



Claiming Time Within Migrations

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Introduction

Whereas “migration has conventionally been conceived of as a predominantly spatial phenomenon” (Brux et al., 2018: 3), today it is increasingly common to find research on migrants’ everyday lives that focuses on the temporal dimension (Anderson, 2007; Andersson, 2014; Barber & Lem, 2018; Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths, 2014; Griffiths et al., 2013; Jacobsen et al., 2021; Tsianos et al., 2009).

The analytical lens of time has been adopted to investigate the multiple facets of migration: the hegemonic role of time in the movements of acceleration and stasis in border areas (Andersson, 2014); the uncertainty produced by waiting inside camps and detention centres (Griffiths, 2014; Campesi, 2015; Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018); the different forms of illegality in the existence of those migrants kept at the margins of arrival societies (Bryan, 2018; Lucht, 2012); and the role of capital accumulation in shaping migration in different areas (Barber & Lem, 2018).

To describe the condition of migrants before and after their arrival in the destination country, scholars often resort to the metaphors of limbo (Brun & Fábos, 2015) and stuckedness (Hage, 2009). Here again, migration scholars urge extreme caution when using these metaphors, as they may give rise to the belief that migrants live within a parallel or suspended temporal dimension (Jacobsen et al., 2021; Ramsay, 2019). As pointed out by Jacobsen, Karlsen and Khosravi (2021), these metaphors are nevertheless helpful for more closely understanding the experience of subjects whose position in time and space is in betwixt and between (Turner, 1967), having no place in the order dictated by the nation-state system (Brun & Fábos,

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2015; Malkki, 1995; Menjivar, 2006). Conceived as linear, the temporal order of the nation-state gives non-citizens the feeling of being outside of its time; they feel suspended, trapped, in limbo or prolonged uncertainty. Thus, temporal uncertainty is the hallmark of migration experiences (Griffiths, 2014), and it is migrants themselves who depict their relationship with time and space in terms of limbo, suspension, waiting, and stuckedness (Sanò & Zanotelli, 2022, Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021a; Karlsen, 2021; Griffiths, 2014). The ethnographic data collected both inside and outside the reception system for asylum seekers and refugees often reveals a varied geography of time, within which it is possible to recognise all four of the cardinal points reported by Griffiths: sticky, suspended, frenzied, and ruptured.

Of course, these temporal experiences may blur or overlap, depending on the circumstances and the stage reached by the person directly involved in the recognition and regularisation process.

A feeling of prolonged uncertainty inside a reception centre might combine with one of frenzy due to the speed with which a recognition or denial decision is issued or with which migration policies transform regularisation procedures. This interpretation of the relationship between time, temporality and migration helps us to avoid describing migrants as stuck, suspended and out of time. On the contrary, it invites us to think in terms of juxtaposition or, if we prefer, to return to the starting point of heterochrony, in which different times and temporal experiences are juxtaposed within the same space, e.g. the reception centre. Through the case of Alasan, Stefania Spada (*infra*) demonstrates the co-presence of different acts of temporalisation. She uses an account of a court hearing in relation to an application for international protection as a starting point for recounting how institutions employ the category of time to certify and verify the credibility of asylum seekers, creating a short circuit between the subjective dimension of time and the procedural one.

Concepts such as limbo, uncertainty and temporal uncertainty are used both hermeneutically and therapeutically, thus partly serving to overcome the desire to consider migrants outside their historical context.

Navigating Spatial and Temporal Im-mobility Inside and Outside the Reception System

In the shift from the tendency to mobilise only the dimension of space to an assessment of the impact of time on migration, interest in the notion of im-mobility has grown and become enriched with additional meanings. Some of these start from the indications of Glick-Schiller and Salazar (2013), according to whom previous interpretations provided by theorists of the so-called *mobility turn* did not take into account the element of stratification to which time control and disciplining *dispositifs* are subject. Numerous variables converge on the terrain of im-mobility, meaning, for example, that migrants do not enjoy the same freedom of movement as tourists. Although useful from a theoretical point of view, debates on the mobility turn clash with the multifaceted nature of migrants' geographical and biographical trajectories, which are subject to controls, blockages, stasis and sudden accelerations. Altin and Degli Uberti make an effort to recognize

the importance of the historical context in exploring im-mobility. In their paper (*infra*), they examine the historical layers of reception in Italian border areas (Trieste and Bolzano), analysing how time and forms of im-mobility have been differently experienced by asylum-seekers and Ukrainian refugees, as a result of, amongst other things, the politics of bordering and layers of solidarity.

Ethnographically analysing the *dispositif* of mobility reveals its true nature as a prism (Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021b) whose faces serve to irradiate the multiplicity of spaces, times, and existential experiences found along the jagged trajectories typical of “subjects in transit” (El-Shaarawi, 2015; Fontanari, 2019).

Viola Castellano’s contribution (*infra*) uses the lens of temporal dispossession to investigate the multiple forms of displacement that take shape in the existential trajectories of Gambian migrants before, during, and after their journeys, both in their country of destination and in their country of origin. She writes: “The intersection of different kinds of dispossession hampers their possibility of envisioning a future, proceeding in the various stages of life, and fulfilling personal and sociocultural expectations in terms of existential trajectories”.

Of course, the concept of immobility needs to be placed under the magnifying glass of migration and refugee studies, since although im-mobility is a prism and a distinctive feature of contemporaneity (Ricciò, 2019), it is nevertheless necessary to understand how mobility regimes from time to time apply to migrants’ geographical, biographical and existential trajectories (Sanò & Zanotelli, 2022).

Within field of migration, embodied (Pizza & Ravenda, 2016) and spatialized time take the form of a border, either a political-territorial border or a reception centre or immigration office.

According to Bredeloup, the reciprocity between time and space becomes remarkable in the act of waiting in transit “which paradoxically expands time but compresses space for immobile individuals” (2012: 465).

It is thus necessary to interrogate the mechanisms that regulate the operations of bordering and the logics of differential inclusion (Mezzadra & Nielson, 2013) that apply to migrant subjects in their countries of arrival. Time plays a decisive role within these logics in producing subjectivities that yearn for regularisation, socio-economic inclusion, and insertion into the labour market.

Adopting the notion of “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011), Pettit and Ruijtenberg explain the oscillation between depression and hope felt by migrants, arguing that migratory regimes: “encourage people to develop cruel attachments to objects that are embedded with the promise of migratory success, but at the same time inhibit the means of achieving it for many” (2019: 4).

The life journey (Irving, 2017) of migrants, even after migration, is marked by experiences of waiting and stuckedness “as a result of racialised labour and citizenship regimes in destination countries” (Pettit & Ruijtenberg, 2019: 2). Waiting is a “mechanism of temporal governance” (Vianelli et al., 2022) that is exercised in a discretionary and arbitrary way. Asylum-seekers’ experiences with the politics of time starts during their journeys, with their never-ending attempts to reach a safe country from all borders areas. Once they have finally arrived in a country that receives them, they are often hosted within reception centres, which have

been found to resonate with the theoretical form of the “camp” (Declich & Pitzalis, 2021; Rahola, 2003).

The “camp form” stands as an interstitial space on the border and between borders, a space suspended between two different worlds, in which the history of asylum-seekers is inscribed (Lobet-Maris, 2021), and in which they experience a change in terms of their life and status. The “camp” is also an “out-of-time” space, or better, a “space of suspended time”, in which waiting also represents interstitial time (Salvino, 2018). The urgency and provisionality governing the structure of the ‘camp’ and its organization produce a slowed-down present characterized by a waiting that lasts for a long time but can end at any moment. The “camp” is the main subject of the paper by Sabastian Benedikt (*infra*), which explores informal settlements as ambiguous spaces, lying between coercion and subversion. While informality is used by state authorities to disrupt migrant multiplicities, mobility, and temporalities, it can at the same time provide a loophole for migrants to evade control, deportation, and detention, and to pursue their migration projects. Through practices of appropriation, migrants not only regain time and space, but also the rights that they have been denied. In doing so, they contest the temporalities of control, demonstrating that time can be “taken” through endured limbo, but that it is still relative and can thus be recoded.

Moreover, the “tyranny of the emergency” (Bindé, 2000) governs and organizes reception policies, meaning that asylum seekers live in a perpetual state of temporal and spatial exceptionality and social workers operate with an indeterminate set of practices and procedures. In her paper, Silvia Pitzalis (*infra*) demonstrates how the waiting time experienced by people hosted in the reception system comes together with the hectic time experienced by those who work with them. The reflections on these intertwined temporalities allow Pitzalis to stress the importance of ethnographic work in unveiling overlooked temporal dynamics. Forde, McGovern, and Moran (*infra*) also engage with the politics of time and how it is embedded in people’s everyday work. They use the concept of “imagined temporalities” to explore how resettlement workers in the UK understand the treatment of migrants by social and political systems—and their own personal struggles and hopes—within the wider context of a more divisive post-Brexit Britain. They reveal the highly politicised space the resettlement workers operate in, and the ways they balance the needs of service users within the constraints imposed by overly rigid time regimes.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the set of characteristics that constitute the “camp form”, including prolonged experiences of waiting and uncertainty, also function in relation to the capitalist manipulation of migrants’ biographical and geographical trajectories. As Barber and Lem (2018) repeatedly point out, while migration studies have emphasized aspects related to the existential dimension, particularly focusing on the relationship between institutional time production and individual reactions, they have not sufficiently explored the link between capitalist time production and the formation of the “discrepant temporalities of migration”, that is “how migration has been shaped by forms of capital accumulation in distinct eras” (Barber & Lem, 2018: 4). Building on Anderson’s (2014) analysis, in which the “camp-form” is not an economic exception but only a phenomenological one, Barber and Lem highlight the valorisation of

time by capitalist ideology. The “camp-form” represents a significant investment for “humanitarian entrepreneurs”, who use it in various ways: to profit from disused properties; to generate new profits related to investing in new professional figures; to circulate profits related to the assistance, care, and control of migrants; and to create assistance-related industries in areas affected by reception. Thus, by intersecting the spatial and temporal immobility of migrant people, capitalist ideology profits from the migration experience both inside and outside its reception system.

Concluding Remarks

Those who manage to survive the journey’s selection are then subject to other pressures, with the blackmail of deportations, exhausting stays in reception centres, and the prolonged waits mentioned earlier—that is, all the arsenal of the domestication of the future workforce that supports the economy of agricultural entrepreneurs, hotels and restaurants, and the Italian and European manufacturing industries. Suspended times and waiting lead to the physical and mental deterioration of immigrants, making them more docile and available (Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021a; 2021b).

As suggested by Dimitriadi and Fontanari (forthcoming), the labour market rules favour the creation of the non-deportability status of migrants due mainly to the “essential” and extremely flexible nature of migrant labour in certain sectors of the market. However, alongside the condition of non-deportability, these workers remain invisible and irregularised. This supports the idea that waiting represents a privileged government tool for retaining a section of the labour force that can be coerced while awaiting improved living and working conditions. Thus, time seems to play a fundamental role in processes of illegalisation and in the production of irregularity (Bryan, 2018; Lucht, 2012; Sanò & Zanotelli, 2022).

Despite the temporal and existential disconnections produced under the capitalist mode of production and reproduction, scholars have stressed how migration “is increasingly positioned as a spatial answer to an inability to experience progress in time (Ferguson, 2006; Mains, 2007)” (Karlsen, 2021: 116).

In this sense, waiting can be seen both as a strategy put in place by capitalist and humanitarian ideology aimed at controlling the mobility and labour trajectories of migrants, as well as a tactic employed by migrants inside and outside the reception system to navigate towards an uncertain and changeable future. Understood as strategy, the act of making someone wait implies the impossibility of navigating uncertainty (Ramsay, 2019). As a tactic, the act of waiting emphasises living with current conditions rather than moving forward, thus becoming a form of social navigation (Karlsen, 2021: 118). Each of the contributions collected here critically addresses the relationship between time, temporality and migration, highlighting how migrants’ geographical and biographical trajectories challenge the logics of time displacement typical of bordering, mobility, reception systems, and the capitalist regime.

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