

## Bordering and Debordering Across Time. Refugees and Asylum Seekers Facing Chronopolitics

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“Waiting is one of the privileged ways of enduring power”, as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us (1997). Indeed, the imposition of a time to wait and let time pass is an exercise of power. In the case of subaltern subjects, such as asylum seekers and refugees in the face of the state, waiting constitutes a violence – by the state – taking shape through its capacity to control time and ultimately the lives of this specific type of migrants (Griffiths et al., 2013; Jacobsen et al., 2020; Mercier et al., 2021; McNevin and Missbach, 2018). This violence manifests in Italy through the waiting times that the state imposes through confinement in hotspots, Cas (Centers of First Aid and Reception), Cara (Reception and Accommodation Centers), as well as Cie (Identification and Expulsion Centers) and Cpr (Centers for Repatriation), which are various types of administrative detention centers for migrants seeking international protection and undocumented immigrants, where systematic violations of basic human rights occur (Caja and Esposito, 2022; Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021a). Added to the times dictated by confinement and detention are the (in)finite waiting times for interviews with the Territorial Commission, for the Recognition of International Protection, for document issuance, for obtaining the Fiscal Code, etc., increasing the sense of uncertainty and existential precarity (Fontanari, 2018; McNevin and Missbach, 2018; Mercier et al., 2021; Schultz, 2020).

Within the framework of migration, in addition to political and physical borders that obstruct, make mobility difficult, and select in space, true temporal borders arise that confine migrants in temporal immobility. These are the product of national and supranational policies and ideological rhetoric of social entrepreneurs, marked by moments of stagnation and sudden accelerations

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(Altin and Degli Uberti, 2022; Chattopadhyay and Tyner, 2022; Fontanari, 2018; Griffiths et al., 2013; Mercier et al., 2021).

These ideological, political, and institutional modes of disciplining and subjugating migrants and migratory movements are ideologically justified within the framework of the “permanent emergency”, leading to the “vice of speed” (Spada, 2023). European and Italian policies have been and still are enacted in terms of urgency, shaping a contingent structure trapped in the present – in distress – without the capacity to envision the long term. This speed serves to disentangle responsibility when systematic violations of human rights emerge. At the same time, however, speed is assumed as a parameter of efficiency and goodwill (*ibidem*), detaching the structural nature of racism embedded in the state and its policies (Basso, 2010). In his article, Pasian (*infra*) attempts to describe how the discretion of social workers – street level workers – in the reception system acts and models the temporal trajectories and life of migrants.

The frenzy of policies contrasts with the stagnation of lives. In fact, waiting constitutes a key experience and a crucial analytical category for the study of the temporal and spatial aspects of migrants, subjects under constant discipline by the power of the state and its military, legal, and bureaucratic apparatus (Chattopadhyay and Tyner, 2022; Conlon, 2011; Philipson Isaac, 2022). It is a “mechanism of temporal government” (Vianelli et al., 2022), implemented in a discretionary and arbitrary manner. While some scholars believe that waiting can be transformative: a place of struggle and a place of political possibilities (Achtlich, 2022; Conlon, 2011); others see waiting as a costly process that can deplete migrants of “their financial and emotional resources” (Zharkevich, 2021), as a “means of expropriation” (Philipson Isaac, 2022), and existential precarization, aimed at extracting value from the labor of migrant workforce, disciplined (also) through waiting.

Refugees and asylum seekers are spatially and temporally “stuck” (Brun, 2016; Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021a; Hage, 2009a; 2009b) due to the fact that they often find themselves trapped in the legal and social limbo of the reception system. While waiting to receive a status – and, consequently, a residence permit –, they are forced to adapt to severely limited possibilities of mobility, employment, integration, and social life (Fontanari, 2018; Sanò and Zanotelli, 2022). Viewed in these terms, the waiting translates into a form of “entrapment” that operates both within and outside the reception system.

In many respects and in various circumstances, the Italian reception model mirrors the “camp form” (Declich and Pitzalis, 2021), involving the physical and legal confinement of asylum seekers. The space of the “camp” takes the shape of an interstitial space, at the border and between borders, a suspended space between two different worlds, where part of the trajectory of

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international protection seekers unfolds (Lobet-Maris, 2021), and where they experience existential and status changes.

However, it also constitutes a “time-outside” or, more accurately, a “suspended time-space”, within which the waiting constitutes an interstitial time (Salvino, 2018). The urgency and provisionality governing the structure and organization of the camp produce a slowed present characterized by a protracted waiting, which could end at any moment.

According to Lobet-Maris (2021), this waiting unfolds in three different temporalities that structure the existence in the camp. The first is linked to the time and rhythms dictated by those managing the reception and confinement structures, through the imposition of a long series of rules. The daily life of asylum seekers within the camp is regimented and disciplined by detailed schedules for meals, showers, laundry, access to changing rooms, language classes, and more (Rotter, 2016). On one hand, this fills the void of the waiting that asylum seekers are compelled to endure within the camp; on the other hand, they must adhere to these rhythms to progress through the arduous process of international protection recognition. Non-compliance pushes them to the margins of the reception system.

The second temporality identified by Lobet-Maris is related to the aforementioned waiting concerning the international protection request procedure. It is a temporality over which migrants have no control, dominating and rendering them vulnerable, but imbued with hope (Brun, 2015), towards a future that is “too slow to come”. The camp, thus, becomes a place where people “hold their breath”, following the ceaseless and dramatically random cycle of positive and negative outcomes of asylum requests. However, this waiting is not empty or static. The Author identifies a third time given by how each person experiences their “being in time”, adopting individual tactics to resist the waiting. Therefore, this third level is that of the singular experience of time. An experience that is not homogeneous but marked by particular articulations, dependent on each migrant’s history, individual agency (*ibidem*), and ability to live in this intermediate space (Rotter, 2016). It is also important to note that sudden accelerations in procedures – always dictated by the state – particularly those related to asylum applications, precariousize migrants’ daily lives and, progressively, erode their rights (Chattopadhyay and Tyner 2022; Lobet-Maris, 2021; Sanò and Zanutelli, 2022). From this perspective, waiting can also be seen as a “useful” and “constructive” moment. Actually, waiting time is not always and necessarily a void, spent uselessly and exhaustingly, needing to be filled. Instead, it can be a “useful” time, laden with weight and meanings (Conlon, 2011; Rotter, 2016), for understanding the social maps to navigate the new context and how the asylum system works, learning the language, creating social networks, and structuring one’s daily life. Ultimately, as

Martini (*infra*) reminds us, the hypermobility produced by the regime of borders and time policies exercised within the reception system can be understood as a tactic, in which waiting also plays a fundamental role. It is in the interstices of time that define this hypermobility, where individuals put themselves and their ability to accumulate knowledge and understanding, configure new and alternative migration scenarios, and use waiting to their advantage.

Therefore, waiting is a spatio-temporal dimension in which, alongside uncertainties and frustrations, hopes and expectations also exist and are generated (Biner and Biner, 2021; Kwon, 2015; Secor et al., 2022). Within such a framework, the use of smartphones represents an antidote to the empty time of waiting for migrants. Indeed, it allows them to engage more efficiently in networking, as well as in entertainment, the construction of collective and individual memory of their experiences, etc. The smartphone, in other words, fills temporal gaps and acts as a “miniature time capsule”, capable of containing, expanding, and compressing time (Jacobsen et al., 2020; Lobet-Maris, 2021). It also serves as a space for autonomy and expression of a moving subjectivity. Sometimes, this subjectivity is also expressed through the rejection of institutional reception spaces and times, in favor of grassroots forms of solidarity (Giliberti and Fravega *infra*).

However, it should be noted that the set of characteristics that constitute the “space-field”, including prolonged experiences of waiting and uncertainty, also function in relation to 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 “discrepant temporalities of migration”, that is “how migration has been shaped by forms of capital accumulation in distinct eras” (Barber and Lem 2018, p.4). Building on Andersson’s (2014) analysis, in which the “space-field” would not represent an economic exception but only a phenomenological one, the Authors insist on the valorization of time by capitalist ideology. In general, the “space-field” represents a significant investment from the “humanitarian entrepreneurs” perspective, as they 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 create assistance-related industries in areas affected by reception. In this sense, capitalist ideology, by intersecting the spatial and temporal immobility of migrant people, derives profits from the migration experience both inside the so-called “space-field” and outside it. What socio-anthropological research, including the contributions in this Special Issue, highlights is that the formation

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of “discrepant temporalities” not only operates within the “space-field”, but also shapes migrations beyond the camp regime. This is the case in the ethnographic work of Ingvarsdóttir (*infra*), according to which capitalist ideology, by shaping a hyper-productive masculinity conforming to heteronormative production standards, inevitably also affects the existential and migratory paths of the LGBTQ+ population, creating a dissonance between the sense of self dictated by the ways and times of capitalist production and the sense of self oriented towards satisfying desires and needs through individual modes and times that do not fit into the capitalist system.

Asylum seekers and refugees are, indeed, equally “stuck” along the borders of pre- and post-reception (Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021a). In fact, waiting does not exist in and of itself but is a permanent existential condition, intentionally caused, a result of a structured social and power hierarchy that is also produced and reproduced along “racial” and class lines (Jacobsen et al., 2020; McNevin and Missbach, 2018; Rotter, 2016). The configurations of temporalities and waiting experiences in the migratory journey are also shaped by the various ways in which migrants are classified, the historical-political and social moment of arrival in the destination country, the reasons for emigration, the country of origin, how they arrived, the route taken, and their migration seniority. Ultimately, these temporalities and waiting experiences intersect and are reshaped by the different positioning of individual migrants within the civic stratification system (Lockwood 1996; Morris 2003).

Forms of immobility experienced by migrants in their migration trajectories (Altin and Degli Uberti, 2022; Brun, 2016; Conlon, 2011; Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021b; Fontanari, 2018; Griffiths et al., 2013) constitute temporal suspensions that condition and reshape both the biographical and existential trajectories of immigrants “here” – prisoners in the temporal limbo of waiting – and those of their families in the countries of origin: preventing the remittance sending and, therefore, the benefits that these could bring to the left-behind families of immigrants – primarily, the repayment of debts incurred for emigration – placing immigrants on the margins of the marriage market, inhibiting their entry into adulthood (Della Puppa, 2014). To this, as highlighted by Montagna et al. (*infra*), is added the impact that the temporalities imposed by border regimes and reception devices have on the migratory trajectories of migrating families, determining reconfigurations and recompositions that become crucial in the lives of these individuals. In other words, the waiting that Dwyer (2009) defines as “situationally”, referring to specific contingent events, intertwines with the “existential” or “chronic” waiting, describing an embodied and permanent state. Some forms of “situationally waiting” are specific to migration and determine – or rather reinforce – forms of “existential waiting”,

which is characteristic of the condition of subalterns on the peripheries of the world.

Hage (2009a, 2009b) uses the term “existential mobility” to describe the feeling that life trajectory is “moving well”, progressing along a desired specific direction. According to the Author, it is precisely this feeling that gives meaning and vitality to individuals’ existence. Therefore, for those living in global peripheries, emigration constitutes (also) an institution-building act (Bourdieu, 1982; Della Puppa, 2014) that individuals undertake to seek such existential mobility – which is also social. Opposed to this “existential mobility” is naturally an analogous and opposite “existential immobility”: that feeling of being “stuck” within the biographical trajectory (Della Puppa, 2014). This condition also arises from the experience of waiting, “waiting it out”, which is experienced individually and collectively and entails a feeling of “rigid mobility” (Hage, 2009a; 2009b): “shaped and molded in the expectation that something unpleasant – such as the drying up of living conditions and powerlessness – will come to an end” (Çağlar 2016, p. 17).

The temporal elongation and chronological stasis, dictated by migration and policies of human mobility control and immigrant subjugation, prevent them from achieving entry into adulthood for themselves and their families (Della Puppa, 2014; Sanò and Zanutelli, 2022). Already, Sayad (1999) described the lives of Algerian migrants as an existence spent in continuous waiting and suspension, where the provisional – in anticipation of a return or something else – becomes permanent and crystallizes “here”, “in the land of exile”, in the materiality of daily life, in the absence of relationships, in precarious housing, while “there”, in the country of origin, things take shape in the migrant’s imagination, in their absence.

The construct of waiting can be adopted as an analytical lens to observe the materialization of insecurity and the absence of rights, deteriorating the social and psychophysical conditions of migrants (Kobelinsky, 2017). However, the times and waits dictated by state authorities to migrants constitute only one of the final segments of the violence they endure. Italian and European policies, agreements that Italy has made with the Libyan Coast Guard – governed by para-mafia organizations funded, once again, by Italian state – as well as those made by the EU with Turkey, make the journey of international protection seekers very risky and chronologically lengthy, lasting several years.

Hence, the imposition of these times, besides endangering the lives of migrants, functions as a selection device for them (Schultz, 2020). It should be emphasized that the more dangerous the journey is for the migrants’ safety – as well as economically costly – the more it will function as a school of subjugation: once in Europe, they will be willing to accept any social and work conditions, as required, once again, by the needs of the market (Basso, 2010).

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Thus, both the elongation of times and waiting to arrive in Europe and the waiting once they arrive, work to make refugees and asylum seekers vulnerable for their labor exploitation (Kobelinsky and Pian, 2020). The imposition of waiting and the lengthening of times by policies and state authorities do not aim to hermetically seal European and Italian borders and completely eliminate immigration but to discipline acceptance of the most miserable living and working conditions and to eliminate their rights (Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021a; Jacobsen et al., 2020).

In this context of selectivity at the entrance and forced repulsions, the health emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic played a decisive role through the establishment of quarantine ships and the temporary constitution of a localized blockade in open sea, as elaborated in Caja's chapter (*infra*). The need to subject people arriving by sea to quarantine has resulted in an additional delay in selection mechanisms and waiting procedures, which generally constitute the practice. Never as in this case have we all witnessed the creative potential of time, where quarantine – identified as the period of isolation necessary to prevent possible contagion – ended up producing new confinement spaces and legitimizing practices that, after the pandemic period, have been used by governments to impose an even more inhumane, cruel, and repressive turn in the management of sea arrivals.

Not surprisingly, in Italy, the cynical practice is consolidating whereby, after rescues at sea by NGOs – which challenge Europe's and Italy's criminal policies and the equally criminal actions of Frontex – the government responds to the request for a “place of safety” to disembark migrants by indicating ports of landing far from the place where the rescue occurred. A state strategy aimed at keeping humanitarian ships away from the search and rescue zone and thus lengthening the time needed for new rescues – often to the point of making them impossible. Similarly, chain rejections along the so-called “Balkan route”, carried out by Italian, Slovenian, and Croatian polices, force migrants to try and retry – once, twice, three, ten times... – “the game”, extending the waiting times along the crossing. Therefore, state practices and policies (and polices) act on times to affect lives – and often deaths – of migrants (McNevin and Missbach, 2018).

Then, for those who manage to survive the journey's “selection”, comes the pressure on migrants, with the blackmail of deportations, the times of exhausting stays in “reception” centers, and the prolonged waits mentioned earlier – that is, all the arsenal of domestication of the future workforce that supports the economy of agricultural entrepreneurs, hotels and restaurants, Italian and European manufacturing industries. Suspended times and waiting produce a physical and mental deterioration of immigrants, making them more docile and available (Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021a; 2021b). This evidence is

reinforced by the analysis of Dimitriadi and Fontanari (*infra*), according to whom the labor market rules in Europe favor the creation of a non-deportability status of migrants due mainly to the “essential” and extremely flexible nature of migrant labor in certain sectors of the market. However, alongside the condition of non-deportability, there is a constant invisibility and irregularization of these workers, effectively endorsing the idea that waiting represents the privileged government tool for retaining labor, within the market that can be coerced and awaiting improved living and working conditions. Thus, time seems to play a fundamental role in the processes of illegalization and production of irregularity (Bryan, 2018; Lucht, 2012; Sanò and Zanotelli, 2022).

For all these reasons and for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, it is necessary to overlap the lens of mobility with that of temporality. Both academically and publicly, migrations have been considered and perceived for a long time more as a spatial process rather than a temporal one, more as a physical movement rather than a biographical one (Griffiths et al., 2013). This Special Issue, considering the different situations of waiting in which migrants live and the temporal heterogeneity of their waits, aims to move away from the constraints of methodological nationalism and adopt a genuinely critical approach to the study of migrations (Fontanari, 2018; Griffiths et al., 2013; Jacobsen et al., 2020).

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