said to you, I lived in a... it is not a village, it is a very small town that it’s got about eight miles [...] it’s a very small small small... so I came here and I saw this and I was like... Oh... This is where I wanna be! So from very small houses to very big buildings. [...] I fell in love with that. It’s a million of reasons. It’s the tree... one of the things it was, it was the bad weather!” (Claudia)

Nicoleta’s and Stefan’s words also seem to suggest a similar attitude toward difference:

“I came because I did want to do something for myself, also working, and I liked the country” (Nicoleta)

“More people, in the UK, more people, different people, different culture, but England it’s... I don’t know... you have... It’s possible to find... you take one life, new life. Better. Yeah.” (Stefan)

Encountering Difference through Pentecostalism

In the previous chapter I discussed the strongly dualistic worldviews of the Pentecostal doctrine and the narratives of separation that these entail. In the evidence that I will provide next, nonetheless, Pentecostal practices become rather an opportunity to seek and meet the other. Gabriel’s choice to

participate in a Pentecostal mission in Africa, in fact, is for him not simply an opportunity to travel—an activity that he enjoys—but also, as he mentions, it is a way to discover new cultures and different ways of seeing the world. Although emphasised as an individual choice, this genuine search for difference is never taken apart from Gabriel's religious beliefs. It is in fact through the missionary experience that he attempts to get closer to his Pentecostal values and improve his relations with his family and community:

Gabriel: *I'm travelling a lot... I'm travelling a lot, I'm visiting new places, I'm learning new cultures, isn't that? Seeing what people think, what's the difference between us and them. By travelling you get to know many things that you didn't know. So that's what is helping me to grow up to much of myself.*

[...]

Gabriel: *One of them came to my church and presented himself. He said "I'm a missionary and I'm looking for people that can help us" and there was more than 500 members in my church, and I was the only one who choose to go in Africa.*

Antonio: *And why do you think they choose you?*

Gabriel: *No, they didn't choose me. I chose to go.*

Antonio: *Ah okay, okay. You were the only one?*

Gabriel: *I were the only one in 500 members in there. There were people saying that "I wanna go, I wanna go" but neither of them getting there. I was the only one to get there.*

Antonio: *Why... what is the difference between you and the other people?*

Gabriel: *They're not different. It's just, as I told you, since I was a kid I liked to see how people think and to help them, to help them out, solving their problems, and when this guy came at the church he showed us how people are living there, I thought this is the right thing, this is the right moment to go in there, and see how people... and trying to help them, trying to do whatever they needed.*

[...]

Gabriel: *It's a new experience, you get to know people, you get to know many different things, different things that you never saw.*

[...]

Gabriel: *I always wanted to go to Africa, I was speaking to one of my friends, to go in Africa last year, but I didn't know that I was going to go in Africa for helping people, I just wanted to see and go in Africa for holiday, as a holiday, just to travel and see new cultures. But, I never get to go on holidays, I kept some money to go on holiday with my family, they're going on holiday in the summer, but I still keep saving some money for Africa, this year. So that money, thought I had a different plan with it. My plan was to go and spend it on a holiday, but God said, "No! You have to spend this money going help people in Africa". That's how I get to go in Africa.*

Although Gabriel's interest goes beyond Europe (Pentecostalism is in fact a global movement), it is through exercising Freedom of Movement that he gets to enjoy such a travel opportunity. This "mission" in Africa is in fact something that he could have not accessed in Romania, and this is mainly due to the lack of economic resources:

"I didn't have this opportunity. Even if I had the opportunity I didn't have the money, cause in here I get to go to work, I get to save money, and by saving some money I found out about this, and I went there." (Gabriel)

Moreover, the practice of Freedom of Movement allows Gabriel to establish and maintain bonds with people who share the same interests. His new friends, in fact, all share the same religious values but also the same passion for travelling:

Gabriel: *Yeah, I'm still travelling with them. They're gonna come in here, one time this month, and three days and we're gonna travel through France. We're still friends, we just built a big relationship between us! Yeah, they're really good friends, yeah.*

Antonio: *So what do you think you share with them? What do you think...*

Gabriel: *We can say... What we're sharing?*

Antonio: *Yeah.*

Gabriel: *I don't know what you mean... which sharing?*

Antonio: *I mean if there is some kind of values that you share together, or some kind of passion...*

Gabriel: *Passions... yeah, yeah we all love to travelling, we all, so we're sharing this.*

Antonio: *But they're also from the Pentecostal church?*

Gabriel: *Yeah. We also go to the same church, not always cause I live here and they live in [UK City], but I get to travel to them, in [UK city], and go to the same church.*

Relationality through God

The role of religion in improving relationality within the community cannot be overstated. The social function of rituals and moral norms has in fact been object of study at least since the work of Durkheim (1912). From his perspective, the maintenance of social cohesion, conformity, and solidarity was only possible through a system of shared rituals, norms, and beliefs that would offer answers to existential questions (*ibid.*). Drawing from this latter, Haidt has more recently considered how morality “binds and blinds” in order to explain why people unite and enter conflict with each other as groups (2012, p. 193). Research on Pentecostalism—in the context of ontological insecurity—does not contradict these perspectives. Possamai-Inesedy has in fact suggested—drawing from Giddens (1991)—that as an expert system Pentecostalism might constitute an alternative to the condition of ontological insecurity, since it provides individuals with a sense of routine and with the opportunity to construct a “unified self” (2002, p. 37).

The evidence presented below aligns to this claim. Moreover, as I suggest, through religion the Pentecostal Romanian Roma also attempt to establish a different mode of relationality that can be explained through Durkheim’s sociology. The French sociologist in fact believed that human ties were primarily emotional and possible due to two different set of sentiments. On

the one hand, there is a direct bond between individuals, which is manifested in daily life relationships through sentiments such as honour, respect, mutual affection and fear. These sentiments, as he suggests, do not affect personal autonomy. On the other hand, the individual is also bound directly to the community as a whole by a second set of emotions. In contrast to the former, these latter sentiments “manifest themselves primarily in the relationships of the society with other societies, and could be called inter-social” (Durkheim, 1887, p. 219-222). He also adds: “when I act under the influence of the second [set of sentiments], by contrast, I am simply a part of a whole, whose actions I follow, and whose influence I am subject to” (*ibid*, p.219-222).

This last point is key to understand how religion—in this case Pentecostalism—might offer a path toward ontological security. In contrast to Laing (1990) or Giddens (2013) who both locate ontological security in the self and in the individual ability of making sense of the world, religion provides a kind of relationality that bypasses self-identity. The words of Petru and Violeta seem to support this point. Once you are a convert, your individual agency is outsourced to God, and the direct relationship with him takes priority on everything, even on your family bonds:

“[...] I need not to take just for me and my family everything I do. I need to do everything for God. Understand? It’s very important to do all things for God.” (Petru)

“If God will wish to separate me from my family, that is not going to affect the love that I have for him because it’s gonna respond, I’m obeying his willing and his plan that he has. [...] (Violeta)

Also Stefan seems to share this view. When asked about the kind of relationalities that are possible in church, he tries to explain that Pentecostals attempt to establish a direct relationship with God first. Only through this higher connection people can receive “something good” and “respond” as persons by being happy:

Antonio: *So how do you relate with the other people? How do you... I mean through this activity... I mean did music help you with this activity? With connecting with people?*

Stefan: *No actually, in first time music is connection with the God, you know, because God, he gives this inspiration. You know, he gives the peace, you know, you give the... something good, and you, like the person...*

Antonio: *Answer? Respond?*

Stefan: *Respond! You're happy. Respond you're happy... and...this!*

In this last excerpt Stefan is referring to music and singing in church as activities through which individuals can establish a higher connection with God. One of the characteristics of Pentecostalism is in fact the emotional and charismatic bond between the individual and God (Laurent, 2014). In my research, participants often tried to explain the emotional intensity of this connection in terms of “giving the heart to God”. For Petru, only those who are willing to establish such a bond are allowed access to the ultimate good:

Petru: *Because, He say, the God He say, “Who have a good heart to sing for me, to sing for me. Who have a good heart, to sing for me.” You understand that? [...]*

Petru: *And no all people is... the God he take up. No all. Maybe I'm Christian...*

Antonio: *Why not all?*

Petru: *Why not, yeah? Why not? Because heart is not given all heart to God. Maybe I'm singing, “I love you, Jesus, I love you, Jesus” you see? And my heart is not for God. I don't give it my heart for God. My heart is for mine to drink, to food, and to- maybe to take money, to lot of money, to take more lot money for me, for my family, no.*

This relationship of emotional intensity echoes, again, the work of Durkheim (1912) and in particular his concept “collective effervescence”—a state of collective ecstasy in which “the vital energies become hyper-excited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful” (1912, p.424). As

Durkheim explains, in such moments “man does not recognize himself; he feels somehow transformed and in consequence transforms his surroundings” (*ibid.*).

This sense of transformation is in fact a very common theme among accounts of conversion to Pentecostalism (Acton, 2014). In this study, we have already seen such an experience in the family domain, through the words of Vasile. Similarly to that experience, for Cristina conversion means a new sense of being-in-the-world that is strictly opposed to her previous sense of self. For Cristina, to entrust her self-identity and agency to God means having better relations with people, moral progress, and generally being a good person:

Gabriel (*translating Cristina*): *When she wasn't a believer, she was... a mean person, she couldn't speak with people, she was a bad person when she wasn't a believer. And that changed. She changed when she found God and made her a better person, a good person.*

Antonio: *And why mean?*

Gabriel: *De ce erai o- o persoană rea?*

[Why you were a mean person?]

Cristina: *Pentru că a-- ăă, atunci când nu-l cunoști pe Dumnezeu, în tine stăpânește răutatea. Și răutatea vine. Din lucrurile foarte mici și... stăpânul răutății este decât Satana.*

[Because, when you do not know God, you are in control of evil. And evil comes. From the very small things and... the master of evil is Satan.]

Gabriel: *She said cause when you are not with God—inside you—when you are not with God... I don't know if you know about Devil?*

Antonio: *Yeah, yeah. Satan.*

Gabriel: *Yes, Satan, he makes you being a bad person. And he literally controls your life when you're not with God.*

The bond with God seems generally to improve one's own sense of being-in-the-world and—albeit indirectly—also the relations that individuals establish

among themselves. Moreover, for the Pentecostals, this act of devotion—of committing one’s sense of self to God—is never experienced as a reduction of the individual as a subject. Rather, it is perceived in a way that recalls Buber’s concept of I-thou. In Buber’s view, in fact, the connection with God is the I-thou relationship *par excellence*—a relation that encompasses both “I” and “Thou” (2012, p.vii). As such, God—often referred by Buber as “the Centre” or “the Eternal Thou”—is a “Thou that never becomes an it” and the place where “the parallel line of relation meet” (2012, p.33). In this sense, God can be read as a safe meeting point for subject-to-subject relations. In fact, when relating with God Violeta seem also to relate to any other “thou”:

Claudia (translating Violeta): *I also like the fact that makes me feel more closer to him, I can put on my knees and talk to him like as friend, as a mum, as a dad, as a brother, someone that is willing to listen to me, someone that I can feel like... and talk.*

Claudia (commenting): *The Pentecostal people when they sit down and pray, they think they have this connection of talking freely, they think that what they say they will get listening from opening their heaths to him...*

In the last excerpt, Violeta describes her relationship with God mainly using family roles. In fact, the religious and family domains are not apart from each other and rather tend to intersect through values and meanings. As we have seen, for example, the same meanings of change and transformation are attributed to both choices of family life and conversion to Pentecostalism. Similarly, for Cristina and Gabriel there is a direct correspondence between church and family as a place:

Cristina: *Toți suntem o familie acolo și nu are nimeni altă părere unul despre altul, că nu ne cere Dumnezeu să ne vorbim aproapele de rău.*

[We are all a family there and no one else has any opinion about each other. God does not ask us to speak to our neighbour about evil.]

Gabriel: *What she said is... When you're at church and when you follow God, you became family, a part of a family. And even you are in a church or with your actual family is the same, cause when you became a believer you take part of a family in a church.*

The connection in meaning between family and Pentecostalism can also be found in the next excerpt in the experience of Cristina and her sister. Once embraced the doctrine, the concern of a Pentecostal individual seems to consist, first and foremost in bringing other family members together “with God”:

Cristina: *Ăă, sora mea. Eram mică și sora mea s-a rugat pentru familie, tata și mama nu- și frații nu era, decât o singură fată. [...] Ne-a explicat că Dumnezeu este bun.*

[My sister. I was little and my sister prayed for the family, my father and mother were not, and the brothers were not, only one girl. [...] She explained that God is good]

[...]

Gabriel: *Ce îți place cel mai mult la sora ta?*

[What do you like the most about your sister?]

Cristina: *De toate surorile mele, că suntem șapte. Suntem șapte frați.*

[All of my sisters, we are seven. We are seven siblings.]

Gabriel: *That they are seven. Seven, five sisters and two brothers.*

Cristina: *Și suntem toate pe calea Domnului.*

[And we are all on the way to God.]

Gabriel: *And all of them are with God at the moment and that what she likes the most. That all the family is with God.*

Cristina: *Și cel mai mult mi-a plăcut că mi-a lăsat adevărul, mi-a spus adevărul.*

[And I really liked that she left the truth, she told me the truth.]

Gabriel: *And the most... What she likes about her sister is that she told them about God.*

As we have seen, Pentecostalism allows participants to experience meaning and value in any domain of the everyday life. This is especially the case when individuals go through moments of anxiety. In these moments, the Pentecostal faith gives Cristina the sense of being part of God's plan and the ability to establish meaningful encounters amidst the insecurities of the migration process:

Antonio: *But it was more difficult or easy to find church when she moved to the UK?*

Gabriel: *Oh, yeah. Yeah. Zice că a fost mai dificil să-ți găsești o biserică când ai venit în Anglia?*

[He says, was it more difficult to find a church when you came to England?]

Cristina: *Mergând pe autocar, am găsit un frate. Dumnezeu mi-a pregătit imediat, n-am stat niciun pic fără Dumnezeu.*

[On the bus, I found a brother. God prepared me right away, I didn't stay a little without God]

Gabriel: *On her way she [...] she was coming to UK. She found a man from [name of the UK city where she lives] who invited her to the church, so it wasn't that difficult to find a church, 'cause on the way she was coming to UK, she found... she already found a church.*

Cristina: *Dumnezeu a pregătit. Nu te-a lăsat. (laughs)*

[God is prepared. He doesn't leave you.]

[...]

Cristina: *Așa lucrează Dumnezeu.*

[That's how God works.]

Gabriel: *That's how God works.*

Cristina: Nu te lasă singur.

[He does not leave you alone.]

Gabriel: He will never let you alone.

Experiences of Recognition

Pentecostal participants, as we have seen, seem to have more opportunities to establish a vision of ontological security, since the religious commitment allows a kind of relationality that transcends the constitution of the self as well as the day-to-day challenges of migration. Non-religious participants, on the other hand, need to rely on their individual character and skills when establishing relations with outsiders. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the kind relationality that they can establish through their national or ethnic identity is rather one of discrimination or stigmatisation. Secondly, despite the enhanced possibilities for family reunion, the individual still remains the main focus of the right of Freedom of Movement. As a result, the “meaningfulness” of these encounters originates from an individual—and not collective—experiences of “recognising” or “being recognised”.

For Claudia, in particular, the sense of being recognised outside her cultural and ethnic boundaries is an exclusive personal achievement. As such, it is opposed to the limitations that she experiences inside the cultural constraints and does not extend to the Roma as a group:

“My partner is a little scared of [Claudia], and so his family, but English people love her. [...] I enjoy working—I have found mentors who are encouraging me to do things because they think I deserve a chance. I am starting to be someone.” (Claudia)

Similarly, the meaningful encounters that Claudia establishes during her work experience as a street magazine seller are all with individuals. In her account, these people are diverse and recognised as such—not by race, gender, or class but according to their ability to bring simple humanness in a moment of shared “throwntogetherness” (Massey, 2005). Additionally, Claudia herself is recognised as such:

“It’s thanks to this experience that I am the person I am now. My customers were great. There was a dentist who used to pass a couple of times a week and I would have to dance with him. He would say: ‘Dance with me in the moonlight,’ and I would say: ‘No thank you, not today’. And he would leave, but when he came back he would just take me by the hands and dance. There was another lady who was very kind and every morning and evening she would bring me biscuits and hot chocolate. And then there was [name], another person who was working on the street – he was a cleaner. Every day he would bring a flask of tea to work with him and he would share it with me. He would have one cup for him, one cup for me. He would bring sugar just for me because he didn’t take it. He would say to me: ‘We have the most beautiful restaurant in the city’. And we would sit outside and drink our tea and everyone would look at us and laugh. There was also [name], a great friend from the library café, who would bring me tea and sandwiches. It was cold so I would dance, because my feet would get so I couldn’t feel them, but when I danced, people smiled.”
(Claudia)

This kind of encounter is in sharp contrast with those described in the previous chapter. In opposition to Florin’s depersonalising experience of “being cheap”, for example, they show that it is possible for the individual to establish a relationality that is sensitive to a shared human vulnerability.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the ways in which Romanian Roma individuals attempt to make sense of themselves in the condition of ontological insecurity. As I have suggested, this is also a process in which meanings and values are constituted and pursued. Although contradictory, these meanings and values orientate them toward certain ideas of being-in-the-world. These ideas—which also imply certain conceptions of good life and human relationality—may constitute an alternative to the ontology of the market citizen.

Through Freedom of Movement the individual gets thrown in a confusing context where sense making becomes difficult. However, this context also produces experiences of positive engagement with difference or reflection on one's own sense of belonging.

Chapter Six: Enacting The Good

“Perhaps to have a proper sense of place is not to have a sense of something comforting and familiar, but is rather to have a sense of one’s own uncertain and fragile locatedness in the world, and to have to take responsibility for that.” (Malpas, 2012b, p. 28)

6.1 Introduction

After having discussed the condition of ontological insecurity as a point of departure to understand the Romanian Roma in the UK as EU citizens, I have explored the universe of conflicting and contradictory meanings that are possible from this ontological position. I have also suggested that these efforts in meaning-making or discovery can tell us about specific ideas of the good life.

In this chapter, I will explore this last link more in depth, discussing how ideas of the good are pursued—through which activities. Although I will not consider of the effectiveness of these efforts—that is, how successful are capabilities in becoming functionings, to put it in Sen’s terms (1990)—this account will attempt to map the possibilities for engagement with ideas of the good life in the context of the EU citizenship.

As we have seen previously, for the Romanian Roma the path toward the good life is undertaken both as a search for stability and change and mainly through the modes of relationality of the family and religious domains. In this chapter, I will discuss how these relations are established and maintained through the engagement in meaningful activities and how these latter are experienced in the context of the EU citizenship. By studying what Romanian Roma “do” in the context of the EU Freedom of Movement I also seek a point of convergence among concepts of place, ontological security, and *eudaimonia*.

Ontological Security, Place, and Wellbeing

As I have mentioned previously, theorists such as Laing (1990) and Giddens (1991) have emphasised the importance of day-to-day routinized actions in providing the individual with a sense of ontological security. For the latter, in particular, habits and routine are invested with emotional significance; they are a “crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties” (Giddens, 1991, p. 39).

Similarly, phenomenologists and humanist geographers have recognised this existential function and made explicit connections between engagement in activities and being-in-the-world. Among these, Heidegger was probably the first in recognising that certain activities, constituting “the fundamental structure of *Dasein*”, do not necessarily pass through consciousness but are rather found in the “average everydayness” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 65). Drawing from this idea, humanist geographers have established links among everyday activities, meaning, and sense of place (Tuan, 1977). For example, central to Tuan’s theory of space and place is the “field of pragmatic activity” which—although unconscious—is “necessary to our sense of orientation—of being securely in the world” (*ibid.*, p.86). In this sense, our ontological security—and sense of place—is primarily defined by our engagement in activities.

From a similar perspective, also Seamon (1980) has paid attention to habit and routine. Rather than Heidegger, however, he draws more from Merleau-Ponty (2002) who had endowed the body with its own subjectivity. In line with this latter, in fact, Seamon suggests that the very essence of place might be found in the experience of routinized and embodied engagement (1980). In his view, the body “expresses itself in a preconscious way usually described by such words as ‘automatic,’ ‘habitual,’ ‘involuntary,’ and ‘mechanical’” (1980, p.155). Such idea of place does not only apply to individual experiences. For Seamon, familiarity and a collective sense of place are rather produced by “place-ballets” that are performed every day by people engaging in a web of time-space routines (*ibid.*).

The experience of place—intended as practical, habitual, and embodied engagement with the world—has not only the potential to move individuals away from the condition of ontological insecurity, but it can also propel toward the good life. As I will show, in fact, routines serve a twofold function. Firstly, they give individuals a sense of stability by providing them with a

concrete actualisation of their ideas of the good; and secondly, they are processes by which values are slowly established.

This relationship between routinized engagement and wellbeing has a distinguished history in western philosophy. In *The Nichomachean Ethics* Aristotle argued that the good life—*eudaimonia*—is achieved through “practical wisdom”—a set of virtues that are learned through imitation and habituation (Ameriks and Clarke, 2000). More recently, scholars in the field of positive psychology have drawn from Aristotle’s account in order to develop a number of theories of wellbeing—most notably Waterman’s “eudaimonic identity theory” (1984), Ryff’s theory of psychological well-being (1989), and Ryan and Deci’s self-determination theory (2001). Although each of these theories tends to emphasise different components of what makes a good life, they all seem to converge in considering life satisfaction and positive affect as by-products of a meaningful engagement with the world.

Perhaps more problematic for the purpose of this research is that these theories are culturally-bound to a western context. As a result, they make little attempt to understand a geography of the good life. Moreover, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the very process of self-identity formation—and therefore the idea of self-autonomy that is implied—are perceived and experienced differently depending on one’s ontological assumptions. The very notion of the self—it has been argued (Gergen, 1973; Baumeister, 1987; Sampson 1988)—varies across cultures and over time.

Some scholars have taken these limitations seriously and proposed more context-sensitive understandings of *eudaimonia* (Wong, 2013; Mckay, 2016). For instance, Mckay argues for the need of a “critical eudaimonics” that would shed lights on the conditions in which people cultivate *eudaimonia* in their everyday life (2016, p.410). Similarly, Sheldon has attempted to restrict the scope of such a concept arguing for a sharper focus on the activities that bring individuals closer to their own values (2016).

However, to take into account these limitations is not to say that there is no convergence at all between the experiences of the Romanian Roma as EU citizens and the more established—even universalistic—approaches to the good life (most notably, Nussbaum’s attempts to define a set of universal capabilities based on the Aristotelian framework (1988; 1992)). Rather, in

this chapter I will account for the points of intersection (or divergence) between Aristotelian approaches and empirical evidence.

6.2 Experiences of Engagement

Engagement as a Necessary Employment

To different extents, all the Romanian Roma of this study (except Alexandru) tend to justify their decision to move to the UK in terms of necessity. As I have previously discussed, in fact, the UK context is perceived—in binary opposition to the Romanian one—as a landscape of opportunities. For the participants of this study, these opportunities are first and foremost opportunities for better income, however, the engagement in economic activities seems to go hand-in-hand with the maintaining of meaningful relations—family bonds in particular. In this sense, income allows individuals (especially men) to obtain recognition and sense of place within their family relations. As a result, the practicalities of a specific economic activity are not perceived as important as the income that this activity produces. For instance, Nicoleta and Stefan do not seem to give much weight to skills involved in their jobs:

“I don’t have like... certain dream to follow on about a job, but I don’t mind if I was working in a factory, or in a restaurant... that I would be better paid, that’s the only thing I want at the moment.” (Nicoleta)

Stefan: *Yeah. It’s... I’m very different now. Because before... I think... What can I do next day, for the take money, this. Now I no have this problem, because I know this... I have one job, which is good job... which is good, is good. [...] Now in construction in my work... I’m working with the painter... I changed the place... the house... everything, everything...*

Antonio: *Why do you like your job then?*

Stefan: *Actually, I'm working different jobs. I'm working like barber shop. [...] Yeah, 'cause I am barber. I'm working long time in my country, barber. Just first job in the UK I'm working in warehouse, Amazon. I'm looking just... only... only job... no only job. I'm working every place! [...] I no have... in this moment, I no have preference, because just better for me is working one... one shop, one barber shop, no? It's very easy, no? But I've nothing this... I no think of... as I need work only one barber shop because... closer in my... very nice... I'm looking different in the working, in the construction, on the site. It's different working one barbershop, it's different. But nothing in where place I am working. Only, only I think need working for take money. For this.*

Such a mode of engagement—as experienced by Nicoleta and Stefan—seems to lead us toward the widely recognised barriers that affect the Roma in the labour market. The jobs that Stefan or Nicoleta perform (or even aspire to) are in fact all low-qualified and temporary. More specifically, as Cristina's account shows, these activities allow a great degree of horizontal mobility in a global context, but rarely (Claudia's case being the only exception) produce a move upward in terms of career or social status:

Gabriel *(translating Cristina): she's been working in different countries, in Spain, Germany, France to help her family also.*

Antonio: *And you were traveling all the time?*

[...]

Cristina: *La- la bătrâni. Cum se zice la bătrâni acolo?* [Old people. How about the old people there?]

[...]

Cristina: *Badantă. Badantă.* [Caregiver. Caregiver.]

Gabriel: *She was working for... homecare in Italy.*

Cristina: *În Spania la căpșuni.* [In Spain, strawberries.]

Gabriel: *She was working in Spain for, um, strawberries.*

Cristina: *În Franța, menaj.* [In France, housekeeping.]

Gabriel: *In France, she was... home care.*

Cristina: *În Germania, la abator.* [In Germany, abattoir.]

Gabriel: *In Germany... was working in a... warehouse.*

[...]

Gabriel: *And the job she liked the most was in Spain, for...*

Cristina: *Africa.* [Africa]

Gabriel: *Oh, South Africa...*

Cristina: *Tomate.* [Tomatoes]

Gabriel: *...for collect of tomatoes.*

Antonio: *And why did you like more that job?*

Gabriel: *De ce ți-a plăcut jobul ăla mai mult?*

[Why did you like that job more?]

Cristina: *Pentru că a fost în mai multe luni și a fost bani mai frumoși.*

[Because it was in several months and it was more money.]

Gabriel: *It was for a long term and good money.*

In these excerpts, especially Nicoleta and Stefan seem to be genuinely disinterested in pursuing long-term jobs or the development of specialised skills. This aspirational lack—widely discussed as a “Roma problem” (Battaglia and Lebedinski, 2014; Bereményi and Carrasco, 2015)—is normally associated with marginalisation, discrimination, and to the general context of poverty in which Roma often live (Gatti *et al.*, 2016). As Gatti *et al.* suggest, in such a context, the job search is experienced as “discouraging” (2016). This sense of discouragement, they suggest, is passed down from parents to children and might cause these latter to abandon school (*ibid.*).

As we have seen in chapter four (section 4.5), difficulties in the job search are relevant here and do persist in the context of the UK. The lack of movement upward in the labour market, however, does not seem to depend only on structural barriers. For participants such as Nicoleta, Stefan, or Cristina, the pursuit of a career (and generally the achievement of a position of competence, prestige, or power outside the family domain) does not seem

to be an essential ingredient of their vision of the good life. As I mentioned before, in fact, the experience of growth is primarily sought within family, and (with a couple of exceptions) activities outside this realm are mainly engaged on the basis of their immediate feasibility, accessibility, and economic value. As such, they are only functional to the improvement of the conditions that allow family relations to be maintained.

In these terms, these experiences of engagement in economic activities seem to align to Aristotelian perspectives, at least, insofar economic gains are seen as functional and not as a replacement to the good life. In this sense, if—as Aristotle put it—“wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else” (Sen 1990, p.44) then Cristina seems to have a clear idea of what something else means:

Gabriel: *De ce ai decis să închei jobul și să vii mai aproape de familie?*

[Why did you decide to finish the job and come closer to your family?]

Cristina: *Păi, viața cea mai frumoasă este cu familia.*

[Well, the most beautiful life is with the family]

As in the case of Iazmina (discussed in the previous chapter) also for Cristina the good life is sought in the stability of family relations. Moreover, for Cristina this goal is not only pursued through economic activities, but more holistically, through any other engagement with world. In this sense, her decision to move to the UK is also a choice of family that is put before economic gains. In fact, while she prefers her job in South Africa because of the income, for her, the UK is still a “better place” because it offers the necessary ingredients for a good family life such as children education and health:

Gabriel: *Care țară și care job ți-a plăcut cel mai mult?*

[Which country and which job did you like the most?]

Cristina: *În-- Cel mai mult mi-a plăcut aici, că am fost cu familia.*

[I liked it here the most because I was with my family]

[...]

Cristina: *Prima dată a venit, um, soțul meu.* [First, my husband came]

Gabriel: *First of all, her husband came here.*

Cristina: *Apoi ne-a chemat pe toți aici.* [Then he called us all here]

Gabriel: *Then he brought us with him.*

Antonio: *And do you prefer to live in the UK or in Romania?*

[...]

Cristina: *În Anglia, aicea am putut ajuta fa-- să-mi văd familia mai bine. La școli mai bune .*

[In England, here I was able to help... to see my family better. The school is better.]

Gabriel: *In UK, she could, um, see her family having a better life and, um, um, school- be- be- better school.*

[...]

Cristina: *Prima mea impresie a fost foarte bună, că mi-am găsit soțul sănătos și am putut să-mi aduc copiii.*

[My first impression was very good, that I found my husband healthy and I was able to bring my children.]

[...]

Gabriel: *Oh. Înainte să vii în Anglia, te-ai gândit la ceva care s-ar fi putut întâmpla? Ceva care nu ți-ar--?*

[Oh. Before you came to England, did you think of anything that might have happened? Something you wouldn't...]

Cristina: *Nu.* [No]

Gabriel: *Nu?* [No?]

Cristina: *Nu. La nimic nu m-am gândit, pentru că eu am fost și-nvățată în țări străine și, în primul rând, am fost sub adăpostu', um, familiei.*

[No. I thought of nothing, because I was educated in foreign countries and, first of all, I was under shelter, the family.]

Gabriel: *She said she wasn't afraid of anything when she knew that she's gonna come to this country cause as she told you, she was a traveller. She travelled to many countries.*

This last excerpt well summarises Cristina's ideal of family as ontological foothold, place of the good life, and survival shelter. With this last connotation, family activities are seen as a necessary form of engagement which, unlike economic activities, cannot be replaced by anything else.

Engagement as a Family Activity

As we have seen so far, for the participants of this study the maintenance of family relations fulfils a double function—it provides individuals with a survival shelter and, at the same time, with a vision of the good life. The engagement in family activities—which takes priority on any other kind of engagement—is in fact described by participants especially in this latter sense. Parenting, in particular, is the kind of engagement that allows Romanian Roma mothers and fathers to get closer to their idea of the good life.

Through the engagement with children, I suggest, mothers and fathers are able to transcend the condition of ontological security both symbolically and practically. Firstly, children are seen as a symbol of the good life, as the essence of family life and as the embodiment of happiness. As Marilena puts it, in fact, there is no family without children; these are at centre of family relations:

Antonio: *And... Why did you decide to have children? Why?*

Gabriel: *De ce ai decis ca să ai copii?* [Why did you decide to have children?]

Marilena: *De ce m-am decis să am copii?* [Why did I decide to have children?]

Laura: *Mamă, de ce te-ai decis?* [Mum, why did you decide?]

Cristina: *Urmași.* [Descendants]

Marielena: *Pentru că o familie fără copii nu este împlinită, până nu apare și copii.*

[Because a family without children is not fulfilled, until there are children.]

A similar view is also shared by fathers. In the next excerpts, for instance, Ionuț answers my questions about the transformations experienced through family life insisting on the relationship between children and happiness:

Ionuț: *I'm still like... sometimes I'm still like... 12 o'clock coming home... Sometimes! Before all the times I'm going drinking, I'm going drinking everywhere people. Today no!*

Antonio: *And why did you change this?*

Ionuț: *Because is good to make life with my boy, what else can I do?*

Antonio: *Do you prefer spending you time with your boy?*

Ionuț: *Yeah, yeah!*

Antonio: *And what kind of activities are you doing with your boy?*

Ionuț: *I play with him, everything, everything... I play with him, I stay with him, one car big... I put me pushing... is good!*

[...]

Antonio: *Do you have any obstacles, challenges, everyday problems... in your relationship with your baby?*

Ionuț: *No... When I stay with my boy is better! I'm happy!*

So far I have considered the symbolical value of children in relation to the good life. Additionally—and more practically—through parenting individuals also attempt to practise virtues and follow a routine. In fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter through the experience of Iazmina, motherhood allows the practice of personal virtues such as patience, and—as Nicoleta suggested—to become “more mature”.

Such ideas of growth, I suggest, are maintained first of all through the adoption of a different everyday routine, one that gives priority to children’s spaces and activities. For instance, Ionuț’s attempts to describe private activities—such as playing with a toy car—and the engagement in public spaces such as parks through children events:

Ionuț: *I'm going Friday, because over there the "pictor"... the baby... "pictor"*

Claudia: *Face painting! (Laughing)*

Ionuț: *I'm going every Friday there!*

Antonio: *Ah okay, so you like the baby to...*

Ionuț: *Yeah!*

Antonio: *And why do you like face-painting?*

Ionuț: *Every "pictor", everyone... Why like it? I like it.. I like that.. is... good.*

Antonio: *Is the baby...*

Ionuț: *When he see "marra"... he say "Booou!!"*

Claudia: *He says... when he looks at the mirror he says "Boou!"... His kid he likes it, he enjoys it. So he is enjoying it because that is enjoyment he says...*

Antonio: *Yeah, that's why I'm asking...*

Claudia: *He doesn't know how to say it in the end, he says when he looks at the mirror... he didn't know how to say mirror... not "marra", "mirror"... he's enjoying it.*

For Ionuț, these new forms of engagement constitute a practice of his idea of the good life as well as an attempt to transcend the condition of ontological insecurity. In this latter sense, Adrian's experience is similar and allows me to illustrate this point more clearly:

Adrian: *Ohhhh yeah yeah, no I have anything... when he is sitting I give him some food, you know... so... and he want to go outside, going outside... in the park, you know... meet many kids there...*

Antonio: *he plays with the kids as well?*

Adrian: *yeah... yes playing... going for shopping... yeah just coming before for shopping, yeah, coming house... give him the phone... staying with the girl, you know... seeing the phone... put on the TV... [...] when is too tired, sleeping... Maybe he need sleeping now!*

[...]

Adrian: *It's good, when you have kids it's nice, you know... you're happy. But if you're single in the house... staying like that [opens arms] ...but baby I love playing, happy time yeah...*

Antonio: *You know... he's doing something...*

Adrian: *is happy when the baby is happy, you as well.*

Antonio: *Something new!*

Adrian: *is nice in the house... kids... is like big family, you know...is nice...*

[...]

Antonio: *so you said you stay home with the baby and you go to the park sometimes...*

Adrian: *yeah... shopping... meet [unintelligible] meantime...*

Antonio: *the park here, the close park?*

Adrian: *Yeah yeah [name] park.*

Antonio: *and what are you doing with the baby there? He's playing with the kids?*

Adrian: *I'm staying there with the baby... you know... playing with the kids... [unintelligible] ...he's happy... you know... before you see*

things, now finish, staying 10 minutes, sleeping, he's going up when is coming the mum...

As we have seen in chapter four (section 4.5), Adrian is employed at home in a caregiving role while his wife is away at work. Although, as he mentioned, this model of fatherhood is not one that he willingly chooses, he tends to describe his relationship with his son primarily in terms of routinized everyday activities. Additionally, and similarly to Ionuț or Marilena, he attempts to pursue his idea of the good life by putting children at the centre of it.

Engagement as Routine

Visions of the good life, as I have shown so far, are pursued through attempts to establish and maintain a routine. To continue, I will discuss the how certain forms of engagement become routinized. In the context of ontological insecurity—I argue—this process begins with the experience of absorption. Such an experience—of a natural “flow” of engagement—is regarded by positive psychologists as an essential component of the good life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). From this perspective, through absorption, individuals do not experience separation from the activity that they perform (*ibid.*). This produces a sense of being in the right place the right time or, in other words, a (temporary) sense of place.

As I have already mentioned, there is a contextual gap between the concepts adopted by positive psychology and the experience of the Romanian Roma in this study. Contrary to the subjects studied by positive psychologists (normally individuals whose ontological security is not in question) the participants of this research enjoy a much more restricted range of personal choices and—contrary to Csikszentmihalyi’s assumption (*ibid.*)—rarely seem to exhibit full control on the content of their consciousness. Rather, as we have seen in chapter four, the experience of ontological insecurity is a conflictual and chaotic mode of being—not “a harmoniously ordered” state of mind (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013, p.23).

Nonetheless, the Romanian Roma—as ontologically insecure individuals—are not precluded from the experience of flow. In fact, this state can also be experienced in adverse conditions (*ibid.*). In the context of this research,

however, flow is better understood as a positive experience of adaptation or as an attempt to move out from ontological insecurity essentially by being busy with something. As I will show, in fact, even if these experiences of engagement are intense and imbued with meaning, they are not always accompanied by a sense of personal autonomy. In such terms, flow is experienced in any moment of the everyday life (for example, during work, leisure, and religious activities) and especially through practical and embodied engagement.

For some participants, practical engagement is also a mode of relationality that replaces and complements the inability to establish meaningful encounters on other basis. Rodica, for example, seems to experience recognition and sense of place through the hard routine of her work. Her willingness to enter in the flow of a physically demanding activity seems to compensate for the minimal linguistic interactions that she experiences at her workplace:

Rodica: *Um, ce constă în- o car wash, dă indoor, dă- p-aicea, chestii d-astea dă spălătorie, spune-i că știu engleză.*

[Um, what about a car wash, go indoors, go ahead, stuff, do laundry, tell him I know English.]

Claudia: *Says... Nu, nu mă refer la Engleză. Mă refer așa în mod normal.*

[No, I don't mean English. I mean that normally.]

[...]

Claudia: *Said... is what is about to do with my work, I can understand English, but also I'm okay with people who do... I work, my clients, people who I...*

[...]

Claudia: *And doesn't need to talk too much, just clean.*

Rodica: *Și e mulți, mulți clienți care s-au obișnuit cu mine.*

[And there are many, many customers who have become accustomed to me.]

Friend: *There's people I need to [unintelligible] speak. I need mini valet, like that. You speak 10 pound, mini valet.*

Claudia: *Yeah. She knows them and they also, they know... They say there are customers who are coming often and she knows that they cannot... she cannot speak English and she knows what she has to do.*

To the conceptions of the good life described before—especially those based on the relation between peace and family life—Rodica (and Claudia too) seem to oppose their active engagement in work activities. Despite the physical fatigue, for Rodica her job is a necessary form of engagement because, in addition to the income, it also provides a routine and a sense of mental stability. However, given the personal difficulties she described before (in chapter four) it seems fair to consider this latter as rather a temporary form of escapism from anxiety and negative thoughts. In the next excerpt, also Claudia seems to interpret Rodica’s words in this way:

Rodica: *Păi, nu, că sunt obișnuită cu munca asta a mea.*

[Well, not, as I am used to do my job]

Claudia: *No, because I'm used to work and always do something for myself, so I don't want to stay at home.*

Rodica: *Dacă stau acasă sunt stresată, n-am stare.*

[If I stay home I get stressed, I cannot stay]

Claudia: *If I stay at home I get stressed. I get, um, quite a lot of things on my head. I am the same. Și eu sunt tot fel, dacă nu mă țin activă...*

[The same as me, if I don't stay active]

[...]

Antonio: But, every day, I mean the work is harder in Romania or in the UK?

Claudia: *Acuma ia întreab-o unde-i munca mai grea? Aici, în Anglia pe care munca care o faci sau munca care ai făcut-o în România?*

[Now ask her where's the hard work? Here, in England, the work you do or the work you did in Romania?]

Rodica: *În Anglia.* [In England.]

Claudia: *Is in England, is at the washing car, is more difficult for me.*

Rodica: *Spune-i că-i și programul lung, intru de la opt până la opt jumate seara.*

[Tell him that it's a long schedule, I go from eight to half eight evening]

Claudia: *He says also is a long time because I stay... work for eight to eight.*

[...]

Rodica: *Cre că zi de zi. Zi de zi programul ăsta.*

[I think day by day. Day by day this schedule.]

Claudia: *It says... it's just in the same, every day is the same... program, so it's quite difficult.*

As we have seen through Rodica's case, the experience of flow is not necessarily a "sense of seemingly effortless movement" as positive psychologists tend to portrait it (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013, p. 88). However, there are exceptions. Other participants, in fact, seem to seek and experience engagement also in these latter terms:

Vasile: *Yeah. You know, because, when I play music, when I sing music, my feel is... I don't know how to say... I'm happy! It's like my job, when I play music, I'm working and I play music, you know, and my feel is OK, my feel is... I'm happy, I'm...*

Antonio: *Connected?*

Vasile: *Oh yeah! Connected yeah! That I go quick! You know, is... you know... it's something nice for me!*

Antonio: *Okay... No, I got what you mean... Is something that you are like... you feel one.*

Vasile: *I feel one! My pressure is good... I feel okay! My brain is...*

Antonio: *Yeah, you go with the flow!*

Vasile: *Yes, yeah, exactly, exactly.*

[...]

Vasile: *What I have a relationship for music, when I play the music, I'm not thinking for anything! I'm thinking only for music! You know,*

when I do something, I'm thinking only there! It's like, you know, my job. When I make something I'm thinking only there! No, no I do something and then think different, you know what I'm saying...

Antonio: *Yeah, you're concentrated...*

Vasile: *Yeah, It's very important when you do something and you're thinking there!*

Differently from Rodica's case, the flow experienced by Vasile seems more in line with the work of positive psychologists (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). What Vasile describes is in fact an experience of happiness and an idea of the good life that arises from his engagement with the world. For Vasile, the state of flow is primarily possible through his passion for music, however, it is also experienced during his job, and it is generally pursued in any other form of engagement. More importantly, this experience allows him to pursue the Pentecostal vision of the good life and maintain relations in his community:

Vasile: *When I go first time to church, it was the music! The music make for me to think straight, you know, because before I think... is different... you know, but my music is like... when I play my music in the home plenty friends coming, you know, to see... to see... I make live, you know live on Facebook, I make live, plenty people, give you... you know...*

Antonio: *Comments...*

Vasile: *Comments! Give you like, give everything, you know... Oh! Is really nice, is really beautiful! Plenty people coming! Plenty people coming in the church try to... try to... live the life, leave the bad life, and try to think different, try to help, try to... try to make straight! You know?*

To different degrees, for all the participants of this study the perception of engagement as an effortless activity depends on how grounded is a certain practice in one's family tradition. For example, the passion for music

experienced by Vasile is also shared by his non-Pentecostal family members. For these latter, however, it is part of a very different lifestyle:

Antonio: *And... Why did you choose music for example, and not... I don't know, gym, or other things that... you know..*

Vasile: *No, because... is also for myself. For myself, I... fifteen years ago I tried to think for myself is.... I like music because all my family, in my country, play music. You know what I'm saying? ...my grandfather, my grandmother, before, is playing music for party, you know? That's the job for people, for my country, for my family! This is the job! No to work, not to make something, only the music, go to every party, make money! You know what I'm saying?*

As I have already mentioned, through the conversion to Pentecostalism Vasile has restructured his everyday engagement with the world, and, along with other changes, also his passion for music has been remodelled according to the Pentecostal norms. Differently from his non-Pentecostal family in Romania, for Vasile music has lost its function as a subsistence activity. However, in the new context it has acquired moral value and continues giving him a place within his community, ultimately providing him with a sense of ontological security.

Despite Vasile's evidence, in a context of migration, activities that are traditionally passed down through family are not always sought or engaged. As we have seen in chapter four, this is especially the case for participants who experience the disruption of gender roles and the insecurity of family ties. These individuals begin a process of adaptation to new forms of engagement that challenge their value structure. Along with the insecurities, however, this process can also be experienced positively. Through Freedom of Movement, in fact, some participants have abandoned traditional practices in order to engage in new activities that are considered more fulfilling. Anghel, for example, became a driver after having abandoned his father's job in construction. Contrary to other participants, who, as we have seen, do not take much into account the practicalities of their work activities, for Anghel this is a fundamental aspect:

Anghel: Pentru îmi practicam cu el meseria de a-- în construcții și încercam să fac ceea ce face el și nu-mi ieșea.

[In order to practice my job with him - in construction, I tried to do what he was doing and it wouldn't come out.]

Gabriel: he said that he was working with dad in... in construction, building and dad saw that he wasn't that good in construction and found... and he tried to find something else for him.

[...]

Anghel: Da. Eu am încercat să, îh-- am lucrat cu taică-meu și - îi spui? -, am încercat să lucrez cu tata și eram, îh, salahor. Și v-văzând tat că eu m-- nu-mi-- a practica meseria asta ca salahor îi greu față de un meseriaș.

[Yes. I tried to, I worked with my dad and - you tell him? - I tried to work with my father and I was... ah... day labourer. And seeing that I practice this profession as a day labourer is difficult for a craftsman like my dad]

Gabriel: He said he's been working with dad in construction and he was... a second hand, in construction, he wasn't professional.

Antonio: Okay.

Gabriel: And... that's hard for... to work as a second hand.

Anghel: Și-o considerat că este cam greu pentru [crosstalk].

[And considered a bit difficult for...]

Gabriel: And... and that way he made... he gave him the... he told him to start driving.

Anghel: Și-a considerat că mă văd în-- că mai bine mă vede în postura asta, de-a fi șofer. Zi.

[He thought he saw me in... he'd better see me in this position, if I was a driver.]

Gabriel: And dad thought that for him is better to be a driver than a builder.

Although Anghel gives up the family expectations, his choice of becoming a driver is not taken independently. In fact, his father still seems to have a great degree of decisional power when it comes to choose the right work engagement. Nonetheless, differently from building, driving is an activity that Anghel has embraced and particularly enjoys. This is because, for him, driving can be engaged effortlessly and responsibly at the same time. As such, it is an experience of flow, newness, routine, and meaning:

Anghel: *Tot ce contează, spune-i, că tot ce contează contează să faci cu ceea ce-ți place.*

[All that matters, tell him, all that matters is doing what you love.]

Gabriel: *All that matters is-is what-- to do what you like and--*

Anghel: *Și, um, să-ți... Faptul că ceea ce-ți place... când îți iese bani pe ce-ceea ce-ți place, uh, ai de gând să continui mai departe.*

[And, for you.. the fact that what you like.. when you get money for what you like, you're going to move on.]

Gabriel: *And if you do what you like and you see you get money for what you like... You wish you still wanna do it.*

Anghel: *Și nu te-ar interesa alt job. Nu m-ar interesa alt job.*

[And you're not interested in another job. I am not interested in another job.]

Gabriel: *And he's not interested in other job.*

[...]

Anghel: *De ce șofat și nu alt job? De ce șofat și nu alt job? Pentru că și alte joburi am făcut da' nu mi-o plăcut, nu mă-nu mă descurcam.*

[Why a driver and not another job? Why a driver and not another job? Because other jobs I did not like, I did not handle.]

Gabriel: *Și șofatu-i ușor. [And driving is easy]*

Anghel: *Și șofatul e și ușor, și-- și, acuma. [crosstalk]*

[And driving is easy and now...]

Gabriel: *He said that...*

Anghel: *[crosstalk] așa. [crosstalk]*

Gabriel: *He said he's driving 'cause it's not a hard job, to drive. Now he get used to it... and is no hard.... to do other things. Now to start doing other things he'll find it hard. So that's why he's driving and not something else.*

Such an experience of engagement cannot be taken apart from its context. Anghel's job, in fact, consists in driving people across UK and EU countries, and as such, it is fundamentally an experience of Freedom of Movement. Secondly, in addition to his job choice, also his decision to migrate is motivated by his personal idea of the good life:

Antonio: *Okay, okay. And you said before that... you said you came here for a better life and what is for you a better life?*

Gabriel: *Ai spus că... mai înainte, că ai venit aici pentru o viață mai bună. Ce este o viață mai bună pentru tine?*

[You said that... earlier, that you came here for a better life. What is a better life for you?]

I: *O viață mai bună? Um-- O viață mai bună? [A better life? A better life?]*

[background conversation]

I: *A încerca să cunosc mai multe, să văd cum ar fi și prin viața asta prin Anglia, cum e lumea—*

[To try to know more, to see what it is like in this life in England, how the world is...]

Gabriel: *Să-nvăț-- de la alții?* [Do you learn... from others?]

I: *Să-nvăț și de la alții dacă consider c-ar trebui să învăț. Și datoria omului-i să umble și să și învețe pe undeva... unde umblă.*

[I can learn from others if I feel that I should learn. And it is the duty of man to go and learn somewhere... wherever he goes.]

Gabriel: *Is pretty much as you said, like you're doing this to find out what... how to be a good person. That's how he said. He likes to... to travel. Like he came in the UK to become a better person, to see how other peoples manage to go through... to challenges and became a... good persons. And that would help him to learn from other people.*

Engagement as Helping the Other

In the previous chapter I have discussed how Romanian Roma individuals attempt to develop an attitude of openness toward the world while experiencing a context of overwhelming difference. As I have suggested, individuals actively seek encounters with difference when the latter is perceived to have the potential to bring change. Engagement with difference, however, is not only sought depending on what can be gained from the encounter, but also in terms of what the individual can bring to it. As I suggest, in these experiences, mutual recognition cannot be explained only in utilitarian terms. Rather, the participants of this study—both religious and non-religious individuals—attempt to enact their vision of the good life through acts of solidarity toward the other. This mode of engagement, which intersects with processes of becoming, is sought by different individuals, with different worldviews, and in different contexts.

In contrast to other participants, Claudia values her job more than a simple economic opportunity. For her, in fact, work engagement is primarily a way to give and help the other—an opportunity to be recognised and recognise on the basis of a shared human dignity:

Claudia: *My job I think is always the right thing to do!*

Antonio: *Your activism you mean?*

Claudia: *Yeah, I work as an activist and I also work as a community worker. So what I do I think is the right thing and I find it useful, meaningful and all the stuff you want.*

Antonio: *Ah... And why is it meaningful?*

Claudia: *Because it helps people. It makes a difference to people. It gives people respect of their dignity.*

Although Claudia mentions that she works for her community, with this term, she does not only mean people with the same ethnic or cultural background. In fact, her engagement as an activist does not seem in the service of a particularistic agenda, but it is rather humanist in scope and values. As such, it is driven by equality and justice, and it is aimed at solving people's practical problems, regardless of their different identities, in a chaotic and confusing context:

Antonio: *And do you deal just with activism with the Roma community or...*

Claudia: *Ah no, I do it broadly.*

Antonio: *And what are the main issues for you to act?*

Claudia: *It is not just one issue, because today... shall I say, last six month I worked about law registration, then I work about Brexit laws, then I work about residential, is never like... one. It is a problem? I try to find the solution, and the problem can be in any time and any way, even in all the chaos.*

Antonio: *Ok, Who are the people you relate with? Where are they from? Are they from Europe...*

Claudia: *No, it is not just from Europe, it is all over the place. I am not... In my work that I do at the moment, I don't have like... "I have to work with this kind of people". I work with everyone who comes to me, as long as I know how to help them out. And that can be from reading a paper, to go to a protest, or... to go to a meeting and say "I need your help to tell me what the heck is happening around here, what do you know?" I think it is from A to Z, so it is always a different affair.*

Antonio: *And what do you think you share with them?*

Claudia: *I think we share... the people and I have in common is the fact that we want to do what is fair and equal for everyone...*

Antonio: *So justice?*

Claudia: *Equality and justice is what we share.*

Similar to evidence discussed earlier—in which Claudia recalls the pleasant encounters made while being a street seller—also in this case, people seem to share the same sense of “throwntogetherness” (Massey, 2005). However, differently from that previous account, the encounters described here show a darker side. Before their commitment to values, in fact, the latter individuals seem to share, first and foremost, an insecure sense of reality. However, as I will show in the next excerpt, for Claudia the engagement with this collective insecurity is inescapable. In a fashion that perhaps echoes existentialist perspectives (Camus, 2013; Sartre, 2001) she regards the commitment to action as the only mode of being-in-the-world. It is through this commitment, after all, that shared values are established and human relations maintained.

Again, as in the examples discussed previously, a departure from the condition of ontological insecurity is here attempted through the pursuit of an everyday routine and absorption in activity. In fact, when Claudia is asked about the influence of other people in her professional development, this latter is discussed as a result of “doing the same things” rather than a consequence of exceptional deeds:

Claudia: *Doing the same things. It was not the people doing that. Because if you think there is lot of activist people outside there, and lot, lot of people who fight for what is right and justice. For me having a certain... person, mentor in my life... No, no. But I was seeing it and I said “why not!” I can be one, I can become... a person, and I can fight for this fight... So I think it was me discovering myself.*

Antonio: *Ok, so it was a process of self-discovery?*

Claudia: *Yes, yes!*

Antonio: *Ok. Is someone else participating with you? Who is participating with you in your activity?*

Claudia: *A lot of people, a lot of people. And especially the people for whom I work, because it’s not me who is doing action, it is the people who is doing the action. I am on the way with them. Not me doing it and they doing it because I am doing it, no. They are doing it and I am trying to help.*

[...]

Antonio: *You said the good point is to put people together...*

Claudia: *To put people together... and I say, if you're thinking that you're supposed to be here and have the right to education and job and equal treatment, ok, do something about it. Don't just say it, do it! So, the light at the end of the tunnel would be do it! If you want it, do it! I'm not gonna be there and do it for you. I can do a piece of paper, but that's not gonna help you in long term, so in long term you would have to move up.*

Antonio: *Yeah, yeah.*

Claudia: *So yeah. This is the thing. I am not a superwoman who raises her hands and is doing something.*

Antonio: *No, No... I mean, nobody I think expects you to be like that.*

Claudia: *I know, I know. But, you know how it is. I can say "I can do this!", but I'm not gonna say it! I'm not doing it! People would have to do it if they want to do it!*

Claudia's idea of engagement seems to be caught in the conundrum of conciliating (and balancing) the process of individual self-discovery with a concern for the wellbeing of others. In this sense, the concept of *eudaimonia* is open to similar challenges. Scholars have in fact long considered the place of otherness in Aristotle's account and, in this regard, have taken very different stands. On the one hand, some argued that Aristotle's view is ultimately egoistic, since he considers each person as acting for the sake of his or her own *eudaimonia* (Hardie, 1968). On the other hand, others oppose this view emphasising the importance Aristotle gives to family and friendship and the fact that having concerns for others is a necessary component of his theory of flourishing (Cooper, 1977; Annas, 1988).

Although the concept of *eudaimonia* is criticised in terms of its self-centredness, this is not to say that Aristotle conceived the individual as an atomized being. Rather, for Aristotle, the process of self-formation is never taken apart from the social and cultural context in which the individual lives (Crisp, 2014). By establishing human relations with other selves—including family and friends—the individual has the opportunity to practise virtues and therefore reach his or her potential. Among the virtues that are practised

through the engagement with others, for the Romanian Roma, generosity seems particularly important. In fact, for Vasile, Violeta, Gabriel, Dumitru, and Florin, the willingness to give to others takes precedence over any other measure of moral judgement and constitutes a mode of engagement to which they aspire. The next excerpt, taken from Dumitru's interview, is particularly significant in this regard:

Antonio: *Let's try this question. Imagine that you have lots of money... lots! You know, you can do everything. What would you do?*

Claudia: *[...] (translating Dumitru) I would like to help people...*

Antonio: *Anyone in particular?*

Claudia: *(translating Dumitru) I would help the people who are poor.*

Before this question, Dumitru had discussed his aspiration for wellbeing only in terms of getting more money and material possessions. However, when elicited to reflect on the actual utility of wealth his answer seems to suggest an aspiration of becoming, as well as the need to be put in the condition of practicing the virtue of generosity.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, for the Romanian Roma—especially the Pentecostals—religion has a very important role in providing individuals with a sense of ontological security. In fact, Pentecostal devotees such as Petru, Stefan, Cristina, Gabriel, or Violeta entrust their sense of autonomy—and more generally their ability to make sense of the world—to God. This mode of being-in-the-world—I have suggested—is established through “doing things for God” such as “giving” the “heart” to God.

Despite the metaphysical language used by participants, the act of “giving” involves a very concrete mode of engagement. As Petru and Violeta tried to explain, in fact, generosity is about acting out of God's will and giving to the people who are more in need:

Petru: *Ah, okay. Uh, explain we need to go- to be like to-to-to do something good. To do something good for your... your people, for your friend. Who needs... who needs to help? To help him. You understand? You needs to go on the hospital, you need to go on the*

prison, you understand? There is the people we need to help. That is... to be good for God. You understand?

Antonio: *Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, no, no. I understand.*

Violeta: *Dacă poate să înțeleagă, zi chestia aia. Isus a zis, “Ați fost la spitale, ați fost la--?”* [If he can understand, say that thing. Jesus said “Have you been to hospitals, have you been to...”]

Petru: *Adineauri i-am spus vorba asta.* [I just told him that.]

Violeta: *Ai spus-o așa cum am spus eu acuma?* [Did you say it the way I said it now?]

Petru: *Nu, i-am spus...* [No, I said...] *The God, he say, “Go on the hospital, go on the prison and help him because you help Me. No help him because he’s in a prison, you do that for Me”. No for him. You understand? And you need to do for God something, because... God, He don’t... He don’t... He don’t want to do that, but He want to see you. You can do that? To go on the church, to go on the prison, to go on the hospital to help him?*

This need for generosity, in these words, is not based on a direct giver-taker relationship. As such, it seems to be way apart, for example, from the Aristotelian account of friendship, where the other person is loved for his (or her) own sake (Crisp, 2014). This is because—as I have already discussed—for the Pentecostals, intersubjectivity is established firstly through the bond with God (see section 5.3).

Nonetheless, Petru’s interpretation of the Pentecostal doctrine seems to suggest that altruistic behaviour toward other human beings is part of God’s plans. As I will later discuss, in fact, this plan includes a process of moral becoming that culminates when the individual becomes an “example” for others. During this process, God puts individuals “on trial” through challenges that include “suffering for others”. As Cristina explains, in fact, Jesus Christ is the ultimate embodiment of righteousness precisely because of his example of altruism:

Gabriel: *(translating Cristina)* She said God reminds her how when Jesus came to... to the world and He died for us... that what God reminded her whatever she's going through, what difficult situations she's going through, she has to get through it.

Cristina: *Și el a spus că neîncercat nu vom ajunge în Cer.*

[And He said that without trial we will not reach Heaven.]

Gabriel: *And... she said...*

Cristina: *Unde-i El.* [Where He is.]

Gabriel: *God said that without challenges you won't go through Heaven.*

Antonio: *Is it because...*

Gabriel: *You have to go through the challenges to go.*

[...]

Cristina: *Un exemplu pentru noi.* [An example for us.]

Gabriel: *Care a suferit.* [Who suffered.] *Yeah.*

Antonio: *Okay.*

Cristina: *De dragul nostru.* [For our sake.]

Gabriel: *And he suffered for... 'cause He loved us.*

In the next section, I will return on the mode of being of the example considering its potential for producing experiences of learning.

6.3 Experiences of Learning

So far I have discussed some of the ways of engaging the world that allow participants to pursue their visions of the good life and overcoming the anxieties of ontological insecurity. Such attempts, I suggest, also entail different learning processes. While among Roma scholars and activists learning is mainly discussed in terms of disadvantaged access to the institution of education (Vanderbeck, 2009; Cozma *et al.*, 2000), as an

experience, such an activity occurs in many other ways outside the formal structures. The reduction of human learning to a social institution is in fact a distinctive attribute of modernity (Jarvis, 2012).

More broadly understood, learning “is the essence of everyday living and of conscious experience; it is the process of transforming that experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs. It is about the continuing process of making sense of everyday experience” (Jarvis, 2012, p.11). In this sense, the activity of learning is inextricably tied to the experience of being-in-the-world—it allows understanding this experience, but it also contributes to shaping it.

Scholars have distinguished different ways of learning. People can in fact learn, practically, through their senses (primary experiences) or theoretically through communicative actions (secondary experiences) (*ibid.*). Additionally, as a different response to a particular experience, learning can be grouped in three main categories: non-learning, non-reflective learning, and reflective learning (*ibid.*). All these forms of learning (or non-learning) are continuously experienced in a daily life and produce the sense of self as a result (*ibid.*).

Understood as such, learning always starts with an experience of insecurity (*ibid.*). In fact, it begins when individuals are unable to respond to a specific situation using their stock of knowledge or internalised cultural patterns and causes these to grow or change (*ibid.*). In these terms, learning is a key activity that allows moving from ontological insecurity to security. Moreover, the activity of learning is also central to the concept of *eudaimonia*. As I have mentioned before, in fact, from an Aristotelian perspective the best life is never a given; it is rather a process of becoming that is only possible through learning virtues.

In this section I will discuss the different ways Romanian Roma attempt to learn in the context of the EU citizenship. By studying how and what the participants learn we can better understand the movement from ontological insecurity to the good life.

The Necessity of Learning

Similar to economic activities, for the participants of this study, learning is always valued as a necessary form of engagement—for some, such as

Anghel, as a duty (see excerpt in section 6.2). The perspective that one learns because of “the need” is implied—to different degrees—in all the experiences discussed below. Such a view is particularly explicit, for example, in Gabriel’s motivation for learning English:

Antonio: *I can see that you speak English very well, so... what motivated you to learn English so well, I mean... in three years!*

Gabriel: *Yeah... I just... I had to, cause my family needed me. There was so many letters coming to home and I had to translate them... 'cause that was what I had to do... and keeping like this every day, going college, studying ESOL if you know what it is ESOL, is an English course. I had to go there, and that's how I managed to speak English.*

For Gabriel, learning is a response to family and language insecurities that are typical of the migration process. In his case, this response is channelled successfully through formal structures—I suggest—because the value of education is made tangible within the family domain. In other words, Gabriel’s fluency in English becomes of practical use for all the family. Such an experience of learning—occurring outside the family domain and within the mainstream educational structure—is quite exceptional.

Learning as an Embodied Experience

The experiences of learning described here are very diverse and include both primary and secondary learning. However, among the participants of this study, the latter seem to occur way less frequently. Moreover, for the majority of participants (perhaps excluding only Alexandru) learning is perceived to be more effective when it is a direct and embodied personal experience. Vasile’s account of learning music is perhaps the best example for this view:

Antonio: *Okay. And did somebody teach you to play music?*

Vasile: *No.*

Antonio: *You learned by yourself?*

Vasile: *Yeah I learned by myself.*

Antonio: *But not even your family, they weren't teaching you...*

Vasile: *No, when I'm young, I see my family...*

Antonio: *Okay.*

Vasile: *Also... I see plenty friends, you know, for play the music, and only I see. Only I stay by myself, only I try to think THERE, you know, I try to think THERE, and slowly slowly my brain go to.. you know for... slowly slowly... I play by myself, yeah. [...] But for me is more better to see one people make something, and I make by myself. Maybe somebody teach me, I not understand, you know?*

In the last lines of this excerpt, Vasile opposes primary and secondary experiences of learning. The former—learning through sensorial experience and by imitation—is preferred to the more the traditional teacher-student relation. A similar perspective is also taken by Ionuț, who hopes that his son would become a car mechanic because—in his view—this is a profitable and requested profession. When asked about the learning process that such a job entails, he suggests that his son should learn on his own, through a direct and practical experience:

Antonio: *How you are going to make him a mechanic?*

Ionuț: *How? When he's a big one a little bit, like... fifteen years... I do it indeed... I buy one car for him, I put everything down... Him putting back everything!*

[All laughing]

Antonio: *So are you training him already?*

Claudia: *You understood what he said? He says he's gonna buy a car, he would put it all pieces down and then he says: "repair it!"*

The Example

As I have mentioned previously, becoming an example—an embodiment of Christian values—is for Pentecostal participants a key life goal. At the same time, the example is also a key figure that enables individuals learning how

to be in the world. It is important to mention that he or she does not “teach” their followers in the traditional way. Rather, the example elicits learning by being followed, because it embodies a practical realisation of the pursued values and virtues. For Pentecostals, Jesus is the ultimate example. His lesson, as Cristina and Gabriel explain, is invaluable because it gives them strength during difficult moments:

Gabriel (*interpreting*): *Ce a- ce ți-a dat Dumnezeu? Ce a făcut Dumnezeu ca să te poată să faci să treci prin încercare?*

[What did God give you? What did God do to make you pass the test?]

Cristina: *Mi-a adus aminte că și El a trecut prin supărări, prin necazuri și cum să te ridici. Prin jertfa Lui suntem mântuiți.*

[He reminded me that He also went through upsets and troubles and how to get up. By His sacrifice we are saved.]

Gabriel: *She said God remind her how when Jesus came to the world and He died for us, that what God remind her whatever she's going through, what difficult situations she's going through, she has to get through it.*

The culture of the example, as a mode of being and learning, provides perhaps the best explanation for why the participants of this study value primary experiences of learning more than secondary ones. In the following excerpt, Violeta distinguishes explicitly between embodied action and abstract talking. In order for one person to learn and grow—she suggests—the former should take priority:

Claudia (*translating Violeta*): *To get like more mature, you have to do things... because one of the things that I do, I talk about God, and in order for me to talk, I have to do, and give that, a good example of being a person who is responsible and grows maturing, so if I want to give the people the chance to believe in what I do, I have to first behave as a person that God wants to be.*

[...]

Claudia (translating Violeta): *So following, by doing that and following God, not stealing, acting not hurting and not lying is what God has been teaching us to have a proper behaving on his face and follow his example... you know that God always said that: don't try to be perfect, but at least try to follow an example of God, a personality that is always forgiveness and helpful to people... to be different from the people who are not listening and behaving like his example... to them they say that he says "be the light". For other people who are blind. Be the light... in the life of people.*

The example is not only a Pentecostal mode of being-in-the-world. In a more secular context, in fact, the example summarises Claudia's role model within the Roma community and helps her resolving the conondrum mentioned before—the maintainment of an attitude of dedication toward others while pursuing a process of self-discovery. When asked about her contribution to the community, Claudia answers as follow:

"Uhhh... Good question! Ehm... I wish I could give you an answer, but I don't know. It's depending on what it could be my contribution. I could put people into the right connections, I could put people in touch with other people, I could give people a bit of encouragement... it can be a lot of things... I don't know what it can be exactly at the moment. As I said to you, my work is mostly to empower people, it is not me giving to them. What I give is more spiritual empowerment and guidance and "you can do it! Let's do it together! [...]" So, let's say more this of encouragement!" (Claudia)

Family Learning

The fact that the Roma learn very differently from institutionalised education is not new to scholars. Those who are concerned with the access of Romani children to education have in fact considered how mainstream schools have been "sites for assimilation, reproduction of social prejudice, and the perpetuation of social exclusion" (Vargas Clavería and Gómez Alonso, 2003,

p.560). Others have emphasised the fact that among Romani communities children learn through their inclusion in day-to-day family activities (Smith, 1997). This latter case seems to apply also to the participants of this study.

Similar to the experience of learning shared by Gabriel, in the next excerpt, Nicoleta shows how learning is valued mainly in relation to an everyday family context. These two experiences are also very different. Rather than from secondary experiences that occur outside the family domain, for Nicoleta, learning takes place mainly through (and within) family relations:

Nicoleta (translated by Claudia): *Yes I learned... to cook, to do things in the house, how to behave with people, how to act... I have learned quite a lot from her [Nicoleta's mother].*

Antonio: *Apart from your mother, did you learn from somebody else as well?*

Nicoleta (translated by Claudia): *Yes. I have learned from my sister-in-law the same as I learned from my mother.*

Antonio: *Ok, and what did you learn from your sister-in-law? I mean, in particular...*

Nicoleta (translated by Claudia): *She'd teach me... Ok, when I was a little one, she'd teach me to cook whatever I liked, how to get dressed, who I am allowed to go for a walk, who I could talk... that people are sometimes bad, some people are good... I managed to make a difference between these two people...*

Antonio: *And how do you make a difference between...*

Nicoleta (translated by Claudia): *I've realised by talking to them and stay with them.*

Antonio: *Ok, and how does a good person behave?*

Nicoleta (translated by Claudia): *I feel by talking to them, and... I feel by the respect they are giving to me, that they are not selfish and they can behave properly and you feel the kindness from them.*

Although such learning is mainly about everyday mundane activities, it is also about moral values. Alongside family activities, moral judgements are similarly learned through the direct experience of an embodied encounter.

Learning to Have a Voice

So far I have discussed learning through primary experiences. As we have seen, the aspirations toward the good life of the Romanian Roma are pursued and shaped by what they learn from these experiences. However, such experiences are for the most part non-reflective and tend to reproduce the existing social structures. On the other hand, when reflective, learning has the potential to bring social and cultural change (Freire, 1972; Gadamer, 1976).

Although reflective forms of learning and learning from secondary experiences seem to be less common, these are equally valued by the Roma. In particular, Claudia, Gabriel and Alexandru are the participants who, more than others, shared such kind of learning experiences. Especially for Alexandru, theoretical learning seem to elicit a process of conscientization—the development of a critical awareness about one’s social and political reality (Freire, 1972)—but it also shapes his personal life goals:

***Alexandru:** I was “auto-didact” [self-thought] at the first place, but I realised it's not enough. So, basically, the reason I went in academia was not the diploma of PhD, that's nothing for me, that does not have any value. It's about the knowledge of how to do it... you know... of how to write about Roma issues, how to research. This is what was missing. I knew about the problem, but how to put this problem on a paper, how to bring arguments. [...] How to bring it out, how to build the argument, how to convert all of this reality within a rational... [...] We are just crossing through the life in a bit (snaps finger) and we have so much time to make a difference, and I said I don't wanna just... you know... crossing this life and not make this difference. [...] So... going back to your question... is that I try to elevate above that level, so as I said, I started being a part of an NGO, actually being a part of a group of young people, who were really angry about what is happening, then we built an NGO, then we become part of a larger broader NGO network, and then we thought, you know, we have a*

power, we need to do something together, we did all sorts of things, until one moment, when the whole sector started collaborating instead of challenging the system. And then I said there is no place for me here, and I said you know, the only way of.. you know.. not give up to this fight is to go to the next level, which is academia, and for me academia is the next level because it gives me the tools of bringing the proofs.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the various activities through which the Romanian Roma studied here attempt pursuing ontological security, sense of place, and their visions of the good life. Although seen as necessary, for the participants of this study, engagement in economic activities does not seem to constitute an end in itself. Rather, it is functional to the creation of routines and realisation of other ideas of the good life, such as that of a peaceful family life. Together with economic engagement, parenting serves a similar function. In fact, for the participants of this study, children provide a goal of happiness but also a role of responsibility that allows organising the everyday life.

As we have seen, family relations (and their instability) have a great deal of influence on the choices of engagement and on the experiences of such activities. However, this does not always preclude individuals from pursuing goals of personal development or positive encounters outside the family domain.

Finally, I have treated with particular attention the learning experiences of the participants of this study. More than any other activity, in fact, learning makes processes of becoming possible, potentially allowing individuals to become flourishing citizens. For the Romanian Roma of this study, learning and education are invaluable in any form. However, in the great majority of the experiences studied, learning is unreflective and occurs mainly through primary experiences, through examples, and in relation to the family domain.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis attempts to understand the EU citizenship in terms of its relationship with the experienced reality of a sample of eighteen Romanian Roma living in a big city in Northern England. In order to achieve its overarching aim—exploring the potential of the EU citizenship in bringing marginal EU citizens closer to their visions of the good life—it posed two converging problems. Firstly, from a phenomenological and existentialist perspective, it asked how the Romanian Roma are placed (or unplaced) as EU citizens and how their reality and subjectivity are shaped by their position of marginality. Secondly, it sought to examine the participants' attempts to envision, pursue, and practise their ideas of the good life as marginal EU citizens, questioning the relationship between the EU citizenship and the capabilities and functionings pursued by the participants.

With regards to the first problem, in this thesis I provide a holistic account of the experiential realities of the Romanian Roma. I have explored key domains of experience such as family relationships, encounters with others, relationships with their own culture, and spiritual life in relation to the EU citizenship. The concept of ontological insecurity (Laing, 1990) has allowed me to understand these realities as rather constituting the subjectivity of the people studied.

Concerning the second problem, the condition of marginality of the Romanian Roma and their experiences of ontological insecurity allowed for a case study investigating the EU citizenship as the framework in which ideas of the good life are pursued. Maintaining an existentialist perspective, I attempted to understand, firstly, how ideas of the good life are constituted as meaningful; secondly, drawing from Aristotelian approaches, I have explored the terms in which they are engaged.

A Summary of the Findings

In attempting to address these two problems together, the empirical evidence found in this study suggests that, in the context of the EU citizenship, the experiential realities of the Romanian Roma are too complex and diverse to be represented by a unitary EU citizenship claim. While among contemporary scholars the heterogeneity of the Roma is never in

question, the participants of this study—all members of the same transnational community—pursue a variety of conflictual meanings and ideas of the good life which exceed the current EU citizenship structures. For example, in section 5.2 I have explored how—precisely through the practice of Freedom of Movement—participants aspire for a peaceful and stable family life, rediscover traditional values, and challenge the norms of their culture. Additionally, as I have shown in section 6.2 and 6.3, Freedom of Movement does not only involve engagement in economic activities, but also—and more generally—practices that align with individual and collective values and various attempts to establish everyday routines (for instance, parenting, helping others, learning). Such beings and doings cannot be fully accommodated if the EU citizenship is understood as a mere economic, political, or abstract construction.

The experiential evidence discussed in this thesis also suggests that the need for ontological security is poorly addressed in the context of Freedom of Movement. Overall, the participants of this study experience ontological insecurity before, during, and after practicing Freedom of Movement and in any existential dimension—in relation to themselves, others, and the world in general. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the practice of Freedom of Movement adds new layers of complexity to these already problematic experiences of insecurity. As we have seen in chapter four, the exercise of this right—even when a deliberate choice of dealing with the insecurities (see, for example, the experiences of Claudia and Stefan in section 4.2)—tends to expose the individual to new anxieties and overwhelming challenges. As a result, at least for the participants of this study, the EU citizenship appears as a chaotic and conflictual reality.

It is important to point out, however, that the participants of this study do not experience the EU citizenship (and their marginality) passively or as a fixed condition, but as a process that shapes who they are. In this regard, for some participants, Freedom of Movement provides new aspirations for becoming and possibilities for meaningful engagement. Some experiences of openness, newness and recognition (see section 5.3) or the practices of helping, caring, and learning that occur in this context (see sections 6.2 and 6.3) seem to suggest this. However, there is little evidence that these new possibilities and aspirations will, in the long run, help the Romanian Roma move away from a position of marginality. In the context of the EU citizenship, the pursuit of these beings and doings seems to lack

consistency and occurs almost always on the top of pre-existing conflicts which remain unresolved. As we have seen—particularly with the cases of Rodica or Claudia (see sections 4.2 and 6.2)—the intensive (or even passionate) engagement in work activities accessed through Freedom of Movement does not ameliorate relational and family insecurities.

Although for some individuals the practice of Freedom of Movement has generated a heightened awareness of their lived reality, this realisation can also entangle them in a treadmill of conflict. This is especially evidenced by the rich self-reflective narratives of Claudia or Alexandru. Especially for these two participants, Freedom of Movement allowed them to learn about their own Roma identity and social condition, and this awareness has also allowed them recognition in academic and NGOs circles. However, such experiences of inclusion have also produced conflictual relations with family and community members (section 4.4) and intrapersonal conflicts (section 5.3). For Alexandru, in particular, memories of discrimination and exclusion became constitutive of his sense of self (see excerpts in section 4.3).

While marginality is normally understood in structural terms or as a something that is external to lives of the Roma—for instance, referring to “the policies, legislation and practices that contribute to the marginalisation of Roma, yet do not specifically target them, but all citizens, either on a national or the EU level” (Sardelić, 2019, p.328)—this thesis has shed light on how it is experienced as a Roma reality. From this perspective, marginality is lived as a combination of personal and collective conflicts which start in the family domain with the disruption of everyday routines, personal relationships and traditional gender roles (see section 4.2). Understood as such, this reality sits oddly with the structure of rights of the EU citizenship. Although the EU citizenship grants the right of family reunification and equal treatment to Member State nationals who are not involved in economic activities (Groenendijk, 2006), through the experience of Freedom of Movement the family domain becomes a site of struggle (see section 4.2).

Moreover, this conflictual reality is not only confined to the family domain but also extends to ways in which the Roma access the EU labour market. In spite of the instability of the low-qualified, temporary, and low-paid occupations, most of participants tend to value positively the new economic opportunities. However, these jobs are in most cases accessed through family networks and therefore conditioned by the insecurity of family

relations. This is especially evidenced by the cases of Rodica or Adrian (see section 4.5). Moreover, access to the EU labour market does not necessarily improve the participants' marginal position. As I have shown—especially through the experiences of Florin or Rodica (section 4.5)—market encounters and relations can be dehumanising and exacerbate marginalisation.

Finally, the different meanings, values, choices, and ideas of the good life that are pursued and practiced in the context of the EU citizenship are also reflection of a reality of conflict. With regards to these beings and doings, the EU citizenship acts as an amplifier—it reinforces different aspirations but also the struggles that these entail. For example, the opportunities for personal and professional development that Claudia or Anghel are able to enjoy in the UK also challenge the aspirations of their families (see section 4.2).

Theoretical Implications and Indications for Further Research

The findings of this research have a number of theoretical implications for both Roma and EU citizenship studies. Similarly to other scholarship, this study has highlighted the need to open up spaces for re-shaping and re-conceptualising the EU citizenship (Aradau *et al.*, 2013; Isin, 2013; Turner, 2016; Sardelić, 2017; Sardelić, 2019;). By showing how the Roma sense of ontological security (and so family, personal relationships, culture, and everyday routines) becomes a site of struggle, this thesis has exposed the limits of the EU citizenship regime, its dominant market ideology, and perhaps its possible failure as an inclusive project.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, scholars tended to be very selective in considering the reactions of the Roma to their marginal position and assumed a straightforward link between these “strategies of coping” and citizenship claims (Aradau *et al.*, 2013; Sardelić, 2017; Sardelić, 2019). Such studies have given privileged attention to exploring how marginality produces “subversive” subjectivities (Turner, 2016). From a phenomenological perspective, I would argue that this approach tends to merge together *structural realities* and *experienced realities* of marginalisation, and this might hamper our understanding of the subjectivities studied.

In contrast to this line of inquiry, this thesis suggests that processes of subject formation produced by marginality are underpinned by an *experienced* reality which—as we have seen—is conflictual. Since the different beings and doings pursued by the Romanian Roma are also produced by ontological conflicts, a distinction between “subversive” and “compliant” subjectivities would be very unstable, and potentially misleading. Take, for instance, Claudia’s “fight” against the norms and expectations of her culture or Vasile’s decision to change his religion and convert to Pentecostalism (see section 5.2). Although very different from each other, both these experiences can be considered subversive in relation to their lived reality.

Despite these problems, this thesis suggests that any citizenship claim needs to be considered in relation to its ontological assumptions. From this perspective, the problem of Roma inclusion—and of citizenship marginality in the EU context—is primarily the problem of how to represent and give voice to the complexities and the struggles that different ideas of the good life entail. Such a question should take priority before any political use of these ideas. For this reason, I suggest, scholars should pay more attention to the spaces and places in which ontological conflicts are recognised and resolved.

In this thesis I have identified a couple of key areas—family and religion—and I have engaged with two relevant bodies of literature. Firstly, this thesis contributes to research on transnational families by shedding lights on the complexity of family relations in the context of the EU citizenship, especially showing how different individuals deal with the many challenges encountered. For the Roma individuals studied here, family is a vulnerable and continuous work-in-progress and yet a key component of ontological security and a vision of the good life—not only a source of social capital and migration decisions (Pantea, 2013; Boyd, 1989). Secondly, with regards to the religious domain, this thesis contributes to literature on Roma Pentecostalism stressing its importance in the formation, pursuit, and actualisation of ideas of the good life and establishing an explicit link between these ideas and the process of subject formation in the context of the EU citizenship.

While this thesis found that family, personal relationships, everyday routines, as well as the spiritual domain are as some of the sites of ontological struggle, further phenomenological and existentialist research in the context

of the EU citizenship could continue in a couple of directions. Firstly, it could explore how, in these sites, different meanings, values, and ideas of the good life interact and change subjectivities across time. Secondly, some attention could be paid to the practices of conflict negotiation and resolution that make these changes possible. Besides allowing further insights in processes of subject formation, such research might accomplish two important objectives. Firstly, it could provide an account of biographical and temporal continuity, which is what ontologically insecure subjects lack (Laing, 1990; Giddens, 1991). Secondly, it could allow justifying the politicisation of subjectivities on the basis of this solidly grounded account.

As a general line of inquiry, this thesis indicates that the question of “who speaks *for* whom”—which is often asked along lines of power and ethnicity (Stewart, 2017)—should also be reiterated in terms of “who speaks *with* whom” in order to elucidate on the dialectics between different ideas of the good life. On a parallel note, this thesis opens up the debate on Roma inclusion to the question “inclusion of what?” The end of Roma marginalisation, I would suggest, cannot be achieved without acknowledging the variety of capabilities and functionings pursued by the Roma.

The findings of this study also have some implications with regards to the theoretical debates on the EU citizenship. The first one is that the conflictual reality experienced by marginal EU citizens such as the Roma participants of this study is not one of either inclusion or exclusion—a dualism that some tend to assume (Turner, 2016; Sardelić, 2019)—but it is rather constituted by a dynamic interplay between these two modes of being. Although perceptions of separation from society are indeed very strong (see section 4.3), the participants of this study are nonetheless moving through experiences of ontological insecurity and ideas of the good life. This movement does not occur through “strategies of coping” (Sardelić, 2019, p.331)—which imply a planned set of actions undertaken by a rational agent—but rather as an engagement in a “continuous traffic between interior and exterior, self and other, the movement of which produces feelings, selves and the worlds we inhabit” (Bondi, 2014, p.337).

There are also substantial implications with regards to the way the EU citizen is understood. In this thesis I have proposed a framework for defining the EU citizen in terms of his or her experience of reality. With regards to their spatial experience, the participants of this study seemed to be aptly framed as “emancipated” EU citizens. They are in fact mobile individuals

who are able to practice Freedom of Movement. However, their experience of place and role as EU citizens is more complex and uncertain. In order to understand it, I have used the notion of the “EU market citizen” and introduced that of the “flourishing EU citizen”.

With this last concept, in particular, this thesis offers a framework that allows challenging conventional understandings of what EU citizenship values and practices are. Such a move, I suggest, has allowed including beings and doings that are marginal to the EU citizenship construction, but nonetheless fundamental in the lives of EU citizens such as the participants of this study. Moreover, in considering the EU citizen as a flourishing subject—rather than an exclusively “subversive” one (Turner, 2016)—this thesis takes a step further in opening up EU citizenship spaces to marginal subjectivities.

With such a contribution, this thesis aligns to scholarship that—in the context of EU citizenship—warns against the reticence around matters of value (O’Brien, 2013). In fact, the ontological conflicts described here (especially those in section 4.5) suggest that the risks of a silent acceptance of a self-fulfilling market ontology are very real. As constituted by this reality—rather than by “an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness” (Laing, 1990, p. 42)—the EU citizen might become a person composed by a postmodern “patchwork of personhoods” responding to the logic of individualism (O’Brien, 2013, p. 1643). On the other hand, the concept of the EU flourishing citizens allows considering the full process of subject formation, the complexities of this experience, and generally a more holistic view of what human beings are and can be.

Alongside with the risks just mentioned, this thesis also acknowledges that the boundaries between a “market citizen” and a “flourishing citizen” might be very difficult to draw, especially due to the polyphonic and overlapping nature of identities (Hermans and Kempen, 1993). Perhaps, these two models of EU citizenship should not be really seen as in opposition but as in relation to each other. In fact, for the participants of this study, Freedom of Movement is an experience of market citizenship that takes place within a process of value adjustment, formation, discovery, and learning. For this reason, I would argue that the success or failure of Freedom of Movement in bringing the EU citizens closer to their ideas of the good life will depend on the relationship between these two models.

In this regard, this thesis has shown that Freedom of Movement is much more than a disembodied right. The range of values that the participants experience and attempt to actualise is much wider than just economic aspirations. However, without a supporting structure this universe of meaning is likely to lose significance and succumb to the logic of the free market. Such a structure will be only possible if the potential of the EU citizenship in accommodating different and shared ideas of the good life is acknowledged and realised. From an existentialist perspective, I would argue that Freedom of Movement needs to be understood not only as a right, but also in terms of the values and engagement pursued by EU citizens—in other words, as Viktor Frankl suggests, as responsibility:

“Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility” (Frankl, 1985, p. 134).

Although it has not been my intention to evaluate the success of the participants in pursuing their aspirations, it should be emphasised that market freedom “can bemuse and befuddle, and make one's life more wretched” (Sen, 1992, p. 59). The participants of this study are particularly vulnerable to this risk. They are in fact compelled to make important choices of value in a reality that is chaotic and ontologically insecure.

Besides the focus on the responsibilities, I suggest, a debate on the shared values underpinning the EU citizenship can only begin from addressing this question of vulnerability. In this sense, the ontological insecurity of the Roma and their centrality in the EU citizenship discourse is not only an issue of marginalisation and exclusion specific to this group, but it is also a matter of the vulnerability that all EU citizens share, arguably, because the condition of ontological insecurity is at the centre of what it means to be human (Van Deurzen, 2009; Bondi, 2014).

In the context of the EU citizenship, I suggest, it is important to establish a kind of relationality which—without ignoring cultural differences—is based on the mutual recognition of this vulnerability. From an existentialist perspective, this mode of relationality is not only a prerequisite for transcending the condition of ontological insecurity but also, and more importantly, a value that can, arguably, justify the existence of the EU itself.

In this regard, there is perhaps scope to consider a profound link between existentialist philosophy and the nature of the EU project. As it has been suggested (Probst, 2003; Diner, 2006), this latter has at its foundation the horrors of the Second World War and in particular of the Nazi holocaust, which, as we have seen, involved the Roma directly. Similarly, much of the existentialist knowledge about the human condition arises as a reflection on this particular experience—a lived one for some intellectuals (Frankl, 1985). Arguably, what the holocaust represents—for western philosophy and as a collective European memory—is a tragic lesson about the human vulnerability and perhaps the most powerful example of what the condition of ontological insecurity entails.

Although not about the holocaust, this thesis encourages similar reflections. The experiences discussed here are indeed very complex and diverse, and yet, they are all underpinned by the basic fact of human vulnerability. This shared commonality is not always recognised, perhaps, because it is hidden at the bottom of what Heidegger calls the “average everydayness” (1996, p. 65). Nonetheless, for some participants, this reality seems more vivid, and this is partly due their experience of Freedom of Movement. Take, for instance, Claudia’s reflections on her visit in Romania (section 5.2) and her description of street solidarity (see section 5.3), Florin’s “rediscovery” of his love for family (section 5.3) and Gabriel’s account of volunteering in Africa (section 5.3). All these experiences entail, in different ways, an awareness of what human vulnerability is. Although vulnerability contains, in a sense, the potential for ontological insecurity, it is also the basis for a truly authentic recognition of what we (and others) are.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

- Discussion on the information sheet and informed consent form (5-10 min)

- You should have received and read the information sheet and informed consent form. Was it clear to you? Do you have any questions about this?

- If you have now understood this information, then you can sign the informed consent form and we can start the interview.

- Collection of data regarding age, means of sustenance, and migration (1-5 min)

Before we go to the interesting questions, I need a few data about your age and means of subsistence:

- Are you younger or older than 35? Please note there is no need to specify your exact age.

- Do you have a job or not? If not, how do you sustain yourself without a job?

-When did you move to the UK?

-Why did you move to the UK?

-Were you alone when you arrived?

First set of questions

- These questions aims at identifying the eudaimonic activities and provide data on the participants' **sense of purpose, intrinsic**

motivations and values, personal growth and self-discovery (10-15 min)

I would like to know if there is any particular activity which is meaningful to you or that makes your life meaningful. It might be something that:

- *Makes you always feel genuinely curious*
 - *Allows you to continuously learn and grow as a person – makes you a better person*
 - *Always feels as the right thing to do*
 - *Makes you feel fulfilled*
 - *Absorbs you in such a way that you lose the sense of time*
 - *Is personally expressive / defines you in some way*
- *Why it is meaningful for you? And what motivates you to engage in this activity?*
- *What have you learned or are you learning in this activity? And how does it make you grow / make you a better person?*

Second set of questions

- These questions aim at exploring themes such as **cultural** and **relational influences, personal values, and autonomy** (10 - 20 min)

- *When did you learn / start engaging in this activity? Where?*
- *Do you remember any particular moment when you realised that this activity was important for you?*
- *Did somebody teach you or inspire you in some way?*
- *Why he/she was fundamental and what do you admire of him/her?*
- *Why is he/she important?*
- *Do you relate with others through this activity?*
- *Have you built any important relationship through this activity? Do you remember in which occasion? Where? Who they are? And where are they from?*

- *What do you share with them?*

Third set of questions

- These questions explore **obstacles** and **freedom of movement** (10 - 20 min)

Obstacles

- *Has this activity ever created conflicts or problems in your life? Do you remember any particular occasions?*

- *How did you overcome or tried to overcome these conflicts or problems?*

- *Do you always have the resources (time, money, etc.) to engage in this activity?*

- *How do you cope with the lack of resources?*

Difference between experiences in Romania and the UK

- *Do you feel more like a (musician/painter/carer...) now or in Romania? Why?*

- *How often were you engaging in this activity before moving to the UK? And how often now? Why more often in UK/Romania?*

The following questions might be asked if not addressed by participants in the previous questions:

- *Do you have more possibility to engage in Romania or in the UK? Why?*

- *Were you more passionate about this activity before or now? Why?*

- *Would it make more sense to engage in this activity here or in Romania? Why?*

- *Do you have more possibilities to learn and grow before or now? Why?*

Fourth set of questions

- This set of questions addresses themes such as the **spaces of engagement** and **obstacles** (10-15 min)
 - *Where do you normally engage in this activity?*
 - *What makes you feel comfortable in these spaces? Is there something that doesn't? Why?*
 - *What do you normally do to avoid these problems?*
 - *What can be improved in this spaces?*

Conclusion

(5 min.)

- Reminding participants of the rights of withdrawal and their limits.
- Asking if they know somebody else who would be interested in participating
- Thank you and goodbye.

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Purpose of the Project

Some activities produce wellbeing as they give people a sense of purpose in life and allow them to learn and grow. This research aims to study these activities and the spaces in which they are performed. In particular, the focus is on the values that these activities allow to express and on the obstacles to their engagement.

The right of freedom of movement has allowed people to move freely from Romania to the UK. However, it is not clear if this also means more opportunities to engage in activities producing wellbeing, especially for Romanian Roma migrants.

I have approached you as I would like to know what activities you like, why you engage in them, and what has changed since you moved to the UK. For this research I will need participation of about 15 Romanian Roma migrants who have been living in the UK since at least one year.

If I agree to take part?

If you are willing to take part in this research let us arrange an interview for a time and place which suits you. We can agree a start and end time for the interview which I expect to last about an hour.

An interview, unlike a normal conversation is recorded. Before recording starts we will discuss recording options and options regarding the use of the recorded information. You will either agree (consent) to continuing the interview and recording will start, or the interview will not continue. Should we continue, then after the end of recording we will discuss again the options regarding the use of the recorded information. Either we agree as to how the recorded information will be stored and used (by completing a consent form) or the recording will be destroyed. You may be willing for me to share some things you have said (some parts of the recording) more openly than other parts. We can reflect on if anything sensitive might have been recorded and what can be done to avoid any potential harm of this information being shared. We can also reflect on this as the interview takes place.

I hope you will agree to an audio (sound) recording being made. The main purpose of the audio recording is to help produce a transcript - a text document that details what was said, in what way, and by which of us. If you agree to an audio recording, then after the interview, I will produce a transcript and an edited version of this transcript with some words deleted or changed, like names of people or places, to make the details less sensitive. In producing an

edited transcript, I will not include details that you requested were removed or which I think should be removed due to their sensitivity.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can stop at any time simply by letting me know that you no longer want to participate.

As I would like to see where and how people engage in meaningful activities, I will ask to visit with you the sites where you normally perform the activity we'll be discussing. I understand that my visit might not be possible or welcome and that you might want to check with others before inviting me or letting me know I am not welcome. If I make a visit, then I will try to be sensitive and leave if my presence appears to be a problem.

The time you spent participating to the project will be remunerated with £10 payed in cash just after the interview. In addition to this, local travel expenses will be refunded (if applicable).

Being identified in research/articles – anonymity, confidentiality and risks

I will assume unless you specifically want to be identified in the research, that all data and quotes from our interview will be anonymised so that it would not be possible for anyone to identify you from your name.

However, please be aware that you might be still identified in other ways. For example, let's suppose that you are the only musician in the study. This means that the person who gave me your contact might be able to link this information to you if he knows that you are a musician. This should not be a big deal if you are comfortable being identified, but please let me know anytime during the study if you have specific concerns about it.

In particular, please be mindful providing information that can compromise your relationships with people who are close to you. If – even after the interview - you realise that you have provided such kind of information by any means let me know.

Beside these issues, you also need to be aware that – depending from your personal experience – some questions might be more or less sensitive and involve religious, personal, or political issues. Remember that there is no obligation to answer these questions if they arise negative feelings and that you can stop the interview at any moment.

Withdrawing

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You can stop the interview or stop me from collecting data at any time. If you have particular concerns about any information you have provided please contact me to discuss it.

Up to 15 working days (3 weeks) from the date of interview you can request that all the data collected from you is deleted. At any time, you can ask that your identifying information and any audio recording is deleted from the records.

Your withdrawal from the project will not cause you to lose the £10 you have already earned.

Who is paying for this research?

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Ethical Approval

This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee on **25/09/17**, ethics reference number: **16-187**

Archiving research data

This is in part about sharing data to benefit future research as well as being able to justify findings by demonstrating the data they are based on. In this case this could mean the anonymised transcriptions of the interview being deposited.

There are different ways in which information can be categorised meaning that information would be available to anyone for any purposes – commercial, any media etc. In this research, however, the information will be categorised as controlled and access will be only limited for educational and research purposes.

Information Sheet

You will be given a copy of this to keep. Please contact me if you have any further questions about this research before and after the interview.

Antonio Maffei
School of Geography
University of Leeds
gyam@leeds.ac.uk

07527568528

Supervisors contact details

Dr Deirdre Conlon d.conlon@leeds.ac.uk Tel. +44 (0) 113 34 33350

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

	Initial next to statement if you agree
<p>I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 25/09/17. I have had the chance to ask questions to the researcher about the project and the consent process.</p>	
<p>INFORMATION SHEETS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have been given and had had the chance to read through an Information Sheet and I feel that I understand the research project and the reasons for my selection to participate. The information sheet set out the subject areas of this interview and made clear that I am free to decline to answer any questions 	
<p>RIGHT TO WITHDRAW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand that my participation is voluntary at any stage of the research process • I understand that I am free to withdraw all or part of my data without providing any reason. There will be no negative consequences if I do so. • I understand that it might not be possible to withdraw my data after 15 working days (3 weeks) from the collection date. I have had the opportunity to discuss what this means. 	
<p>OBSERVATIONS AND PARTICIPATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand that the researcher will have access to my personal and private spaces or/and to observe me and take notes only if I give him permission to do so. • I understand that I have the right to stop him collecting data through observations and note-taking at any-time during my participation to the research. 	
<p>STORAGE OF INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any personal information including consent forms will be kept in a 	

<p>locked drawer. Following withdrawal from the study, all relevant data will be destroyed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic data will include transcriptions of interviews, audio-recorded interviews and written up field notes. I will only use encrypted devices to record the interviews, and I will transfer this to the secured University drive as soon as practical where any personal research data will be stored. 	
<p>ACCESS TO TRANSCRIPTS AND FIELDNOTES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I give permission for the researchers supervisors to have access, purely in their supervisory role, to transcripts from interview and written up fieldnotes. 	
<p>PUBLICATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We discussed that data gathered during this research, including the content of this interview may be used in the researcher's PhD thesis, academic articles and conference presentations. We discussed the reasons for this and potential advantages and disadvantages. 	
<p>CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONIMITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand that my name will not be linked to the research materials in the report or reports that result from the research. • I understand the risk of being identified for what I do or say during my participation to the project and I have had the opportunity to discuss what this means. 	
<p>INTERVIEWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I give the permission to be audio-recorded during the interview. 	
<p>DATA SHARING AND ARCHIVING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We discussed the archiving of research data in the University of Leeds repository. We discussed the implications of potentially identifiable information. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I give permission for my anonymised data to be archived in the Leeds University repository only to be used for educational or research purposes. 	
<p>I understand who to make a complaint to or raise any concerns with about the researcher or research project. I have been given the name, email address and contact number of Dr Deirdre Conlon, d.conlon@leeds.ac.uk</p>	
<p>During our discussion I raised the following questions which had not been addressed either in this form or in the Participant Information Sheet</p>	

I am satisfied with the answers that I have received to my questions.	
I agree to taking part in the research conducted under the auspices of a university ethics committee and will let Antonio Maffei know if my contact details should change	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date	