

TIMESCAPES OF (IM)MOBILITY. DISRUPTIONS, WAITINGS, AND TRANSITS

*Giulia Storato**, *Francesco Della Puppa***, *Giuliana Sanò****

Abstract

This Special Issue investigates how refugees and asylum seekers deal with “timescapes of (im)mobility”. By bringing together different case studies, we reflect, on the one hand, on the different temporal regimes, “time traps” or “chronopolitics” that may condition refugees and asylum seekers' daily routines and life experiences, and, on the other, on individual practices of routinisation, acceleration, stasis and waiting which can be read as tactics aimed at claiming time.

Keywords

timescapes, (im)mobility, refugees, asylum seekers, temporal regimes

* GIULIA STORATO, Post-doc Research Fellow at Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin. Email: giulia.storato@unito.it

** FRANCESCO DELLA PUPPA, Associate Professor at Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

Email: francesco.dellapuppa@unive.it

*** GIULIANA SANÒ, Assistant Professor at Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), University of Messina.

Email: gsano@unime.it

DOI: [10.13131/UNIFI/E0JP-V430](https://doi.org/10.13131/UNIFI/E0JP-V430)

INTRODUCTION

In the field of social sciences, the “spatial turn” (Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 1984; 2005; Thirft, 1996), although not particularly well received, especially in sociology (Sheller, 2017), stimulated fruitful scientific practice which led to what has been called “mobile sociology” (Urry, 2000) and “the new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry, 2006). This “mobility turn” was further developed in the new millennium as a consequence of increasingly globalized and networked societies, and it also focused on the systems of inequality that the greater mobility of people and goods generated, leading to multiple regimes of (im)mobility. Both in Italy and abroad, these theories and the empirical research related to them have also been fruitful in the sub-field of migration studies, which started to explore migration from outside instead of inside.

If previous research in this field was more focused on social inclusion processes and on models for the integration of immigrants within the receiving society (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995), the adoption of a transnational perspective led to a huge amount of studies on immigrants as agents on the move. The increased interest in how immigrants build their identities and belongings along multiple spatial scales (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Anthias, 2008) and in phenomena such as onward migration (Della Puppa and King, 2019; Della Puppa et al., 2021; Montagna et al., 2021) provide evidence of how the “mobility turn” contributed to the development of migration studies.

However, both in academia and in public opinion, international migrations have always been perceived as more spatial than temporal, more physical than biographical (Della Puppa, 2019; Griffiths et al. 2013). The temporal dimension has often been considered to be subordinate to the spatial dimension and has not had a prominent role in the analysis. It took a long time for the scientific community to respond to Cwerner’s (2001) seminal article on the need to consider time and temporality in the study of migration (Baas and Yeoh, 2018).

Only in recent years the need to overlap both temporal and spatial perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of migration phenomena has become an established position within the academic debate. This is demonstrated for example in the emergence of the “temporal turn” (Baas and Yeoh, 2018), at least in the field of migration studies, which is still ongoing and seems to have global reach, as shown by the 19th IMISCOE Annual Conference “*Migration and Time*:

Temporalities of mobility, governance and resistance, from which this Special Issue originates.

Beginning from these premises, the aim of this collection is not to explore and clarify the intimate connection between space and time, but rather to analyse what constitutes this intimacy or, more specifically, to understand how and in what particular ways time and space resemble each other. In short, to identify what they have in common.

While the plasticity of space is evident primarily through the possibility of seeing it in motion, the human manipulation of time is more opaque and less evident. In other words, what we think may exist as an innate quality of space – *poiesis* – does not find an exact correspondence in the category of time. Unlike space, time is not immediately visible: to see time it has to pass, to elapse. In a sense, to see time – at the very moment we prepare to look at it –, we can only imagine it. But it is precisely the need to imagine (how it was, how it is, how it will be) in the act of seeing, that re-establishes the connection between time and space. As clarified by Appadurai (1996), imagination is a social practice, and as such, it is linked to invention, to making, to *poiesis*, which we imagine belong to space rather than time.

In this Special Issue we will refer to the experience of time of a particular group of immigrants: refugees and asylum-seekers. Their everyday life is often restricted by an intricate and segmented system of norms and politics, which condition not only their spatial mobility, but also their daily life time. Waiting is a key experience and a crucial analytical tool for exploring the temporalities and spatialities of this group of migrants, whose bodies are continuously disciplined by the power exercised by the State and its military, juridical and bureaucratic apparatus, beginning when they first set off on their journeys (Chattopadhyay and Taylor 2022; Conlon, 2011; Philipson Isaac, 2022).

In the context of migration, beyond the political and physical borders which compromise and shape their spatial mobility, other temporal borders emerge which confine immigrants within a temporal (im)mobility made up of waiting and unexpected accelerations which are produced both by national and international politics and by the ideologies of social entrepreneurs (Altin and Degli Uberti, 2022; Della Puppa e Sanò, 2021b; Chattopadhyay and Taylor 2022; Fontanari, 2018; Griffiths et al., 2013; Mercier et al., 2021).

Waiting is in fact a “mechanism of temporal governance” (Vianelli et al., 2022) that is exercised in a discretionary and arbitrary way. Asylum-seekers’ experiences of the politics of time starts during their journeys, with never-ending attempts to reach a safe country away from border

zones. Once they arrive in a country that receives them, they are often housed in reception centres, which have been found to resonate with the theoretical form of the “camp” (Rahola, 2003; Declich and Pitzalis, 2021). The “camp form” is an interstitial space on the border and between borders, 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” also constitutes an “out-of-time” space or, better, a “space of suspended time,” where waiting also represents interstitial time (Salvino, 2018). The urgent and temporary nature of the structure and organization of the “camp” produce a slowed-down present characterized by a lengthy wait that could end at any moment.

According to Lobet-Maris (2021), the wait in these camps is made up of three different temporalities. The first is ruled by the reception system and reproduced by social workers who establish asylum-seekers’ daily routines (e.g., specific times to wake-up, have a shower, eat, go to school, and so on) (Rotter, 2016). If, on the one hand, these scheduled times allow immigrants to combat boredom, on the other hand, they can create divisions between those who respect the schedule (who are understood to deserve juridical recognition), and those who do not conform to the set of established rules (who are considered not to deserve judicial recognition). This is related to the second form of temporality identified by Lobet-Maris (2021), which is linked to the path towards juridical recognition. Asylum-seekers have no control over this, which makes them simultaneously vulnerable and full of hope (Brun, 2016). The third form of temporality is related to their agency, which is characterized by looking for tactics to overcome the other two temporalities. This last form is not homogeneous and it is linked with each subjectivity (Rotter, 2016). In a condition of spatial restriction, time can be easier to manipulate, thus allowing people to find and elaborate strategies that let them exercise their agency. The time spent waiting in the camps can be used to learn social maps for moving within the new context, asylum rules and procedures, and the local language. It can also be used to establish new relationships and routines. In other words, when we take these three temporalities together, waiting represents a spatial-temporal dimension in which uncertainty, frustration, hopes, and expectations co-exist (Biner and Biner, 2021; Kwon, 2015; Secor et al., 2022). Within this framework, “making space” or “carving out space” – terms that find their correspondence in migration studies with the practices and forms of agency enacted by those who fabricate spaces free from the alienation of capitalist modes of production or from the control and surveillance of

institutions – are not the only forms of emancipation or subtraction that can be associated with migrants, and among them, asylum-seekers. Indeed, imagining another time or living in memories of past times (Jackson, 2008) are equally plausible and valid modes and forms of agency, especially when one is forced to remain within a reception centre or refugee camp for an indefinite and seemingly “endless” period of time. In these cases, as the authors of this Special Issue show, the action of time always corresponds with a dual movement. Whereas time appears as a product of capitalist or humanitarian ideology, within which change or transformation seem impossible, against all expectations, individuals themselves assemble, fabricate, produce, and narrate another time. Of course, this is not a fabrication that takes place solely in the intimate spheres of individuals, as it is capable of producing practices and, more precisely, movement, or, on the contrary, it realises a suspension of the motion – waiting – which, however, becomes one of the facets of the prism of mobility (Della Puppa, Sanò, 2021a, 2021b).

Differentiating between “waiting for” and “waiting to” (Appadurai, 2013; Janeja and Bandak, 2018), the counterpart of movement reveals the extreme flexibility of time, granting individuals the capacity to become authors of their own time and imbuing its suspension with meaning. In the time of waiting, the individuals manage to find an empty space that will give them the means to finally allow them to act. In each of the contributions presented here, it is therefore essential to provide with a vision of time that unfolds through a succession of “spaces” and “intervals” (Lévesque, 2013), in which the capacity to aspire, produce, create, and fabricate tends to be a tactic shared among individuals rather than an exclusive prerogative of ideology.

Beginning from the above premises, this Special Issue gives a key role to the different temporal regimes, “time traps” (Cwerners, 2001), politics of time (Jacobsen, Karlsen and Khosravi, 2021) and “chronopolitics” that could condition refugees and asylum seekers’ everyday lives.

The first contribution, written by Enrico Fravega, highlights the impact of reception centres’ temporal control regimes on asylum-seekers’ lives. His ethnographic fieldwork in Italy shows how asylum-seekers temporalities are fractured, disrupted, and/or dispossessed. He uses the concept of “schizochronicity” to describe this situation, in which the temporal dispossession and fragmentation produced by the reception system not only slow down their everyday lives, but also affect their biographical transition towards adulthood.

This is followed by a contribution from Serena Scarabello and Eriselda Shkopi. They focus on the “lost encounters” between the

temporalities of government policies and the individual life trajectories of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy, emphasising how these time discrepancies can create the conditions that mean they remain in, or fall into, exploitative work situations and social marginalization. They apply the multiscale and relational category of temporalities to state policies and regional projects to counter exploitation in agricultural work.

The agricultural sector is also the main focus of the third contribution by Franca Zadra. Time management in this sector is characterized by power asymmetries that generate precariousness, enabling the exploitation of migrant agricultural workers. Drawing on the case study of a berry farm in Northern Italy, Zadra analyses how the control over time could reduce the labour agency of temporarily employed asylum seekers, making them more easily exploitable.

The fourth contribution by Giulia Dugar introduces an international and comparative perspective through its focus on Japan. Dugar assesses the outcomes of the Japanese Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) by observing it through the lens of time, and by focusing also on its legal regulation and on how it is experienced by the immigrants themselves.

Lastly, Claudia Lintner's contribution reflects on new frontiers of temporal and spatial (im)mobility. Her contribution invites us to rethink our perception of time as a linear description of events and a merely physical experience. She reflects on how new communication technologies shape the temporalities of waiting of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants by demonstrating how the temporal dimension of ICT allows immigrants to reshape their time and to overcome various physical boundaries.

REFERENCES

- ANTHIAS, F. (2008). Thinking through the lens of translocational positionality: an intersectionality frame for understanding identity and belonging'. *Translocations, Migration and Change*. 4(1): 5-20.
- ALTIN, R., DEGLI UBERTI, S. (2022). Placed in Time. Migration Policies and Temporalities of (Im)Mobility Across the Eastern European Borders. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*. 24(3): 439–459.
- APPADURAI, A. (2013). *The Future as Cultural Fact*. London: Verso.
- APPADURAI, A., (1996). *Modernity at large: cultural dimension of globalization*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press
-

- BAAS, M., YEOH, B. S. (2019). Introduction: Migration studies and critical temporalities. *Current Sociology*. 67(2): 161–168.
- BINER, Ö., BINER, Z.Ö. (2021). “Syrian refugees and the politics of waiting in a Turkish border town”. *Social Anthropology*. 29(3): 831–846.
- BRUN (2016). There is no Future in Humanitarianism: Emergency, Temporality and Protracted Displacement. *History and Anthropology*. 27(4): 393–410.
- CHATTOPADHYAY, S., TYNER, J.A. (2022). Lives in Waiting. *Geopolitics*. 27(4): 1231–1256.
- CONLON, D. (2011). Waiting: Feminist perspectives on the spacings/timings of migrant (im)mobility. *Gender, Place & Culture*. 18(3): 353–360.
- CWERNER, S.B. (2001). The Times of Migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 27(1): 7–36
- DECLICH, F, PITZALIS, S. (2021). *Presenza migrante tra spazi urbani e non urbani. Etnografie su processi, dinamiche e modalità di accoglienza*. Roma: Meltemi.
- DELLA PUPPA, F. (2019). A Redeemed Biography? Migration as an Intra-family Redemption Device. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 1: 127-154.
- DELLA PUPPA, F., KING, R. (2019). The New ‘Twice Migrants’: Motivations, Experiences and Disillusionments of Italian-Bangladeshis Relocating to London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 45(11): 1936-1952.
- DELLA PUPPA, F., MONTAGNA, N., KOFMAN, E. (2021). Onward migration and intra-European mobilities: A critical and theoretical overview. *International Migration*. 59(6): 16-28.
- DELLA PUPPA, F., SANÒ, G. (a cura di) (2021a) *Stuck and Exploited. Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion, Discrimination and Struggles*. Venice: Edizioni Ca’ Foscari.
- DELLA PUPPA, F., SANÒ, G. (2021b). The prism of new mobilities. The mobility trajectories of refugees and asylum seekers outside the Italian reception system. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*. 26(5): 503–527.
- FONTANARI, E. (2018). *Live in Transit. An ethnographic study of Refugees’ Subjectivity across European Borders*. London: Routledge.
- GLICK SCHILLER, N., BASCH, L., BLANC-SZANTON C. (1992). *Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding*

- Migration: A NEW ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*. 645(1): 1-24.
- GRIFFITHS, M., ROGERS, A., ANDERSON, B. (2013). *Migration, Time and Temporalities: Review and Prospect*. Oxford: COMPAS.
- JACKSON, M. (2008). The Shock of the New: On Migrant Imaginaries and Critical Transitions, *Ethnos. Journal of Anthropology*. 73(1): 57-72.
- JACOBSEN, M., KARLSEN, M.A., KHORSAVI, S, (a cura di) (2021). *Waiting and Temporalities of Irregular Migration*. New York: Routledge.
- JANEJA, M. K, BANDAK, A. (2018). *Ethnographies of Waiting Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty*. London, New-York: Routledge.
- KWON, J.H. (2015). The work of waiting: Love and money in Korean Chinese transnational migration. *Cultural Anthropology*. 30(3): 477-500.
- LEFEBVRE, H. (1974). *Le Production de l'espace*. Editions Anthropos.
- LÉVESQUE, L. (2013). Trajectories of interstitial landscapeness: a conceptual framework for territorial imagination and action". In A. Brighenti (a cura di), *Urban interstices: the aesthetics and the politics of the in-between* (pp. 21-63). London: Routledge.
- LEVITT, P. (2001). *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.
- LOBET-MARIS, C. (2021). Les trois temps des migrants Enquête sociologique dans un camp de demandeurs d'asile. *Temporalités. Revue de sciences sociales et humaines*. 33.
- MASSEY, D. (1984). *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- MASSEY, D. (2005). *For Space*. London: SAGE.
- MERCIER, D., CHIFFOLEAU, S., THOEMMES, J. (2021). Temps et migrations. *Temporalités. Revue de sciences sociales et humaines*. 33.
- MONTAGNA, N., DELLA PUPPA, F., KOFMAN, E. (2021). Onward Migration: an Introduction. *International Migration*. 59(6): 8-15.
- NEDERVEEN PIETERSE, J. (1995). Globalisation as Hybridisation. In: M. Featherstone, S. Lash, and R. Robertson (eds), *Global Modernities*, London: Sage: 45-68.
- PHILIPSON ISAAC, S. (2022). Temporal dispossession through migration bureaucracy: on waiting within the asylum process in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*. 25(6): 945-956.
- RAHOLA, F. (2003). *Zone definitivamente temporanee. I luoghi dell'umanità in eccesso*. Verona: Ombre Corte
-

- ROTTER, R. (2016). Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty interlude?. *Time & Society*. 25(1): 80–101.
- SALVINO, S. (2018). Migrazione e risignificazione della temporalità quotidiana. In: Floriani, S. and Rebughini, P. (a cura di), *Sociologia e vita quotidiana. Sulla costruzione della contemporaneità*. Naples-Salerno: Orthotes.
- SECOR, A.J., EHRKAMP, P., LOYD, J.M. (2022). The problem of the future in the spacetime of resettlement: Iraqi refugees in the US. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 40(3): 508–527
- SHELLER, M. (2017). From spatial turn to mobilities turn. *Current Sociology*. 65(4): 1-17.
- SHELLER, M., & URRY, J. (2006). The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*. 38(2): 207–226.
- THRIFT, N.J. (1996). *Spatial Formations*. London: SAGE.
- URRY, J. (2000). Mobile sociology. *The British Journal of Sociology*. 51(1): 185–203.
- VERTOVEC, S. (1999). Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 22(2): 447–462.
- VIANELLI, L., GILL, N., HOELLERER, N. (2022). Waiting as probation: selecting self-disciplining asylum seekers. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 48(5): 1013–1032.