

# A lost generation? Racialization and stalled social mobility in a group of Roma migrants in the UK

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## Abstract

The paper applies the notion of *segmented assimilation* to an inter-generational divide within a community of Roma migrants from Romania who settled in Manchester, UK. Drawing on long-term observations, we show how a successful trajectory of upward social mobility comes to a stall as the interplay between Roma-specific demographics (large families and traditional kin networks) and racialized policies sets a ‘mobility trap’, creating a ‘lost generation’ of young people who are unable to progress beyond the status of low-wage, vulnerable employee.

**Keywords:** Roma; segmented assimilation; mobility trap; lost generation; social mobility

## 1. Introduction

Migrant inclusion in the job market and migrants’ prospects at achieving cross-generational upward social mobility have received considerable attention since Piore’s (1979) influential analysis of the trajectories of migrants in Fordist-era US, when the labour market was characterized by a pyramidal structure and intergenerational social mobility appeared to be universal. Piore noted how first generation migrants were willing to accept low-status employment and low social positions as they assessed their own income and social status against the referential context of the values of their community of origin. Through progressive assimilation into American society, subsequent generations developed socio-economic expectations similar to those of natives and, passing first through semi-skilled, middle-income positions, they eventually competed with them on the higher levels of the labour market.

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With the advent of the post-industrial society, dominated by an international division of labour and capital, the pyramidal labour market described by Piore has changed into one bifurcated between high-level occupations, which require computer literacy and advanced education, and low-income, unskilled professions. Archetypical of this new structure of the labour market are what Sassen (2005) refers to as ‘global cities’, in which high-income inhabitants working in the financial sector create needs filled by low-income jobs in the service sector. The availability of middle-income jobs is drastically reduced and upward mobility can no longer be achieved over various generations but requires instead the acquisition of advanced credentials in the course of a single generation (Portes et al., 2009). In such an hourglass labour market, the ‘precariat’ emerges as a new class, de-unionized, less protected by social welfare, and with limited possibilities to achieve upward social mobility (Standing 2011: 57).

Against this background, scholars have questioned the assumption that ‘assimilation, acculturation and mobility were virtually the same thing’ (Kasinitz et al. 2004: 4). The resulting analyses range from optimistic, in cases where migrants adapt to life in the host society and progress in education, employment and status, to pessimistic, noting that migrants remain culturally and socio-economically isolated. Telles and Ortiz (2008), for example, speak of a *generation of exclusion* among Mexican Americans, showing how the second generation attains working class status while the following generations do not progress further. They consider social mobility to be an outcome of migrants’ assimilation in a wide range of structural, cultural and political dimensions of the host society, identifying education as the central variable leading to intergenerational change. Racialization on the part of the host society, however, limits migrants’ opportunities, particularly in educational settings where teachers ‘convey the message that Mexican Americans are less worthy’ (Ortiz and Telles 2012: 54). As a consequence of low educational achievements, Mexican Americans thus remain largely confined to low-income employment and rarely leave the ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods in which they grew up.

Kasinitz et al. (2008), by contrast, observing young migrants in New York, argue for a *second generation advantage* that is accrued as younger migrants socialize with indigenous minorities and established migrants. Through these interactions they become more aware of opportunities and more ready to seize them, achieving better education and employment goals than their parents. While the authors consider intergenerational educational and employment outcomes as the main indicators of social mobility, they also note how acculturation and accommodation do not necessarily lead to assimilation, but, rather, create a youth culture ‘that is neither “immigrant” nor “middle American”, but something new’ (Kasinitz et al. 2002: 1022).

The notion of *segmented assimilation* (Portes and Rumbaut 2006) addresses processes in between these two poles, acknowledging that the social mobility trajectories of migrants are the product of a variety of factors: the human capital of parents (i.e. their skills, education and formal qualifications), the social context of reception, and the composition of immigrant families. Highly qualified migrant parents tend to adapt more successfully to the host society and are better equipped than unskilled ones to support their children to increase their social standing even further (cf. Zhou 1997; Portes et al. 2005). However, opportunities for intergenerational mobility also depend on the barriers that confront the children of migrants, such as racism and the constraints of a bifurcated labour market. In addition, mobility trajectories depend on migrants’ social capital, i.e. their opportunities to obtain resources through relations with other individuals (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Ideally, these

must strike a balance between ties with fellow migrants, who provide stability through solidarity, and ties with people outside the kinship or co-ethnic group, which can offer opportunities for social mobility (Portes 2014). Finally, policies towards particular migrant groups and the host society's view of migrants' race and ethnicity can strengthen or hinder parents' efforts to motivate their children.

The interaction between these different factors can lead to different trajectories of inclusion, varied degrees of social mobility, and considerable differences between migrant parents (generation 1), children who moved with them at an early age (generation 1.5) and those born in migration (generation 2 and subsequent generations). Differences in social mobility trajectories can also lead to intergenerational tensions as younger migrants come to reject elements of the parental culture in order to become members of mainstream society (Portes and Rivas 2011).

In regard to migration policies, it has been noted that the criminalization of migrants, often tied to their contested legal status and the threat of deportation, makes migrant parents 'ineligible for many services' (Waters and Kasinitz 2015: 131) and forces them into low-earning, often exploitative employment or into the informal economy, with negative effects on the educational and professional outcomes of their children. Portes and Haller (2010) also note that language difficulties and racial or ethnic discrimination represent significant incentives for self-employment. When legislation regulates informal employment and self-employment, migrants with high levels of education can establish entrepreneurial communities and achieve upward social mobility (cf. Chen 2012). However, migrants who become 'entrepreneurs', but lack skills to compete on the job market, often remain confined to poorly paid self-employment (cf. Portes and Yiu 2013).

Policies that ensure access to welfare support and benefits may allow individuals to remain outside the labour market for long periods of time. There is then a risk that parents might not be able to offer guidance and stimuli to their children, though the positive trajectories of second generation migrants in Sweden suggest that 'an active welfare state can and does compensate for many differences in parental background and greatly facilitates immigrant integration' (Reisel et al. 2012: 127).

Our aim in this paper is to show how different trajectories of social mobility can mark not just differences between generations, but also divides within a single generation. We draw on a case study of male Romanian Roma migrants to the UK.

## 2. Roma migrations and social mobility

The studies discussed above have shown how, contrary to Piore's analysis in the context of a pyramidal job market, migrant social mobility is not progressive across generations and does not stand in direct correlation with assimilation. In the contemporary hourglass job market (Sassen 2005), characterized by the emergence of the precariat (Standing 2011), assimilation, cultural retention and racialization on the side of the host society intertwine, resulting in non-linear and heterogeneous social mobility trajectories across migrant generations. In the case of Roma, however, studies have so far focused exclusively on first generation migrants.

It has been observed that, like other migrants, Roma see migration as an opportunity for personal upward social mobility (Grill 2012, 2016) and to secure a better future for their children (Pantea 2012). Roma migrants generally engage in low-skilled ‘precarious’ employment or informal activities. Assessing the experiences of Roma migrant women, Pantea (2012: 1252) states that there is little evidence that Roma are gaining upward social mobility abroad, but that migration is a way of gaining social mobility at home. A common pattern of investment of remittances, attributed to the negative reception in the destination countries or part of a strategy of short-term, repeated migrations for seasonal employment, has also been observed. It generally involves the creation of small family businesses (cf. Toma et al. 2017), the education of ‘left-behind’ children (cf. Benedik et al. 2013; Toma et al. 2017), and the construction of new houses (cf. Benarrosh-Orsoni 2015; Grill 2016; Tesăr 2016), which often enables residential desegregation (Toma et al. 2017). Invariably, the effects of social mobility at home have been discussed in connection with the renegotiation of individual and group identities, such as changes in gender relations (Pantea 2012) and in the relationship with the majority population (Benarrosh-Orsoni 2015; Grill 2016; Tesăr 2016; Toma et al. 2017). In line with Piore’s analysis, these studies show that the first generation of Roma migrants engage with their communities of origin, and are set on improving their social status there and are therefore willing to accept a low occupational status in the migration country. The lack of an explicit intergenerational approach, however, leaves open the question as to how the growing number of Roma raised as migrants or born to migrant parents are achieving social mobility.

We take an ethnographic approach with a focus on cross-generational social mobility trajectories, and follow the progression of a group of male Roma migrants from Romania now living in the UK. We discuss how their employment trajectories are shaped by their expectations and various forms of capital, but are also constrained by policies and racial stereotypes. After a brief discussion about the connection between policies and stereotypes with forms of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant et al. 2014), we introduce the group and its history. We then demonstrate how mobility and different times of arrival in the UK have allowed different generations to acquire different types of human capital. We then discuss each generation’s integration strategies and articulated goals for the future. We show how the formalization of income generation activities of parents and the integration into the labour market of children who arrived with them constitute the first steps in a trajectory of upward social mobility both in Romania and in the UK. This trajectory, however, appears to stall among the children who joined the migration in later stages. We argue that the interplay between Roma demographics (in particular the tendency toward large families organized in transnational kin networks) and racialized policies that target Roma creates a ‘mobility trap’ (cf. Portes and Yiu 2013) whereby a ‘lost generation’ of Roma migrant children stalls in low positions in the ‘precariat’ segment of the labour market.

### 3. Territorial stigma and racialized policies

Roma are minorities even in their countries of origin, where they are the object of racialization and discrimination. The racialization of Roma is a phenomenon dating back to the early modern age and resting on stereotypical images of ‘Gypsies’ as untrustworthy nomads

prone to crime (Matras 2015a). In Eastern Europe, historical patterns of residential segregation across ethnic lines have often compounded stereotypes with particular neighbourhoods. Many Roma thus suffer from the effects of ‘territorial stigmatization’, a process whereby social discredit is linked to space and residents of disparaged districts are ‘painted in darker and more exotic hues than their demography warrants’ (Wacquant et al. 2014: 1274). This, in turn, underpins discrimination by the wider population, as well as the deployment by government actors of restrictive measures, which further limit opportunities for residents of ‘bad neighbourhoods’. Since territorial stigma is tied to spatial location, however, Wacquant (2007) has argued that its negative effects can be avoided through geographic mobility. Indeed, Eastern European Roma who experienced high levels of segregation under communism were among the first to migrate, already in the early 1990s. However, stigmatization meant that they had to rely almost exclusively on kin networks in their choice of destinations and employment (cf. Pantea 2013; Vlase and Voicu 2014; Toma et al. 2017).

Segregation experiences and the reliance on kin networks have made Roma migrants more willing to take risks but also more vulnerable to exploitation on the job market and more inclined to accept sub-standard housing conditions (Matras 2000). As a result, they have often faced victimization, marginalization and criminalization (Clark and Campbell 2000; Sobotka 2003), often resulting in settlement in shanty towns (Nacu 2012) or dedicated ‘nomad camps’ (Clough Marinaro and Sigona 2011). These settlements, portrayed as cultural nomadism or voluntary segregation, have in turn created new forms of territorial stigmatization. As noted by Maestri (2017), such images resulted in ‘extensive’ territorial stigma, affecting not only those Roma who resided in disparaged settlements but the entire Roma population.

The extension of territorial stigma to the entire Roma population has gone hand in hand with the spread of securitarian ideologies, resulting in the implementation of unprecedented control measures such as ethnic profiling and the expulsion of EU citizens from other member states (Sigona 2005; van Baar 2014). Similarly, the depiction of Roma as particularly prone to exploitation of vulnerable members of their communities (Matras 2015b) has led to their depiction as a threat not only to others but to themselves, which in turn has been used to justify increased control measures and targeted social support interventions (Leggio 2017). We regard such policies as racialized since, driven by ideological pre-dispositions and stereotypes, they target a particular ethnic community, essentializing and exaggerating cultural differences and turning them into signs of divergence.

## 4. Methodology and data

Our study draws on long-term (2009–2016) ethnographic engagement with a group of Romanian Roma (approximately 500 individuals) in Manchester. At an initial stage (2009–13) we carried out participant observation by accompanying Roma in their efforts to gain access to the job market and to services and conducted a series of pilot interviews. In the second phase (2013–16) we carried out a more systematic examination of the motivations, expectations and strategies of Roma migrants, drawing on notes from a weekly advice and support facility operated by Roma for Roma, interacting with Roma in their homes and in

settings such as schools and public service offices, and complementing our observations through interviews with 40 informants. The interviewees originated from different towns in Romania and resided in the same multi-ethnic working class neighbourhood in Manchester (for full details see MigRom 2014a, 2015). We also trained a group of seven young members of this community as research assistants. They helped recruit informants through a snowball process and carried out most of the interviews under our guidance. All authors are fluent in Romani and regularly interacted with informants using their family language.

A first round of interviews was conducted in Romani with 16 informants ranging in age from late teens to early 40s. We used an open-ended interview guide designed to collect information about migratory experiences (e.g. age at first migration, number of migration countries, travel between and living conditions in different countries) and socio-demographic data (e.g. education, work experiences, age at marriage and first child bearing, number of children). A second round of interviews in Romani, with eight informants aged above 30, followed a life history approach with a particular focus on migratory experiences. Towards the end of the observation period we interviewed 18 Roma teenagers, this time in English, who had recently completed secondary education in Manchester, using an open-ended interview guide with a focus on school experiences.

The Roma research assistants provided additional information about their own education and employment and those of their parents and friends. As the majority of the Roma assistants were kin-related males originating from the same region, our sample for the present study shows a gender and community bias, comprising 26 males, fathers and their sons, originating from Ialomița County in southeastern Romania. They refer to themselves as *Kangljari* ('comb-makers', the traditional occupation of their ancestors), share the same Romani dialect, and adhere to the Pentecostal faith. The *Kangljari* were among the first Romanian Roma migrants to reach Manchester in the early 2000s and most of our informants have since lived in the city continuously. Their history in Manchester offers an opportunity to observe how the interaction of multiple factors (human capital, cultural practices and racialized policies) influenced the choices and outcomes of various individuals. The ethnographic approach offers an opportunity to examine the cumulative, integrated effect of a variety of factors on the way that adaptation strategies have changed across generations.

Table 1 provides key biographical data about the individuals included in the sample.

## 5. Migration history

The *Kangljari* (sometimes referred to as *Ursari* by outsiders) are descendants of itinerant groups who were forcibly settled under communism in a *țigania* or 'Gypsy neighbourhood' on the outskirts of Țăndărei, a small rural town in southeastern Romania. They worked mainly on collectivized land and at a ceramics factory that opened in the 1970s. Some held low-level administrative positions. Ion, the first father to reach Manchester in 2000, reported that his father worked at a warehouse where rationed goods were distributed to the population. Many people also engaged in itinerant trades. The *Kangljari* abandoned their traditional trade in comb making, but Ion reported that they traded food products acquired

**Table 1.** Sample (*Kangljari* male). Pseudonyms provided for informants whose stories will be presented below

Individual	Year of Birth	Source of data
CG	1962	Life history, 2014
CT	1971	Participant observation
AT	1973	Participant observation
Ion	1975	Life history, 2014
AF	1975	Participant observation
IM	1982	Life history, 2014
AS	1986	Migration experience, 2013
Elvis	1991	Migration experience, 2013
LT	1993	Participant observation
VT	1993	Participant observation
FM	1993	Participant observation
David	1995	Migration/school experience, 2013/2015
MaT	1995	Migration experience, 2013
AZ	1995	School experience, 2015
Mihai	1995	Participant observation
MI	1996	School experience
Stefan	1996	Migration/school experience, 2013/2015
MZ	1997	School experience, 2015
Ronaldo	1997	School experience, 2015
SI	1997	School experience, 2015
AI	1998	School experience, 2015
CI	1999	School experience, 2015
AC	1999	School experience, 2015
Marcu	1999	School experience, 2015
CAI	1999	School experience, 2015
PC	1999	School experience, 2015

when working in collective farms. *Kangljari* women sold these products at local markets, while men collected scrap metal and children begged for old clothes, shoes and rags that were then either sold or kept by the family. The combination of these activities granted the *Kangljari* a measure of economic stability and men generally attended eight years of mandatory education. However, as in the case of the *Ursari* described by Toma et al. (2017), they were associated by the authorities and ethnic Romanians with beggary, burglary, and illicit ambulant trading and their neighbourhood was surrounded by a barrier that restricted their access to the town.

Following the 1989 revolution, most *Kangljari* lost their state-backed jobs and were excluded from land redistribution. Ion recalled how worried his parents were at seeing

the revolution unravelling and how their economic situation progressively worsened as they could only sell second-hand objects at local markets. This sudden and significant socio-economic change led to conflicts within the *Kangljari* community, prompting Ion's family and others to move to Fetești and other nearby towns (see also [Matras et al. 2009](#): 13) where they settled again in segregated neighbourhoods. The dispersal did not, however, solve the economic problems and Ion and his wife, recently married and still without children, were the first to leave Fetești in early 1992 and to seek asylum in Germany. The couple spent around three years in Germany, where they were joined by other *Kangljari*, relying on government support for asylum seekers and on informal economic activities. A number of children, including Ion's first, were born in Germany during this period. However, they were forced to return to Romania as part of the readmission protocol between Germany and Romania, signed in November 1992 (cf. [Matras 2000](#): 42).

Upon returning to Romania, these families resumed their engagement in itinerant trades. Some, like Ion, began to invest the money earned in Germany in building or buying new houses outside the segregated neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, their income was very limited and the prospect of better employment was scarce or non-existent. The situation worsened during the economic depression of 1996–7 (cf. [Sandu 2010](#)). With the signing of free movement treaties between Romania and a number of EU countries, *Kangljari* families began to migrate to Italy, France, and, less frequently, to Belgium. At this stage, most children aged 5–7 travelled with their parents.

The *Kangljari* were generally unable to secure stable accommodation in Italy and France as they did not qualify for state-sponsored housing and, due to discrimination as well as high rents, they found no access to private market accommodation. Consequently, they resided, alongside other Roma migrants, in makeshift settlements. Ion recalled how these sites were often located on rural land with no running water or electricity and few transport connections with the urban areas and subject to regular evictions. When evicted, the *Kangljari* simply set up another settlement close to the same city or moved to a different country. As a result of continuous evictions, they had no access to health services. Due to their low level of skills and lack of formal qualifications, they were forced to engage in informal economic activities, mostly begging and scrap metal collection. Older children were often expected to help the family and did not attend school regularly, not least due to their irregular status and residential instability.

In order to protect younger children from conditions in the makeshift settlements, couples often decided to split their households. Because of the difficulties in accessing health services, they travelled back to Romania a few weeks before or shortly after a child's birth. This allowed children to be left with their grandparents by the age of one or two. Children born shortly before migration were also left in Romania. Ion, for example, moved to Italy in 1999 with his wife and their oldest son, Mihai, at the time almost five years old. Three more children, aged between one and three, remained in Fetești with their grandparents. According to Ion, in order to ensure that left-behind children attended school, parents sent remittances to the grandparents. The desire to guarantee a better future for their children prompted Ion and many other *Kangljari* to leave Italy and France. In January 2000 he moved to the UK while other *Kangljari* went to Spain.

In Spain, the housing situation was generally better than in Italy and France, although in Madrid the *Kangljari* faced similar difficulties. Informal employment in the then

burgeoning building industry and as seasonal workers in agriculture led to high inter-urban mobility and access to services remained limited. The practice of leaving young children in Romania therefore continued.

Between 2000 and 2004, the *Kangljari* tried to apply for asylum in the UK. In some cases, the UK government offered support to settle, generally in the form of social housing or limited financial aid. Other families were sent back to Romania and quickly resumed the pattern of mobility between Italy, France and Spain. Some families, such as Ion's, managed to remain in the UK between 2004 and 2007. This was possible thanks to the fact that scrap metal collection in the UK is regulated through a licensing system that allows individuals to register as self-employed. In Manchester, a further opportunity was provided by *The Big Issue*, a newspaper produced by a charity whose street vendors were registered as self-employed. Through these forms of self-employment, the *Kangljari* were able to settle legally and access welfare support such as child and housing benefits. The income generated in this way was sufficient to rent cheap houses on the private market, mainly from South Asian landlords who were happy to rent to the Roma. In 2001, a pastor from Țândărei set up a Pentecostal church. The first services attracted families from Leeds, Bradford and Liverpool, and the church assisted families who faced financial difficulties.

The *Kangljari* thus experienced greater stability in Manchester than they had in other countries. As Romania joined the EU in 2007, more families moved to settle in Manchester. Housing stability and the opportunity to access schools also meant that there was no longer a need to leave children in Romania to guarantee their education. A trend towards family reunification characterized the period between 2005–9 and from that moment onwards both cohorts of migrant children lived together with their parents in the UK.

The *Kangljari* families in Manchester are generally larger than the average white British, middle class family, but tend to be similar in size to British Asian families. However, their families and kin networks are usually more extended and denser than those of other European migrants (MigRom 2014b). The tendency towards large families, common among Romanian Roma migrants, can be attributed in part to the aggressive pro-natalist policies implemented under the Ceaușescu regime. A shift towards smaller families began with migration to the West (see Gamella et al. 2017). We noticed the beginning of such a demographic transition among the *Kangljari* which, however, was halted by the conversion to Pentecostalism, which discourages birth control.

## 6. *Kangljari* generations

As a result of their migration history, different generations of *Kangljari* in our sample were socialized in different countries and acquired different levels of education, skills and formal qualifications—what Portes and Rumbaut (2006) refer to as 'human capital'. The parents (generation 1) grew up in Romania where they attended the mandatory eight years of education. While a second generation of British-born *Kangljari* was emerging at the time of our research, the children generation included in our sample arrived in Manchester at an early age. They are thus migrant children rather than children of migrants or, as suggested by Rumbaut (2004), they constitute generation 1.5. In the *Kangljari* case, generation 1.5 is not homogenous: an older cohort, whom we call generation 1.5a, spent their early

**Table 2.** *Kangljari* migrant generations

	Parents		Children	
Generation	1	1.5a	1.5b	
Individuals sampled	7	6	13	
Year of birth	1962–86	1988–96	1995–9	
Country of birth	RO	RO/various	RO	
Country of early socialization	RO	Various	RO/UK	
Year of first migration	1992+	1992+	2000+	
Age at first migration	20+	0–5	1–12	
Year of arrival in UK	2000–11	2000–2	2000–10	
Age at arrival in UK	22–49	5–11	1–12	
Education level <sup>a</sup>	Mid	Low	High	
Migration history <sup>b</sup>	Complex	Complex	Simple	

<sup>a</sup>Mid: 5–8 years. Low: 0–5 years. High: 8–10(+) years.

<sup>b</sup>Simple: Romania to UK. Complex: Romania to UK via one or more countries.

childhood migrating and did not attend school regularly. Their younger siblings, generation 1.5b, remained in Romania or moved to the UK as infants and attended school regularly. Thus, while the parent generation is homogeneous, the children generation comprises two sub-groups (Table 2).

### 6.1 *Kangljari* parents

*Kangljari* parents can be regarded as low-human-capital migrants as they did not acquire any formal qualification above the equivalent of secondary school. Migration policies had a negative effect on their opportunities to acquire new skills. Ion remembered how, as asylum seekers in Germany, they were granted welfare support but were not allowed to seek employment. However, he recalled how, while awaiting the outcome of his application, he managed to find informal employment as a cleaner.

In Italy and France, widespread anti-Roma sentiments and the common belief among policy makers that Roma are ‘nomads’ resulted in policies aiming at the systematic removal of the Roma or, at best, at their containment in dedicated ‘nomad camps’ (Sigona 2005; Clough Marinaro and Sigona 2011; Nacu 2012). Evictions, deportations and segregation prevented the *Kangljari* from obtaining housing stability and thus from accessing education for their children (generation 1.5a) and employment for themselves. In this situation, informal activities such as begging and scrap metal collection were the only possible forms of income generation. In Spain no explicit policy targeted Roma migrants, but the building and agriculture industries relied on informal work of unskilled migrants (Arango 2012). The *Kangljari* engaged in these sectors while continuing to perform the same informal activities practised previously. Their legal status remained unclear and they remained cut out from services. Not seeing any long-term integration opportunity and well aware

that their income had high purchase power when sent back to Romania, *Kangljari* parents continued to invest their earnings in Romania. This decision allowed Ion and many others to complete and extend the houses that they started to build after returning from Germany. This material investment also led to the emergence of transnational households, whereby remittances were used to support the elderly who remained in Romania and cared for the new houses. The elderly *Kangljari* also ensured that the children left in Romania (generation 1.5b) received regular education, unlike those in migration.

During this highly unstable and mobile phase, the *Kangljari*'s engagement in informal activities was clearly a survival strategy. As with other migrants (cf. Waters and Kasinitz 2015), legal uncertainty prevented engagement in the formal economy and pushed them towards informal economic activities.

Nonetheless, this experience equipped the *Kangljari* parents with a set of skills on which they could rely when they reached Manchester. Here, the system of licensing for scrap metal collection and the opportunity to replace begging with the selling of charity newspapers allowed them to formally register as self-employed and so as taxpayers, thus 'gaining access to legal and social protection as well as support services' (Chen 2012: 15). Romania's EU accession in 2007 and the efforts of Manchester City Council to engage with Roma further strengthened the legal status of *Kangljari* migrants. At this point, the only obstacles to full integration into the UK job market remained the transitional measures that barred Romanian citizens from seeking employment until 2014. Once these restrictions were lifted, *Kangljari* parents continued to engage in low-skilled self-employment.

[1] **Ion:** I sell magazines, Big Issue! [. . .] Not that I like it, but I don't speak English. That's a big problem. I don't speak well enough to get the job I'd like.

Ion's testimony highlights how low-skilled migrants' self-employment 'can become a "mobility trap" preventing minority persons from acquiring the necessary skills and experience' (Portes and Yiu 2013: 76) to then move onto more remunerative employment.

Although circumstances improved, *Kangljari* parents still feared deportation and expulsion, a fear rekindled in 2016 by the UK's decision to leave the EU and the resulting uncertainty about the status of EU migrants. Ion thinks that, as Romanian citizens, Romania is the only place that can offer him and his family safety. He and his peers travel regularly to oversee improvements on their houses outside the segregated neighbourhood. The fact that they hire ethnic Romanians for this work signifies for them just how much life has improved since they left Romania. As Toma et al. (2017) remark, owning houses has significantly improved the *Kangljari*'s 'bad reputation' among their ethnic Romanian neighbours.

## 6.2 Migrating *Kangljari* children

Migration policies had an even stronger impact on the employment trajectories of the *Kangljari* children who migrated since the early 1990s. Many were born in Germany and could have formed a generation 2 (children of migrants) there, attending school and eventually moving into the job market, if it had not been for Germany's repatriation policy. Subsequent migration turned these children into generation 1.5a. Yet, the years

of instability in Italy, France and Spain led them to miss education and to early engagement with the same informal activities practised by their fathers.

When they arrived in the UK, these children thus had less formally recognized qualifications or work competences than their parents, in the best of cases having attended up to five years of school, though often irregularly and in different countries. Until 2009 *Kangljari* children faced a shortage of school places and discriminatory practices by schools that refused to accept Roma children (Matras et al., 2015). However, like their parents, they had acquired a set of skills through their engagement in informal activities. They therefore shadowed their parents in their choices of work:

[2] **Elvis:** Now I sell the Big Issue. [I'd like] a job that pays good money . . . something that is mine . . . not part time . . . something nice, something where I can work 35 hours.

Unlike their parents, however, they quickly learned English and were able to build friendship relationships with neighbours, particularly those of Pakistani background, around shared interests like urban popular culture, R&B, rap and football. Through these connections, some managed to secure informal employment as deliverers for Pakistani-owned takeaways. Some, like Elvis, Stefan and Mihai, participated in a training and placement scheme co-ordinated by a local charity organization in collaboration with the City Council. Aiming to provide mediators for parents and role models for younger children, the scheme engaged late-teen *Kangljari* as freelance interpreters and classroom assistants between 2010 and 2011. Their inclusion trajectories thus resemble Kasinitz et al.'s (2008) 'second generation advantage': the ability of migrant children, having acquired the language of the country, to tap into other migrants' networks to foster their own social mobility.

This cohort's drive to do better than their parents, however, remained limited until 2014 as a result of employment restrictions on Romanian citizens. Unsurprisingly, immediately after the removal of these restrictions they were the first to search for better employment.

Elvis, encouraged by his mother, visited a local biscuit factory in the spring of 2014. By the summer he was working there temporarily through an employment agency and was also attending training offered by the factory. By mid-2015 he was employed full-time by the factory. Up to that moment, although married and a father since summer 2013, he had lived in the same house with his parents and younger siblings, as he was unable to rent on his own. Once employed, he immediately started to look for a new residence and, when his second child was born in summer 2015, he moved into a terraced house with his nuclear family. Similarly, in spring 2015 Stefan found a part-time job as a classroom assistant in a secondary school. One year later he was offered full-time employment and rented a house with his wife and two-year-old son. Finally, Mihai, Ion's first born, regularly attended youth clubs where he acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills and built relationships with children from other communities. He drew on these skills during the training and placement scheme run by the charity organization. Between 2012 and 2015 he attended adult training as a youth worker. As a father of one since 2014, in 2015 he also started working part-time in a warehouse. He left the youth work training, moved to full time employment and in 2016 was attending training to become a deputy warehouse manager.

Elvis, Stefan and Mihai are among the most successful of their peers. The rest of generation 1.5a entered the labour market as unskilled workers in fast-food chains, delivery

drivers, valets at car retailers, and warehouse workers. Their contracts are non-standard (part-time, temporary, contract work with on-demand service providers). This reflects the rising share of foreign-born workers in low skilled occupation in Britain during 2002–15<sup>1</sup> and the global trend of polarization and ‘precarization’ (Standing 2011) of the employment system. However precarious, such employment offers benefits (limited insurance cover and paid holidays), a more constant income, and more opportunities for socialization within the British work culture than are achievable to scrap metal collectors or sellers of charity magazines.

These improved working conditions mark the beginning of an upward mobility trajectory among *Kangljari* children in the UK. They are well aware of it, yet they can also see the limitations they face. Mihai, for example, insisted that, while better off than his father Ion, he was missing out on opportunities because of his lack of formal education. This awareness goes hand in hand with a different attitude, compared with their parents, towards a possible return to Romania:

[3] **Stefan:** I don’t like talking about Romania. In Romania you have no opportunities. You have no chances in Romania. Here you have a lot to do, a lot to seize upon. But in Romania there’s nothing you can do.

These feelings of alienation and the perception that, mostly because of stronger anti-Roma sentiments, they would have no opportunities in Romania, led the older *Kangljari* children to question their parents’ practice to invest in houses in Romania. Until the referendum on EU membership in June 2016, they contributed to these efforts and travelled regularly with their parents to Romania, but also considered buying houses in the UK. Stefan even acquired British citizenship in summer 2014. However, following the referendum they started to appreciate the security provided by owning houses in Romania.

Based on these social mobility trajectories and attitudes, we expected children who attended school regularly (1.5b) to share similar plans for their futures. As they entered adulthood, they seemed to be in a position to build on their older siblings’ progress and to further improve the quality of their employment. However, asked in 2013 about the prospects of his younger brothers, Stefan noted:

[4] I don’t know what they’ll become. They’re not like me. They don’t want to go to school, to learn, to do like I do, to become independent.

### 6.3 Left behind children and racialization

As in the cases of various other migrants (cf. Koc and Onan 2004; Asis 2006; Biao 2007), the *Kangljari*’s investment in houses in Romania led to the emergence of transnational households which enabled care for the elderly and the education of left behind children. *Kangljari* children who stayed in Romania until the mid-2000s (generation 1.5b) either attended primary school in Romania and secondary in the UK or had all their education in the UK. They had all completed their studies by the time we interviewed them in summer 2015. Although they were the most educated in our sample, none of them had achieved grades high enough to access pre-university education, though they were all in a position to access professional training. Three children, who grew up in Manchester, were interviewed soon

after their last school day, when they were yet to receive their grades. Two of them had no plans for the near future, while Marcu wanted to get a job in the food industry and become a chef, possibly in a famous curry restaurant in the neighbourhood. He proudly told us that he had already applied for a position at a fast-food chain. Those who finished secondary schools in the previous years mixed childhood dreams with concrete plans for their future. Others left secondary education before graduating and were pressuring their peers to do the same:

[5] **Ronaldo:** I had plans to be a policeman. But my mum didn't like that plan [...] she told me to choose another one. So I'm still thinking of becoming an engineer

**Interviewer:** [...] How would you do that?

**Ronaldo:** Work hard. Get to college on time. Listen to the teacher, to instructions, everything [...] Some friends [might] stop me. Because they're skipping college, and they say 'you come with us as well'. So I have a bit of water in the head, so I listen to them and don't go to my lessons.

The *Kangljari* settled in a particular area of Manchester, creating, from 2007 onwards, a tight-knit and visible community. They attracted attention from local residents, services and politicians, not least as a result of growing public debates around the increasing visibility of eastern European Roma migrants and the launch of a highly publicized police operation ('Operation Golf', led by London Metropolitan Police) that targeted allegations of organized human trafficking and benefit fraud by so-called 'Roma gangs'. Manchester City Council responded to political pressure by setting up a dedicated, high-level 'Roma Strategy Group' in 2009, thus in effect framing the presence of Roma in the area as a 'problem'.

Due to their concentrated settlement in one neighbourhood, most *Kangljari* children attended Pine Hill secondary school. Acting on suggestions that Roma posed a threat to community cohesion, the school commissioned a local agency to provide dedicated support to help manage its growing population of Roma pupils. Through memos and teacher training sessions, the agency propagated an image of Roma as reluctant to engage in education, superstitious, suspicious of outsiders in general and of authorities in particular and culturally prone to early marriage and school drop-out (see [Matras et al. 2015](#)). One such memo, circulated to senior school staff in 2013, advised that 'Roma students can be very promiscuous and are very accepting of inappropriate sexualised behaviour from male students', that Roma pupils leave school at the age of thirteen to 'get married back in Romania', that they are caught 'begging in the city centre' and that weddings of Roma take place 'from the age of eleven' at a nearby public park (see [MigRom 2015: 54](#)).

The same narrative was also promoted by a number of officers from the City Council's Education Services and replicated in various City Council reports and committee meetings in the period up to late 2014, where mention of Roma in the minutes is frequently associated with issues of 'irregular school attendance' and 'safeguarding' (see [MigRom 2015, 22ff.](#)). Acting on the advice of agency 'experts' and City Council Education officers, Pine Hill school implemented a designated 'pathway', which was criticized during an external audit of English as Additional Language provision as early as 2011 as effectively being a 'segregation mechanism' for Roma (yet it was continued until 2015). The school also adopted a specially designated 'Roma Referral Form' that was used until 2015 to compile

details on the behaviour of individual Roma pupils and was then forwarded to the external contractor so that it may deal with ‘problematic’ pupils.

The effects of this policy are apparent, as many of our interviewees seemed to share the idea that they were not as skilled as the other students and could not achieve as well:

[6] **Ronaldo:** when the picnic happened in year 7, I went [. . .] to Alton Towers, so I didn’t go with the rest of the class to the picnic. We went only the Roma people [. . .] when the other guys had to go to a normal class, maths, the other teacher took me and some other Roma guys to another classroom, to teach us like step-by-step. Because the other class was a higher level than us.

The *Kangljari* children also felt that teachers held a bias against them:

[7] **Ronaldo:** I was writing in English, say about like Shakespeare. I wanted to do a story about it [. . .] some of the English people said that I did it too well [. . .] better than the English students. The English teacher [. . .] she said it wasn’t good.

We can see here parallels with the case of Mexican pupils in the US observed by [Telles and Ortiz \(2008\)](#), who noted self-perpetuating racialization as low expectations held by teachers led to the pupils’ disengagement and, later in life, to low professional achievements, stalling the social mobility of third and fourth generations migrants. In the case of the *Kangljari* children, such stalling occurred even earlier: generation 1.5b, with a higher formal human capital than generation 1.5a, could have aimed for higher qualifications and less precarious employment than their older siblings. However, all our informants followed the example of their older siblings and are currently entering into the same precarious forms of wage labour and attempting to leave the parental households:

[8] **David:** I want to be a teacher of sport, or maybe go to work in a gym [. . .] To get the certificate I would have to go to college [but] let’s say if I would move, like to get a proper house. . . so I wouldn’t have much to pay rent and go to college as well. I think I would stop it and just work.

Although all the children in our sample entered or were about to enter the precariat, they followed distinct inclusion trajectories. That of generation 1.5a can be described as positive, driven by the second-generation advantage. The other trajectory, characteristic of generation 1.5b is interrupted, where the potential for upward social mobility was blocked by racialization.

## 7. Conclusion

The case of the *Kangljari* confirms how, in the hourglass labour market typical of global cities like Manchester, the social mobility of migrants is not a linear progress. Unless they are able to acquire advanced skills quickly (cf. [Portes et al. 2009](#)), migrants run the risk of joining the emerging precariat ([Standing 2011](#)). Our case study also illustrates how different trajectories of inclusion can co-exist within a single generation of migrants. While longitudinal, quantitative studies based on large samples can isolate the effect of individual factors, our fine-grained, qualitative analysis has shown how the complex interaction of

differences in individuals' human capital, cultural practices and racialized policies has a cumulative effect on micro-level, individual variation in integration trajectories.

The inter-generational split we observed is the combined outcome of racialized policies that target Roma and the particular demographics of Roma communities. The effect of policies can be found recurrently in the successive countries of settlement. The collapse of communism in Romania reinforced prejudice and exclusionary practices against Roma and motivated the first *Kangljari* to leave for Germany as asylum seekers (cf. [Beluschi Fabeni 2013](#)). Germany's repatriation agreement with Romania targeted mainly Roma migrants (cf. [Matras 2000](#)), blocking integration prospects. Continuous territorial stigmatization back in Romania and the resulting exclusion from employment prospects during the economic hardships of the mid- and late 1990s, provided renewed push factors. Containment in makeshift settlements and 'nomad camps' in France and Italy, and to some extent in Spain, renewed territorial stigmatization, blocking access to stable housing and education, and prevented *Kangljari* children from acquiring a second-generation advantage.

The *Kangljari* demographics and distinct family structures, on the other hand, both added to the challenges and offered strategies to manage them. The tendency, relative to the majority population, toward high birth rates and early child bearing required strategies to manage the welfare of children in light of difficult circumstances, while the strong affinity to kinship networks ensured transnational support in the raising of children. The absence of long-term security in migration encouraged parents to maintain their social engagement in Romania and to invest remittances there. This was further reinforced by the need to care for the elderly and other relations left behind, creating an option to split households and care for children born during migration back in the home communities.

As a result, the children generation is split between those who arrived in the UK from other migration countries at primary school age and had no formal education, and those who arrived directly to the UK, either having attended primary education in Romania, or at pre-school age, and completed their formal education there.

Following Romania's EU accession in 2007, migration to the UK opened up new opportunities. Unlike other destinations, in the UK access to the private housing market offered a way to avoid territorial stigmatization, opening up access to services including education. Children who accompanied their parents during the early years of migration and those who had been left in Romania could now both draw on human capital (early year education in Romania or entire education in the UK, quick acquisition of English language skills) or social capital (contacts outside the Roma community), or both.

In the case of children who had previous migratory experiences in other countries but no formal education, these opportunities were further boosted by the training and placement scheme in which they engaged. Interestingly, this intervention aimed at raising aspirations among migrant children and at equipping them with advanced skills was promoted and run by a charitable organization which *de facto* took on the responsibilities of the state. On the other hand, racialized policy limited the opportunities of children who arrived directly from Romania and attended school regularly. The segregation mechanism that was erected by Pine Hill school blocked their progression trajectory and affected their motivations and future aspirations.

The trajectory of *Kangljari* parents, successfully escaping the territorial stigma attached to their former neighbourhood, confirms [Piore's \(1979\)](#) observation that first generation

migrants maintain their community of origin as a reference to assess social status improvements and that self-employment constitutes a survival strategy for low-skilled migrants (Portes and Yiu 2013). These orientations and strategies have combined with racialized policies that prevented the migrants from acquiring skills to advance towards higher tiers of the labour market and made them willing to accept and maintain forms of low status, low earning self-employment.

The *Kangljari* children's trajectory resembles observations by Reisel et al. (2012) on how an active welfare state can help the integration of migrant children, while the role of racialization in stalling positive mobility is similar to the experiences of many Latin American migrant communities in the US, who assimilated into the working class over the first two generations but were then unable to progress further (cf. Telles and Ortiz 2008; Itzigsohn 2009).

Our case study is particular, however, in two respects. First, those children who had moved through various countries, despite having no formal education, achieved better employment status than their parents. Second, the stalling of progression occurred not among their children, but already among their siblings who had arrived directly from Romania and who, at least in theory, had better chances since they had achieved a higher level of formal education.

While stalling in the precariat, the *Kangljari* children developed different expectations to those of their parents, particularly in respect of how they viewed the possibility of a return to Romania and future life in the UK. They increasingly orient themselves toward the goals shared by their non-Roma peers, yet they are often aware that their opportunities are limited as a result of missed or segregated education. In this respect, they can be regarded as a 'lost generation', willing but unable to improve their social status. This situation bears striking resemblances with the case of Roma migrants in Italy described by Pontrandolfo (2017). Like the *Kangljari* children, those migrants spent most of their lives in migration and were increasingly unwilling to follow their parents in poorly remunerative employment and in investing remittances in Romania. However, Italian policies inspired by a pervasive anti-Gypsyism limited their opportunities to the point that the only option they could envisage was to resume migration and move to another country.

This parallel confirms how migration and education policies that target a particular ethnic community and which are driven by ideological pre-dispositions and stereotypes constrain the social mobility trajectories of migrants. At a time of increased flows of migrants whose culture is seen as problematic by the receiving populations, this observation calls into question the validity of targeted interventions that embrace rather than counteract racial stereotypes. Such policies risk the exclusion or early dropout of young migrants from the training required to access the higher tiers of the contemporary labour market, and the creation of 'lost generations' of young migrants whose prospects of social mobility are curtailed. The case of the *Kangljari* children who attended school in the UK suggests that interventions that are flagged as supporting migrant inclusion but are based on racialized images may have similar effects, as they limit both educational outcomes and employment expectations.

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## Note

1. <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/> (accessed 5 March 2018).

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