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„Living with Parents Again: A Step Back or Forward?

The Accounts of Young Czech People Staying at their
Parental Home during the Covid-19 Pandemic”

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1 Introduction

It is usually easy for someone to distinguish an adult from a child. The general idea is that the difference lies in age and appearance, certain life experiences connected to this, and specific abilities. This understanding then seems to reflect and be reflected in the different scientific perspectives of various disciplines that deal with adulthood, such as psychology, sociology, human biology, or even in the official acts of everyday life, such as legislation. However, when we look closer, asking for consensus about the specific criteria for adulthood, or how exactly one becomes an adult, we may realize that the boundary of adulthood is not unequivocally clear, and that becoming adult might be a rather gradual process. Moreover, socio-cultural realities change when we explore different times and places, as well as the ideas and meanings associated with adulthood. Does one become an adult by reaching a certain age? By becoming responsible and accountable? (And how can we measure these qualities?) Or is adulthood reached, as a traditional sociological perspective assumed (Gauthier 2007), by landing a full-time job, buying a house or starting one's own family? While all these questions and ideas may be important to the child or young person who desires to become an adult, an anthropologist might ask why is the category of adulthood important at all? What meaning does adulthood have for the social life of a person, since young people wish to reach it? And perhaps most importantly, how do the different ideas associated with adulthood influence the lives of young people and their decision-making, and how do the people deal with these ideas in their everyday lives? Being both a young person and an aspiring anthropologist, I was able to ponder upon all of these questions during the months I spent conducting research and writing the following pages.

Having passed most of the exams of my studies, I found myself confronted with the final assignment: my thesis. And although I enjoyed the past few years of my studies, during which I was constantly confronted with the clever thoughts of other scholars that often blew my mind allowing me to see how everyday phenomena and things I took for granted, may be deconstructed and understood from the anthropological vantage point, I felt like the studies had already been taking too long, and I was looking forward to finishing. As a 26-year-old, I was not entitled to any student support in my country, the Czech Republic, any more, so I had to pay the minimum rate of health insurance or report to an unemployment office. Even though I tried to work part-time, I was still dependent on an allowance provided by my parents, and the whole situation felt uncomfortable for me, not only due to my brother who kept mocking me for "being a parasite". I was dedicated to finishing my studies as fast as

possible, so that I could find a job to stand on my own two feet, because I felt ashamed, too old to be a regular full-time student. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly hit the whole world, disrupting my plans to conduct research abroad and apply for a research grant. My efforts to deal with the situation led me to try to view it from an anthropological perspective. As I tried not to drown in my thoughts and feelings, I started to consider the very familiar everyday experiences as strange and not self-evident, which led me to ask the questions I then decided to explore in the thesis.

When the pandemic entered our everyday lives, which as a result changed dramatically from one day to the next, I intuitively realized that many young people who did not live with their parents any more would return to their parental homes. Due to my own situation, I thought this would not be an easy voluntary choice, but rather a consequence of wider circumstances, such as the loss of a job, caused by the pandemic protective measures and subsequent lack of income, which would force young people to search for support through their families. I thought the pandemic would reveal young people's lives to be unstable and vulnerable to such sudden and wide-ranging societal changes. I assumed their position would be overlooked by the state, which did not (at least at first) produce any compensation for the part-time workers who were the first to lose their income once businesses began to cut their expenses due to the nation-wide lockdown and closures. Viewing the situation from this standpoint, I asked: Why did the young people go to live with their parents during the pandemic and how did they experience this? Taking this as my research question, I expected to be able to give voice to their accounts of marginality.

My initial assumptions were very much in line with the traditional sociological theories of passage to adulthood. Working within a Western context, scholars suggested five transitional events which lead a young person from adolescence to adulthood: the end of formal education, the start of a first job, the leaving of the parental home, marriage (or union), and the birth of a first child (Gauthier 2007). These events should occur closely after one another and upon completing all of them a person would then be considered an adult. Although these markers of adulthood are not universal, they should be understood as valid for the Czech Republic, where I decided to conduct my research, as I was living there at the time of my project.

The perceptions around the leave of the parental home, specifically seem to be influenced by a combination of cultural and structural factors. While the expectation that a child should

eventually leave the parental home is by no means universal (Lloyd and National Research Council (U.S.) 2005; Juárez and Gayet 2014), sociologists and anthropologists exploring life-course through the lens of political economy seem to consider it natural and important for reaching adulthood, at least in Europe. However, even within Europe scholars analyzed a north-south divide in the timing of this life-event. In Scandinavia or the United Kingdom, young people tend to leave their parent's home earlier, while their counterparts in countries like Italy, Spain or Portugal usually live for a longer time with their parents.

The destinations after leaving the parental home also differ; it is common in northern countries to start living on one's own or share the household either with friends or a partner, while in the south of Europe young people often leave to start a family or at least cohabit with a partner (Hašková 2014). After moving out, young people in the north also return less often than is the case in the southern European countries (Iacovou and Parisi 2008). Scholars associated these differences both with structural factors (such as the welfare regime or conditions of the housing and labor markets) (Berngruber 2016), as well as with the cultural perceptions regarding the value of individual autonomy, which may be sought within the family or outside its household (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005).

The Czech Republic then does not seem to belong to either end of this imaginary spectrum, but rather to be somewhere between the northern and southern European countries (Hašková 2014). As a colleague from Finland pointed out to me, returning to the parental home when the pandemic had begun might not have been the first intuitive response of young people living in her home country, while I intuitively considered it as a natural move. This could be caused by the differences in perceptions of this life event across different European countries.

The traditional sociological perspective of the five transitional markers generally views the reversal of one or more of the transitional life events, such as the loss of a job and return to studies, or returning to live with parents, as a step back on the pathway to adulthood. Such a step back is considered undesirable for young people (Jones 1995), and in this sense, returning back to the parental home during the pandemic should not have been perceived as desirable. This is the position I assumed at the beginning of my research. However, as the frequency of this phenomenon differs along the north-south European divide (Iacovou and Parisi 2008), the desirability of such a move could also be assumed to differ in connection with the other cultural factors. Moreover, it seems to be increasingly more common all around the world to reach adulthood through heterogenous ways consisting of steps forwards and

back, no matter what the local tangible criteria for adulthood is (Mendoza-Denton and Boum 2015).

From a psychological understanding of life-stages, Arnett (2015, 2000) suggested a new developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood to describe this phenomenon. Arnett's stage is specific to industrialized or postindustrial societies, but even there not all young people go through this new stage. It seems rather to apply to the highly educated, because the less privileged often take the more traditional path (Arnett 2015; Bynner 2005). Calling the new stage "emerging adulthood", Arnett characterized it by the subjective feeling of being in-between adolescence and adulthood which is connected with identity explorations. These happen through trying out different possibilities: training and schools, jobs, relationships etc. Frequent changes in residence are a part of this process, nonetheless Arnett does not seem to be interested in the leave or return to the parental home as such.

Focusing on the experiences of young people who returned to their parental home, Warner, Henderson-Wilson, and Andrews (2012) researched this phenomenon in Australia, finding out that such "backtracking" (cf. Jones 1995) may actually be beneficial for some of the young people in achieving their long-term goals (such as traveling or saving money to afford their own house). So, such events do not necessarily have to be seen as a step back. Moreover, these scholars called for further qualitative research to be done in this area, in order to understand the situation of young people more fully.

The current pandemic offered new empirical material to explore this topic, because many young people went back to live with their parents at the same time. This was confirmed by the offices of different university dormitories¹. While the apparent reason for all the young people to return to their parental home might be the pandemic and connected measures, more thorough understanding reveals further aspects of their lives. In this thesis, I would therefore

¹ There are no official statistics about how many young people changed the place of living during the pandemic, but asking about the numbers of students who left or temporarily left some of the university dormitories across the Czech Republic during the first wave of the pandemic in March and April 2020, the assumption that many of the young people would leave such residential arrangements independent from their family was confirmed. It was ca. 3.8% (339 students from the total number of 8861 accommodated before March 16, 2020) completely deregistering and ca. 41.3% (3656 students) temporarily left the dormitories of the Charles University in Prague before April 30, 2020. In Brno, the second largest city of the Czech Republic, some 40.9% (1404 out of 3434 students accommodated before March 12, 2020) were „technically deregistered“ (meaning temporal leave) from the dormitories of the Masaryk University, and ca. 36.7% (about 1100 out of ca. 3000) students living at the dormitories of Mendel University used the opportunity to get a discount on the price of accommodation due to being elsewhere. (Information obtained through e-mail communication with Ms. Iva Jarolínová, Ms. Miroslava Hurdová, and Ms. Renata Pavlicová.)

like to enhance the sociological understanding of the process of becoming an adult with an anthropological perspective. The aim is to have a look at how this process is a part of the everyday lives of young people, how it influences and is shaped by their everyday realities. I want to explore the liminal stage between adolescence and adulthood through the specific experiences, expectations or hopes connected with the notion of home, as the change from parental to one's own home is considered to be one of the specific markers of adulthood. As such, the notion of home plays a significant role here, but I will not go deeper into understanding the concept of home as such, but will rather consider home to be a place where the processes and changing relationships that are connected with the attainment of adulthood, take place.

I will first describe in more detail the context and the methods I used within this research (section 2), then I will try to contextualize the sociological approach from a broader theoretical perspective (section 3), and present my analysis of the gathered data (section 4). Being interested specifically in the liminal period before reaching full adulthood, I searched for research partners who would comply with the conception of emerging adulthood. Therefore, I decided to focus on university students, and although not all would define themselves as partly adult and partly not (and thereby not all of them could be labeled as emerging adults in line with the definition further discussed in chapter 3.2), all recognized a certain degree of liminality in their lives present at least through an external recognition (specifically the lack of recognition of their full adult status by others) and the connected expectations thereto. As my interest was in the young people's own understanding of the notion of adulthood, the meanings they ascribe to it and the workings of this notion in their everyday lives, especially during the time of the pandemic, in relation to their housing situation, I conducted structured open-ended online interviews with them. I tried to interview each of them two times, six months apart. The first round of interviews was conducted during the first wave of the pandemic, in spring 2020, and a second round followed in autumn that year while a second wave was at its peak in the Czech Republic. Although not all of my research partners were willing or available for the second interview, this approach still allowed for comparison and showed significant changes in perception of the pandemic over time and connected shifts in behavior and choices regarding living arrangements. This in turn spoke to the general topic of adulthood, as I will discuss in the analytical part of this paper.

However, before moving on to the analysis, I will try to broaden the view on adulthood and the passage to it. I will consider the notion of adulthood as we know it today to be constructed

as inherently modern, as such it goes hand in hand with values such as independence, responsibility or reason (chapter 3.1). These characteristics are also viewed as traits marking the difference between the contrasting categories of childhood and adulthood (Brewer 2005). However, when it comes to the passage into adulthood, the assessment of these characteristics is not simple and straightforward. They are viewed differently in various domains of life, as I will suggest in chapter 3.2. While the legal system draws a simple age-based boundary of adulthood, young people are also confronted with social norms concerning appropriate behavior based on the values associated with adulthood. Compliance with such social norms may be demanded or assessed by others, who then recognize the young person as a complete adult or not fully corresponding to such norm, no matter the age and legal adult status. Moreover, within the family of origin one never ceases to be the child of one's parents. All these different criteria and meanings can have the potential to create tensions on the passage to adulthood.

The sociological approach of five tangible criteria then reflects a normative sequence of life events which tended to occur in the lives of young people, amongst others, also in Czechoslovakia until the 1989 Velvet Revolution (Macek, Bejček, and Vaníčková 2007; Možný and Rabušic 1992). Recently, however, in many cases, the paths to adulthood are getting longer and more complicated, as the conception of emerging adulthood suggests. In chapter 3.3, I will try to link this phenomenon with the current historical era of late modernity and its individualist discourse of self-realization, which holds everyone responsible for their own life and all their life-choices (Laceulle 2018). Being held responsible for one's own life, as well as for "properly" reaching adulthood (such as holding a stable job and living within an independent household), might work as a type of a neoliberal technique of governmentality (Burch 2018). However, people in their lives also face different types of responsibilities (Trnka and Trundle 2017). Therefore, this type of responsibility seems to have to compete in everyday life with other responsibilities (such as to one's family or self). This was also the case within my research partners' experiences. Having such contradictory pushes and pulls in life may create feelings of ambivalence, when the person cannot or does not want to decide on which stance to take or which feeling to follow. As I will use the concept of ambivalence as a way to begin to understand my research partners' experiences, I will briefly write about it in chapter 3.4 before moving to the empirical data collected within this research in section 4.

As I will analyze in chapter 4.1, living independently from parents as one of the tangible criteria of adulthood proved to be important for my research partners. Yet, adulthood for them

did not only consist of such tangible criteria as conceptualized by sociologists, but bore a sense of a changed subjectivity. That which was most often mentioned, was a shift in the capacity of foreseeing and being able to take into account the consequences of one's own actions and make responsible choices based on this way of thinking and being. Eventually reaching the tangible milestones of adulthood (of which my research partners most unequivocally recognized only living and subsistence fully autonomous from their family of origin) were then only some of the responsibilities they felt to currently have. I will show this in chapter 4.2, through the ambivalent perceptions they held around the notion of home and the multiple places they considered as homes. Some other responsibilities they faced in their lives were connected with their belonging to the family of origin. The family's claim to spend time with the young person was quite contradictory to the responsibility of the young person to become an autonomous productive unit of society who would ultimately also be capable of supporting their aging parents or other family members.

Moving to the situation of the pandemic in chapter 4.3, I will argue that navigating in a matrix of such contradictory and competing responsibilities could construct the stay at the parental home during the situation of a nation-wide crisis as a responsible choice, in line with the needs of the family-group, and thereby an adult decision. Staying within a family environment could also be a challenge, testing the skills learnt by independent living. While this approach considers the stay with parents as one of the natural responsibilities of belonging to a family and was fairly common among my research partners, the return to the parental home could also work as a type of help offered to the young person, especially in the case of a lost job, which would then be perceived as disempowering. Yet, in my research, even such a case was chosen by a research partner herself as the least disempowering type of help. This choice highlighted her attempts to reach the socially recognized adult status.

2 Methods and Context

The measures connected to the Covid-19 pandemics put young people in an unprecedented situation worth exploring, while simultaneously limiting the possibilities of ethnographic research. Therefore, the initial research design relied on digital recruitment, and presupposed that besides two rounds of virtually conducted interviews, the participants would be asked to journal their everyday life with an emphasis on their relationship with parents. This would then be contextualized within the development of the situation as followed through media and government announcements about the concurrent measures and their withdrawals. As will be explained further, this initial design had to be modified due to the changing situation; in the end, the method of journaling was not used, but two rounds of interviews were conducted six months apart. I did, however, try to follow the events closely, and further relevant data was acquired in October when the government tried to prohibit the stay at student dormitories, which gave rise to resistance and an online petition against these measures was formulated. Anyone could sign it and comment with their reasons for signing. These comments then served as an additional source of data from a wider range of students, which I did not anticipate acquiring when planning the research in the quickly changing environment in spring.

2.1 The Beginning of the Pandemic and the Research

In the beginning of March 2020, the first few people were diagnosed with Covid-19 in the Czech Republic. This led to brisk governmental actions; on March 10, large events with more than one hundred participants were prohibited, all schools and universities were closed the next day, and a state of emergency declared by the government on March 12. A nation-wide lockdown was introduced on March 16, when 300 cases of the disease were confirmed. The national borders were closed and free movement of persons within the country limited to the most necessary travels (such as to work, grocery shopping or to take care of family members). By the end of March, the measures were gradually getting stricter, including the duty to wear a facemask or the prohibition of meeting more than one other person in public. This first wave escalated around April 8, when the number of people hospitalized due to Covid-19 was the highest compared to the rest of the spring. As fast as the measures were put into action in March, many of them were also lifted in April and May without much notice. The university students could take part in one-on-one consultations from April 20 (if these students were in their last year of studies) or from April 27 onwards, on-site teaching was allowed in smaller

groups (max. 15 people) from May 11. The state of emergency ended on May 17, and by the end of the next month even the facemasks ceased to be an obligation.

In the beginning of April when the nation-wide lockdown was still in place, I started with the digital recruitment of participants. Based on the concept of emerging adulthood as well as the ease of access, I decided to focus specifically on university students. The concept of emerging adulthood suggests a longer pathway between adolescence and adulthood connected to the exploration of identity and experimentations in different domains (such as work or relationships), which is possible due to the extended period of education and training necessary to acquire prestigious jobs in the service economy (Arnett 2000, 2015). According to Bynner (2005), however, even in service economies, the possibility of such exploration and postponement of full adulthood is particularly available to the “more educated” in comparison to others, who often reach adulthood in a faster, more traditional way. Because my research design focused on those “in-between”, and the interplay of different factors in their decision-making, university students corresponded best to this notion. Moreover, during the pandemic, when virtual contact was the best way to approach people, “university” was a practical keyword for finding online communities.

I reached out to possible participants through Facebook, as this seems to be the most common media for Czech students to form online communities. The reason might be that this social network allows the creation of groups and sharing content within them even if the members do not know each other personally. Searching the locally used versions of the keywords “university” and “students” (“vysoká škola”, “univerzita”, and “studenti”), I found the Facebook groups of many different Czech universities. Usually, each of the faculties had separate groups, but sometimes there was one group for the whole university. Some of the groups were completely public, while in others I had to send a request to be accepted as a member, which in some cases was connected to a survey on why I want to be a member of this group or questions regarding specific knowledge about the faculty and/or its subjects. In all cases, I asked for permission to post a request regarding my research, either through a direct message to the group administrators or by explaining my research and request in the survey. In total, I contacted more than 20 different groups in this way, but did not gain access to all of them. This was one of the limitations of this approach. At the end I was permitted to actually post my request to only 12 groups, which included five university groups, six faculty

groups and one group focused on student accommodation.² Most of the specific faculty groups that permitted me to post my request were faculties of humanities and social sciences. There was a significantly lower response rate when it came to technical subjects or natural sciences. This imbalance was also projected in the final group of respondents who answered my request.

It is relatively common to post requests for help with a student research project in the university groups on Facebook. There were a few others who asked in a similar manner as I did. My request briefly explained the research topic and expected methodology. Unlike others with questionnaires, I was the only person asking for two lengthy interviews (1-2 hours) and the possibility of two weeks of everyday journaling. Although the latter method was not used in the end, my requirements could have discouraged some people. In the end, ten people got in contact with me (nine of them actually participated in the first interview and six of them also took part in the second).

In my request, I decided to ask people to contact me in case they were interested, either directly, through a message, or through an application form which I included as an easier way to respond for those who might have felt shy. This proved to be a good strategy, as nine out of the total of ten responses that I acquired came through this form, where I explained the research again and simply asked their name, contact (e-mail, phone, Facebook or whatever way of contact that person preferred) and whether they were available to participate in both interviewing and journaling or solely interviewing. Only one respondent wrote me a personal message. Most of the participants also preferred communication via email, however, one of them never responded when I tried to schedule an interview. In total, I had nine interview partners for the first round of interviews, aged 19-26. Most of them were women (eight out of nine) and a majority studied humanities or social sciences. When it came to the second interview in autumn, three of the previous participants excused themselves due to time restraints.

The prevalence of the humanities and social sciences influenced the ideas my participants had when it came to the general discussions about adulthood we had together. As I will argue, their accounts contrasted a subjective idea of adulthood and an external one. This external

² The full list of specific Facebook groups into which I was accepted as a member and allowed to post my request for participation: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Filozofická fakulta UK, ČVUT Studenti, Filozofická fakulta MU, Univerzita Pardubice - Fakulta Filozofická, Univerzita Pardubice Fakulta chemicko-technologická, Metropolitní univerzita Praha – students, Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, Studenti PedFUK, Spolubydlení UPOL - studentské bydlení v Olomouci, Univerzita Hradec Králové, HTF UK.

idea often reflected an objectifying definition they had learnt in their studies, some of them even mentioned remembering the definition from a study book. However, even the accounts of students of technical subjects reflected the dichotomy of the subjective and external view of adulthood, even if not necessarily informed by the same sources.

In my request, I also stated to be searching for young people who “decided to spend the lockdown with their parents although they regularly live elsewhere”. In this way, I expected to get in touch with people who returned to their parental home as a consequence of the pandemic measures. Nevertheless, one participant showed me that it was only my assumption, because she decided to spend the time with her father, whom she did not remember ever living with before. This, however, turned out to enrich my data. She was also one of five participants, whose parents did not live together. This may reflect the overall situation in the Czech Republic which continues to have one of the highest divorce rates in the EU, with around half of the marriages ending by divorce (Eurostat 2019). More than 50% of the divorced couples have children under 18 years of age³ (Český statistický úřad 2019).

In the interviews, I did not stress this aspect of their family life, and when asking them questions about parents or parental home, I mostly did not specify which parent or place they should talk about, leaving them space to choose or define this on their own. The term parental home (or “home at/with parents” as would be the direct translation of the wording used in Czech) was then almost always at their mother’s place⁴, which was also where they lived before moving away. Their fathers have, however, always supported them financially in some way (directly or indirectly through the mother). Material independence, a term which I decided to use for the connection of independent residence and financial independence (as further discussed in chapter 4.1), then also inherently signifies a situation in which the young person is not dependent in these realms on either of the parents.

2.2 The Interviews

At the end of April, the first round of interviews could begin. At this time, some of the measures were starting to be lifted but the situation still seemed unsure. I personally also got

³ Between 2000 and 2013 the divorce rate in the Czech Republic ranged 45-50% (Eurostat 2019). In 2019, 59% of the total divorces were couples with minors (Český statistický úřad 2019).

⁴ None of my research partners lived with their father before moving away, although all of them kept some contact. This is the typical post-divorce arrangement in the Czech court praxis, as Loužecká Beerová analyzed from the statistical yearbooks of the Ministry of Justice. According to her analysis, minors are generally entrusted to the exclusive care of the mother after divorce. Although this trend seems to be declining slowly, there has not yet been a year in which it would be less than 80% of cases (2018).

sick and the first round of interviewing therefore spread over the course of circa three weeks. But the changes were taking place fast during this time, and therefore some interviews were conducted under quite different circumstances than others. With the changes in nation-wide protective measures changed also the overall mood: while the first interviewees still expressed fears and concerns about the development of the situation, some of the last ones already talked to me from their "own" homes and did not feel threatened.

As I initially also wanted to use the journaling method and counted on a second interview in the fall, the first interview was designed as a first encounter, during which I wanted to get to know my research partners and their situation; when did they first move away from home and why, what did this change mean for them, what was their relationship with their family like, and how did they think about returning home when the unexpected pandemic situation arose. Therefore, I decided to conduct the interview in a semi-structured way, as such interviews "attempt to capture something of the 'control' of structured interviews without the need to use closed-ended questions or force people into the role of a 'respondent' rather than that of an 'initiator' of information" (Fife 2005). In this way, I could follow the predetermined topics, but the open-ended questions allowed my partners to represent their views and experiences in the ways they wanted, express ambivalences, or altogether detour to other topics they found relevant.

As the research was designed at the time of the peak of the first wave of the pandemic in the Czech Republic, which was also the time of a widespread panic and a public solidarity, a part of the initial design was also to consider significant ethical concerns to make sure not to induce or worsen any negative feelings of the research partners. Therefore, during the initial contact, the interviewees were not compelled to reflect on their ongoing experiences and living arrangements, as the situation and changes connected with it emerged fast and could cause a disruption in personal lives. Research with people going through crises, such as refugees, shows that such disruption and simultaneous insecurity about the future may cause difficulties in making sense of the situation as it happens, and make life impossible to narrate. It is then only retrospectively, that people are capable of making sense of things (Jackson 1998). For these reasons I strictly tried not to ask potentially sensitive questions during the first interview, and designed the second round of interviews with the specific aim of a narrative retrospective reflection upon life under the changed circumstances, to make sense of what the participants experienced and journaled during the lockdown. However, with the fast easing of measures in April and May, journaling about the constrained life in unexpected

cohabitation with their parents became an irrelevant method of gathering data. When the first round of interviews was finished, the universities were already (partly) reopened, the free movement of persons was re-established and some of the participants moved away from their parents' once again.

Looking back, the data I gathered could have been richer, if I had taken the changing situation more into account during this first round of interviews. If I had not stuck too tightly to the initial design of topics to discuss and was not so anxiously concerned about my research partners' negative feelings. At least in the case of the people interviewed later in time, I could have modified or added questions directly associated with the new situation and asked them already during the first interview to reflect more deeply on what they experienced. Retrospectively, it also seems to me that even potentially sensitive topics such as familial conflicts or relationships with and between divorced parents could have been addressed more directly and would have enabled me to gain a better understanding of the experiences. It might have been more fruitful to adjust the structure of the interview to the situation not only because it was possible, and it could have partly substituted the unrealized idea with the journals, but also because three of the nine people did not take part in the second interview which was planned as a retrospective. Nonetheless some of them could already reflect on the situation at the time of the first interview.

Moreover, although I planned to conduct the second round of interviews at a time when life would have "gotten back to normal", I have paradoxically either missed such a situation or it has not happened in the time when I was gathering data. The measures were lifted during the summer, and every one of the research partners who took part in the second interview told me that they had enjoyed the summer break as much as they could. Even if some of them gave up traveling abroad, in general they compared their summer experiences to their regular summer. However, many of them also spent this time at their parent's place, which may be usual for them during the summer holidays, but because the research design wished for them to reflect on their time spent in the parental home, I wanted to wait until the beginning of the new semester when they would move to their "own" homes again. Before such a situation could happen for all the interview partners, the second wave of Covid-19 hit the Czech Republic, bringing about governmental restrictions once again. For some of my research partners the semester had not even started, and it was already clear that there would be no on-site education. As I could not postpone the research any longer, I decided to conduct the second round of interviews at the beginning of November. This moment proved itself later to be the

peak of the second wave – the measures were the strictest during the whole of 2020, and yet a record number of new cases were confirmed every day.

Compared to the first wave in spring, which was relatively mild in the Czech Republic, this second one was like a tsunami. Unlike in spring, when there were a maximum of a few hundred diagnosed each day, now it was thousands. The foreign press evaluated the situation in the country through a metaphor of schoolchildren: in the spring the Czech Republic was at the top of the class, while in fall it turned into Europe's problem child (Strašík 2020). For my research, this situation offered a new type of data, not expected in the initial design. One of these was the unexpected petition against prohibiting students to stay at the student residences, which offered the general reasoning of many young people why not to come stay with their parents. The more in-depth data then came from my six research partners during the second round of interviews. It was planned as a round of narrative interviews. I wanted to let my research partners talk about their experiences of what I thought would be a past situation. Thanks to the summer break from everything (the measures and panic, as well as their studies), the situation in spring seemed to be something more or less closed off and in the past, and the people could talk and reflect on it. Moreover, the new situation provided a new comparative frame. It was surprising, that while in spring all my research partners spent the lockdown with their parents, now most of them informed me already in the emails before the interview that they did not plan on living with their parents again, or at least their ideas were much more relaxed, suggesting that they would switch between their "own" home and the one where their parent(s) live.

Aside from that, I also studied the literature on leaving home as a possible rite of passage to adulthood. Studying this in more detail led me to include some more abstract questions in the second interview (e. g. Do you see yourself as an adult and why yes/no or in which aspects do you or do you not?). Although the structure of the interview was not as smooth as it could be, because it included a narrative part of the previous experiences connected with Covid-19, as well as a semi-structured interview on topics such as the perceptions of adulthood and maturity, the research participants did not seem to mind and a better insight in their inner understandings of social categories and values was gained.

2.3 The Digital Format

Due to the situation, both rounds of interviews were conducted mainly online, although I had discussed the possibility of an in-person meeting for the second interview with a few of the

participants. The reason for considering personal meetings was that I anticipated it to be more pleasant than an online meeting for both parties. An extreme example confirming this assumption was one of my research partners, who told me to have a general problem with calls, which worsened during the pandemic. However, as the participants were from different places around the country and it was impossible for me to visit them unless using the public transport, we mostly agreed on online calls anyway, because it in the end seemed as the safest and simplest solution. One exception was the very last interview, because my interview partner planned on switching between two homes, one of which was located in the city where I also lived. Therefore, we agreed to meet for a walk in a natural park, while both also using facemasks⁵.

This different setting very clearly showed the specificity of online interviews. When planning them, I expected to have difficulties establishing rapport with my interview partners, however, the opposite proved to be the case. Perhaps because people were generally lacking social contact with strangers during the lockdown, or because we were in the same life stage and similar situation, most of my respondents seemed to be fairly open as they answered my questions, telling me stories and anecdotes to illustrate their point or while reflecting and considering how they had been perceiving things. Although I intended to conduct the interviews in a semi-structured way, the virtual format led to more structure than I had imagined, as it did not support a freely flowing conversation but rather a question-answer pattern. On the other hand, during the walk in the park we often switched the role of the speaker, sometimes laughed together or just exchanged opinions and views. During the online interview there seemed to be a certain barrier. In fact, when I tried to overcome it, reacting to my research partners' anecdotes by adding my own experiences, it felt embarrassingly forced and my partners often seemed confused as to how or if they should respond to what I said. This was also the case with the same person with whom the personal conversation flew by easily.

A related issue was the response time, which was longer during the online interviews than in a personal conversation, and which also varied in length from one interview to another. This was probably due to the quality of the internet connection. Sometimes I had to wait for a longer period of time after asking a question. Not knowing whether my partner had heard or

⁵ Although taking place during a walk, this interview was not designed as a walking interview in the way used by Andrew Irving and other scholars who understand the walking itself as a specific focus (Irving 2005; Butler and Derrett 2014).

understood properly, I often started to explain further what I meant, only to hear that the other person started to speak at the same time as me, which sometimes led to confusion. I also had to be careful not to influence the answers by extended explanations of my questions, which sometimes led me to suggest specific answers. Other technical difficulties included misunderstandings due to noise or poor connection, which had to be cleared up, and interruptions of the video call which led to the repeating of sentences. Nevertheless, these were just minor issues and even if they were sometimes a bit frustrating, many of the interview partners spontaneously said that they had enjoyed the interview at the end.

The expected difficulty of rapport also led me to choose an informal tone of communication. There are two ways of addressing a person in the Czech Republic; “ty” and “Vy”. The first one is informal and common among non-adult persons (children, youth, adolescents), an adult addressing non-adult, and among friends or family members. The latter applies to anyone (non-adults and adults alike) addressing an adult stranger or someone who is merely an acquaintance but not a friend. The latter is generally more common in the public sphere, but also at e. g. work-places, where the formal is slowly shifting to informal in certain, more casual, spheres. Ever since the beginning of my research, I have tried to set the communicative tone to the informal in order to gain a closer connection to the participants to allow them to feel more relaxed than in formal contexts. This was also possible thanks to the shared life stage both me and the participants have been going through. But the ambiguities connected with emerging adulthood brought up some issues to consider. While addressing someone informally is common among fellow university students in the Czech Republic, it is usually not so among adult strangers, even if they are the same age as university students. Although I had written the request posted in the Facebook groups informally, copying this style from other posts, I still felt it was polite to ask each of the respondents whether this form of addressing them was alright, because our ages made us both legal adults and in many contexts strangers treat us (and thus also address us) in this way. This caused an initial dilemma for me about the appropriateness of addressing my research partners in an informal manner before we got to know each other “personally” (in this context this meant before we saw each other and spoke through a video call). As everyone agreed to this form of being addressed, it worked well to connect us on an equal level, talking like friends (one participant even addressed me by a diminutive of my name).

Such friendly ways of addressing one another prevented the risk of an artificial detachment during the interview, but also constructed the encounter in a specific way. As it has been

suggested, the responses in an interview are produced by multiple factors, including the interviewee, the interviewer, and the circumstances and setting in which such encounter takes place (Silverman 2006). As a university student and emerging adult myself, it was easy for me to connect with and understand my respondents in many ways, however, this positionality also bore certain issues. Although I could relate to their situation, I personally did not decide to spend the lockdown with my parents. There were multiple reasons for this, some of which I have mentioned in the introduction, yet the most prominent and legitimate one was the fact that my partner was staying in our home and I decided to keep him company. When we touched upon this topic with my interview partners, I needed to explain my situation in a neutral way, so that they would not feel morally judged in any sense. In this way, I was trying to conduct myself in a “neutralistic” way, a notion Rapley (2007) describes, in contrast to being neutral, as the efforts to facilitate talking without judgment or assertion of one’s own opinions, and the conduct which is neutral in regard to the topic but interested in the account of the interviewee.

I was careful about my personal positions and opinions ever since the beginning of the research project and thought about this in advance, as my research interest stemmed from the opposition between my own and my research partners’ decisions regarding the stay at the parental home. However, there was a more intrinsic problem, stemming from the fact that my research partners and I shared cultural background as well as a stage of life. So even though I was genuinely interested in their accounts and tried to display this interest during the interviews, I sometimes had the false feeling of understanding my interview partners’ perception or situation from only a short description. When I tried to summarize how I understood my interviewee’s perception, I would often discover that they meant a slightly different thing, which led me to understand that I needed to ask more follow up questions or ask for examples of what they are talking about. Moreover, during the analysis I also had to reflect on my interpretation and its connection to my personal life and experiences. While my personal experiences often brought me an intuitive understanding, I had to question my conclusions, searching to prove or disprove them by the accounts of my research partners.

From the choice to conduct interviews online also arose ethical questions regarding my research partners’ privacy. In order to protect them and at the same time make this as easy for them as possible, I decided to use Fairmeeting videoconferencing service, which is encrypted and GDPR compliant, while at the same time browser-based and does not require registration (fairkom 2020). It also allows to secure the conference room with a password, so that no one

else can accidentally enter it. However, this service did not work well for all participants, especially when their internet connection was not stable. These issues had to be solved operatively by switching to other services, such as Edumeeet, which is also browser-based and keeps traffic inside an own network. In one case, the participant's microphone only worked with Google Meets but no other video conferencing service. We tried to connect through Fairmeeting, Edumeeet and other secured services for almost an hour and I also offered to call by phone, but the participant explicitly expressed the wish to use Google Meets. I recorded the interviews using AnyCap recorder, which does not store the record to a cloud service but on a local drive, and separate encrypted external hard drive partitions were used for the storage of each interview, as well as for their transcriptions.

In order to pseudonymise my research partners, I changed their names, and am not exposing the places of their homes. Instead, the names of the cities and towns have been changed into "the university city" or similar expressions. When dealing with how to distinguish the different places my research partners considered as their homes, I also struggled with what to call the place other than the parental home. The place where they live without their parents, but which they do not own or sometimes even do not consider as a permanent residence in the future. Even if some hope for this location to be a relatively long-term home, it is still a rented apartment subject to the landlord's demands, who may see them as not-yet-adult students, and not as stable tenants. The apartments are also often shared with friends or flat-mates, and generally seen also by the research partners as somewhat temporary. For these reasons, I use the label "own" home, with quotation marks. However, before I begin the analysis of these realities, I will now elaborate on the theoretical perspectives which will put the traditional sociological approaches on the transition to adulthood into a broader context and may be helpful to enhance the understanding of the moves back and forth, and the experiences of being in-between the recognizable milestones of adulthood.

3 Theoretical Background

Using the word adult in our everyday repertoire, we usually do not question this concept. It seems easy to us to distinguish whether a person is an adult or not, but we hardly ever stop to actually consider how we came up with our conclusion. It is mostly when we deal with people on the margins that we start reflecting on these ideas; for example, when dealing with young people who want to be considered an adult but for some reason we feel that they don't comply with the expected societal norms of adulthood we have implicitly considered, or with people seeming too young who surprise us by their mature behavior. But what is the meaning of adulthood, why do these young people try to attain it, and what is life like in the grey zone of gradually becoming an adult (rather than simply taking a step from the imaginary black to the white of the dichotomy child-adult)? These are the questions we need to consider, when trying to understand the experiences of young people coming to live with their parents during the pandemic after they had experienced living independently from them.

As the idea of attaining adulthood was one of my starting points for this thesis, I will now, in chapter 3.1, try to look into the historical constructions of the meanings currently associated with this concept. I will try to understand how the contemporary meanings of adulthood emerged in the context of European modernity together with the value placed on the ideas of independence, responsibility and reason. I will continue in this endeavor throughout chapter 3.2, which focuses on the passage to adulthood and the different criteria considered important for reaching an adult status. While the legal system only bases adulthood on a certain age, the meanings associated with adulthood seem to be more complex. Sociologists traditionally base their statistics on specific tangible criteria, but in the past few decades their importance seems to be changing. Therefore, in chapter 3.3 I will look more closely at the context of my research project, connecting the heterogeneous ways in which young people reach adulthood nowadays in the Czech Republic with the late modern discourse on self-realization. This might be both complementary and contrasting to the meanings and criteria associated with adulthood. Yet, both seem to work as possible strategies of the neoliberal governmental power and its efforts to generate self-reliant responsible citizens. However, I will try to argue that these responsibilities towards the state (of reaching adulthood and living a self-chosen “good” life) are competing within the lived experiences with other responsibilities the young people may have (towards their families, partners, universities, workplaces etc.). To conclude, in chapter 3.4 I will briefly consider the notion of ambivalence, which I intend to use as a lens to understand these different responsibilities of my research partners.

3.1 The Construction of Adulthood as a Specific Type of Maturity

The conception of adulthood as a specific type of maturity has not been around forever, but is connected with a historical shift in ideas regarding political authority, as Durham (2017) explains. Building on Ariès' (1962, as mentioned in Durham 2017) argument that throughout Western history, children were mostly treated as small adults, she suggests that a more precise view would be that of a society which was not distinguished by the categories of childhood and adulthood but rather other more specific statuses not primarily tied to age groups. As Brewer (2005) describes in her book *By Birth Or Consent*, such status could be that of a daughter who could become an apprentice at the age of two and get married at seven, therefore consenting to contracts and becoming a wife already very young, or that of a prince who could acquire the status of a king already in the infant years. Moreover, even if the relationship between master and apprentice could then metaphorically resemble that of the prince and his subject, the master, prince and husband were very different sorts of people. Brewer argues that the rise of the significance in distinction between the categories of childhood and adulthood in the Anglo-Saxon world was connected to the socio-political changes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This time period marks the beginning of significant shifts in thinking about society and its order, serving as grounds for the actual changes that took place and led to what we now call modernity. In one of his lectures, Foucault (1991) traced the development of political theories of this time, focusing on the shift from sovereignty to government. According to him, the foundation of sovereignty was a territory and by extension the subjects living there, and the aim of the sovereign should be “the common good”, which, as Foucault deconstructs, ultimately signified a total obedience to the law. On the contrary, what he calls “government” is concerned with the complex relations of “things” including humans and all sorts of other things, such as wealth, resources, the territory and its specific conditions, irrigation, climate, but also habits, customs etc. The aim of government is then different from sovereignty, it is to dispose of things in a way leading to a “convenient” result for each of the governed things, “[...]it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even using laws themselves as tactics [...]” (Foucault 1991, 95). Contract theorists then argued that government requires a kind of consent of the governed to be governed. For the theorists of that time, the family was seen as a model for government with its head considering the wellbeing of all its family members, but it was difficult to extend this model to the whole state. Statistics, which Foucault (1991) views as the

science of government, and which was previously applied to keep up sovereignty, started to gradually show certain phenomena specific to the level of population from the eighteenth century onwards. These phenomena were impossible to be reduced to the family or individuals, and gave rise to the perspective of a population as a whole, which then encompassed the family as a segment of population. The aim of government could then be conceptualized as the wellbeing of the population, and measured by statistics in e. g. the form of birth or mortality rates and timing, or through economic factors.

These shifts from sovereignty to governmentality and from obedience to contract were also connected with the shifts in moral judgment towards dependency. As Fraser and Gordon (2006 [1994]) describe, in the hierarchical society divided by birth statuses, almost everyone was dependent on somebody else. The notion of dependency was a characteristic of social relationships (rather than individual people) and it simply signified hierarchy. Because this type of relationship was so common, the notion of dependency was not stigmatizing. The concept of independence was first used for aggregate entities (such as the church or nation) but not individuals, however, by the end of the eighteenth century a person could be designated as independent if owning land and therefore not having to labor (2006, 593). With industrialization and the ideal of equality, certain dependencies (specifically that of white adult males) started to be perceived as deviant and bearing shame, while others were deemed proper (Fraser and Gordon write specifically about the gendered and racialized uses, but it seems that also child dependency was and is perceived as natural, in fact it appears so natural that even Fraser and Gordon do not question it but take the childlikeness of dependency for granted, 2006, 594). The previous meaning of dependency as a general subordination fractured into the realms of socio-legal, political, and economic dependency. Moreover, the word which previously referred solely to social relations could now also connote a personal character trait, thereby the register of what Fraser and Gordon call the moral/psychological dependency was created. However, as hierarchies based on inborn status ceased to appear natural or just, it was independence (in all of these realms) that became an ideological basis for the new concept of citizenship (2006, 593–94).

According to Brewer (2005), the struggles for a shift away from total obedience required by sovereignty, to the political ideology based on consent, were also accompanied by the constitution of a new social position for children

Those who opposed patriarchal arguments for absolute monarchy acknowledged the necessity of obedience, but said it applied to children only during their “minority” Adult males, in particular, should have equality, freedom, and the ability to consent to their government; children in their “minority” should not (2005, 4).

The idea of a universal capacity to reason and thereby also to govern oneself and take part in public decision-making was meant to promote equality among all men, in comparison to the previous unequal and unchangeable birth statuses. However, when creating this type of equality it also laid down a different line of exclusion based on the idea to be able to reason fully. It was then suggested that a child first needs to obey and learn to use its reason, before being able to reason fully (Brewer 2005). This lack of reason is comparable with what Fraser and Gordon (2006) decided to call moral/psychological dependency, and as Brewer argues, it was “awkwardly” connected to the physical dependence on parents: “physical dependence can create mental dependence, since those upon whom a person is dependent can sway their judgment. But the mental development was most central: a person needed the ability to exercise reason, and age was to serve as a preliminary marker” (2005, 103–4). And, as Brewer continues, while young children are by nature dependent on someone else’s care and there was never any doubt about that, in the pre-modern social order this stage of complete dependence was comparably shorter and children would quickly acquire various responsibilities (as the two-year-old apprentice or seven-year-old wife). The political theory based on consent created new disadvantages unique to children, differentiating them from adults along the lines of socio-legal and political dependency.

Moreover, as Brewer argues, this conceptual shift also occurred within the construction of identity.

The shift within principles of justice described here both put much more emphasis on reaching and passing an age of reason and defined childhood as characterized most significantly by an almost complete inability to exercise judgment. In doing so, it elevated reason beyond all other human attributes. It put perhaps too much weight on this sudden transformation, on the difference between a child and an adult. What was once a new emphasis is still fundamental to our law and to our ideas about human development (2005, 351–52).

The gradual transition of a child to adulthood was seen rather as a specific milestone which should both signal the change of status as well as influence the construction of identity. The

emphasis on this sudden transformation could probably be argued, not only to have influenced our present-day legal system, but also the whole interest in passage to adulthood, including the sociological statistics or classical anthropological explorations of the passage to adulthood, with which I will deal later, in chapter 3.2.

This strict distinction of childhood and adulthood ideologically extended dependence and incapacity of one's own judgment until the “age of reason”, condensing the gradual maturation process into the milestone of passing through this age, imbued the category of adulthood with power, constructed it as something exclusive, and thereby desirable for those outside it. As Durham puts it, “[i]n many ways, the idea of adulthood is profoundly democratic and egalitarian—and as such, is also exclusive and privileged” (Durham 2017, 9). Those seen as lacking the capacity to (fully) reason were excluded from the public spheres of rational discourse; next to children, there were also women or different racialized populations (Brewer 2005). It is not a coincidence that these were the same groups whose dependency was seen as legitimate at the time. In this way adulthood started to serve as a dominant normality to which the deficiency of others can be noted and compared (Durham 2017). The unequal power structures previously connected with differences in birth status were now based on age and assumptions about the capacity to reason. The new political ideology thereby excluded the under-aged and dependent from public as well as private decision-making (Brewer 2005).

The shifts towards a democratic form of government have also been connected to the origins of the notion of responsibility and who is a “responsible citizen” (Keltz 2008). According to McKeon (1956), citizenship was long conditioned to exhibit signs of responsibility, such as property ownership or education. Only the universal right of suffrage which appeared at the turn of the 19th to 20th century marked a shift towards the recognition of responsibility as a universal capacity, although, as connected with citizenship, we could again argue that the universality of this capacity is reserved for adulthood. Children are still not recognized as full citizens. McKeon suggests that the notion of responsibility was first based on previous concepts of accountability and imputation, which he describes as negative and external in the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the state, operating through punishment and approval. However, with the gradual shift of political authority, there emerged a new understanding of responsibility which also encompassed the notions of freedom and rationality. “The earlier formulation of this conviction tended to be restrictive: representative government or democracy will work only if the people is ready for it, that is responsible. The

reformulation inverts the relation: responsible government depends on a responsible people but a people acquires responsibility only by exercising it” (McKeon 1956, 24).

With this shift in political authority, citizenship was based on both responsibility as well as independence. Fraser and Gordon (2006) describe the welfare-related uses (of the time between 1890 and 1945) of the notion of dependency, which suggested “good” household dependency of the wife and children on the male breadwinner, and a type of “bad” dependency on charity and public assistance. An economic dependency at that time was and remains until today often associated with condemnation of personal traits of moral/psychological dependency. “The contention is that poor, dependent people have something more than lack of money wrong with them” (Fraser and Gordon 2006, 599). The postindustrial era got the gendered and racialized legal and political dependency formally abolished. This together with the decentering of a family wage based on the male single-earner led to the current situation in which, as Fraser and Gordon argue, “there is no longer any self-evidently “good” adult dependency in postindustrial society. [...] Independence, however, remains identified with wage labor. Everyone is expected to “work” and be “self-supporting.” Any adult not perceived as a worker shoulders a heavier burden of self-justification” (2006, 597).

Due to these historical developments, adulthood, synonymous with citizenship, is nowadays identified as including responsibility, independence and self-sufficiency, and is contrasted to childhood, which is seen as the age of dependency and insufficient ability to reason. Although the gendered and racialized exclusions of early modern adulthood were, at least formally, abolished, the age-based childhood dependency is still perceived as natural. Through this exclusion, adulthood with its privileges is still desirable for those outside of this category: children.

3.2 The Passage to Adulthood through Milestones or Gradual Transition

While adulthood may serve as a synonym for citizenship (and is also used in this way by scholars, such as Jones 1995), its opposite, childhood, also reveals a relation to a different social position. Childhood is simultaneously the relational category of adulthood as well as citizenship, making this term meaningful, and at the same time the word child denotes a specific social position within the relationships of kinship, defining a person’s relation to other kin, probably most specifically to their parents. And while we legally reach adulthood by gaining a certain age, and thereby we cease to be children in this context, we will never

stop being the children of our parents, although our relationship with them will probably change. To make things more complicated, citizenship or the relationship between the individual and the state, is not only about the legal system, but also connects adulthood to a certain social norm contrasted to childhood (associating it with attributes such as responsibility or independence, as I tried to show in the previous section). According to Brewer, the early modern socio-political changes also led to the establishment of legal parental custody as we know it today, which bound the different aspects of childhood closer together. As she describes

In the late sixteenth century, most children had no “custodian,” [...]. Parents normally had no custodial power. [...] Children were “responsible” for themselves in the sense that they could form many valid contracts—influence from their “friends” (parents or others) was common, but parents did not legally make the decision. [...] By the early nineteenth century [...] virtually all children had custodians to make decisions for them during a custody that usually ended at a standard age of twenty-one (2005, 232).

According to Brewer, through such custodial power which parents gradually acquired, they gained more authority over their children in regards to decision-making or punishment, but she also writes about new responsibilities the parents got through this shift in comparison to the pre-modern times, such as the responsibility to upkeep one's own children or take care of them if wounded. When the gradual transition to maturity was condensed into the milestone of passage of a legal age, the childhood-adulthood dichotomy was constructed in such a way, that children started to be seen as dependent and were not vested with responsibility for public nor private decision-making, and had to obey their custodians (either parents or others), who newly got the power to consent for the children. By passing a certain age, the children turned into adults and could bear responsibilities for the consent by themselves.

This dichotomy of childhood and adulthood as two contrasting categories is still valid today, although the legal system might also recognize a somewhat transitional stage as is the case in the Czech Republic. The legal system recognizes adulthood as full citizenship and delineates it through age milestones. In the Czech Republic, adulthood is reached with the eighteenth birthday, when the person acquires full legal responsibility. Yet, already from the age of fifteen onwards, people are not considered children any more, although they are not seen by the law as full adults either. They get an ID card from the local authorities, also acquiring certain rights and responsibilities. Such person can be punished for serious misconducts, but

the penalty may only be half of that for adult committing the same crime (*Zákon č. 218/2003 Sb., o Odpovědnosti Mládeže Za Protiprávní Činy a o Soudnictví ve Věcech Mládeže a o Změně Některých Zákonů (Zákon o Soudnictví ve Věcech Mládeže)*, n.d.). Such a person cannot buy alcohol and cigarettes, but their sexual life can begin, although they could only get married in specific cases (such as when pregnant) if the court grants them full legal responsibility to do so. They could also try to get a driver's license for a small motorcycle, but have to wait until eighteen to acquire other types. Eighteen is the age of full legal responsibility, when they can start voting in elections, or consent to any kind of contract (such as for full-time employment, marriage or a loan). Yet, if such person continues their education, they are still entitled to support through their parents (and their parents are entitled to support due to taking care for a dependent child by the state) or directly by the state in case the parents are unable to do so themselves, and can draw benefits from this student status until the age of twenty-six (*Zákon č. 117/1995 Sb., o Státní Sociální Podpoře*, n.d.). These privileges might include discounts on public transport or exceptions from contributing to social and health insurance. However, these exceptions cease to be applied after their twenty-sixth birthday, even if the person continues to be a full-time student.

The legal path to adulthood is thus clearly bound to age, but the construction of adulthood as a contrasting category to childhood is not based only on age. As I have tried to show, adulthood is associated with characteristics such as independence, responsibility or full reason, and further meanings could be explored. According to the online Dictionary of the standard Czech language (*Slovník spisovného jazyka českého, Ústav pro jazyk český 2011*) the word “dospělý”, meaning adult when used as a noun characterizes (1) “(about man) one who has grown up, usually physically or at the same time mentally, spiritually”, when used as adjective it bears the meaning of (2) “relating to an adult, own to an adult person”, and as an adverb it designates someone (3) “(in what) advanced, knowing something; (to what) qualified, capable of something, mature”. The noun specifically connects a process of biological maturation with mental development, which is also the underlying assumption of the legal age milestones. The adverb then suggests that doing things in an adult way means to have advanced knowledge and skills in that area. The word “dítě” for child in the dictionary is characterized by its relation to adulthood as (1) “juvenile [the source saying “nedospělý” literary meaning non-adult] human (up to about 14 years of age); the human individual in relation to their parents”, (2) another meaning when the word is used to describe an adult, it reveals certain attributes ascribed to children:

an adult but reminiscent of a child, a childish person: the man is a real child, he starts to cry immediately; a fairy tale for big children [in this context “big children” designates] adults; [when someone] is a political child [the word is referring to someone who is] naïve, inexperienced in politics; expressively [the word child is used] in addressing a nice person, usually women or a younger person by older, or in addressing members of a friendly group [...]

The notion of a child then again points to the age criteria, and connects children with being emotional, naïve, inexperienced and nice. In contrast to adulthood, it might be used to address a friendly group (as opposed to addressing someone in a serious manner) and the current use which figuratively mimics the previous gendered exclusions from adulthood. Although the social norm of childhood and adulthood is based on age, the meaning of the contrast is clearly not solely the age difference but the suggested mental development, advanced knowledge and capabilities of adults in contrast to the childlike emotional impulsiveness, naivety and inexperience. Thereby, adulthood constitutes a social norm of behavior considered appropriate and natural for a certain age. By reaching the adult age, the person is vested with legal responsibility, but also expected to be experienced and knowledgeable enough to take on responsibility, in comparison to the naïve inexperienced child. And although legally the adult status is acquired through age, it does not necessarily grant full adult status in the eyes of others, such as one’s parents.

While one does not cease to be the child of one’s parents when reaching the legal age of adulthood, the relationship between a child and their parent(s) change(s), and the general conviction is that it should change throughout the course of one’s life. Although the reality is usually more complex and complicated, the simplified mainstream view is that of a development from a child, totally dependent on its parents, who becomes autonomous and eventually takes care of their aging parents as they become increasingly more dependent in their old age (cf. Weigert 1991). While in the legal system age clearly designates the beginning of adulthood, in everyday social realities, most significantly within the family, but also in other everyday social interactions, the adult status is less clearly marked and may not even be allowed by others. According to the social norm, an adult person should be autonomous, independent, responsible, experienced, knowledgeable etc. But how much knowledge, experience, responsibility or independence is enough to gain an adult status? How does the change of relationship between the parent and child emerge? And how should it happen? It is this tension between the different meanings of being a child (*vis-à-vis* the state,

the legal system, the different types of people one meets in everyday life – friends, acquaintances or strangers, and the family) that I am dealing with in this research project. Moreover, a further tension which may possibly complicate these processes, might arise between one's subjective feelings regarding adulthood (and thereby also their levels of knowledge, responsibility, experience or independence) and the recognition (or the lack thereof) by others.

In anthropology, transition between social statuses has been classically explored through the scholarship on rites of passage. Arnold van Gennep (1977), the father of the term, used it for rituals which marked the transition of individuals or groups between different social statuses (not restricting the term to personal life course transitions, such as birth rituals or initiation to adulthood, but also including seasonal passages, full moon rites etc.). He suggested a three-part structure of such rituals, distinguishing the phase of separation from a previous role or state, the period of margin between the old and the new, and the incorporation or reintegration of the newly acquired role or state into society. Victor Turner (1979) focusing on rites of transition to maturity and initiation rites then extended the understanding of the in-between period of margin or liminality, characterizing it as an interstructural situation. He distinguished the fixed structural statuses or states as “any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized” (1979, 234) from transitions, which are rather processes of becoming or transforming, and have different cultural properties than states. “The subject [...] is, in the liminal period, structurally [...] “invisible”. As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture” (1979, 235). He expanded the notion of liminality to being between socially established categories in general and not solely in the midst of two ritual stages. As such, the notion also signifies the condition of being between two differing sets of expectations connected to one's social role (Neumann 2012).

According to La Fontaine (1977), the classical anthropological understanding of rites of passage was based on research with groups where multiple domains of power and authority overlapped. Therefore, the initiated person could change their social position and attain power and authority in multiple fields at once, becoming fully adult through such rite. Although Brewer (2005) argues that the gradual maturation process of pre-modern times got condensed into a sudden change from a child into adult in modern society, such change was not ritualized into a single rite of passage. Although the child or adolescent acquires legal responsibility

nowadays when passing into the age of being an adult, some other fields of authority, such as authority within the family, do not change when the 18-year-old blows out the candles on their birthday cake. Instead, it has been argued that industrial and postindustrial societies do not have rites of passage to adulthood in the classical sense, that there is no simple moment when a person acquires full social recognition as an adult, but it is rather a gradual process (Jones 1995), even if this process is different from the process of pre-modern times, when there was not such a significant distinction between childhood and adulthood as Brewer (2005) describes.

Leaving the parental home for the first time has then been viewed as one of the important milestones of such gradual passage, a significant event possibly marked by intense ambivalent emotions, of both the children and parents (Jones 1995). In modern societies of a certain time, including Czechoslovakia, at least until the Velvet Revolution in 1989⁶, this life event normally occurred in close proximity to others – finishing education, starting a job, getting married, and having a first child. These events usually happened in a relatively short time, one after another and in a normative order (such as first getting married and then having a child and not the other way around). Therefore, these five transitional events came to be considered as sociological markers of adulthood (Gauthier 2007).

However, the anthropological approach has never entirely separated the structural statuses from the subjective feelings, as Durham (2017, 20) suggests. She points out that transition rituals are not empty ceremonies producing solely publicly recognizable signs of maturity, but that they influence the participants' subjectivities through emotional experiences which are perceived as important for the people to become adults. Looking from this perspective, the first time the parental home is left, is important because of the intensive emotions associated with it. Proposing the notion of adult subjectivity, Cooper (2018) draws attention to these two aspects of adulthood; the structural social positions one inhabits in a given society, as well as the ways of feeling, thinking and doing. To achieve such subjectivity (which is changed compared to the previous stage of childhood or adolescence), one has to undertake "personal transformative work" (Cooper 2018, 672), it is not sufficient to take on the roles regularly associated with adulthood (such as not living with one's parents).

⁶ Gauthier (2007) suggests that the normative sequence of adulthood transitional life events in all advanced industrial countries has declined since the 1970s, however, the local political historical context played an important role in Czechoslovakia. As I will further discuss in chapter 3, under the communist regime most people reached adulthood through the traditional path described here (cf. Macek et al. 2007; Možný and Rabušic 1992).

Moreover, the view of leaving home as one of the decisive markers on the way to adulthood has established the idea that not leaving or returning after one had left is a sign of failure or backtracking along the transitional path (Jones 1995). A specific category of “semiautonomy” (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986, 1989) or “living away” (Jones 1995) was suggested to account for young people moving out of their parental homes due to temporary commitments, who did not achieve the other markers of adulthood straight away and could even legitimately return to their parental home once the temporary commitment was over. An example could be leaving for university studies or military service. As such, the living arrangements were considered by scholars as inherently temporary and thereby their “home” was still proposed to be at their parental home rather than e. g. the term-time residence (Jones 1995). It has also been suggested that such semiautonomous living is a type of liminal phase between childhood dependence and adult independence (Jones 1995), but the significance of such a leave of the parental home for achieving adulthood has also been questioned (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986). Moreover, it has been pointed out that such living arrangements raise ambiguous perceptions regarding the desirability of the child’s return once the temporary commitment is over in both the parents and their children; “[...]while some parents are surprised to find their children home again after college, others are disappointed that, after a few short visits, their children never come home to live again“ (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986, 189). Although such living arrangements are fairly common nowadays, they used to be perceived as an exception from the traditional model in which the important transition converged (e. g. educational, employment, housing and family transitions).

While some young people nowadays still follow the traditional paths to adulthood consisting of the relatively short period when they finish education, find a job, leave home, get married and have a child, others do not. The pathways are increasingly more heterogeneous and the transitions may happen gradually over longer periods of time (such as when “living away” from the parental home before establishing one’s own household) rather than being a one-time event. Ethnographic studies from all around the world describe cases of delay (caused both voluntarily, e. g. youth traveling, and involuntarily by underemployment, homelessness or war) and “hopscotching” as a transition to adulthood. “We define this term in reference to the act of hopping backward and forward into and through, and then out of, different milestones, both voluntarily and compelled by circumstances” (Mendoza-Denton and Boum 2015, 302). Overall, the pathways to adulthood do not seem necessarily to correspond to the traditional model, revealing such a traditional model to be based on the distinction between adulthood

and adolescence, or adulthood and childhood. While these categories were viewed as kind of fixed states of a structure, the transition between them was the invisible liminal period, as Turner (1979) would have understood it. However, with the increasing occurrence and prolongation of this liminal period before full adulthood can be reached, which might be attributed to the socio-historical conditions of late modernity, scholars started to search for new conceptualizations. The prominent one being Arnett's (2000, 2015) conception of "emerging adulthood", as a new life course developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood, explaining the phenomena of "hopscotching" in the case of industrialized and postindustrial societies.

This in-between stage of life is in its nature a transition, and therefore it can be said to be a stage of liminality. It is based rather on perceptions and experiences of the young people themselves, rather than certain objective markers. Arnett (2015) writes about three criteria considered by emerging adults in the USA⁷ as the most important criteria for adulthood; accepting responsibility for themselves, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. As these criteria are gradually attainable, so is, in this view, adulthood. He then characterizes the stage by five distinctive features; (1) identity explorations, (2) instability, (3) self-focus, (4) feeling in-between, and (5) possibilities/optimism. (2015) In his view, emerging adults are more independent from their parents than before, while not establishing other enduring commitments (such as permanent employment or marriage), which gives them the possibility to explore available options in various areas of life, leading to clarification of their sense of who they are and what they want from life, and thus (1) development of identity. These (5) possibilities may lead to optimism about their future, as their dreams were not yet tested by reality and this life stage offers the opportunity to transform oneself based on independent decisions. Emerging adults learn about themselves as they discover that the chosen degree, job or partner is not right for them, that they do not get along well with their flat-mates or that there is more or different education needed in order to earn decent money. Such explorations, however, go hand in hand with (2) instability, as all of the mentioned examples require certain unplanned changes, which are often also connected with the change of residence. The lack of stable commitments leads to (3) self-focus, when they have to make every decision by themselves (whether this is as small as what and when to eat, or as important as whether to switch jobs, universities, apartments,

⁷ Based on the literature, Arnett (2015) suggests that these criteria should be valid for many other countries as well, including the Czech Republic.

roommates, move in with a partner or break up). “To be self-focused is not necessarily to be selfish, [...] The goal of their self-focusing is to learn to stand alone as a self-sufficient person, but they do not see self-sufficiency as a permanent state” (Arnett 2015, 14). Such a temporary state, however, leads to (4) feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood.

Arnett (2000) associates this stage with the shift from manufacturing to service economy, as the latter requires extended periods of training and education to gain more information and technological skills. As a result, the typical adult commitments, such as marriage and childcare, are postponed. This, in turn, gives time to the exploration of identity (connected to the remaining distinct features of emerging adulthood) before taking on the responsibility of such commitments. Arnett (2015), however, also admits that experiences might vary considerably across cultural, national and socioeconomic contexts. His critics stress the structural factors, pointing out that even in industrial societies, less privileged young people’s pathways to adulthood are more traditional with less pronounced emerging status (Bynner 2005).

3.3 Late modernity and Competing Responsibilities

Although Arnett (2000) connects his notion of emerging adulthood with longer periods of training and postponement of marriage which then allow for identity exploration, one might also approach the problem from another angle, asking why the young people nowadays feel compelled to focus on themselves for an extended period of time, exploring their identity and possibilities. The answer to this question could be located in the specific discourses within the socio-historical context they live in, the context of postmodernity or late modernity. As Gauthier (2007) suggested, the phenomenon of increasing heterogeneity of pathways leading to adulthood, which Arnett suggested to look at as a new developmental stage of emerging adulthood, has been occurring roughly since the 1970s. According to Macfarlane (2018), this time was also the beginning of the dissolution of any integrated worldview. “It was the realization that the speed of change, especially in politics and communications, meant that there could not be any shared vision either in the West or the Rest” (2018, 9). He describes this as a shift to postindustrialism, postrationalism or postmodernism, thus designating the turn from production to consumption economies, the rejection of the assumptions about reason brought through the “enlightenment”, and above all, the rejection of so-called modernity. Others (such as Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) have however suggested that we are not “done” with modernity by these shifts, that we did not move to a completely new era distinct from it. Rather, a new phase of modernity in which the processes

and features which were previously connected to modernity, such as globalization and detraditionalization, or dynamic social change and uncertainty, are intensified in an extreme way. Moreover, the reflexivity which was previously turned towards traditionalism is now turned towards modernity itself. As a continuation of modernity, they labeled the present historical phase as “late modernity” (Giddens 1991), “reflexive modernity” (Beck 1992), or “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000).

According to Laceulle (2018) this present historical phase of late modernity, as I will refer to it, is closely centered around the discourse of self-realization. The processes of globalization and detraditionalization bring about an abundance of lifestyle options to choose from, while they also blur the self-evident status of previously recognized guidance offered by traditional practices and sources of knowledge. Thereby, the former institutionalized forms of identity decline, as the individual is forced to choose and decide on all aspects of one’s own life. This calls for constant reflexivity whenever a person acquires new information or knowledge. Appropriated habits and practices in the form of a lifestyle then help people organize their reflexive life-choices. “In its late modern interpretation, self-realization pertains to the idea that a life considered ‘good’ exhibits a self-chosen, authentic lifestyle, that is, a lifestyle in accordance with the good, purposes or value orientations one reflexively identifies with” (2018, 34). Through this view the “good” life is based on individually chosen lifestyles, and future decisions stem from this. Young people in the grey zone between adolescence and adulthood are now faced with the requirements of socially recognized criteria of adulthood such as independence and experience, but also with the requirement of finding an own authentic lifestyle that will help them navigate their future life-choices. Therefore, reflection on and exploration of one’s own identity becomes an important process in reaching adulthood. A process, through which young people may also reconsider the values and approaches learned and internalized throughout their previous upbringing.

While the increasing stratification of ways to achieve adulthood has been observed in the industrialized countries since the 1970s (Gauthier 2007), the circumstances in the Czech Republic are different due to its political history. Although scholars have, similarly to other European countries, identified the life stage of emerging adulthood also in the Czech Republic (Macek, Bejček, and Vaníčková 2007), the local socio-historical context needs to be taken into account when trying to understand the experiences of young people today. Due to the fast political and societal changes which took place during the last few decades, the current generation’s pathways into adulthood is dramatically different than it was for their parents’

generation (Macek, Bejček, and Vaničková 2007). The period of the communist regime which lasted until 1989 could be characterized by the dependence on state authority connected with a low degree of personal freedom (e. g. restricted freedom of speech or sanctions when breaching loyalty towards the regime). The constraints were, however, balanced out by a comparatively high standard of social benefits. Due to the state-provided social assistance, the need to take responsibility for one's own life was minimized (Klicperová, Feierabend, and Hofstetter 1997). The number of university students was limited by admission quotas, and if one did not study, work was compulsory. From the 1970s onwards, not having a stamp from an employer in one's identification documents could lead to the conviction of being a "social parasite". Therefore people tended to remain in the same job for long periods of time or even throughout their whole careers, as the switching of jobs was also perceived negatively. The most common path to adulthood was therefore following the traditional model of finishing secondary education and immediately starting to work. Men also had a compulsory military service inbetween. Getting married was then connected with partner cohabitation which could start before or at the same time, and the wedding was quickly followed by the first child (Možný and Rabušic 1992; Macek, Bejček, and Vaničková 2007). These were the realities in which the parents of the current emerging adults were brought up.

The internalized social norms learnt in the previous regime could be questioned but not totally forgotten over the course of the optimistic post-revolutionary 1990s and later. The Czechoslovakian society underwent many changes during this time, as new identity was searched on national, social, as well as on individual levels. The country was split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The neoliberal ideology was incorporated quickly into policies and economic life without questioning it (Bugarič 2016), society was gradually stratified, and people, whether young or old, had to revise personal values, appropriate new aims and perspectives on life, and re-learn responsible adult behavior. This optimistic and hopeful era with a vague legal environment and social norms allowed people to experiment, but the previous regime also left behind the so-called post-communist syndrome; low self-esteem, insufficient initiative and lack of responsibility, accompanied by hopelessness (Klicperová, Feierabend, and Hofstetter 1997). The economic and political crisis of the late 1990s led to a sobering up of the post-revolutionary optimism and the loose legal and social norms had to be put in place before the country became a member of the European Union in 2004 (Macek, Bejček, and Vaničková 2007). It was probably then, in this ambivalent atmosphere that most of the parents of my research partners reached adulthood and when my research partners

experienced their early childhood. According to Macek, Bejček and Vaničková (2007), the emerging adulthood of people growing up in these conditions was inevitably shaped by those childhood experiences.

The late modern discourses of self-realization seem to be complementary to the neoliberal governmentality, which is based on individual responsibility of each person for their own lives. When Foucault (1997) described the modern shift from sovereignty to governmentality, he suggested that the techniques of disciplining individual bodies were accompanied by regulatory techniques which functioned on a level of the population as a whole. Thereby, laws became a technique of power, just as, for example, the statistics of birth and mortality rates or, in the present case, that of the timing of the life-events of transition to adulthood. The former was supposed to discipline the subject, while the latter deals with the issues of the population in order to analyze, regulate and “improve” their outcomes. This is achieved through an attempt to regulate the conditions under which people live their lives. In modern forms of governmentality, power works in subtle ways across multiple sites, through various different strategies and technologies, ultimately enforcing self-regulation (Burch 2018). “At the level of population, it is not possible to coerce every individual and regulate their actions in minute detail. Rather, governmentality operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs” (Li 2007, 275). In this way, people are led to want to do what they “should” do. And while the public discourse suggests the freedom of choice, the underlying power of self-regulation relies on individual responsibility (Burch 2018).

According to Trnka and Trundle (2017), one of the key mechanisms of the neoliberal governmentality is responsabilization.

The concept of responsabilization is most often used to refer to the increasing divestiture of obligations from the state onto individuals who are under growing pressure to formulate themselves as independent, self-managing, and self-empowered subjects [...]. We can see this at play in the most dramatic of circumstances as well as in the most mundane, for example, through new self-motivating apps that enable novel forms of self-surveillance and care [...], or the production of self-reliant citizens who do not make too many demands on government services (2017, 2).

The self-realization discourse which, according to Laceulle (2018), requires people to take responsibility for their own lives and, in fact, to acquire mastery over it, may be viewed as one of the strategies of the production of self-regulated, self-motivated and self-reliant citizens.

While this may lead to a longer path to adulthood, the category of adulthood itself with the multiple associated requirements and characteristics may also work as a discourse of governmentality, even if intuitively aiming in quite a different direction and not supporting the extension of a liminal phase between adolescence and adulthood. In this way, as Burch (2018) analyzed on the example of the UK's 2014 Special Education Needs and Disability Code of Practice, the discourses about adulthood might be themselves specific strategies and techniques of power deployed in order to create self-regulating future citizens responsible to the state with its ambitions to reduce welfare expenditures, and by extent being responsible towards their fellow citizens. The multiple aspects of adulthood, such as economic independence or independent living, then constitute adulthood as a matrix of intertwined dreams, strategies and proceedings aimed to generate such responsible neoliberal citizens. While the notion of adulthood may call for independent living, the discourse of self-realization, to a certain extent, offers the choice of where and how such independent living should be realized.

Nevertheless, as Trnka and Trundle (2017) continue, even if responsibility is central to the neoliberal discourses, in everyday life there are multiple other meanings to the notion other than solely the responsibility to the state, because people are entangled in various interdependent relationships within their family or occupation, but also relationships with their environment, or other communities. Therefore Trnka and Trundle argue for a scholarly debate in which analysis would be focused on these subtle differences of multiple responsibilities, suggesting three main areas; (1) various possible forms of personal responsibility which may include the neoliberal individual responsibility, as well as other attempts to cultivate the self, (2) care for another, often present in everyday intimate relations that may create an elementary social obligation, which can work as an opposite to the emphasis put on self-reliance, and (3) the responsibilities between larger interdependent collectivities, which include the interdependent relationship of the state and an individual incorporated in ideologies of social contract. Trnka and Trundle suggest the notion of “competing responsibilities” to refer to these different intertwined obligations.

The different sets of expectations related to social roles which stretch the young people between childhood, adolescence and adulthood are thus also entangled with these multiple responsibilities towards different actors. In the Czech Republic, young people already have legal responsibility and rights of an adult at the age of eighteen, but legally they are still eligible for financial support if continuously studying until the age of twenty-six. While the

legal responsibility changes their relation *vis-à-vis* the state, the right for financial support primarily influences their relationship to their parents, who do not lose all the responsibilities they previously had for their children while minors, as they still have the responsibility to sustain them. In the case of my research partners, such financial dependence was potentially connected to further sense of authority the parents possessed and entangled with their ideas about adulthood, which could differ from that of my research partners’.

The ideas which are connected with notion of adulthood, the social norms of independence, responsibility, experience, knowledge and so on, and according to which anyone belonging to the category of adulthood should ideally behave, seem to give the responsibility for becoming a self-regulating citizen both to the young person, as well as to their parents (or possibly other custodians). This responsibility lies within the parents’ power, because their obligation to the state and fellow citizens is to raise their own children to “fit in” the society. And while legally most of their responsibilities may end with the child’s eighteenth birthday, in reality this does not seem to be the case and the parents can actually become the main guardians, on whom the children may depend for allowance or approval of the category of adulthood, as was sometimes apparent in certain interviews. Although both the children and parents might share the responsibility that a child will become a self-regulating responsible citizen, their ideas about how to reach this and how to recognize if one has become such a person may (but do not have to) differ, and so may differ also their definitions of adulthood. Moreover, they can also recognize that there are further socially recognized criteria for adulthood. My research partners usually talked about multiple ideas of adulthood, suggesting one to be their internal way to measure, which they usually put into a context with some other views.

Moreover, besides this obligation to reach adulthood, the relationship between parents and children was, for my research partners, one of the strong family bonds, and as such imbued with other obligations and responsibilities. These were the responsibilities to care for the other, to use the notion suggested by Trnka and Trundle (2017). This type of responsibility constitutes a kind of counterpoint to self-reliance, emphasised by the self-realization discourse. Therefore, also the responsibilities present in the relationship between parents and children were somewhat contradictory. There were, on the one hand, the responsibility for the children to reach adult independence and self-reliance, and on the other hand, there were also responsibilities of care for other family members, which center around familial bonds. Moreover, both parents and their children were responsible for the child to reach adulthood, while not forgetting about the contrasting responsibilities of care for close (familial) others.

Besides these contradictory responsibilities, the young people I interviewed also had other responsibilities towards themselves, other close people (such as partners or grandparents), or their workplaces or educational institutions. The experiences and decision-making of each person depends on how strongly these “competing responsibilities” are perceived, as well as on how much they actually compete with one another, because these different responsibilities may sometimes even converge in the same direction. All of these responsibilities, whether competing or not, affect people’s everyday lives and manifest themselves in various decision-making, the decision where to spend a nation-wide pandemic lockdown being only one of many choices to be made. Because the young people in the liminal gray zone between adolescence and adulthood are placed between so many contradictions, the response can hardly be to follow a single specific responsibility. In my research, which focused around their housing situation, the solution to these contradictions was often a denial of a single choice manifested through an ambivalent attitude. It was not the numbing deviant ambivalence as a psychological trait signifying incapability of choice, but rather an ambivalence in which multiple perspectives were recognized and taken into account, which allowed them to live in such socially contradictory position for a long period of time (even several years for the whole duration of the university studies). As I will now try to explain, it might be productive to explore such ambivalence in order to understand which different (competing) responsibilities are manifested in the lives of emerging adults and how.

3.4 Ambivalence of Family Relationships and Other Social Positions

The word ambivalence, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is the combination of a Latin prefix *ambi* (both) and *valere* (to be strong), and thereby refers to the experience of strong feelings connected to different aspects of a single topic (Merriam-Webster n.d.). The dictionary defines two slightly different meanings, the first described as “simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings (such as attraction and repulsion) toward an object, person, or action”, while the second is a process of “continual fluctuation (as between one thing and its opposite)” and “uncertainty as to which approach to follow”. Scholars have made analytical distinctions between ambivalence and ambiguity, the latter being seen as a cognitive process rather than an emotional one (Peletz 2001).

The notion of ambivalence comes from the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis, where it was discussed as pathological. The experience of ambivalence was perceived as an intermediate step of decision-making in which a person takes into account different aspects in order to choose one. As such, a long-lasting ambivalence was viewed as distressful and the

lack of synthesis of the contradictory feelings (the inability to appreciate a rose despite its thorns rather than both liking its beauty and disliking its thorns) was seen as pathological. (Bleuler 1914, cited in Kierans and Bell 2017). Due to its origin and the individualized perspective which did not account for a social and cultural context, social scientists have long been skeptical to include the notion of ambivalence into their analytical repertoire.

Nevertheless, Kierans and Bell (2017) sum up the later emergence of sociological ambivalence as a counterpart to the psychological one. Through the lens of the social sciences, Robert Merton (1976, cited in Kierans and Bell 2017) suggested that ambivalence reflects the contradictory obligations and demands of the social structure in which people are entangled. Therefore, the problem which needed to be solved was not located in the psyche but in the external social structure, which also made it impossible to resolve. Furthermore, the more complex and nuanced accounts presented ambivalence in less negative terms. “In these accounts, ambivalence is portrayed as something produced by (and productive of) our orientation to the social world, rather than constituting an explanatory device in and of itself” (Kierans and Bell 2017, 26–27). Therefore, exploring ambivalence becomes a productive way to better understand the contradictions present when responsibilities compete.

According to Peletz (2001), the “new kinship studies” recognize that kinship and gender relationships are specifically ambivalent, because they are based on both differentiation and exclusion on the one hand, and inclusion and commonality on the other. As key components to systems of morality, they inscribe hierarchies laden with value. Peletz therefore argues that

[...] ambivalence is a feature of virtually all kinship systems, and that this is so not only because of the contradictory structural imperatives inherent in such systems (and all other institutions) but also because something like prescriptive amity or “diffuse, enduring solidarity” seems to be a feature of virtually all such systems (2001, 434).

According to Weigert (1991), Family and particularly the parent-child relationships have been perceived as prominent sites of ambivalence by psychoanalysts, while social scientists also extended this notion onto other less intensive relationships. “This analysis suggests that ambivalence is a general feature of dominance or leadership positions as incumbents strive to be both respected and liked, authoritative and nurturant, or evaluative and supportive toward the same person (1991, 40)”. While this ambivalence stems from a single status and role, social ambivalence within family ties may also be caused by the tension between different roles and statuses and the associated individual and group needs. As Weigert asserts, “Group

members seek both the autonomy and profit that our individualist culture holds so dear, and the security and commonweal that everyone needs and the group provides” (1991, 46). Thereby, kinship relationships are ambivalent due to the inherent hierarchies, and the contradictory pulls of responsibility connected to family belonging and competing individual responsibilities.

As families are groups of people with their own responsibilities, there might be multiple responsibilities connected with the group belonging as each member has their own voice. Dealing with the multiple voices present in families of aging labor migrants in Vienna, Palmberger (2019) suggests the term “relational ambivalence”.

It shows how assessments of particular situations and decision-making processes are made in conversation with several voices (particularly of family members). Thus, ambivalence is understood as a relational experience that is often tied to strong (relationally driven) emotions (2019, 75).

Through this concept, she shifts the focus from different statuses and roles of migrants in their host country and country of origin, to the intimate relationships they have with their family members. For her research participants, these were the main sources of ambivalence.

As I tried to outline briefly, ambivalence is present in intimate family relationships, as well as at their intersection with other structural conditions and expectations connected to social roles. Therefore, it seems especially relevant to examine the ambivalences in the lives of young people in the liminal stage between childhood or adolescence and adulthood, whose social positions are changing. Such ambivalences may help us understand the contradictory responsibilities they deal with in their daily lives, as they are on their gradual path to adulthood entangled between the different ideas and expectations of various actors. In the following section of the thesis, I will turn to the everyday experiences of my interview partners.

4 Empirical Part: Living with Parents during the Pandemic

When I started my research, I was informed by the classical sociological life-course theories which considered the leave of the parental home as a step towards adulthood and the return there as a kind of backtracking. In more recent research, however, I found different perceptions which had the potential to reveal the return to a parental home as a possibility to help young people reach further goals. This research called for further qualitative exploration (Warner, Henderson-Wilson, and Andrews 2012). Arnett's (2000, 2015) conception of emerging adulthood suggested that changing residence was quite common for people in this liminal stage of life, but did not elaborate on the specific role of home or the act of living with parents after one has lived independently from them before. Therefore, I was interested in exploring this in more detail, trying to understand the role of home within this liminal phase, the meanings of moving away from a parental home and then living with parent(s) again. I asked myself, if the pandemic which caused many young people to go live with their parents, was disempowering for them, or disrupting their pathway to adulthood, as the classical sociological theories suggested. Viewing the decision to stay with parent(s) in this way, I thought it would be perceived as important by my research partners, and it would take careful consideration before making such a decision. I also expected them to explain a variety of reasons they considered before going back to their parental home. These reasons could help me understand the experiences of the liminal phase of emerging adulthood, the possible various expectations and obligations, and the roles that the independent residence and the parental home play in this stage of life.

Nevertheless, in my research partners' accounts, the decision to live with their parent(s) was not perceived with as much significance as I expected. Although they did perceive living independently as an important step towards adulthood, their ideas surrounding adulthood were ambivalent, and so were their perceptions of home. These ambivalences revealed different responsibilities which competed in their lives. Especially the notion of home and the connected ambivalence – the different feelings and meanings associated with different places which all could be called “home”, although they stood for very different things – could then be seen as a manifestation of the competing responsibilities turned into tangible or material realms of physical places.

In line with the concept of adult subjectivity as it is composed of both the social positions as well as ways of doing, feeling and going about practices (Cooper 2018), adulthood in the

accounts of my research partners was a combination of their subjective feeling based on their sense of responsibility and an external recognition by others which mostly connoted (material and legal) independence. While some of them could subjectively feel adult, they often said they were not recognized as such. In this way, not all of them, in fact, corresponded to the concept of emerging adulthood which is based on the person's own definition of being an adult in some things and not an adult in others, because some of them insisted on being a full adult although they were not recognized as adults by others. However, due to the lack of external recognition of their adulthood, their experiences were still that of a liminal phase, as they were perceived to be in-between, and therefore also had to face various social expectations connected with different roles. In chapter 4.1, I will present two different notions of adulthood – the subjective and the external – how they were perceived and made sense of by my research partners, and how through this understanding, the move away from the parental home presented itself as a step towards an adult subjectivity.

However, their perceptions of home in this phase of life, which can be seen as liminal, did not simply connote a single place, as I will argue in chapter 4.2. Rather, it was a fluid category related to multiple places and feelings. Each place was then connected with different feelings and bore different meanings as one of the possible homes. While their “own” home stood for individuality and independence, the parental home was connected with group belonging. Such ambivalent perceptions of home are symptomatic of the competing responsibilities, the specific social expectations and obligations the young people faced. While they perceived the need to become an adult and thereby take responsibility for their actions, decisions, and independent living, they also had to deal with what is expected of a child belonging to a family, not recognised as an entirely independent entity. Yet, even if the family wanted the child to spend as much time at home as possible, one of the familial obligations may also be to achieve independence in order to take care of the aging parents in the future. Thus, the family itself also contributes to the emergence of ambivalence as it creates quite contradictory demands.

In the situation of the pandemic, these different responsibilities and the ambivalent perceptions created by them, seem to have played a role for the young people when deciding where to spend the lockdown. Due to the ambivalent perceptions of home, according to which both of the places, the parental and their “own”, are homes, and due to the social expectations placed on young people in this liminal phase of life, the stay at the parental home may not have been perceived as a step back on the pathway to adulthood by many of my research

partners. This will be discussed in chapter 4.3. Having multiple homes meant that it was natural to spend time in all of them. In line with the tension of the social expectations, the stay at the parental home could be perceived as a concession, something done by the young person for the family when the whole group faced an unprecedented risk situation, rather than an act of help offered by the family to the young person who was unable to live independently. In this way, it could be perceived as responsible towards the group, as the independence, autonomy or freedom associated with independent living were given up for the sake of the group when facing global risks. These attributes, which make leaving home a sociological marker of adulthood, still played an important role for my research partners. Although they lived with parent(s) (and family), they saw it as something temporary, did not give up their independent residence, and after the experiences in spring, did not want to repeat the same degree of cohabitation in autumn, when there was more knowledge about the situation and their perception of risk was more relaxed. The situation then again reflected the tensions between the social expectations of independence from the family of origin connected with adulthood, and the emphasis put on fully belonging to the family as a parent's child.

4.1 Ideas about Adulthood

To explain the meaning of return to the parental home during the Covid-19 pandemic, I will first try to look at the general ideas my research partners had about adulthood. In line with the multiple different ideas and sets of criteria that come up when thinking about adulthood in relation to different actors (such as the legal system, the state and sociological statistics, a general other represented by friends, acquaintances or strangers, and the family), also my research partners often talked about various different meanings, expectations, and ideals connected with adulthood. They often contrasted a subjective idea to one which they perceived as an external basis for judgment or recognition of their adult status by others. The subjective idea was based on personal responsibility for one's actions, while the external criteria important to my research partners seemed to be mainly material independence. While these two notions of adulthood were not identical, they probably stem from the same socio-cultural context. As I have outlined in the theoretical part based on other scholars (Brewer 2005; Fraser and Gordon 2006; Durham 2017; Foucault 1991) the significance of independence and responsibility as certain traits developed together with the notion of adulthood when the social order in Europe shifted from pre-modern to modern, from birth statuses connected with obligations to the ideology of equal independent citizens based on the universal ability to reason and thereby also consent and govern. The value put on

independence, reason and responsibility should therefore be seen as specific to this modern and by extension also late modern idea of adulthood, one type of maturity which is by no means universal. Independence and responsibility, which in the current research marked the external and internal perspectives on adulthood, had then been explained to me also as complementary by some of my research partners, who suggested that to really test out one's responsibility, the person first needs to be independent. In this vein, I will then (in chapter 4.1.2) analyze the move away from parental home as a step towards adult subjectivity (a conception suggested by (Cooper 2018), within which both the externally recognizable social positions and the approach to life reflected in the ways of feeling, thinking and doing converge), even if the move is not connected with financial independence.

4.1.1 Subjective and External Perceptions of Adulthood

The objectively measurable situation in terms of the sociological markers of adulthood was fairly similar for all of the research participants. Except for being university students, almost all of them had some kind of part-time job, but were not financially independent of their family of origin who supplied them with resources in cash and kind. They did not regularly live with their parents, but often considered both the parental home and their own place homes. This will be elaborated further in chapters 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. None of them were married or had children and their romantic engagements were diverse. Some were part of a romantic relationship, but only one cohabited with her partner. The relationship status of a few of the participants changed during the few months between the interviews, as some got together with a (new) partner. Some of those who were currently out of a relationship mentioned the difficulty of starting one in the pandemic, expressing an underlying wish to find a partner. Overall, the transitions through the sociological adulthood markers of finishing education, leaving the parental home, entry into labor market and formation of a marriage or union seemed to be in progress⁸.

However, when talking about adulthood with my research partners, most of these markers were only partially important for them. Their answers, when asked whether they felt like an

⁸ Considering my research partners from this outside perspective might lead one to treat them as emerging adults, as they would remain in this situation of gradual transition at least until the end of their studies, thereby not reaching the sociologically recognized full adulthood through a quick sequence of the adulthood milestones or markers. However, as I will also discuss later, not all of them considered themselves as being in-between the different statuses, some saw themselves as adults. Thereby, I consider their situation as liminal due to the lack of external recognition, or their own perception of in-betweenness of some of my research partners, or a combination of these. Although liminal or in-between, I will not automatically call them emerging adults, because not all of them correspond to the definition of subjectively feeling to be between the stages, as Arnett (2015) suggests to be the case.

adult, reflected multiple simultaneous, and yet different ideas or definitions of adulthood. There was a notion of a subjective feeling of adulthood, which was, in their accounts, contrasted by one or more external ideas of what adulthood means to other people and based on if other people may or may not perceive the respondent as an adult person.

The subjective notion or feeling of adulthood was generally associated with responsibility for one's own actions, their consequences and impacts on the world and others. From this perspective, they often suggested being an adult in the domains where they were able to take care of themselves and deal with (certain kinds of) everyday problems. Sometimes, they spoke of an altered way of thinking, compared to their younger selves. Thanks to the life experiences they already gathered, they reported to reflect more on their own actions, be more critical (as opposed to naïve) towards themselves as well as others, and to have abandoned previous idealized views of how others should behave and the way things should be. The new responsibility they took on, compared with childhood and youth, could be both empowering, as well as burdensome; while it was good to feel that life was in one's own hands and not managed and controlled from the outside by the parents, it also was grounded in the idea that "no one else would do it for you" as one of my research partners defined it.

In whatever ways the idea of responsibility was explained, by the majority of my research partners it was perceived as the most important characteristic to be an adult. This corresponds to Arnett's (2015) findings, when developing the conception of emerging adulthood. According to him, responsibility is the single most important trait for adulthood recognized by young people. As it is gradually attainable, emerging adults may feel both like an adult and not like one at the same time, feeling responsible in certain realms or situations but not in others (Arnett 2015). Some of my research partners, however, suggested being fully adult based on this definition of responsibility, and thereby would not correspond to Arnett's definition. In their insistence, being an adult was a kind of argument against their parents' authority. This will be discussed later.

The ideal of responsibility, however, might also be seen as embedded in a wider socio-cultural context. The origins of its current value and meaning are intertwined with the development of citizenship and the right to it. Once responsibility had to be proven by an external sign (such as ownership of property) in order for full citizenship to be granted, later it was recognized as a universal ability (McKeon 1956) when reaching a certain age, and nowadays it is also combined with the notion of a "responsible citizen" as "buzzwords for the

adoption and internalization of some of the core ideals of neoliberal or advanced liberal governance, in particular the devolution of what were formerly states' obligations and duties to other parties" (Trnka and Trundle 2017, 5). Responsibility in this sense marks the relationship between the individual and the state. It is now the individual who is made responsible for all aspects of one's own life, as (Laceulle 2018) suggests when describing the late modern discourse of self-realization. According to her, as individuals in late modern times face an abundance of options in all aspects of their lives, the popular discourse suggests that the "good" life is comprised of authentic choices based on purposes and values that one chooses and reflects upon. From this perspective, all the responsibility lies with the individual. Thereby, the responsibility for one's choices and actions and the ability to reflect on the impacts they may have, seem to be the crucial skills needed to be a full – adult – member of the society⁹.

Complementary to this value of responsibility, Fraser and Gordon's (2006) analysis of the development of the ideas and moral judgments surrounding dependency and independence point out that the modern emphasis on individual personality also highlights the idealisation of independence. "Fear of dependency, both explicit and implicit, posits an ideal, independent personality in contrast to which those considered dependent are deviant" (p. 22). In this way, independence is another important notion interrelated with that of responsibility and adulthood. Fraser and Gordon (2006) categorize independence into four "registers": economic, socio-legal, political, and emotional/psychological, leaving the classification open for possible further meanings. Similarly to findings of Holdsworth and Morgan (2005), a total emotional independence was not considered possible or desirable for some of my research partners, while others expressed the aspiration for autonomy and authority over one's own responsible and reasonable decision-making. The degree of independence in this realm (and whether it was perceived as sufficient or not) seemed crucial for the claims of adulthood within the family. These were, however, confronted by the external recognition based mainly on the economic and sometimes also legal registers.

For my research participants, specifically the economic register played an important role as an implicitly or explicitly expressed external view of adulthood. This external view constituted a

⁹ According to Laceulle (2018), the discourse neglects the circumstances, which one cannot control. While this is certainly true to some extent, some of the research participants also mentioned that responsibility entails a degree of circumspection for the unexpected occasions, such as having savings for the case of an accident. In this way the discourse then actually makes individuals responsible even when facing uncontrollable circumstances, and the difference between a child and an adult also lies in the ability to foresee these unexpected situations and be prepared for them.

kind of objectified understanding, and their own subjective feelings of responsibility were in a certain relationship to such objectified understanding of adulthood. In their accounts, however, this economic register was enhanced to the whole material realm, not solely in the form of financial independence (as in earning enough money to sustain oneself financially). One part of such “material independence” could include their “own” home, the independent residence, regardless of who financed it. Legal independence (such as reaching the age of maturity) was sometimes implicitly mentioned as an external sign of adulthood too. It is therefore in these meanings that I will further use the word “independence” as something that is important for the external views of adulthood. In line with this, it is important to stress that these external perspectives were only unequivocally connected to these two realms. While psychological independence was discussed as specifically (un)desirable by the research partners, political independence was not mentioned at all.

The external views of adulthood partially resembled the sociological markers, although not all of them were mentioned by my research partners and some were in some cases even contested (specifically the markers of marriage and having a child). The general nature of the external perspectives on adulthood seemed to be that of objectively assessable conditions, based on which other people would be able to recognize one as an adult. My research participants negotiated between their own subjective feelings of adulthood and these externally measurable conditions.

The notion of responsibility seemed to help them in these efforts. As a buzzword which is often used today, as Trnka and Trundle (2017) suggest, “responsibility” can not only encompass the relationship between the individual and the state, it also covers different domains of personal responsibility and care for close others. Trnka and Trundle suggest these responsibilities to be in competition, and thereby, what it means to act responsibly may be quite relative, based on which responsibilities, towards whom are taken into account¹⁰, while the externally measurable criteria are fairly specific.

There were multiple sources of external views on adulthood implicitly taken into account, and each of the research participants contrasted their subjective ideas to a different one. The specific relationship to the source and the situation(s) in which the concept of adulthood had

¹⁰ Such was the case of Tomáš, for whom it was responsible towards the family to stay during the pandemic at the parental home (as his mother wanted him to spend time there, it was financially beneficial for the whole family, because he did not have to pay the full price of the student accommodation, and when staying there and not going to public places he also protected the health of his mother), but by doing this, he could not fulfill the responsibilities of care for his partner, who felt the need to be physically close with him.

been used by the research participants in their lives influenced their overall feeling about themselves as an adult or not, and the definition of adulthood more broadly. In the account of Natálie, a 25-year-old trying to be recognized as adult by her parents, the external perspectives on adulthood were mentioned rather explicitly:

Petra: [...] Do you perceive yourself as being adult?

Natálie: (laugh) Yes, I perceive myself in that way.

[...]

I just have to laugh now, because it totally reminds me, like my, my age of seventeen and later, when I had to deal with this, in myself, because I had very much the feeling that my parents had a terrible problem with it, like to allow me that category of adulthood, yeah. So I still felt those limitations there, when on the one hand you want to say "Well, I'm already an adult," and "mind your own business". And then there is always "as long as we feed you" and "as long as you live under our roof" and so on. But I perceive adulthood in the way that one consciously takes responsibility for what one does and the possible consequences of it. And... it is certainly related to being able to take care of oneself, but I wouldn't connect it with the financial side, that the person would need to be financially secure. It's more like, that one can cope with everyday life and does not need assistance in some basic everyday activities.

In her narrative, Natálie described the conflict between how she had perceived herself for several years already (at the time of the interview she was twenty-five years old) and how she wished to be treated on the one hand, and on the other, how she felt she was treated by her parents. Subjectively, she felt like an adult and wished to be seen as an equal by her parents, striving for psychological independence. She felt responsible for her own life and did not want her parents to interfere in it. Nevertheless, her parents, who did not want to allow her the "category of adulthood" yet, pointed out the objective markers of financial and residential independence. Although having a part-time job, she acknowledged that she did not have full financial independence, and similarly, to be able to live on her own in the city of her university, she was dependent on the resources supplied by her family. "Adulthood" for her became a reason why parents should (not) interfere with their child's life and thereby also a domain to fight for. Using adulthood to support her hopes for a change in the family relationships, she did not include the criteria of financial independence to its definition

because then she would not be fully adult. In her use and understanding, therefore, the subjective idea of responsibility was not necessarily supplemented fully by the external notion of material independence.

But even if not dealing with a familial conflict and not trying to acquire more psychological independence through the concept of adulthood, others also perceived a difference between the subjective perception of themselves and some external perspectives. The talk with 26-year-old Barbora about the topic started in this way:

Petra: [...] Do you have the feeling about yourself, that you are adult?

Barbora: (chuckle) Well, I'll have to think.

Petra: Sure, I understand, I'd also have to think.

Barbora: But that probably depends very much on how people perceive adulthood. How each person perceives the criteria. So, like for a lot of people, I probably wouldn't be an adult, because I don't meet the basic criteria of being self-sufficient, being economically independent... and... but if I had to take it purely by my own feeling, I'd say yes. [...]

Similar to Natálie, Barbora also suggested a basic discrepancy between her own subjective feeling and something that she perceived as a general public criteria to recognize adulthood. Right after asking the question, she started to laugh, then took a bit of time before replying, indicating that this was not the sort of question she would usually be dealing with. The lack of clarity when answering the question may suggest, that her life and the lives of other young people might not necessarily be concentrated around the idea of adulthood, if they are not using the notion for their own purposes as Natálie did, or are not in any other way forced to think about adulthood¹¹. The everyday lives and the role of adulthood within them may therefore be probably seen better through the lens of different competing responsibilities. Achieving adulthood through the externally recognizable criteria is then only one responsibility amongst others, as I will discuss further in this thesis. Even the case of Natálie, who used the notion of adulthood to acquire more power when dealing with parents, could be seen as an attempt to balance the different types of responsibilities she had (towards the

¹¹ Tomáš, who studied psychology and was well aware of the conception of emerging adulthood was able to answer the question of his adulthood fast and with clarity, using this concept. Learning about it at the university probably also led him to think about his situation.

family, but also towards herself and the state, not only to be a “good child” but also a “responsible citizen” with a life chosen by oneself).

However, returning to the contrasting views of adulthood in Barbora’s account, when she tried to answer the question I asked, she first took up the perspective of an external reception of adulthood, which would not accept her as an adult. Only after acknowledging this, she gave me a clear answer of how she personally felt. This might suggest that in general she did consider herself adult, when she did not think about the meaning behind the concept of adulthood. However, when specifically confronted with the question, she considered the concept in more detail, realizing that even though she generally felt she was an adult person, her situation did not correspond to how she had learnt adulthood was defined by others. Taking the external view into account, she realized a contradiction.

Unlike Natálie, Barbora did not perceive the notion of adulthood as laden with efforts and hopes for a different family dynamic and increase in the psychological domain of independence, therefore the two ideas, the subjective feeling and the external material criteria, could peacefully coexist. Moreover, she acknowledged that others may not perceive her as a fully adult person, even if she felt like one. Both of the ideas were part of the answer, even though I specifically asked about her feelings. Her answer revealed an ambiguous conception of adulthood, which might allow for ambivalent perceptions of one’s adult status. Thanks to being aware of the external recognition of adulthood, she might accept both the roles of an adult and not-yet-adult person in different contexts which also means she has to face the various expectations connected to these different roles.

Both Barbora’s and Natálie’s accounts describe a kind of ambivalent experience. The ambivalence is caused by multiple voices or multiple social norms associated with adulthood. The internalized social norm constitutes a subjective idea of responsibility, while there is also a perception of an externally assessable social norm, important for the acknowledgement of one’s adult status by others. It is their ability to take these multiple voices into account, that creates the ambivalence, and based on the situation in which these different voices face each other, they are either urged to try to resolve the ambivalence (as in the case of Natálie) or decide to live with the contradiction (as in the case of Barbora).

Their answers, however, also reveal deeper assumptions of the socio-cultural context. The external view points to the expectation that an individual should be financially independent and self-sufficient in order to be a full member of one’s own society. Another research

partner, Elsa, even suggested that she was not an adult in specific areas such as the paying of social and health insurance or income taxes, because she was still studying and thereby free from these duties. In this sense, adulthood corresponded once more with the status of a responsible citizen. As Fraser and Gordon (2006, 599) put it, “The contention is that poor, dependent people have something more than lack of money wrong with them.” Thereby, based on this idea, the material responsibilities and obligations exist. The fulfillment of these demands are necessary for the person to be perceived as an adult (in the sense of a general norm which also serves to bring awareness to deficiencies). In line with this, young people perceive a certain social pressure to take such a kind of responsibility and abide by the social imperative. However, the individualist self-realization discourse also calls for personal rights.

Based on the abundance of options and the freedom to choose (even if such freedom might easily turn into a must to choose), the discourse of self-realization takes these things for granted (Laceulle 2018). Yet, as Natálie shows, such freedom of choice might be corrupted. In her case this happened through the monitoring and possible distinct views of her parents, on whom she was also materially dependent. Through her affiliation with the category of adulthood, she tried to assert her psychological independence, perceived as a right to possess an underlying freedom of choice. In line with the assumption that a lack of money signifies deficiency also in other realms, financial dependency seemed to entitle those on whom one is dependent on, to have a say in one’s life. Even if Natálie’s parents might not have meant to limit her unnecessarily and only wanted to make sure that she would make right and responsible choices, such monitoring was perceived as taking away the freedom to responsibly choose on one’s own. Independence then, can provide the freedom to choose, while responsibility should ensure that the choices made will be “good”. This constitutes a good reason to include the external views of adulthood as material independence when considering one's own adult status, because through dependency, one may be stripped of the possibility to even exercise one's own responsibility.

The two conceptions of adulthood presented through the accounts of my research partners correspond to Cooper’s (2018) understanding of adulthood in a Kenyan village. She suggests that adulthood, or in her terms adult subjectivity, consists of both the social positions that the people inhabit and their (in comparison to childhood or youth changed) ways of thinking, feeling and doing. In the present accounts the material independence also reflected certain social positions and relationships, different from those of children; it meant not living with parents, not being dependent on them financially, and thereby acquiring forms of authority

which others (mostly parents) used to have over my research partners previously. Responsibility then connoted ways of doing, thinking and feeling.

Nevertheless, Cooper goes on to suggest that although structural factors might impede the attainment of adult social positions, it would be limiting to view this as preventing adulthood altogether, as adulthood also entails a subjective maturation process and its outcomes. Such a view may enhance the understanding of the attitudes of the Czech students, although they were relatively privileged and probably not facing structural constraints as severe as the research partners in Cooper's Kenyan study. The young Czechs were well aware of the ideal and requirements of material independence. However, their full-time university studies, on the one hand did not leave them with enough time and energy to have a full-time job and thereby be completely financially independent, and on the other hand, the studies were also a legitimate reason to not be fully in such a position. This, however, did not hinder the subjective maturation process characterized as taking responsibility for one's actions and their outcomes.

As I have tried to show, adulthood in the accounts of my research partners consisted of subjective ideas according to which adulthood equaled responsibility and an external reception which understood adulthood as independence. These two conceptions could be contrasted with each other or placed hand in hand. Responsibility, in the views of my research partners, was seen as an ability, an approach or a way of thinking and doing things. Compared to this, independence in their accounts connoted the social positions, the conditions of living, or a state of (the lack of dependent) relationships to others. Although they mostly judged themselves, and status of their adulthood, based on the subjective idea of responsibility, material independence served them as an ultimate condition which can probe and prove their ability to be responsible. In this sense, it was not strictly necessary to be independent (if their situation did not allow for this or made dependence legitimate) but rather to have the abilities to cope in case there was no one to be dependent upon.

This was mostly reflected when talking about (parental) help. In a thought experiment with a gold credit card, 19-year-old Veronika explained the relationship she perceived between financial independence, help and responsibility:

Petra: What about a person, who has a gold credit card from the parents, because they are just terribly rich, and he'd never had to work...

Veronika: In my opinion, he is not financially independent... Yeah, he is not... I don't judge him, I don't think that it is, like, bad to have a gold credit card from the parents, but... well... if it is a person, who is like... [...] like the person would, in my eyes, sink incredibly low, actually, I would not consider him an... adult, at the moment... if he got into troubles, I don't know, the credit card would be blocked and he'd have to think about it somehow, so if the person would be capable of solving the situation, without asking parents for help, and if he'd be able to take care of himself on his own and find, for example... some kind of a part-time job, when it gets unblocked he could use the credit card again, so at that moment, in my opinion, he is like an adult, although he is still financially dependent on his parents, or he uses the credit card, so he is financially dependent on his parents, but... he is able to take care of himself and solve the situation. So at that moment I have no reason not to consider him... that he is not an adult. So like, at that moment it's, in my view, alright and... if the person is so lucky that he's born or has parents who are so rich that they let him have a gold credit card, he should simply use it, but at the same time, he should not be selfish or an idiot. And... he should use this, this... higher standard of living so that the world can benefit from it, and he should just not be an idiot, well, and he should not be ruthless. Yeah, I'd probably leave it there.

In Veronika's opinion, financial independence *per se* was not as important for adulthood as having the capabilities to be financially independent if the situation calls for it. This leads back to the subjective notion of responsibility for oneself as the main sign of adulthood. The most important thing in this exemplary situation was to be able to be responsible and take care of one's own needs. In this perspective, the unexpected situation (of a blocked credit card) can test this ability. In this sense, asking for help is seen as a failure, a sign of lacking capabilities to be able to take on the responsibilities in a certain aspect of life.

On the other hand, coping with the situation was perceived as an adult behaviour. This might not bear much importance when dealing with acknowledged adults, however, such probes and proves of adulthood were especially significant to my research partners, who often admitted that their social positions did not reflect full adulthood. They were often concerned about "not following the easiest path" in various aspects of their life. Because they were still financially dependent, and unable to proceed to an adult social position in this realm as long as they were studying, they tried to mature in other ways. And one of the ways to mature was to take care of themselves when living on their own.

4.1.2 Living Independently from Parents as a Step towards Adult Subjectivity

The living arrangements of university students living at the place of their university has been conceptualized as “semiautonomy” (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986, 1989) or “living away” (Jones 1995) from the parental home (rather than out of it). In this view, the move away from the parental home does not lead to the formation of an independent household and it is not a step towards adulthood (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986). Although this perspective might be very informative in acknowledging a specific liminal status of university students’ living arrangements, it does not take into account their experiences and subjective ideas regarding adulthood. Looking closer into this topic in the accounts of my research partners, I will now try to show, in which ways they, indeed, perceived the experiences of living away from their parental home as a step towards adulthood, and how there were the two notions of adulthood – the subjective of personal responsibility and the external of material independence – intertwined.

The first time not living with parents presented a different situation for all of my research participants. They suggested that it demanded certain skills that were not necessary at the parental home. Such skills could include managing one’s own budget, everyday care for oneself (cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes etc.), dealing on their own with other people (such as landlords) or problems (when something in the house got broken). There was no consensus on which exact skills were the most important ones. Moreover, some people were forced through the move away from the parental home to learn some of these skills from scratch, while others reported to have known them before. For the latter, the move constituted a part of a gradual process of growing up rather than a sudden turning point. But all of them perceived at least a slight change in their lives.

Another change, specific to the situation of moving to a different city (which was the case for all my research partners, at least for a few months) were the challenges connected to such a new environment. While some of my research partners suggested that they had been looking forward to the move away, they also acknowledged that the beginnings were tough. This could have been caused by the new duties around the house, but it was also very related to the overall new conditions; these young people moved on their own to a different city for the first time, where they had no previous background, family or friends. For some it was also the first time they started working. Those who moved away together with someone else from their previous life, such as a partner or a schoolmate, suggested this to be helpful for coping with the situation.

While to live on one's own requires overcoming these initial difficulties and in many cases learning new types of housework and how to manage them all, it also gave them more space to focus on their own life. This was also the main reason to look forward to the move. As Barbora said, when asked what changed after moving away from the parental home:

What changed for me? Well, basically I was suddenly far more... far more relaxed; I really started to focus on some of my own goals, on what one day my life should look like... I opened up a lot... how to say it... I opened up to both new experiences and new people. My social life has improved a lot.

The independence in residence supported responsibility and self-reliance on these two levels; On the one hand, it forced people to rely on themselves when dealing with new circumstances, and to take on more responsibilities, as they started living on their own and had to learn the skills of taking care of the house and their everyday life, without anyone else to do these things for them. But, on the other hand, it simultaneously provided the environment to take responsibility for one's own (life-)choices. It gave them space to try to "design" their own life and lifestyle, in line with the discourse of self-realization as presented by Laceulle (2018). Their social position thus changed, compared to positions in which they were during childhood and youth. They got less materially and psychologically dependent on their parents, gaining more authority over their own decision-making in both short-term and long-term matters. Moreover, by coping with the initial difficulties, they proved both subjectively and externally, that they are capable of living on their own. Nonetheless, this did not happen in the single moment of moving away, but rather gradually over time, when they had the possibility to try out and learn. As time went by, they got more secure in independent living, formed new social networks which allowed them further independence from their parents, gained more responsibility and thereby also got closer to the subjective ideal of adulthood.

However, in order to pertain to the external views of material independence associated with adulthood, the social position of independent living needs to be maintained. And as my research partners considered both of these approaches to adulthood, they also imagined their future living arrangements as (gradually) more and more independent from parents. Moreover, even when judging (hypothetical) others, they suggested that people of a certain age should not live in the same household as their parents any more. A few could imagine such cohabitation working for some hypothetical adults, but no one actually knew any

example of that from their lives. In other words, residing independent from the parental household was perceived as one of the social norms of adulthood. And interestingly, it was also perceived in this way by those who presented themselves as adults, while simultaneously considering a parental home as one of their homes (as I will further discuss in chapter 4.2). Therefore, it seems that for these young people the bond to the parental home does not constitute a straightforward obstacle on the path to adulthood, as was suggested to be the case when conceptualizing such a situation as semiautonomy (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986).

To sum it up, the accounts of my research partners uncovered two intertwined components of adulthood or adult subjectivity (Cooper 2018): the subjective one, which they connected with responsibility as an approach to thinking, feeling and going about practices, and an external idea of objectively assessable social norms, which connected adulthood mainly with material and sometimes also legal independence. Living independently, away from parents, was like a step towards adulthood for my research partners on multiple levels. Looking through the lens of the subjective idea of adulthood, the practical situation required and offered more responsibility. It was at once empowering and challenging. However, managing the challenges led to further empowerment in terms of their feelings of responsibility. In this view, only having the experience of living independently from their parents for a certain period of time could be sufficient to change the subjective identity towards adulthood, regardless of the further residential arrangement (so as a person with the experience of living away from parental home could have this changed subjectivity even if they then returned to their parental home). Nonetheless, the subjective identity is confronted with the external view of adulthood. In this external view, adulthood is connected with material independence. And according to the external social norms, grown-up children in this sociocultural context should not share the household with their parents. From this perspective, the state of living away from or out of the parental home itself signified a certain degree of such independence, but it was only one part of the material independence as a whole. Only taking into account the objectively assessable, this second perspective views the return to a parental home as a step back. However, as my research partners were not complete adults when considered from all perspectives, the parental home still had a meaning for them as one of their homes, and corresponding there to, they were expected by others to keep returning often to their parental homes.

4.2 Ambivalent perceptions of home

In this chapter I will explore my research partners' perceptions of home. I will argue that contrary to a popular straightforward idea of home as in a single place of residence, my research participants' perception of the concept was ambivalent, allowing for two or more places to be seen as home at once. In this perception, each home could bear a different meaning. Through a detailed exploration of these different meanings, I will try to understand the social realities of which the ambivalence is symptomatic, uncovering at least some important competing responsibilities that my research partners had to face in their lives.

4.2.1 Home as multiple places

All the sociological and psychological theories dealing with the transition to adulthood seem to be connected with an underlying assumption, that a person perceives only one place at a time as their home. Such conception of home also seems to be native to the socio-cultural context, as the Czech law on population registration says that 'A citizen can have only one place of permanent residence' (§ 10 paragraph 1 of Zákon č. 133/2000 Sb., o evidenci obyvatel, own translation). Similarly, even if the 2011 census form acknowledged that people can actually live in a different place than that of their permanent residence, when asked to write it down, it only provides space to fill in one other place, while in other categories (such as mother tongue or nationality) it allows for more options (Český statistický úřad 2011). It was also my own unconscious presupposition that the people would feel that only one place could be home rather than multiple. When I asked the participants "What does home mean to you and which one of the places is it (the one where you live with your parents or on your own)?" An overwhelming majority of participants, however, suggested both places to be their home, but each one to have a different meaning attached to them.

In scholarly debates, home is seen as a multidimensional concept. As such, it has been connected with the notions of place, space, feelings, practices or states of being. While it might correspond to the material side of a house or a dwelling, it might also be the lived space of social interaction, or hold both of these meanings.

Home can be singular and/or plural, [...] fixed and stable and/or mobile and changing. It can be associated with feelings of comfort, ease intimacy, relaxation and security and/or oppression, tyranny and persecution. [...] Home can be given and/or made, [...], an atmosphere and/or an activity, a relevant and/or irrelevant concept (Mallet 2004, 84).

The feelings my research partners associated with the general notion of home were mostly positive. When trying to describe the meaning behind the concept, they included the simple facts of having their own things in that place and being able to use the space (for Elsa, her university living arrangements felt less like home when she was not allowed to “even hang a picture on the wall”). But to use the space may also mean to feel that one can “be oneself”, connecting the feelings of relaxation, comfort and a kind of safety. Safety to be who one really is, not to have to answer to anyone else, but also a sense of general security. Home was also perceived as something stable, a place to which one can always return or something unchanging which might be necessary to leave in order to explore new things, but upon return will be the same as before. The sense of stability, security, relaxation or comfort related to both the material realm as well as that of social relationships, and could be connected to multiple places. Each of the possible places could then be imbued with a different mixture of such feelings, making the notion of home an ambivalent category, as multiple places could relate to this simultaneously.

Dealing with the notion of home among Turkish aging labor migrants in Vienna, Palmberger (2019) also described their feelings as ambivalent, suggesting the perception of home as something that is not clearly fixed.

Home for my research participants held a plurality of meanings and was not a fixed category but rather was free to be negotiated [...]. While feelings of home regarding Turkey were closely linked to it being the place of “origin,” childhood and socialization, they experienced Vienna as home mainly due to present social relations and as the place where family life took place and where friendship and community life were nourished on an everyday basis (Palmberger 2019, 81).

Although Palmberger’s research discussed a transnational context and the homes of my research partners were mostly located within one country, they described these in a similar way, considering two or more places as their home. Eva, a 24-year-old living in a shared flat with her partner and another couple, but spending the first lockdown at her parental home answered my question in this way: “Both are in a way, like a sort of my home. I take it, as if I have two homes, actually. One as the kind of familial and one as my own. Like, it’s kind of hard to answer.” It was also hard for her to find the general meaning of the concept of home, but taking a few moments to think, she was then able to describe her feelings. Yet, as she

shows in the quoted answer, choosing only one place as home was impossible for her. Many other interview partners have answered in a similar way.

The two homes might seem to oppose each other when considered from the sociological life-course perspective which views the leave of parental home as one of the definite steps towards adulthood, and thereby, life within the parental home is associated with childhood and adulthood is signified by the establishment of one's own household. However, the contradiction between the two homes is only based on the notion that one person may only perceive their home one place at a time. This assumption also underlies the idea that leaving the parental home is a definite milestone towards adulthood. The view of my research partners who did not perceive the two homes as contradictory acquires new meanings, when we allow two places to correspond to the notion of home, and allow the pathway towards adulthood to be rather a gradual process than a switch from one state to another. In the understanding of my research partners, both of the two places were homes, but each one meant something different to them. In this way the two places were rather complementary than contradictory. The two (or more) places constituted two (or more) different aspects of the general notion of home. Similar to the ideas in Palmberger's (2019) research, the issue for my research partners was not which of the places to call home, but rather how to divide time between the two (or more) homes.

4.2.2 Living with parents or on one's own

Dealing with the issue of how to spend time at both (or all) places that one calls home, the different meanings of the specific places come to the foreground. In this section, I will therefore elaborate on these differing meanings and how they were negotiated by my research partners. These included living with a group of family members which was contrasted with the notions of personal autonomy and independence, the perceptions of stability of home on the one hand and temporariness on the other, and ideas about one's future, both connected and not connected to expanding efforts to make even a temporary residence into one's home. When describing these different meanings, I am trying to bring attention to the tensions connected with the ambivalent perceptions of home.

In the accounts of my research partners, the "own" home was seen as one's own world. It was often connected with a sense of personal freedom to do whatever one wants, without having to take other people into account. This related to both the immediate, everyday activities (such as to have lunch whenever it suits the person on that specific day and not at a regular time

which is a fixed part of other household members' schedules), and the long-term personal goals on which it was easier to focus when one acquired a higher degree of freedom from the family. Complementary to this, for some it was also a place where they felt they could more easily "be themselves", as they also did not feel "monitored" (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005) by their parents. Through these perceptions, the "own" home could be seen as a place where one can (or has to) take on the responsibility to and for oneself easily, and where space and time allows for the development of a personal project of self-realization.

The parental home, on the other hand, was perceived as a place where one is part of a group, which calls for a different behavior than being on one's own. The young people said they had to take the needs of others more into account, while their own needs were often less respected than in their "own" home (a common example was, that other family members frequently disturbed my research participants when they were studying, which is something which would not happen in their "own" home even if they lived in a shared apartment). This was, however, not necessarily judged as either positive or negative, but rather accepted as a different way of being. It was perceived as natural, to some extent, as a thing that has always been that way. Therefore, the parental home might be more readily associated with the responsibilities one has to the other family members.

In the same vein, the parental home was mostly perceived by my research participants as an obvious ever present possibility. This seemed to be characteristic of the relationship rather than the place *per se*, especially for those whose parents moved out of the house of my research partner's childhood home. The ones whose parents did not move, however, often still had their own room and many belongings were still kept at their parental home. As such, the parental home represented stability, security and comfort. It could be argued that the young people expected the close family members, especially the parents, to be there for them, which represented a reciprocal responsibility the parents had towards their children. In this way, the parental home was also connoted as a possible safety net, if something went wrong, yet the hope was, a situation in which it had to be used as a safety net would not occur.

While the parental home provided stability in this way, the "own" home or independent residence supported my research participants' autonomy and, as I have described in chapter 4.1.2, led to an increased responsibility and thereby also worked as a step towards adult subjectivity. Therefore, although the general comfort and stability of the parental home might be relaxing, it must not necessarily be what a (young) person desires. As 19-year-old

Veronika suggested, (parental) home and the associated comfort were not important notions for her life, at least at that moment. The impulses she could acquire outside of the parental home and which helped her develop were more important to her.

Moreover, she also questioned the unchanging stability of the material realm of her childhood room at the parental home, contrasting it to her current life. „The facility stayed the same as when I... like... before I left for the university, but I have changed, so I would currently... I’d want, or in an ideal case I would need something different, but technically it’s not possible.“ Although the parental home stayed the same and was welcoming to her, her life developed into something different while she was living away. And because she perceived the idea of personal development as more relevant for her (current) life, the comfort associated with home became, at times, uncomfortable, forcing her to search for strategies to cope with the situation of living at the parental home during the lockdown, as will be discussed later.

As has been described, the comfort and stability associated with a parental home might provide security, but also be felt as problematic. On the other hand, the “own” home in this ambivalent liminal stage, might lack that sense of stability altogether. As Goldscheider and DaVanzo (1986) suggested, college dormitories might be characterized as a temporary living arrangement, because after graduation, one is also expected to leave the dormitory. They argued that this might lead to the return to the parental home, although there was no consensus regarding the desirability of such a move. Although most of my research participants did not live in dormitories but rather in private apartments, whether shared or not, they also perceived their living arrangements as a more or less temporary situation.

They had different reasons to feel this way, however, most of those could be viewed as typical for late modernity, as well as for the stage of life described by Arnett (2015) as emerging adulthood. While some were not sure whether they would eventually work in the same city as they studied in, others were skeptical about the future of their housing and careers after the recent experiences of multiple moves. Yet another factor considered in the equation was the possibility of future partners and relationships which might also call for a change of residence. Overall, the constant (possibility of) change made the “own” home feel temporary and unstable, hindering some to feel totally “at home” there. Barbora described her experience after she had to move from one apartment to another on multiple occasions:

Basically, for the time being when I was in the first apartment where I was for those two years, I started to perceive it as my home, and I perceived it more as my home

than the one in my hometown. But... then, as I actually moved all the time, my perspective changed a little. Because... now I basically have almost a problem to get used to somewhere, yeah, that actually, when I unpack somewhere, I'm already expecting to go away again in a few months, and I'm almost afraid to get used to the place, so... In fact, after these experiences, I started to take my hometown a little more as a home again. Or the apartment in that hometown.

While she reflected on the flip side of the immense possibilities and fast changes typical to late modernity and emerging adulthood especially, her account also shows that the parental home is seen as natural or given. When another place did not feel as a sufficient home, the feeling was instinctively re-associated with the parental home. In contrast, the place of one's "own" home has to first be created as a home. One needs some time to get used to it, and an effort to make the unfamiliar place into a home. Because of the risk of a sudden change, Barbora did not want to put in too much effort, which in turn shifted her view of home, causing ambivalence.

Elsa (who was 25 years old at the time of the interview) spoke directly to the notion of making one's "own" home:

the flat, that I have in [the university city], that is the kind of my own little place, which I made myself, in the way that it would be nice for me to live in, that I would like it there, that I have equipment which I want to have there, to make it nice for myself, so that I would like coming back, and it was not only about coming there in the evening, throwing my purse in the corner, taking a shower and going to bed.

Although Elsa saw her "own" home as temporary, she deliberately decided to put in the effort to make it into a home. Personalizing the facilities according to her own needs, wishes and taste, she imprinted her personal identity there. Therefore, her "own" home was her own world in the relational realm as well as material. In this way, she could feel the freedom and autonomy associated with young people's "own" homes, but she also felt "nice" in the space in general. She could use the space, in ways "being herself" not having to take other people into account, but also using the facility, having her belongings there, which expressed her identity. In this way, the apartment became closer to her, not only as a practical place to sleep over when she needed to go to university.

The temporariness of the living arrangements and consequently the processes of making a place into a home were at the heart of the ambivalent perceptions of home. When the living arrangements were seen as definitely and deliberately temporary to the extent that a return to the parental home was expected, even wished for in the future, and the homemaking processes did not take place, there was no ambivalence. This was the case of Světlana.

She was the only one of my research partners, who was absolutely certain that her home was solely one place – the village of her origin. She grew up there, similarly to her boyfriend. As she decided to pursue a university degree, she chose an institution in a city, where one of her siblings lived and worked. Moving in with her brother, she saw this as a temporary arrangement. She planned to go back to the countryside to start her own family. Although she had a job in the city at the time of our interview, she still imagined going back in the future. In contrast to all the other research participants, she did not see her future in a place far away from her parental home, and that was probably the reason why she did not try to make any distant place her home. Although she experienced similar feelings of personal freedom when living in the city of her university, she did not consider this place her home.

Contrary to that, Elsa, who took great care to create her “own” home, revealed in one of the interviews, that she was not sure whether she would stay in the city where her university was, or would move to another one after finishing her studies. Nevertheless, she was certain that she did not want to return back to the region where she used to live with her family. This view of her future signified a difference between her view and that of Světlana, and it seemed to also be the main motivation to put any effort into creating a different place as a home. Looking at the difference from this perspective, Světlana did not really move out of the parental home, although she lived elsewhere, while others did. This is the reason, she also did not consider any other place to be her home.

4.2.3 Social realities of ambivalent perceptions of home

As has been described, the ambivalence regarding home was connected with the tensions between the feelings of autonomy versus group belonging, the notions of personal development versus stability and comfort, and in general the ideas about one’s future as viewed through the lens of both past and present situations. These feelings and ideas are, however, embedded in and working in relation to wider social circumstances, as I will try to demonstrate now. First, the “own” home will be briefly discussed as an element of an individualized independent adult identity, and thereby fostering responsibility towards oneself

and individualized projects of self-realization. After that, the working of familial voices and obligations will be related to this notion, showing responsibilities towards close family members.

In line with the conceptions of adulthood in an individualized society, all my research partners who took part in the second interview imagined that their autonomy would increase in the future, not only in regards to their housing situations. As I tried to describe in chapter 4.1.2, an “own” home independent from parents was mostly seen as one of the conditions of/for adulthood. Moreover, even when confronted with a scenario in which other family members would require intensive help or care from my research partners for an extended period of time, they were reluctant to suggest a move back to the parental household. They imagined that even such responsibilities of care towards close others would not disrupt their autonomy, or they would not wish it to do so.

Of course, if it was from the point of view, that my mum had a car accident and she’d just need something like a more time-consuming supervision and help... I guess I would, as if it were to be for a longer period of time, so I would probably deal with it by finding an apartment in the same city, so that I could be close, but still had a sort of my own refuge there.

In her account, Elsa exemplifies the idea of not returning to the parental home, which was perceived similarly by all of the respondents who took part in the second round of interviews. Some suggested moving in with grandparents who lived nearby, or even to take the parent (or other family member) in need of assistance to the research partner’s own household rather than fully returning to the parental home.

This reflects the crucial importance of the notion of independence for adulthood in the current individualized society. Even if the parental home was during the time of the interviews, perceived as one of their homes, it was neither viewed nor imagined to be possibly viewed as their only home in the future. In this way, leaving the parental home was seen as definitive, even if gradual and with a possibility to return for several months during holidays or due to other circumstances. (Elsa herself stated to have lived mainly in her parental home for seven months during the Covid-19 measures). None of my research partners anticipated or wished for a complete return to a situation which might resemble the one before they moved away. This perception seemed to be culturally based, influenced by the notions of individualism of late modernity, in which people are expected to find and live their own autonomous “good

life”. In this way an “own” home is perceived as important for the constitution and nurture of individual identity.

The own home, own refuge, as Elsa called it, is meaningful both as a part of the individual identity, as well as in the relationship with the parents. Because it can serve as a direct leverage on them, it secures a degree of respect and autonomy. As Barbora mentioned when describing the change of her relationship with her mother after moving to a different city: “A huge difference made, that she suddenly knows that if something happens, if there's a very big conflict or something, I have another place to go.” The independent residence, even if (partly) financed by her parents, thereby changed the dynamics of the parent(s)-child relationship. In these ways, the “own” home can be understood once more as a symbol as well as practical means of autonomy from one’s family, which differentiates itself to the above described stability and family membership enacted in and represented by the parental home.

Nevertheless, such explanations may only account for one layer of the ambivalence of the perceptions of home. In line with Palmberger’s (2019) notion of relational ambivalence, it seems that the mixed feelings are also caused by voices other than those of my research participants. Natálie explained the expectations of her mother:

But with my mum it’s like... I think that my mum has not yet fully accepted, that I have already left the nest and that I am kind of like a self-sufficient unit, so my mum kind of calls often, often I hear ‘You don’t call us’ and ‘When will you come to us?’ And when I’m at home, I’m there too little. And when I am already there, it is still too little, so there it is...

Such a voice is heard and taken into account by young people when deciding how to divide the time between the different places of home. It might also have a much subtler form, as in the case of Elsa, who said “I am still welcomed at my parent’s, wanted, and it would never occur to me that I could in any way avoid this place.” In both cases, however, there is still a clear notion, that the parents want the children to keep returning to and spending time at their parental home, which might be seen as a specific responsibility, a kind of commitment or obligation these young people have towards their family of origin.

At the same time, however, there seems to be another, contradictory expectation connected to individualization. While the young people feel wanted and maybe perceived as a part of the parental home, they simultaneously feel that they should head towards adulthood (if they do

not feel they are already an adult) which, as has been elaborated on, in chapter 4.1, is associated with the ideas of responsibility and independence; hence taking responsibility for oneself, including one's own independent living. This notion of growing up and becoming autonomous is not only important for young people themselves, the relationship between them and the state, and their life within the society, but can also be perceived as yet another responsibility they feel to have towards their family of origin.

The whole tension was exemplified in the account of Tomáš. Talking about the second lockdown, when he spent some time at his mother's place and some at his "own", he described the expectations of his mother who wanted him to spend as much time at the parental home as possible. "In fact, I like going to [the university city] and be here, but again my mum asks herself, why do you go there when you have nothing to do there." And later, when reflecting on his situation, he suggested:

So I'm basically in a situation that threatens me that I could get into some kind of regression. [...] And I'm just trying to gradually fight my way into the adulthood. [...] But I'm just trying to take steps to be independent and responsible for myself one day, and possibly to be able to take care of my parents. Because, my parents, even before the trend began, they supported the trend of emerging adulthood by studying for a long time and not having a family and children for a long time. So, my dad is just over sixty and my mum will be sixty in a year, so... and just the health in our family... well... it tends to... not be completely stable. So I'm a little afraid that one day there will be a situation, when I'll have to take care of them and maybe interrupt what I'm doing, in my career, or God forbid, in my studies. Because, like if I don't-, if I don't have time to finish the studies before someone in the family will not be able to take care of themselves, then it will probably be quite restrictive for me... [...] And... so, I'm actually trying to gain that experience now and get as close as possible to that independence, so that in case, I can take care of them anyways.

The personal responsibility or feeling of obligation towards developing into an independent adult is not only connected with the late modern discourse of self-realization, but also connected to the anticipated needs of the family. The perceived obligation to take care of their parents in the future fuels current efforts to reach adulthood, and thereby also compelled Tomáš to take steps which would lead him there (one of which might well be the independent residence). In this way, there is a tension between the current and anticipated responsibilities

to the family. A contradiction between living in the parental home and spending time with the family on the one hand, and dwelling in an “own” independent home, which helps one reach adulthood and also allows the opportunity to take care of other family members, in case they need support.

At the same time the possible future needs of the family are seen through the lens of the process of self-realization itself, perceived as possibly threatening to it, which is explicitly expressed in the sentence “if I don’t have time to finish the studies [...] it will probably be quite restrictive for me.” This then suggests a tension between the late modern idea of self-realization as a product of one’s own authentic choices and the uncontrollable health conditions of other family members, the result of which might be the disruption of the “good life” one imagines for oneself. The awareness of this tension provokes the wish to set out towards this imagined life as quickly as possible.

4.3 The Return to the Parental Home during the Covid-19 Pandemic

So far, I have tried to discuss the general notions of adulthood and home, as perceived by my research partners. I have shown that adult subjectivity for them consisted of the subjective notion of personal responsibility and the external perception of adulthood as based on (mostly material and legal) independence. While none of them were fully financially independent, they also knew they were not perceived as full adults, which however did not hinder them to feel at least to a certain degree that they had encompassed adulthood due to the responsibilities they felt to have attained. The move away from their parental home was one of the important steps in attaining more personal responsibility as well as independence, and thereby a place of their “own” home bore the meanings of freedom and individual development. On the other hand, the parental home was a stable place of family belonging, and another type of responsibility – responsibility towards the close other – was connected with it. Both of the places (or even multiple in some cases) were then seen as home. The visions of the future and the decision-making about how to divide time between these places were driven by the various and often contradictory responsibilities associated with their personal individual aspirations as well as the social norms of adulthood and family belonging in the socio-historical context of late modernity with its discourses about self-realization and independence.

The decision to return to the parental home during the Covid-19 pandemic can be viewed as yet another instance of decision-making regarding the distribution of time between one’s

“own” home and the parental home. In this chapter, I will therefore focus on the way this decision and the mutual impact that the return to the parental home and attaining adult subjectivity had on each other. In the first section of this chapter I will focus on the first wave of the pandemic which happened in spring 2020. I will argue that the decision to go live with parents was caused by voices of other family members, and therefore staying at the parental home could be seen as fulfillment of my research partners’ responsibility towards their close others (in particular their parents and other family members). Therefore, it was mostly not seen as disempowering on their path to adulthood. If it had been seen as a way to help the young person (and thereby the person’s insufficient responsibility in a certain domain of life, even if temporary), it could have probably been felt differently, even in line with the way help was discussed (chapter 4.1.1) as disempowering and a step back on the path to adulthood. However, in this research, even in the cases when the help to the young person was felt stronger than their responsibility towards other family members (thereby it could be seen rather as the responsibility of the family towards the young person and not the other way around), it was chosen as the least disempowering type of help. The traditional sociological perspective which views the return to the parental home as a step back seems to be neglecting this possibility of parental voices wanting the child to come home and the responsibility of the young person towards them. After discussing these topics, I will focus on how the unusual time of the pandemic and the connected measures was experienced by my research participants, and how some of them conceptualized it later as a challenge which could be viewed as a step further in attaining an adult subjectivity.

In the shorter, second part of this chapter, I will continue the analysis with the second outbreak of Covid-19 in the Czech Republic which occurred in the fall of the same year. I will argue that due to more relaxed attitudes towards the risks and measures connected with the situation, also the decision-making regarding the division of time between one’s “own” and parental home became less strict. The idea of switching between the two places prevailed amongst my research partners. The suspension of on-site teaching however, brought different ideas about adulthood and student life to the foreground, as well as the various responsibilities young people face in this liminal stage of life.

4.3.1 The Urgency of the Unexpected

With the growing severity of the Covid-19 epidemic in Asia at the beginning of 2020, the Czech Ministry of Health began to gradually issue emergency measures. At the beginning of February, the flights from China were cancelled. As the disease spread to Europe and

eventually also appeared in the Czech Republic, flights from other seriously hit countries were forbidden in the beginning of March. These were quickly followed by bans on export of respirators and hand disinfection, ban on holding mass events, and ban on visits to inpatient health care facilities. A 14-day quarantine became mandatory for people returning from countries with a high incidence of the disease and for those who were identified as having close contact with someone diagnosed. Everything was happening quickly and the rules were put into force immediately. On March 10, the personal presence of pupils and students of all types of schools, including universities, was prohibited the next day on. Some university dormitories eventually responded by reducing the cost of rent when students left their rooms and had them sealed, not using the services for a certain period of time. Later, also a law protecting private flat rental contracts was approved, according to which such contracts could not be terminated because of missed payments when the tenant proved the inability to pay the rent due to Covid-19 and the related measures, but could repay it by the end of the year. These protective measures were not yet in place at the beginning of March however. On Thursday, March 12, a day after closing schools, a state of emergency was declared for the next thirty days. The country then closed its borders for travel to and from abroad. Further measures included the closing of all shops, except for pharmacies and grocery stores where part of the opening hours was reserved for people over the age of 65. From March 24, the free movement of persons was prohibited in the whole country, only the most necessary travels could be conducted (such as going shopping, helping family members in need of assistance, or taking a walk for one's own health in nature). People also had to start covering their mouth and nose everywhere outside of their home, yet face-masks were still scarce, which led to a wave of solidarity as everyone started sewing masks at home and distributing them to their neighbors and passersby.

In this rapidly changing environment, my research partners had to react, as their university commitments were suspended overnight and the state of emergency in which the whole country suddenly found itself indicated the weight of the situation. Should they stay at the city of their university or go to their parents? Each option could entail certain benefits, expectations or obligations – material as well as in the realm of social relationships. When planning the research, I thought going to their parents' during the pandemic would be an important decision for young people. I thought they would have many pros and cons, entangled with outside reasons, and would maybe discuss it all with their fellow students before heading to their parental home. I expected them to talk in length about the decision-

making process, explaining their choice to me, a person who decided otherwise and stayed a few hundred kilometers away from their family. Therefore, I was perplexed when they simply narrated the sequence of events, as if there was no real decision-making happening, as if spending the time with one's family was a simple and straightforward consequence of the closure of the universities. The decision was then rather implicit, on the go, described in a passive manner. At the first glance it even looked like it was decided for them.

Petra: Could you describe how the decision-making to return home now, for the state of emergency, took place for you? Or was there a long decision-making or it was more like... that you thought "Yeah, that's clear."

Eva: Well, it was pretty much decided by my parents and the family. And we made it just before the state of emergency was declared. When I was talking with, for example with my parents, they told me, well, that it would be better if I went, rather than staying there all the time alone. Plus, I wouldn't know for how long and so on. I couldn't just come [to the parental home] if something happened. So that's why my dad and I called one day, and just before the state of emergency broke out, he came for me right away, the next day, sometime in the morning. And sometime at four in the afternoon I was home. So it was absolutely great for me, that we managed to do it before the state of emergency. [...] Then I might not get home.

[...]

Petra: But your parents decided it for you primarily...? Like you haven't thought about it before?

Eva: Mostly yes. Yeah, because it didn't seem so serious to us at the beginning, I thought, "Well, we'll last a while longer here [at the home in the university city, where she lives with her partner and friends]" or something. That "I'd stay here a few more days." But it was slowly getting tougher, so we thought it would be better to go [to the parental] home and stay home.

The account of 24-year-old Eva illustrates that she still felt like she had two homes, both on the material level of home as a dwelling as well as in terms of her social relationships. In fact, the group she felt she belonged to foremost was her family of origin, and therefore the voices of the family members were crucial for her decision making. This phenomenon was clearly present in most of the accounts of my research partners, although the weight given to such

familial voices (as compared to one's own) and the exact messages taken into account could differ. Some parents feared for their children in such an unprecedented situation, some simply desired to be with them as they usually do, and in some accounts they persuaded them with the reasons of financial benefits for the whole family. The family of origin was taken into account by some research partners also through their own initiative, e. g. by Elsa who suggested that her usual lifestyle in which she always visited the parental home during weekends might endanger her family, because she had been used to taking the public transport, and therefore she decided to stay at her parental home.

While the accounts presented included belonging to one's family of origin and considering the voices coming from there, they did not give up the possibility of my research partners' own agency and decision-making. Although Eva's account seems to be strongly oriented towards the voices of others, as she asserts the return to her parental home to be decided mostly by her parents and the family, she then predominantly uses the grammatical category of the first person plural, saying "we made it just before the state of emergency" and "we thought it would be better to go home and stay home." In this way, she clearly constructs herself as a member of the group. Even when complying to their propositions, she inserts her own agency too. The decision seems to be an agreement, accepting of what her parents and family said, but she doesn't present it as an imposition, it rather seems that the family pulls together when faced with such an unknown situation.

This suggests that although the move away from the parental home may definitely lead to the change (a step forward) in the subjective perceptions of one's adulthood (as argued in chapter 4.1.2), the family of origin might still for many people constitute a group of primary belonging. The ties are not only material (in the form of financial dependence) but mainly emotional. It might be hypothesized that such emotional ties would weaken or be balanced out once the young person establishes one's own family, which the traditional sociological theories view as an important step towards full adulthood (in the milestones of forming a union and having a child). Yet, as has been suggested (in chapter 4.1.1, as well as in literature, e. g. Holdsworth and Morgan 2005), an emotional interdependence between parents and their children might prevail forever and a total emotional independence may not be perceived as desirable, although a certain degree of psychological independence is certainly wanted by young people. This might be the reason why the current research participants were sometimes expressly against the necessity of family formation for one's adulthood. Their social norms of adulthood in the form of responsibility and material independence in many cases did not

require a total independence (in all registers) from parents and the family of origin. The notion of responsibility rather required independence within the family, the autonomy to make independent decisions, in which they could responsibly take the emotions and ideas of others, as well as their own into account. Or, using the term suggested by Trnka and Trundle (2017), to juggle between and balance out all their competing responsibilities; the personal responsibilities (towards their university and workplaces, as well as towards themselves), the care for different close others (various family members, a partner, flat-mates, friends), and larger collectivities (such as the state). This also seems to be what they did when faced with the unprecedented situation of the pandemic.

Focusing in their accounts on the other family members' perspectives, the stay at the parental home was then mostly not conceptualized by my research partners as a form of help towards them by the family. In this way, the unprecedented situation which in fact led them to stay with their parent(s) was not conceptualized and perceived as one of inability to take care of oneself and thereby also as a situation of insufficient responsibility for one's own life, but rather, the decision to return was presented as a mutual decision reached when considering the voices of the family and its members. Eva explains: "they told me, well, that it would be better if I went, rather than staying there all the time alone. Plus, I wouldn't know for how long and so on. I couldn't just come if something happened." She then acts (responsibly) in line with her ideas as well as the familial well being suggested by others, rather than based solely on her own perceptions which she contrasts later "I'd stay here a few more days." This perception of the decision as reached through a mutual group agreement then creates space for their dignity and (partial) adult identity. The responsibility they learnt and/or proved by their move away is not threatened by the stay with their parents, because their agency and responsibility are part of the decision.

The case of Kristýna might seem very different. For her, the possibility of returning to her parental home was a kind of safety net which she had to use. To this extent, she admitted having felt like going back to the time before she left the parental home. But even her decision making and choice between possible options were driven by her efforts to keep as much of her adult identity as possible. With the pandemic measures closing gastronomic facilities, her workplace also had to stay shut. As a waitress she lost her income, and therefore she decided to go to live with her parents. Nonetheless, even this decision was based on her ideas regarding the severity of different types of help. She said she would feel more ashamed

to ask for money – ashamed in front of herself, her friends, and her parents – than to simply go home.

My parents keep telling me that I don't have to work, that there are money for my university studies [...], but I feel terribly uncomfortable asking them for money. I get some pocket money from them [...] which covers the rent and a bit of food, but otherwise I really make my own money for the rest of the things, and it is really uncomfortable for me to ask for money. So I rather went home and used the sources there, which were kind of secondary, like the full fridge or I didn't use my own warm water, than asking for the money.

Although she admitted here that it would not be a practical problem for her parents to increase the financial support they were offering, she tried to prevent this from happening. As she said “I really make my own money for the rest of the things,” she also expressed her pride in being at least partially financially independent. The shame in asking for money may be seen as a loss of this independence. Therefore, she would rather compromise her spatial independence than being more financially dependent. This was also less disempowering, because she could still keep her second home and planned to return there.

These accounts show two aspects of staying with parent(s) after a young person has lived independently. The group belonging constitutes reciprocal responsibilities between the close others. On the one hand, the young person has responsibilities towards their family of origin; the responsibilities to spend time with the close others (family members), care for their emotional wellbeing, try to not endanger them during situations such as the pandemic, or the possibly competing responsibilities towards reaching full adulthood, getting more independent and be eventually able to take care, also materially, of other family members. On the other hand, the family also has responsibilities towards the young person; after bringing up a child, the family should be there as a kind of safety net, as in the case of Kristýna, on their path to adulthood and onwards. Coming to stay with one's family of origin can be considered a type of help, in this sense, especially when connected with the loss of a job or other similar issues. In this case, it may be viewed as a disempowering step back, because the person is in some aspect unable to take care of oneself in the same way they used to. However, if there is no apparent reason for the young person to return and they do so because the family wishes them to do so, it may be viewed as fulfilling their responsibility towards their close others, prioritizing the current needs of the family over the future ones and over

other responsibilities the young person is facing in the everyday life, and thereby a (possibly) responsible decision. These two aspects may be intertwined in reality, and Kristýna is a good example of this. Although she primarily came to be helped materially, the idea that her parents are happy to spend time with her was also present throughout her account.

In these ways, the time spent at the parental home was not conceptualized as a step back on the path towards adulthood by most of my research partners, or it was chosen as the least disempowering one. But the ambivalent perception of home, in which both of the places constituted homes although each bore different meanings, was another crucial element why the stay at the parental home could proceed and not be perceived as a type of disempowering help. Together with this, the specifics of the situation also played a significant role in the decision-making (or lack thereof) and perceptions of the return during the first wave of Covid-19 and the first state of emergency. I will now try to look closer into these aspects.

As mentioned above, the regular lifestyle of my research partners often consisted of noticeable, frequent switching between the two places of residence. While Eva's decision-making took place before her father picked her up with all the things she needed, some others only reached this decision with their family when they came for a visit on the weekend. Both being there for the weekend and then taking or accepting the decision to stay longer was only possible thanks to their ambivalent perceptions of home. When the parental home is still considered to be one of the homes, going and being there, even for a considerably longer period of time is not such a special occasion. Just in the same vein, the concepts of living away (Jones 1995) or semiautonomy (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986, 1989) suggest that university students can keep returning to the parental home even for a few months during the summer holidays. Through this perspective, being temporarily in the parental home is actually quite normal for university students.

Considering a parental home as one of the homes can also be connected to having one's own belongings there, or even a fully equipped room (as discussed in chapter 4.2.2). Even if these material things may be to some extent remnants of the past rather than facilities corresponding to the current needs and tastes, they still provide the material background necessary for a day-to-day life. Moreover, they allow the feeling of home in the sense that it is something known and unchanging. Such characteristics of stability and an ever-present safety net, which were associated in general with my research partners' parental homes (when specifically compared to one's "own"), also played a role in the face of the unprecedented changes caused by the

pandemic. Both the speed and the extent of the changes caught my research partners, as well as the rest of the world, by surprise. They recounted that during this initial phase of the pandemic they were spending hours in front of television waiting for the news, or constantly checked for updates on the internet, to keep up with the new unknown situation, to know what was happening, and to learn what they should or could do to protect their own health, help their relatives and some also to be useful for the society – trying to find volunteering opportunities or work opportunities in their local hospitals and communities. Opposed to the risks and whirlwind of changes, the safe haven of the parental home could work as a calming balm.

Eva's sentence "Then I might not get home." from the opening of this chapter, is especially revealing in how much insecurity was experienced during the initial phase of the pandemic. For almost the whole first year of the pandemic, there was, in fact, never a nationwide measure prohibiting the move of persons within the Czech Republic, especially if it meant to visit one's parents. In the international context, however, cities were closed into isolation and the concern something like this would come was indeed in place. If the family of origin is the primary group of belonging, it is natural to want to be spatially closer to them, especially in such a case where other spatially bound commitments (the university studies) are suspended.

But the parental home did not only stand for stability and family ties for the university students, it also stands contradictory to the "own" home associated with independence, responsibility, and personal development. Such qualities were probably not at the center of attention when the people faced what was perceived as an immediate threat of the pandemic. In fact, times of global crises tend to bring close ties to the foreground and strengthen them (Sanrı and Goodwin 2014). Yet, in the long-term perspective, the responsibilities associated with the self-realization discourse, the projects of personal development, and the expectations associated with externally recognizable adulthood were still important for young people to reach adult subjectivity in the individualized late modern society. And as natural as was the possibility to come and stay at their parental home during the time of the unusual Covid-19 conditions, it was also natural to return to their "own" home once the conditions would be over or the parties would consider it reasonable. Therefore, the research partners kept their previous means of accommodation as much as possible – even if some had their dorm room sealed, not to be used until the measures were over. They all kept paying the rent for a place they did not live at for several weeks or even months, or at least, in the case of Alena who returned from abroad and had no contract for accommodation in the Czech Republic, kept

looking for a new place to move to once the situation changed for the better. Hence, the stay at the parental home was perceived to be temporary and not conflicting with the ideal of living arrangements increasingly more and more independent from their family of origin (as described in chapter 4.1.2). Furthermore, even if they did not spend time at the “own” home, it still offered them a degree of autonomy within the family. They kept the option open to be able to leave their parental home any time they had wanted, having a possible, legitimate and spatially independent place to go. This option provided them certain power within their relationships with other family members, ensuring a degree of authority over their own decision-making.

Nevertheless, the temporary period of living with their parents was unnoticeably extended from weeks to months. The initial expectations regarding the duration of the risks and the measures taken against them were fairly optimistic, unmarked by any previous similar situation. Remembering this time, Tomáš recounted in fall:

In fact, the first time I was really mad at Corona was when they just closed our university. Until then, I took it as something abstract that didn't concern me and only, I don't know when it was, if in February or March, I don't even know, so they just wrote to us from one day to another that the next day there are no classes and that we should go home. So I went home, I thought, well, I'll be home for a while, when it calms down a bit, we'll get back on. Yup, vacation. Like a week or two. Well... That didn't happen. The situation tightened. The measures tightened and everything suddenly felt totally like, like in a state of war.

While he made the sudden decision to go to his parental home with the idea of a short break for a week or two, he got stuck there for months, which was also the case of many others. The state of emergency was extended twice until it ended on May 17, with some of the measures gradually being lifted from April 20 onwards, (the universities could open on this day in a restricted form of one-on-one appointments for the students in their final semester, a week later others could also schedule one-to-one meetings), while other measures (such as the duty to wear a face mask in public transportation) stayed in place until early summer. Although the stay at their parental home was justified by these extraordinary conditions and could be perceived as a visit rather than a full-fledged return, the whole situation made it feel different than a regular visit. Sooner or later, the more practical issues of familial cohabitation took

over the sense of urgency and immediate threats that had been experienced at the beginning of the pandemic.

The measures, one of which restricted meetings in public to a maximum of two people, constricted social interactions into homes and the possible risks of the situation put everyone under pressure. The young people taking part in my research mostly did not perceive themselves to be directly threatened, as they described themselves as young and healthy. This can be attributed to the statistics in the news, recognizing that older people dealing with other health issues were those most at risk. The perceptions of risk could, however, differ significantly within the households or other social relations (such as romantic ones) which took place as long distance relationships. Such differences in the perception of risk created tensions within the relationships and could become one of the arenas in which one's power could be manifested.

This was the case of Natálie, who was abroad in a country which was much more severely hit at the time. After her 14-day quarantine, she came to her mother's home for a visit and then stayed longer.

The situation connected with the state of emergency was suddenly so distressing, as I say, at [her mother's] home they started to experience it terribly, my mum stopped going to work, so suddenly I, my sister, my mum and my stepfather who also went to work only partially, so suddenly we were all pretty much together [...] so really suddenly such a cohabitation which, even when I was at high-school, it wasn't like that [...]. I know that I thought, already the first week, that I would go away as soon as possible, because I couldn't make it there, that it was awful, that the... atmosphere there wasn't pleasant, and like my mum pushed me to act the way she wanted me to, so that I didn't go around, I didn't meet anyone, [...] so there was this psychological pressure there, quite strong.

[...]

I respected it for a few days, but then actually, when I went out to walk the dog, I just met a friend outside who lives in [the city of her mother's home] yeah, for me the situation, I have already experienced my own hysteria or my own fear when I came back from abroad. [...] It wasn't a threat for me anymore and I didn't perceive it even as a threat for the family. [...] My mom didn't know about it, of course, when I met

someone outside, I think, like she could have guessed it, but she didn't even ask, I think she knew that if she asked she'd learn things that she didn't want to know.

The contained relationships caused distress, which was ascribed to the extraordinary situation. Natálie, who fought particularly hard for her status of an adult (as described in chapter 4.1.1), now had to be subjected to her mother's perceptions of risk. And her mother, driven by fear, tried to exercise her parental authority. However, Natálie, trusting her own judgment, decided to act otherwise after some time. Seeing herself as responsible (enough), she behaved in the way she perceived as right, trying to balance her responsibility towards her family with the responsibility towards her own wellbeing. In order to not disturb the atmosphere at her parental home and the family relationships, part of her responsible judgment also was not to tell her mother directly. This may be seen as a kind of emotional work (cf. Hochschild 1979) to protect relationships. Her mother joined in this emotional work by not asking about her choices. Although "she could have guessed it" her mother did not require a complete subjection to her demands, thereby acknowledging that she did not have the power to make her grown daughter comply with her ideals. Even though she tried to exercise "psychological pressure" to enforce her requirements and position, she did not have the power to claim them. Natálie's possibility to leave for her "own" home also probably played a role in this, because if her mother tried to demand obedience too harshly, Natálie could have left the place.

While familial cohabitation could get difficult because of the differences in opinions and the changing balance of power-relations connected to this stage of life, young people also faced other challenges connected with the pandemic. The university courses were problematic, because neither the universities nor the teachers were ready for the distance education implemented. Similarly, the facilities present at the parental homes might have been my research partner's own past rooms and belongings, but in many cases they did not meet the requirements needed for these distance university studies. Amongst others, the problems with internet connection were fairly frequent; many of my research partners could only connect to the internet in certain parts of the house. As a result, such rooms had to be shared with others – siblings who were also studying for school or university classes or parents forced to work in home offices. These people and their needs were perceived by my research partners as needing to be taken into account, (an approach specific to their parental home is described in the chapter 4.2.2), while my research partners felt they sometimes did not get the same consideration from them. The mixture of these issues experienced at the parental home

eventually led many to yearn for a return to their “own” home and some to ultimately schedule a date of return, even if the measures were still in place.

In spite of this, looking retrospectively, some assessed the situation in which they found themselves as a challenge, which became another tiny step on their path to adulthood when handled successfully. Coming to a parental home for an unusually long period of time after getting used to residential independence, the personal responsibility towards themselves and for a whole household was tested, and the responsibility to care for close family members was practiced. The skills to care for oneself, which some of them were forced to acquire after moving away, could be put to the test in an environment in which their parents were used to and ready to take care of them. Even the act of partially taking responsibility for the management of a household (and not waiting for the parents to tell one to take out the trash, but doing it based on one’s own attention and judgment) could be perceived as being a bit closer to an adult than before. Through these acts of dealing with the material aspects of running a household, also the consideration of others could be manifested (in this example, it was particularly consideration for the parents who would otherwise have to manage the household or do the chores themselves). This initiative of taking on the duties which others would previously have to handle also shows an acknowledgement and respect for those other people, their own personal lives and other duties they might have. Such acknowledgement and respect may be viewed as another instance in which the responsibility towards others or the care for the close others is revealed. Similarly the successfully shared common rooms, those with internet connection, or Natálie’s emotional work, might also be seen as an instance of this type of responsibility.

4.3.2 Tired of Protective Measures

The last nationwide anti-epidemic measure of the first wave was lifted on July 1, when the covering of the mouth and nose in public spaces was only a recommendation and no longer an obligation. After this, putting other measures into action was the responsibility of local authorities. Such easing of the measures led to what most of my research partners described as a relatively normal summer. At the end of the semester already, during the exam period in late May, some of them returned to their “own” home, while those who would usually spend the summer break at their parental home did so this year as well. Regardless of this, they finished the semester unusually fast due to an altered approach from the universities and teachers. Afterwards, in summer, some of them decided to leave out previously planned trips abroad, in order to not put themselves and consequently also their families in danger, but other than that,

they could enjoy the break as usual; with friends, part-time jobs, and summer camps. Yet, after such a relatively “normal” summer, a second outbreak of the disease came in autumn.

The winter semester in the Czech Republic generally starts between mid September and mid October, based on the conventions of each university. On September 18, the ministry of health put a nationwide obligation to wear a facemask in all public interiors into effect. The decision to switch the teaching and learning at the university to a distanced form was within the competence of the regional hygienic stations, which often decided to do so unexpectedly within a few days after such an announcement. (The abolition of on-site teaching from the next day forth, was not an exception) and without previous communication with the management of the universities. Although the measures were now supposed to be local, based on the situation of each region, most of the universities across the whole country were gradually closed to the personal presence of students and for teaching, around the beginning of the semester. The state of emergency was declared again, from October 5 onwards, and schools and universities closed nationwide from October 14 onwards. In practice, most of the universities were already closed at that time because of the hygienic stations¹². These measures were, however, taken up again so suddenly and without consultation with the universities, that the students had by that time planned to go to the cities of their universities, and if they wanted to move, they had already arranged different apartments or made new contracts at their student dormitories.

Moreover, together with the nationwide closure of schools and universities, this time, stay at student dormitories was also forbidden from October 14 onwards, for everyone with another place of residence within the Czech Republic. The news was announced only two days prior to the implementation. This measure stirred up a wave of disapproval among the concerned students, who were also supported by some teachers or even principles, resulting in an online petition against it. Thanks to it, the students were eventually allowed to stay, if they provided an affidavit stating reasons why they could not return; such as a job commitment within the city of their university or due to their familial situation. Nevertheless, the whole incident may

¹² For example, the start of teaching at the Masaryk University was set on October 5, and according to Martin Bareš, the rector of the university, a crisis committee worked throughout the summer months to take on measures with the goal to account for the public’s health as well as the highest possible quality of teaching (Bareš 2020). The regional hygienic station, however, decided on September 22, that from the next day on, the personal presence of university students in teaching situations would be banned (KHSJM se sídlem v Brně 2020). The rector was publicly against this, criticizing the actions of local authorities, which, however, did not change the situation for students. In this case, less than two weeks before the actual beginning of the semester (and in other universities, this happened only a week before the beginning, or even two days into the semester, as was the case of the University of West Bohemia) on-site teaching was forbidden.

be seen as a conflict of social norms, expectations and obligations externally connected with the status of a university student and the real experiences and feelings of the people in this position.

While the politicians perceived students as only having the commitment towards their university studies which was now temporarily suspended in their view, the students who signed the online petition highlighted in their comments that they also had other commitments at the place of their university (most commonly a job) and that although on-site teaching was forbidden, it did not mean that they could study from anywhere. Some stressed the importance of certain minimal conditions (such as internet connection, their own working spaces etc.) necessary for distance learning, while others pointed out they had arranged their practical curricular internships at the city of their university, and their work was still needed by their employer as well. Moreover, the politicians expected the students to simply have another home, based on the place of permanent residence, to which they could always return. Yet, except for the mentioned infrastructure of such a place (missing internet connection or one's own space), the students signing the petition also considered the health of their parents, often perceiving it irresponsible towards them to come from the bigger city where they potentially met many people, take the public transport with another chance of potential risk contacts, and thereby to disturb the relative safety of a countryside house. The urge to do this within two days would not even give them an option to plan such a move. In these ways then, the external political view put students into a simplified position of dependent children. From this perspective, they did not have commitments (other than university studies), independent needs or responsibilities and the parents were still waiting for them at home, ready to help out. While their parents might be available for them and willing to help, the young people expressed in their petition that such help might not always be perceived as the best solution. That they are gradually trying to become full citizens through working, even if part-time, and they take on the responsibility towards such a workplace. In line with the self-realization discourse and the regular neoliberal demands for personal responsibility, they also valued their independence, and in fact, perceived it as their right. They also called to the responsibility they (presumably) felt towards their family, suggesting their personal judgment to be more responsible and able to take into account the health situation of their parents in comparison to the nationwide decision taken by the politicians.

In this environment, my second interviews took place, at the turn from October to November, and my research partners generally shared the views of the students signing the petition. The

in-depth interviews, however, provided a closer insight, showing that their ideas regarding living arrangements changed in comparison to spring, together with the change in their perceptions of risks connected to the situation. Although the second wave of the disease was in many ways more intense than the spring one, my research partners reported that both their own and their parents' risk perceptions were more relaxed. This corresponds to the overall statistics in the Czech Republic. The European National Panels' panic index regarding Covid-19, which is based on the concerns about one's own health, the health of the loved ones, and the degree of preventive measures taken by the person, was the highest in the Czech Republic in March 2020 when it reached over 70%, decreasing in June to the value of 50%, and escalating again at the end of October to 62.6% when it started decreasing again (STEM/MARK, Nielsen Admosphere, and NMS Market Research 2020-2021). Another study conducted by Ipsos in the first half of October found out that although the feelings of threat had been increasing since summer, at this point the proportion of people who believed that the country had chosen an optimal approach to the situation had decreased, especially among young people under 29 years, and all age groups except for the oldest (above 66 years) relaxed when it came to compliance with the preventive measures, mainly in restricting social contacts (decrease from 62% to 30%), and staying at home (decrease from 57% to 30%). Many people also stopped wearing protective gloves, limiting the use of public transport, wearing face masks, or trying to avoid places with a high concentration of people (Ipsos 2020).

Due to the changed perceptions of risk and the weariness of the whole Covid-19 situation which was lasting for too long already, the abrupt autumn changes were not perceived by my research partners and their families with such a sense of urgency and worry as was the case in the spring. Instead, the general idea among my research partners was to lead as normal a life as possible, even though the protective measures were restricting this. Moreover, the experiences from the spring lockdown, when some of them had to constantly take into account other household members while their independent space was not entirely respected and the situation was unexpectedly extending from weeks to months with no view of an ending, made them more careful about going to their parental home. Therefore, when I asked them in autumn where they would live for the semester which had just started, they did not limit their stay to a single place, but rather considered multiple places with their different meanings as homes. The question was again concerned with how to distribute time between these places within the changed circumstances rather than which place was "their home".

While the initial plan counted on on-site teaching, which would automatically answer this question (for most of the time) for them, its suspension brought to fore the other factors influencing their decision-making. The suspension of on-site teaching itself allowed the possibility to study from different places, also the parental home, but at the same time a legitimate reason to live independently from one's parents disappeared. This meant, that if the young people did not have any other legitimate commitments in the city of their university (such as a job or a partner whose existence was known to their parents), they could spend more time with their parents if they wanted to, but if they did not, they often had to find such a reason. Veronika who also lived in a student residence and had to deal with the new governmental measure about not staying there explained this:

I was determined to stay there [in her "own" home], because for me it was like, in a way that I would lose my freedom [if she went to live in the parental home]. So that was also the reason why I stayed there. I was also in a hurry, in a hurry to find an internship, so that I could have an argument as to why I need to stay there and didn't have to lie.

This reflects the tension between, on the one hand, the personal responsibility towards oneself, the individualist needs and aspirations stemming from the late modern discourses of independence and self-realization, and, on the other hand, the responsibility towards close others, the group belonging to one's family with its connected obligations and expectations, which might be demanded by family members, but also by the external voice of the emergency governmental measure. The individual aspirations are consistent with the social norms of adulthood, which my research partners were gradually trying to attain or subjectively felt to have reached already. In contrast to that, the obligations and claims connected with the familial belonging were in line with the view of financially (partially) dependent students as not corresponding to the adulthood status based on the category of (mainly financial) independence, and therefore not entitled to it. Such effort to keep residential independence previously legitimated by the on-site participation in university studies was then also an active struggle towards the external recognition of their adulthood.

In line with this, the statements of insufficient infrastructure and inadequate conditions for university studies at the parental home, might, at least partially, be seen as their claim to the right to a certain degree of independence the young people seem to feel to have. Arguing with their apparent student status and the commitment to the obvious main occupation, their

studies, then appears as a more legitimate reasoning than would be the case with adulthood. As discussed in chapter 4.1.1, they are aware that they must not be perceived as fully adult by others. Their student status is, however, not contested. Therefore, even if the on-site studies are suspended, their agency may still be expressed and exercised through the needs ascribed to their studies in general, and it is in this way that they challenge the familial obligations when trying to achieve their individual aspirations.

This aspect of the situation is then commensurate with the traditional sociological idea in which return to the parental home equals a step back on the pathway to adulthood. In this situation, however, it did not mean that the young people would only pursue their individual aspirations and stay solely at their “own” homes. They also wanted to and did spend time at their parental home, some of them even more time than at their “own”. The important thing was to keep their agency and thereby also the authority to decide between multiple competing responsibilities, which in this instance could be exercised through the choice of which place to stay.

5 Conclusion

I started this research as a kind of therapeutic project, when I was experiencing the insecurities of the liminal situation – feeling mature but knowing I do not comply with all the externally recognizable criteria for adulthood. I was curious about how others in a similar situation feel and deal with it. Not wanting to return to my parental home during the time of the nationwide lockdown, I asked myself why would people in this phase of life make this choice, and how would they perceive such a return. This question was underlined by the assumption that the return to the parental home would not be a voluntary action, that the young people would not want to stay with their parents after they acquired at least partial independence from them. I thought that there would have to be further specific reasons for such a return besides the risks connected with the pandemic, such as the consequent loss of a job and thereby also (part of) one's income.

These assumptions aligned with the traditional sociological approach to adulthood, which views the passage to adulthood as a sequence of five life-events, leaving the parental home being one of them. Other such markers are defined as the end of education, entry into the labor market, marriage, and the birth of a first child (Gauthier 2007). Inherently taking this perspective, I assumed, similarly to the scholars using these theories (such as Jones 1995), that once young people acquired their independence and freedom by moving away from their parental home, they would not want to stay with their parents any more, and they would only choose to do this if they needed help from them, for example, if a job and income was lost during the pandemic. As these sociological theories could conceptualize my feelings and assumptions, they became my starting point for this research.

However, upon further examination it became clear to me that there are phenomena – specific living arrangements of university students (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1989, Jones 1995) and cases of returning to the parental home, in which it was not perceived as a disempowering step back (Warner, Henderson-Wilson, and Andrews 2012) – which cannot be explained by the simplified theoretical position of the five transitional markers. This created a gap which I was curious to explore, and the request of Warner, Henderson-Wilson, and Andrews (2012) for further qualitative research in this area encouraged me to take on this project and design an open-ended research in the unprecedented situation which offered new empirical data.

When designing the research, I tried to treat the situation of the pandemic with special care, considering different possibilities of remote methods. In the end, however, only online

qualitative interviews could be used in a meaningful way. In preparation for these, I especially considered my research partners' privacy and mental wellbeing, because of the stress and other difficult emotions possibly caused by the unexpected situation in which we all found ourselves and about which I was gathering data. I was therefore surprised and unprepared when my research partners talked with ease about the situation and seemed to not find the precautions I made (such as the use of the encrypted video-conferencing service) very important. However, the research design which counted with two interviews several months apart proved useful. Initially it was suggested in order for my research partners to be able to make sense of the stressful experiences, which did not seem to be necessary in the end. However, with the development of the situation, which I did not anticipate at the beginning, this research approach allowed for additional questions to be asked after a preliminary analysis, and an insight into the perceptions which changed throughout the development of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Starting with the assumptions described above, I was surprised at how naturally and generally in positive terms my research partners perceived their parental home. They also talked about their "own" homes with an enthusiasm which was similar in extent but differed in content. The perceptions of home seem to have been previously estimated to merely explain the results of quantitative research projects (cf. Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986; Jones 1995), and the outcomes of the current research did not correspond to these estimations. It was ultimately this realization that led me to reconsider the theoretical framework in order to understand the experiences of my research partners better.

To do so, I tried first to put the traditional sociological approach in a broader context and to look at it as if it was only one part of the specifically western, modern conception of maturity. Following in the footsteps of other scholars (Brewer 2005; Durham 2017), I argued in the thesis that this specific view of maturity called adulthood is associated with characteristics such as reason, responsibility, independence or experience, and that these qualities are assessed in distinct ways in various domains of life. As such, legal adulthood and thereby citizenship as well, is based on age, but as a social norm assessed or required by others, adulthood rather connotes the behavior considered appropriate for that age. The traditional sociological approach then takes the five milestones mentioned above as markers of desired adult behavior. However, even as an adult, when facing one's family, especially parents, one may never cease to be viewed as a child. These many aspects may create tensions in the experiences of the young people on their paths to adulthood.

While the sociological criteria might be important for demographic purposes or even for the people who experience these life events closely one after another, the university students in my research who were in a longer in-between stage, did not view such life milestones as the main criteria for adulthood. Rather, they constructed the notion around certain inner qualities, most unequivocally responsibility, which can be reflected in the behavior of a young person. Nevertheless, they did recognize that others, most significantly their parents, but also general others, could judge them based on at least some of the tangible criteria favored by sociologists. In the interviews we spoke specifically about material independence (living on one's own and being financially independent). The notion of adulthood and the different possible definitions based on internal (responsibility) or external (material independence) criteria, could then become one of the specific sites of a power-struggle within the family. In this way, some of my research partners claimed adult status based on their inner criteria to gain more autonomy within the family. Others who did not seem to feel the need for more autonomy within the family, were however, fine not being considered a full adult yet and/or did not seem to consider this status something so important to their current lives.

The notion of responsibility then seemed to more fully encompass the everyday realities that my research partners experienced. While the externally recognizable criterion of material independence is fairly specific, responsibility has nowadays become a kind of buzzword (Trnka and Trundle 2017). As such, it may refer to the responsibility towards the state and society (at least partially achieved when reaching material independence), responsibility to oneself (e. g. to use all available possibilities to live a “good” life in line with one's values) or to close others (e. g. the contradictory voices of both a partner or family members to spend time with them, or the contradiction within the family circle to both spend time with the family and try to reach independence in order to support the family members later). A specific behavior, such as the return to the parental home, could bear signs of both responsibility (when done with the needs of the family members in mind) and the lack of it (when happening as an act of help, such as in the case of losing a job, and thereby the decrease of one's own personal material responsibility).

Although the subjective perception of adulthood was not based on externally recognizable markers, when specifically talking about living in their “own” homes, my research partners did perceive a connection between the higher degree of responsibility associated with adulthood and the independence gained through the move away from their parents. Their “own” home could allow, foster, and demand more responsibility than the life with one's

family. Although this connection between the externally and internally recognizable criteria was clear, the notion of adulthood which is based on inner responsibility (rather than an apparent independence) can incorporate the wider social realities of the young people's lives.

Using Trnka and Trundle's (2017) conception of competing responsibilities, I took the achievement of the tangible criteria for adulthood as one of many possible responsibilities the young people could have. Trying to understand their everyday experiences and decision making regarding where to spend the nation-wide lockdown, I was interested in the other responsibilities that competed with the idea of independent residence as an appropriate way of living for an adult person. Due to the contradictions between them, these responsibilities created ambivalent feelings around my research partners' perceptions of home. Therefore, I explored this ambivalence to analyze the contradictory responsibilities.

Even though all of my research partners have experienced living in a different place than their parents and considered this as a more or less significant move towards adulthood, all of them also still considered the parental home (or one of their parental homes) one of the places they call home. Most also considered (a) different place(s) their home(s), and did not want to choose only a single place. They were dealing with the question of how to divide time between their multiple homes rather than figuring out which place was their home. Looking closer at the distinction between the parental and an "own" home, these places proved to bear different meanings. While an "own" home was associated with independence, responsibility and the future, the parental home was foremost a place of group belonging. The "own" home also stood for the responsibility to reach the tangible criteria for adulthood, become materially independent from the family of origin and possibly take material care of other family members in the future. Such responsibility may be seen as the responsibility towards oneself, the family, as well as the state and fellow citizens. On the other hand, the parental home with the voices of other family members, who want the young person there, indicates the responsibility towards the close others, the responsibility to act according to the other people's wishes and to take care of the other people's emotional needs at the time being. The heart of the conflict between competing responsibilities then lies both at the intersection of the public sphere of the late modern society and close family relationships, as well as the contradiction between the different demands, present and future, that the family-group claim or could claim. And while most people might generally face certain contradiction between such and other competing responsibilities, it seems that it is specifically the liminal stage with its different sets of expectations (usually connected to the stages of childhood/adolescence

and adulthood) that amplifies and balances out the powers on both sides of the contradiction, thus in regular life leading to ambivalence rather than a definite choice.

Nevertheless, the unexpected situation of the pandemic disrupted the course of regular life. As the disease and the fear of it spread across the globe eventually also reached the Czech Republic, one of the first governmental protective measures was to close universities, and so on-site education was cancelled. With the single most obvious legitimate reason for not spending time at the parental home gone, the university students were faced with yet another instance of decision-making regarding the division of time between the different places. Contrary to the idea stemming from the sociological theories, that a young person's return to the parental home is a kind of backtracking on the path to adulthood (Jones 1995), and thereby should be undesired by young people, most of my research partners did not seem to give much thought to this issue. Their situation was, of course, different; they did not fully reach the milestone of leaving the parental home, as they still felt it was one of their homes. Yet, as they considered their "own" home to be another one of their homes, the sociological notion of semiautonomy or living away could not describe their situation either, because it views the "own" home as a mere practical arrangement to allow the opportunity to study far away from the "real home" which is still with the parents (Jones 1995; Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1986). How then can the choice to stay with the parents during the pandemic be understood?

In the thesis, I have suggested that the lives of my research partners were stretched between multiple responsibilities, and not solely driven by the idea of achieving the milestones of adulthood suggested by sociologists (cf. Gauthier 2007). It was also through this perspective that I tried to explain the decision why young people stayed at their parental home during the first wave of the pandemic in spring 2020. Connected to the notions of stability and family belonging, the parental home could both provide help to a young person returning due to reasons such as the loss of a job and income, as well as subtly require or even strongly demand the young person to fulfill their responsibilities towards other family members; not put them in danger, spend time with them and face the unprecedented situation together in the familial safe haven called home. In general terms, both scenarios seem easily imaginable and the reality may often be a combination of both.

Among my research partners, the aspect of help sought out by a young person at their parental home was not very common, and when it was suggested as a reason to come live with their

parents, it was connected to the idea that parents also appreciate children visiting. Thereby, it was also presented to me as the least disempowering type of help that could be asked for. More often, however, my research partners presented the decision to come stay with their parent(s) as one made for them or requested of them by the family. Here the interests of the other family members were kept in mind. It can be viewed as a way of making decisions between the competing responsibilities of usual life. First, the competing personal responsibilities to get to know one-self, cultivate the self and make the life-choices according to one's values and with the idea of the personal future and the "good" life in line with the self-realization discourse. Second, the responsibilities towards the close others to care for them and their needs. And third, the responsibility to the state to eventually become a productive responsible citizen. When faced with the unprecedented situation of the pandemic, my research partners decided to temporarily give priority to the responsibilities of belonging to a family, responsibilities towards others close to oneself. When putting the interests of others into the foreground, many of my research partners were then able to construct this decision, not as a step back on the path to adulthood, but rather as a temporary stop or even a step forward. Because this responsibility was seen as the most important in the given situation, and the personal responsibility to know and cultivate one-self could be practiced in this changed environment.

In this way, it seems that the phenomena of going back, forth and through the milestones sociologists view as markers of adulthood, also called hopscotching (Mendoza-Denton and Boum 2015), might be better understood by taking into account these other responsibilities the young people face in their lives, not only the responsibility to reach the tangible criteria. While these other responsibilities might not be seen as part of the criteria to reach an externally recognized adult status, they still play a role in the young people's own perceptions regarding adulthood. This was what my research partners focused on, the inner qualities (such as responsibility) rather than the externally assessable conditions (such as a full-time job).

Nevertheless, staying at the parental home during the pandemic was often accompanied by difficult situations. Some of my research partners experienced conflicts due to differing perceptions of risk. Another common issue was the infrastructure and spatial arrangements which were insufficient for all the family members to be able to change their lifestyle to study and work from home. Although unpleasant, some (even though not all) of my research partners managed to view these problems productively in retrospect, as challenges. Being able to cope with them was then perceived as another small step towards attaining adulthood.

However, when the second outbreak of the disease, accompanied by the second lockdown, happened in fall, these challenges or difficulties also played a role in new decision-making.

In fall 2020, the situation was already better known and most of my research partners decided in a much more relaxed way; either to stay at their “own” home or to be switching between the places in a similar manner they usually would, even if the distribution of time would now be different than before. There were various reasons for these decisions. Pretty much in line with the traditional sociological theories, certain commitments (most significantly that of a job) near to one’s “own” home, could cause one to stay there rather than staying with the family. This reason seems to be considered legitimate, as it was often used by students who signed a petition against the closure of student dorms. Interestingly, they also argued that returning to the parental home could put other family members in danger. The same concern – not putting other family members in danger – was one of the reasons for staying with the family, that my research partners used in the first wave of the pandemic. Although it might seem contradictory, the students signing the petition were put under time pressure. They merely had two days between the governmental announcement and the day they should leave the dorms, and therefore often used the inability to arrange a safe means of transportation as an important reason to support their standpoint. On the other hand, many of my research partners in spring were picked up by car by another family member or decided to stay at their parental home anyways, so they did not face the same issue. The possibly problematic infrastructure at the parental home was then another reason often used by the advocates of the petition. This reason accompanied by other accounts of difficulties experienced in spring were also significant for my research partners, some of whom actually turned to other legitimate justifications to stay at their “own” home, such as quickly finding a job there in order to avoid having to go back to living with their family.

This change from spring to fall shows that the responsibilities towards one’s family, to spend time together and look after each other’s wellbeing, lost priority when compared to the competing responsibility for a young person to become materially independent and autonomously follow a self-chosen life path. This may be attributed to a general greater familiarity with the lockdown situation, a less urgent sense of crisis, as well as other life changes, or the possible difficulties of cohabitation experienced in spring. Nevertheless, the initial decision to stay with their parents in spring, which was usually not considered a step back on the path to adulthood, points to the importance of close ties that seems to be naturally strengthening in times of global crises (cf. Sanrı and Goodwin 2014).

Such close ties seem to be an important aspect of a young person's life. One's parents may be the guardians (dis)allowing the externally recognized adult status. The family of origin, and by extension the parental home, may be the most straightforward place of support, the imaginary safe haven or safety net. It can also be the idea of future care, the responsibility to be there for the parents once they grow old, that motivates young people to become more materially independent and reach adulthood. But it seems too great a simplification to view the path towards adulthood only as a process of increasing independence from one's parents. The analytical lense of competing responsibilities allowed me to see that when making decisions, my research partners took into account both their independence and the wellbeing of close others, including the voices of family members who wanted them to spend time at their parental home. The relationship between the parents and their children is clearly changing as the child grows towards the stage of life that we call adulthood. But it does not seem to be a simple change from a dependent child to an independent adult who eventually supports their aging parents. Rather, the responsibility and support between parents and children seem to be reciprocal, manifested in different areas (such as material or emotional ones) and evolving throughout their whole lives. Young people returning to their parental home because they feel it is their responsibility towards the other family members, are thus not necessarily compromising their responsibility to become independent adult citizens, that they have towards the state. It rather seems that their ability to negotiate between the different responsibilities that they face in their life is what leads them to become truly adult in familial, personal and public spheres.

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List of Interviews and Other Field Materials

All interviews were conducted in a digital format via a video-conferencing platform, recorded and transcribed. There was only one exception; one interview took place in-person during a walk. This is mentioned at the specific entry. This interview was also recorded and transcribed.

All names were changed as part of the process of pseudonymisation, through which I am trying to protect the privacy of my research partners. In this list of interviews, I also use the pseudonyms.

First round of interviews (spring 2020)

Interview with Eva. April 20, 2020. Duration 2:08 (official interview ca. 1 hour, the rest of the recording is rather a casual conversation; transcript only contains the official interview).

Interview with Elsa. April 22, 2020. Duration 1:05.

Interview with Alena. April 24, 2020. Duration 1:46.

Interview with Tomáš. April 27, 2020. Duration 1:06 (technical issues, the interview starts at 00:37 of the recording, which has the total duration of 1:43).

Interview with Světlana. May 8, 2020. Duration 0:44.

Interview with Barbora. May 11, 2020. Duration 0:47.

Interview with Veronika. May 11, 2020. Duration 1:24.

Interview with Kristýna. May 11, 2020. Duration 1:02.

Interview with Natálie. May 18, 2020. Duration 1:05.

Second round of interviews (fall 2020)

Interview with Veronika. October 31, 2020. Duration 2:04.

Interview with Alena. November 2, 2020. Duration 1:18.

Interview with Natálie. November 2, 2020. Duration 1:01.

Interview with Elsa. November 3, 2020. Duration 2:12.

Interview with Barbora. November 4, 2020. Duration 1:28.

In person walking interview with Tomáš. November 5, 2020. Duration 1:10 (duration of recording is 1:51, official interview is supplemented by casual conversation; transcript only contains the official interview part).

Websites regularly consulted during the research

Among general news, these websites specifically informing about the situation related to Covid-19 in the Czech Republic, the connected measures, and the reactions of universities were consulted throughout the whole research (April-November 2020). Last time I accessed these websites for the purposes of completion of this thesis in September 2021, and the specific addresses I provide here are versions of the websites as accessible at that time.

Complete list of governmental measures connected with Covid-19 taken in the Czech Republic in 2020: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/epidemie-koronaviru/dulezite-informace/vladni-usneseni-souvisejici-s-bojem-proti-epidemii-koronaviru---rok-2020-186999/>

Official statistics of the Covid-19 situation in the Czech Republic: <https://onemocneni-aktualne.mzcr.cz/covid-19>

Websites of universities across the country and their current responses to Covid-19

Academy of Performing Arts in Prague: <https://www.amu.cz/>

Charles University: <https://cuni.cz/UK-6311.html?news=9843&locale=cz>

Czech Technical University: <https://www.cvut.cz/informace-cvut-ke-koronaviru>

Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague: <https://aktualne.czu.cz/cs>

Masaryk University: <https://www.muni.cz/en/coronavirus>

Mendel University in Brno: <https://mendelu.cz/koronavirus>

Palacký University Olomouc: <https://www.upol.cz/>

Prague University of Economics and Business: <https://www.vse.cz/english/covid-19/>

Silesian University in Opava: <https://www.slu.cz/slu/cz/koronavirus>

Technical University of Liberec: <https://www.tul.cz/en/university/official-desk/covid-19/>

University of Hradec Králové: <https://www.uhk.cz/cs/univerzita-hradec-kralove/koronavirus>

University of J. E. Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem: <https://www.ujep.cz/cs/covid-19-info>

University of Ostrava: <https://www.osu.cz/aktuality/>

University of Pardubice: <https://www.upce.cz/koronavirus>

University of West Bohemia: <https://www.zcu.cz/cs/Students/emergency.html>

Vysoká škola technická a ekonomická v Českých Budějovicích:
<https://www.vstecb.cz/koronavirus/>

Other field materials

The petition against the prohibition of stay at student dormitories:

Petice proti zákazu bydlení na kolejích. Author: Martin Lekeš. Retrieved from https://www.petice.com/petice_proti_zakazu_bydleni_na_kolejich on October 13, 2020.

Emergency measures regarding the closure of schools (dated March 11 and 12, 2020):

Mimořádné opatření – uzavření základních, středních a vysokých škol od 11. 3. 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.mzcr.cz/mimoradne-opatreni-uzavreni-zakladnich-strednich-a-vysokych-skol-od-11-3-2020/> on March 21, 2020.

Usnesení vlády č. 201: Krizové opatření o zákazu školní docházky na základních, středních i vysokých školách, vzdělávacích a volnočasových aktivit ve školství. Retrieved from <https://apps.odok.cz/attachment/-/down/IHOABMNHPTS8> on September 2, 2021.

Cancellation of emergency measure no. 201:

Usnesení č. 421: Zrušení krizového opatření č. 201 ze dne 12. března 2020 o zákazu účasti žáků, studentů a některých dalších osob na vyjmenovaných druzích vzdělávání. Retrieved from <https://apps.odok.cz/attachment/-/down/RCIABNRL6FFN> on September 2, 2021.

Emergency measure (dated April 15, 2020) substituting cancelled emergency measure no. 201:

Mimořádné opatření Ministerstva zdravotnictví ze dne 15. dubna. Retrieved from archive: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200519164106/http://www.mzcr.cz/Soubor.ashx?souborID=40951&typ=application%2Fpdf&nazev=Mimo%C5%99%C3%A1dn%C3%A9%20opat%C5%99en%C3%AD%20-%20uzav%C5%99en%C3%AD%20%C5%A1ko!%20a%20%C5%A1kolsk%C3%BDch%20za%C5%99%C3%ADzen%C3%AD%2C%20s%20%C3%BA%C4%8Dinnost%C3%AD%20od%2020.%204.%202020.pdf> on September 2, 2021.

Schedule of re-opening of schools in spring 2020:

Harmonogram uvolňování v oblasti školství. Retrieved from <https://www.msmt.cz/harmonogram-uvolnovani-opatreni-v-oblasti-skolstvi> on April 20, 2020, updated June 15, 2020.

Abstract (English)

The concept of adulthood is a part of our everyday repertoire, but we hardly ever stop to think about it. Its contemporary meanings emerged in the context of European modernity, together with the value placed on the ideas of independence, responsibility and reason. These are assumed to be the qualities that distinguish an adult from a child or an adolescent. But how can we recognize that one has “enough” of these abilities to be considered an adult, when becoming one seems to be a gradual path? A traditional sociological perspective suggested that adulthood is marked by specific transitional events, such as moving out of one’s parents’ home and starting one’s own household. Viewed through this perspective, returning to living with one’s parents again is a sign of failure, a step back on the path to adulthood. However, in the past few decades, there seems to be a trend towards prolonging the ways adulthood can be reached, and they are becoming more complex with possible steps back and forth. This calls for new theoretical conceptualizations. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, our everyday lives changed rapidly, and this dramatic change also influenced the living arrangements of many young people in the Czech Republic. Significant numbers of university students, who had previously moved away from their parental home, went back to living with their parents during the nation-wide measures protecting against the spread of Covid-19. In my research, I asked how these young people experienced such a return to their parental home and how they made sense of it with regard to their path towards adulthood. I conducted two rounds of in-depth qualitative interviews with affected university students during the first two waves of Covid-19 in the Czech Republic. The gathered data was supplemented with my observations of the situation as covered in media and on social networks. In the accounts of my research partners, their subjective ideas and feelings regarding their adult status were usually presented in relation to some external, objectifying, socially recognizable criteria for adulthood. I learnt that the move away from the parental home was indeed a step towards adulthood for my research partners on both of these levels – the internal and external. But even though they moved away from their parental home, they often considered multiple places as their homes (including the one where their parent(s) lived), and the possibility of spending long periods of time in either of them seemed natural. Moreover, attaining an independent life was not the only responsibility they felt to have. They were also concerned about their close others (such as family members or partners), and their lives were influenced by responsibilities connected with their studies and/or work. Their decisions were made through the negotiation of the different pulls of these competing responsibilities.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Das Konzept des Erwachsenseins gehört zu unserem alltäglichen Repertoire, jedoch halten wir kaum inne, um über dieses nachzudenken. Die heutigen Bedeutungen des Erwachsenseins entstanden im Kontext der europäischen Moderne und gehen einher mit dem Wert, der den Ideen von Unabhängigkeit, Verantwortung und Vernunft beigemessen wird. Es wird angenommen, dass dies die Eigenschaften sind, die einen Erwachsenen von einem Kind oder Jugendlichen unterscheiden. Jedoch stellt sich die Frage, wie man erkennen kann, ein "Genug" von diesen Fähigkeiten zu haben, um als erwachsen zu gelten, wenn die Entwicklung zum Erwachsenen scheinbar einen schrittweisen Prozess darstellt? Eine traditionelle soziologische Sichtweise besagt, dass das Erwachsensein durch bestimmte Übergangsereignisse gekennzeichnet ist, wie etwa den Auszug aus dem Elternhaus und die Gründung eines eigenen Haushalts. Aus dieser Perspektive ist die Rückkehr zum Elternhaus ein Zeichen des Scheiterns, ein Rückschritt auf dem Weg zum Erwachsenwerden. In den letzten Jahrzehnten scheint sich jedoch ein Trend entwickelt zu haben, der die Wege zum Erwachsensein verlängert, welche mit Schritten nach vorne und zurück immer komplexer werden. Dies erfordert neue theoretische Konzepte. Als die Covid-19-Pandemie über die Welt hereinbrach, veränderte sich unser Alltag rapide, wobei dieser dramatische Wandel auch einen Einfluss auf die Lebensumstände vieler junger Menschen in der Tschechischen Republik hatte. Während der landesweiten Maßnahmen zum Schutz vor der Ausbreitung von Covid-19 lebte eine beträchtliche Anzahl von Universitätsstudenten, die zuvor aus ihrem Elternhaus ausgezogen waren, wieder bei ihren Eltern. In meiner Forschungsarbeit ging ich der Frage nach, wie diese jungen Menschen eine Rückkehr in ihr Elternhaus erlebten und wie sie diese im Hinblick auf ihren Weg zum Erwachsensein verarbeiteten. Während der ersten beiden Wellen von Covid-19 in der Tschechischen Republik führte ich zwei Runden von qualitativen Tiefeninterviews mit betroffenen Universitätsstudenten durch. Die gesammelten Daten wurden durch meine Beobachtungen der Situation in den Medien und in den sozialen Netzwerken ergänzt. Meine Interviewpartner berichteten ihre subjektiven Vorstellungen und Gefühle in Bezug auf ihren Erwachsenenstatus in der Regel in Relation zu einigen externen, objektivierenden, gesellschaftlich anerkannten Kriterien für das Erwachsensein. Ich erfuhr, dass die Interviewten den Auszug aus dem Elternhaus tatsächlich als einen Schritt in Richtung des Erwachsenwerdens auf zwei Ebenen - der internen und der externen - sahen. Aber auch wenn sie von ihrem Elternhaus wegzogen, betrachteten sie oft mehrere Orte als ihr Zuhause (einschließlich des Ortes, an dem ihre Eltern lebten) und die Möglichkeit, längere Zeit an einem dieser Orte zu verbringen, erschien ihnen selbstverständlich. Außerdem war die Erlangung eines unabhängigen Lebens nicht die einzige Verantwortung, die sie zu tragen glaubten. Sie sorgten sich auch um ihnen nahestehende Personen (z.B. Familienangehörige oder Partner) und ihr Leben war von Verpflichtungen im Zusammenhang mit ihrem Studium und/oder ihrer Arbeit geprägt. Ihre Entscheidungen wurden durch das Aushandeln der verschiedenen Einflüsse dieser konkurrierenden Verantwortlichkeiten getroffen.