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Theoretical Considerations on Waiting among Refugee and Migrant Communities

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Abstract

The theoretical literature on “waiting” is quite recent, yet already substantial, especially in relation with migration. Pioneering work by sociologist Barry Schwartz in the 1970s insisted on the power relations between those who wait and those who make wait, singling out, through the example of welfare benefits, States and State agencies on the one hand and disadvantaged and marginalised populations on the other. Schwartz’s research was useful to many scholars who, such as Eviatar Zerubavel, wanted to understand anew disadvantaged populations and subaltern subjects, but it was only four decades later that Schwartz’s framework was taken up by scholars such as Shahram Khosravi and Sarah Turnbull who specifically work on the experience of migration.

Two evolutions are also particularly interesting for us here. The first one has to do with a shift of the critical conversation on waiting away from the issue of power to attend to the phenomenology of this experience. How do people wait? What are they doing while waiting? How do they keep themselves busy during times of waiting? These questions, explored notably by Rebecca Rotter and Giovanni Gasparini, relate to the meanings and values that those who wait ascribe to their waiting. Is waiting synonymous with time lost or with time gained to do something else like reading, listening to musing, talking to others? Could waiting therefore, and quite paradoxically, be a meaningful experience? Waiting can be long and full of uncertainties, but it can also be put to use and invested with productive meaning.

The second evolution concerns the conjunction between waiting and mobility, as explored through the lens of the “New Mobilities” paradigm developed by Mimi Sheller and John Urry from the mid-2000s. Alongside David Bissel, these scholars investigate “how waiting-as-event is a specific kind of relation-to-the-world that transcends and folds through this relational dialecticism of (im)mobility”. In other words, moments of immobility such as times of waiting are constitutive of the experience of mobility that migrants live through and fashion. For migrants, journeying is a multidimensional experience. Noelle Brigdena and Cetta Mainwaring, as well as Deirdre Conlon, thus work on the migrants’ immobile mobility, that is, on the phases of waiting that the migrants’ journey is interspersed with. Studies like these enable to picture more accurately the transformations undergone by subjects-in-waiting, whether they be journeying migrants pausing or being forced to pause in their travels or whether they be potential migrants waiting to leave.

We will be looking here at how migrants and refugees, both actual and potential, make use of the time spent “waiting” to reach higher objectives. Activism, often by way of an

engagement in a political, social or religious association, is one way of spending time that empowers those who wait. Refugees and migrants who choose that path not only undergo personal transformations, but also tend to reverse the power relation between those who wait and those who make wait. This will be our main concern here.

Outline

I. The Origins of ‘Waiting’

II. Two Parallel Evolutions

A. The Phenomenology of ‘Waiting’

B. ‘Waiting’ and Mobility

III. The Political, Social and Religious Activism of Those Who Wait

I. The Origins of ‘Waiting’

(sociologist Barry Schwartz)

Work on waiting started in the 1970s with sociologist Barry Schwartz. Waiting was then seen as a loss due to the fact that time was seen (only as) a finite resource: “in waiting, usable time becomes a resource that is typically nonusable” (Schwartz 1974: 844). It has proved difficult to get away from that conception of waiting as a loss: it still very much informs both academic writing (although there has been an awareness of and a critical distance from that conception on the part of some researchers) and the general opinion about waiting. In academic writing, one can mention, Crapanzano (1986), Bourdieu (1999), Bissell (2007), Schweizer, (2008) and Sella (2008), who all said that waiting, in Western contexts, is primarily conceptualised as undesirable, unproductive and wasteful – as a consequence, waiting involves passivity, idleness and subordination.

(waiting and power in Schwartz’ work)

What is especially interesting in Schwartz’ work is how he brings power into the equation, showing how much the loss created by waiting can increase or decrease when mediated by the power relation between server (the one who makes wait) and client (the one who waits). As he explains: “We have introduced the category of power, as exercised in server-client relationships, as the ultimate determinant of delay, *the main assertion being that the distribution of waiting time coincides with the distribution of power.*” (Schwartz 1974: 867, italics added) This leads to the idea that there is a stratification of waiting that is linked to class (even though Schwartz does not use that word): “typical relationships obtain between the individual’s position within a social system and the extent to which he waits for and is waited for by other members of the system [...] Thus, the least powerful may almost always be approached at will; the most powerful are seen only ‘by appointment.’” (Schwartz 1974: 847) In other words, the relationship between servers and clients in respect to waiting is an instance of an “organized dependency relationship”: servers’ holding power is contingent upon clients not being able to frequent less accessible and/or more expensive servers, while client autonomy requires the server’s availability (Schwartz 1974: 867).

Schwartz is interested in understanding why the privileged wait less and the least advantaged wait more – according to him, “while the relationship between privilege and the necessity of waiting cannot be generalized in any deterministic way, there appears nevertheless to be a relationship between the two, with the least-privileged clients compelled to do the most waiting” (Schwartz 1974: 849). This is where he agrees with Leon Mann who concluded that “queuing is confined largely to the less-privileged groups in society” (Mann 1969: 353). Schwartz focuses mainly on what he calls “public people-serving bureaucracies” where there is quasi monopoly on the various services offered and where enormous amounts of waiting time are imposed to people. His examples include bureaus which distribute welfare benefits to long lines of disadvantaged people, places where the relatively wealthy as well as the poor are put to inconvenience by having to wait in person for licenses, permits, visas, tickets, information and the like, the government-sponsored transportation facilities Amtrak, as well as a day in court.

Schwartz’ definition of power is that “[it] entails among other things the capacity to provide scarce services which people must wait to receive,” which in turn makes the desirability of the service important (Schwartz 1974: 856). So we wait because the service is valuable, but the service is all the more valuable as we are made to wait longer. A common willingness to wait for a service sustains the objective scarcity of the service which, in turn, transforms itself into a subjective value. To conclude, and somewhat paradoxically, the subjective value of the service (for the waiter) is positively modified in the very act of waiting, even though waiting itself is not desired.

(the social and psychological aspects of waiting in Schwartz’ work)

His study is also directed at both the social and psychological impacts of waiting in terms of power relationship. If there is objective dependence and subordination of the waiter, there is, in addition to that, subjective dependence and subordination of the waiter. The questions here are: How does waiting produce the subjective effects of dependency and subordination? How does objective waiting become subjective submission? For Schwartz: “To be kept waiting – especially to be kept waiting an unusually long while – is to be the subject of an assertion that one’s own time (and, therefore, one’s social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait.” (Schwartz 1974: 856)

Going one step further, it is not only the subjective value of the service that is modified, but the subjective value of the client who provides the service. The implications of the idea that waiting is related to a person’s position in a power network is that the management of availability itself, regardless of the purpose for which an individual makes himself available, carries with it distinct psychological implications (Schwartz 1974: 867). We enter here into the psychology of social exchange. The worth of a person also depends on the amount of time others must wait for that person: “Because a person’s access to others indexes his scarcity as a social object, that person’s social worth may only be realized by demonstrated inaccessibility.” (Schwartz 1974: 868) The consequence is that one can maintain and dramatise one’s own worth by purposely causing another to wait.¹ The restriction of access to oneself by forcing another to wait is therefore instrumental to the cultivation of social distance. This is what Schwartz calls “ritual waiting.” It refers to a form of waiting that is imposed without reference to scarcity of server time and that, as such, is a form of mystification.

Variation in waiter irritation is then governed by a general rule: the more pronounced the honour of the server, the longer we are expected to willingly wait for that server. This is

¹ However, this has to be on the condition that the initial perception of that person is positive or at least neutral – this indeed works best when the rank of the client is superior to the rank of the waiter or when there is an ambiguity about ranks.

what Schwartz calls “ceremonial waiting.” There is, according to him, a continuum limited at one end by instrumental waiting and at the other end by ceremonial waiting. Between the poles of this continuum we find cases which present the difficulty of ascertaining to what extent the wait may, on the one hand, be occasioned by the server’s objective scarcity and, on the other, by the demand for temporal tribute implied in the server’s refusal to open himself up for interaction at the first available instant.

Schwartz concludes with the idea of a reinforcement of power relations: secondary dramaturgical modes leading to “ritual waiting” and “ceremonial waiting” have come to subserve a fact that was originally grounded in an objective supply-demand structure.

(after Schwartz)

This is how Schwartz established the basic contours of a sociology of waiting. There are variations in waiting time that are socially patterned and that respond to power differentials: the unequal distribution of waiting time tends to correspond with unequal distribution of power. It took a long time before his ideas were further developed: most notably by Eviatar Zerubavel, who considered waiting a phenomenon associated with a lack of respect and dignity (Zerubavel 1981), and, by Pierre Bourdieu, for whom waiting is amongst the ways in which the effects of power and domination are experienced (Bourdieu 2000). More recently, Javier Auyero, following the same line, showed in a study amongst clients in an Argentinian welfare office how “welfare clients learn, in practice, to be patients of the state” (Auyero 2011: 14), suggesting that being a (poor, female, and racialised) welfare recipient creates and recreates relations of domination and subordination: “To be an actual or potential welfare recipient is to be subordinated to the will of others. This subordination is created and re-created through innumerable acts of waiting (the obverse is equally true; domination is generated anew by making others wait).” (Auyero 2011: 24)

However, what is of more interest to us here, is the extent to which Schwartz’ work has been useful to migrant scholars. Schwartz focuses on the least-privileged clients and one could argue that migrants generally fall into that category of disadvantaged populations and subaltern subjects – this would be especially true for the least privileged of migrants, i.e. asylum-seekers or migrants without documents. It is however only quite recently that someone like Auyero pointed to “interesting similarities between the waiting experiences of the urban poor and those of the un-documented: uncertainty and arbitrariness plague both” (Auyero 2011: 26). And it was only four decades later that Schwartz’s framework and ideas were taken up by scholars such as Melanie Griffiths (2013), Ruben Andersson (2014), Shahram Khosravi (2010; 2014) and Sarah Turnbull (2016) who specifically work on the experience of migration.

(Turnbull)

Turnbull’s work focuses on immigration removal centres in the United Kingdom. She has come to consider the lived experience of detention as a unique experience of waiting. If waiting is a common human experience, the passing of time within custodial settings poses special challenges for incarcerated individuals. In the present case, because there are no statutory constraints on the length of time an individual can be detained, detention may last a few hours or a few days, or weeks, months, and even years, before leading to usually one of two options, i.e. release to the community or expulsion from the country. Detention therefore has very high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability: detainees have to wait to know both when and how detention will end. However, what is of particular interest to us here, is that “detainees’ time was scheduled by others” (Turnbull 2016: 68). This brings us to the power of the state.

The ability of the British government to dictate detainees' time as part of the lived experience of detention impacts both the schedule and the duration of waiting. This is usually seen as threatening, but it can also produce other effects on detainees. They can experience state power as infantilising, because of the frustration of having to wait until the appropriately determined points in time to do certain things, such as when to eat, exercise, use the Internet, or attend social visits (Turnbull 2016: 68); they can also consider the state's ability to take away their time (by removing them from the domain of education and the labour market) as punitive, unfair, and incomprehensible (Turnbull 2016: 70); and they may decide to play the waiting game, thus prioritising long-term (a definitive end to their immigration cases) over short-term goals (their getting out of detention) – this means strategically choosing to be patient, to wait rather than try to force the Home Office into a hasty decision, although there is a limit to how long people can wait (Turnbull 2016: 71-74).

Turnbull's conclusion is that waiting is first and foremost an experience of power: "Waiting is thus about being subordinated to the will of others – an exercise of power that is enacted and re-enacted through acts of waiting. Such relations of power are especially marked in the context of immigration detention where those who wait are involuntarily confined and subordinated to the decision-making of others." (Turnbull 2016: 76) The end result being the production of what she calls "detained subjects," i.e. subjects who are compliant to the will of the state: "That detainees and former detainees, as a group, are largely compliant suggests that the practice of detention may be productive of detained subjects who acquiesce to the dictates of the British government." (Turnbull 2016: 76)

(Khosravi)

(Andersson)

Andersson operates a change of scale when looking into the political economy of waiting. This means that he moves away from considering power relations on an individual level – what waiting or making people wait does to an individual – in order to explore the institutional level. He prolongs Griffiths' idea that there is "a strong relationship between power, the state and management of time" (Griffiths et al. 2013: 30) to look into an hypothesis put forward by Roos Pijpers according to which waiting is used by the State as a technique to fight illegal migration. "Is waiting just a byproduct of state institutions and bureaucracies or might it be a tactic, a management technique that is not outside but fully part of the state, struggling as it does to strike a balance between sedentarist and flexible ideologies?" asks Pijpers in his work on European labour migration (Pijpers 2011: 432). Pijpers answers in the positive. And so does Andersson: "Temporality, it will be argued, has become a multifaceted tool and vehicle – even a weapon of sorts – in the 'fight against illegal migration.'" (Andersson 2014: 796). The time delay built into the migrant's migratory experience thus comes to be regarded as the Western states' response to unauthorized human mobility. And this comes down to considering waiting also, and perhaps foremost, as a technique used by the State to deter migrants from coming. So, for Andersson, "the authorities engage in an active usurpation of time for the purposes of migration control" (Andersson 2014: 796). This proposal goes against the general idea that migration is regulated through space – for Andersson and others such as Griffiths or Pijpers, migration is also, and perhaps primarily, regulated through time.

Andersson's work is on what he calls "the battle over time" between, on the one hand, sub-Saharan migrants and, on the other hand, Spanish police and European politicians in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. He was in Ceuta in August 2010, when irregular sub-Saharan migrants housed in a temporary reception centre had staged a loud protest on the central square, in front of the Spanish government delegation. For him, what happened then

was “a silent day-to-day battle [...] being waged over time withheld and stolen, emptied time, time bought and given, and time retrieved for observation, scrutiny, and care” (Andersson 2014: 803). He moves back and forth exploring the temporalities of control (state time) and the temporalities of migration (the migrant’s subjective time), juxtaposing two opposed temporal frames, a coldly calculating “time of control,” on the one hand, and a rugged “time of migration,” on the other hand. He thus highlights intricate entanglements, as well as clashes, to conclude: “[T]he possibilities of anticipation, interception, and deferral opened up by compression and speed have led to precisely the opposite reality for those who are targeted: a world of slowness and stasis. One mobile assemblage – that of control – feeds off and perpetuates the increasing immobility of its necessary Other.” (Andersson 2014: 806-807)

But what is also of interest in his work is his explanation of what happened: “This was so because Spain’s North African enclaves were gaps in the border’s landscape of time – liminal spaces with their own warped temporal logics. Yet in these gaps, the times of control and migration would also come to clash openly with each other.” (Andersson 2014: 803) The explanation can be summed up with the “landscape of time” idea – i.e. “the complex landscape of time jointly created by migrants and border guards at Europe’s fringes” (Andersson 2014: 806). It refers to the existence of intricate interactions between geography and temporality which makes it possible to talk of a temporal topography; it also reconciles the idea that migration is either regulated through space or through time – migration is indeed regulated through both time and space, as the one cannot be separated from the other. And this brings in an interesting view of encampment, where the focus is not on space alone, as it usually is, but on time and space. Camps have been seen as “speed boxes” or “sorting centres” in the regulation of migration, but Andersson’s work suggests an evolution: camps should now also be seen as traps: “From having been springboards, Ceuta and Melilla had become, in the words of police, activists, and lawyers alike, *ratoneras* or *trampas* – that is, traps.” (Andersson 2014: 803)

II. Two Parallel Evolutions

If the focus on power has continued to be of interest for migration and other scholars, academic works on waiting also took other directions. Two such evolutions are particularly interesting for us here. The first one has to do with the lived experience of waiting (the phenomenology of waiting), while the second one is linked to the mobility turn of the mid-2000s.

A. The Phenomenology of ‘Waiting’

Interest in the lived experience of waiting is quite recent among migration scholars. The focus has long been on the content of “events” in the migrants’ life (e.g. for the asylum seeker: the journey, the asylum interview and the appeal hearing), which lead to a neglect of the ordinary “non-events,” i.e. of everyday life of waiting between these “events.” This may have been due to a sense that nothing (or nothing of interest) happens during the time of waiting.

However, the shift of the critical conversation on waiting away from the issue of power to attend to the phenomenology of this experience eventually lead to new questions: How do people wait? What are they doing while waiting? How do they keep themselves busy during times of waiting? These questions, explored notably by Giovanni Gasparini (1995) and Rebecca Rotter (2016), relate to the meanings and values that those who wait ascribe to their

waiting. Is waiting synonymous with time lost or with time gained to do something else like reading, listening to music, talking to others? Could waiting therefore, and quite paradoxically, be a meaningful experience? Waiting can be long and full of uncertainties, but it can also be put to use and invested with productive meaning.

(Gasparini)

Gasparini is one of the first sociologists to have engaged in depth with the phenomenology of waiting. He is interested in the wealth of meanings the actors ascribe to waiting, focusing mainly on everyday waiting and queuing to access service activities. He considers three types of waiting: as blockage of action; as an experience filled with substitute meanings; and as a meaningful experience.

(Rotter)

Rotter's is an attempt to move away from the dominant conception of waiting as passive, empty and wasted, which, as we have already said, still very much informs both academic writing and the general opinion about waiting. Her case-study on the experiences of asylum seekers in Glasgow suggests that waiting in the asylum determination process is not just "an empty interlude." She begins by examining the ways in which her participants' narrative accounts of waiting cohere with dominant notions of waiting, but she refuses to stop there; she then considers broader ethnographic material generated from immersion in the asylum seekers' everyday lives and, as she explores contrasting accounts and observations pertaining to the same participants, she reveals that waiting is a complex dialectical process, involving both a sense of empty, idle, suspended time and a kind of emotionally and cognitively demanding, active, productive time (Rotter 2016: 86).

The complex ethnographic picture of waiting that comes out of her study is that waiting is a three-dimensional process. She has come to consider waiting as an *affective*, *active* and, in limited circumstances, *productive*, process for asylum seekers. It is affective because it involves anticipation: they reflect on what they desire and value (and, it follows, what is lacking in the present), thus constructing an idyllic future and preparing for the worst-case scenario (Rotter 2016: 90-93). It also involves activity: they made use of the available resources and time, actively pursuing various activities to release themselves from the cognitive burden of waiting and to gain a sense of movement towards specific goals – although it must be acknowledged here that the long-term duration of waiting due to the local context (Scotland) allowed them to construct a relatively stable, routinised tempo, in contrast to the frenzied time that many irregular migrants experience (Rotter 2016: 93-95). And, in some instances, it also involves productivity: this happens when they are provided with more time to strengthen asylum cases, build relationships or prepare for more permanent settlement in the United Kingdom – although here again it must be noted that the transformation of time into capital is dependent on external processes, such as the legacy case review (Rotter 2016: 95-96).

Rotter's exploration of the phenomenology of waiting shows that the asylum seekers' (and more generally the migrants') agency, on both individual and collective levels, has been wrongly neglected, when not simply negated by migration scholars. She argues "against the ubiquitous common sense view of waiting as an empty, banal, wasted interlude, which leaves little space for any recognition of asylum seekers' individual and collective agency" (Rotter 2016: 97) and thus, *a contrario*, for a positive reevaluation of the asylum seekers' and the migrants' agency in waiting.

B. 'Waiting' and Mobility

The second evolution concerns the conjunction between waiting and mobility, as explored through the lens of the “New Mobilities” paradigm developed by Mimi Sheller and John Urry from the mid-2000s. David Bissel was one of the first scholars to investigate “how waiting-as-event is a specific kind of relation-to-the-world that transcends and folds through this relational dialecticism of (im)mobility” (Bissel 2007: 278). He was not specifically focusing on migrants, but other scholars in his wake have come to regard moments of immobility such as times of waiting as constitutive of the experience of mobility that migrants live through and fashion. The idea that journeying is a multidimensional experience has been picked up. Noelle Brigden and Cetta Mainwaring (2016), as well as Deirdre Conlon (2011), work on the migrants’ immobile mobility, that is, on the phases of waiting that the migrants’ journey is interspersed with. Studies like these enable to picture more accurately the transformations undergone by subjects-in-waiting, whether they be journeying migrants pausing or being forced to pause in their travels or whether they be potential migrants waiting to leave.

(Bissel)

Bissel regards waiting as the neglected Achilles heel of modernity. And this, according to him, comes from a gap in the “New Mobilities” literature: “From airports, to railway stations, from traffic lights, to bus stops, the practice of waiting through spaces of mobility is an often-inevitable and frequent experience woven through the fabric of the mobile everyday but is yet strangely absent from the current and burgeoning mobilities literature.” (Bissel 2007: 277) He explains this gap by the domination of a productivist model, which itself comes from an economic bias. His idea is that associated economic, business and more generally competitive neo-liberal rationales of productivity and a concern that time needs to be utilised more productively in order to be more profitable have all led to a focus on differential speed as the central feature of the relational contingencies between mobility and immobility. And, as a result, studies on mobility have tended to concentrate on uneven differential mobility, taking as a premise a primacy of the mobile as the more desirable relation in the world.

What Bissell suggests is a move away from this productivist model to a more phenomenologist perspective. He thus argues for a phenomenology of waiting focusing on the body, as well as for a reappraisal of the “New Mobilities” literature away from the mobility/immobility paradigm and towards an activity/inactivity approach: “I want to think through the event of waiting from the perspective of embodied corporeal experience. I enact this through a reconsideration of bodily practice so that the event of waiting is not viewed from the angle of im(mobilities), but instead from the perspective of activity/inactivity.” (Bissel 2007: 278) His idea is that the logic of rhythms obscures and possibly negates the ways in which bodies have the potential to transcend this schema: instead of focusing on relative velocities as the differentiator when considering mobilities or immobilities, it may therefore be more fruitful to consider relative embodied activity or inactivity (Bissel 2007: 284). Bissel’s proposal is thus for a change of focus: not velocities as the differentiator when considering im(mobilities), but activity or action.

This is how waiting as an event could be conceptualised as a variegated affective complex where experience folds through and emerges from a multitude of different planes, “a mixture of activity and agitation of the world, and conversely a deadness-to-the-world” (Bissel 2007: 279). His interest lies in waiting as an everyday experience, that is, quotidian waiting events: “What I want to focus on are the multitude of less productive prosaic, quotidian corporeal suspensions that occur everyday and as such comprise part of the fabric of everyday life.” (Bissel 2007: 282) Such suspensions or practices of waiting are, for him, the frequent but often overlooked part of our everyday corporeal existence.

(Brigden and Mainwaring)

Brigden and Mainwaring start by acknowledging the fact that a migrant's journey is made up of both mobile and immobile moments or, in other words, that moments of immobility are an inherent part of migrant mobility. Migrants can either stop en route or endure immobility when physically contained in boats, hidden compartments, trucks, and cargo holds in order to facilitate the onward movement of the journey. This leads them to "an understanding of journeys as a nested series of journeys within journeys that could elucidate the relationship between state policies and migrants' lived experiences" (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016: 409). They refer to this "nested series of journeys within journeys" as "matryoshka journeys."

The migrants' journeys are rarely a linear passage, travelled from point of origin directly to destination; rather, migrants travel in broken, unplanned stages; a failed stage may give rise to another unexpected leg of the journey. The literature on "fragmented journeys," which builds upon Michael Collyer's work (2010), is already well-documented. What Brigden and Mainwaring want to do is to add a new concept: the "matryoshka journeys" concept. They examine not only fragmentation, but also the purposeful surrender of agency as a survival tactic within larger geographical and life trajectories – "a layered relationship between empowerment and disempowerment, which can be explained with the metaphor of the matryoshka journey" (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016:416). This metaphor is further developed: "The matryoshka is a nested series of dolls, one concealed within another. Likewise, migration journeys become a nested series of adventures and concealment strategies, as migrants attempt to evade capture by the state or escape violent criminal predators. [...] Migrants may need to undertake journeys within journeys, not only by changing direction, taking meandering routes away from their destination or waiting for opportune travel conditions, but also by strategically forfeiting or reclaiming control over their own body in transit. Thus, in these moments, migrants may be rendered physically immobile in the most extreme forms, for instance, while in secret compartments, boats, trucks or smuggler's safe houses." (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016: 416)

We begin to see here how immobility is thought of as working for the cause of mobility: "When viewed within this larger complex of goals, moments of immobility are not just ruptures, but also rungs on a ladder to further movement. Furthermore, during these moments of rupture – which are experienced differently as refusals, restarts, indefinite suspensions, voluntary interruptions or forced terminations – migrants devise nested tactics and strategies to achieve both immediate and long-term goals." (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016: 417).

We are also made to see immobility moments during the journey as both an expression of agency and a surrender of that agency. The corporeal scenes described in migrant narratives reveal the multiple layers of structural constraint and individual room for manoeuvre. This brings us back, but from another perspective, on the phenomenology of waiting.

(Conlon)

Conlon coordinates a special issue in which "contributors examine some of the ways in which waiting is socially produced, imbued with geopolitics, and also actively encountered, incorporated and resisted amidst everyday spaces that migrants experience" (Conlon 2011: 353) What is of particular interest to us here is the contributors' use of the work of feminist scholars. The general idea that is shared by many of the contributors, such as Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles, Alison Mountz, Liza Schuster and Breda Gray, is that there is an implicit alignment of mobility as masculine and staying as feminine. This is also to say

that waiting is gendered. Hyndman and Giles thus observe: “Regardless of their gender, those who wait in refugee camps in the global South are feminized, considered passive, immobile and more likely deemed ‘authentic’ refugees. In contrast, individuals who move are produced in accordance with masculinist assumptions; they are coded as politicized self-serving subjects who represent a threat to security and resources in the global North.” (Conlon 2011: 355, referring to Hyndman and Giles) For Schuster too: “asylum seekers’ encounters with waiting belie the masculinist hue with which they are cast en route to the global North as they are re-inscribed with feminized codings of stasis and passivity” (Conlon 2011: 357, referring to Schuster). Not only this, but the “tacit gendercoding” that differentiates refugees who remain displaced in camps from refugees who are (im)mobilized while on the move “ultimately exacerbates the wait” (Conlon 2011: 355-356, referring to Hyndman and Giles).

Conlon concludes on new directions that could be taken with the contributors’ studies: 1) we might consider how attending to specific modes of waiting sheds new light on apprehending the social spaces of protracted waiting among refugees in the global South; 2) we could examine how asylum seekers who wait in liminal spaces in the global North might strategically incorporate waiting into subjective understandings of themselves and within life projects; and 3) we might also explore the generative possibilities for counter-topographies of migrant (im)mobility and social and political activism that arise from attending to waiting as an intentional act amidst migrant (im)mobility (Conlon 2011: 358).

These new research directions are interesting on several aspects. We can see here how the two evolutions that we have identified in the research on waiting eventually come together. Some of the scholars who have embraced the ‘New Mobilities’ paradigm now also look at waiting as a lived experience, focusing on how waiting impacts the migrants’ subjectivities. The different route taken to explore the phenomenology of waiting, marked here by a strong feminist detour, might bring in interesting new ideas, if further explored. We can also see here how the move away from seeing waiting as a passive and wasted time, combined with the political engagement of feminist studies, could enable scholars to explore the various forms of activism that can emanate from waiting. Not only can the time of waiting be active, or actively spent by migrants, but waiting can also bring in fruitful results, not just on an individual, but also on a collective scale – for the activity invested by migrants may not just be any kind of activity, but could be activism itself.

III. The Political, Social and Religious Activism of Those Who Wait

When we are made able to view waiting as an exercise of agency, a new range of possibilities are offered to us. Following Mountz’ idea, our minds open up, from the ambiguities of waiting, to waiting as it is actively experienced, and to the activism that takes place in waiting: the liminal spaces of waiting can suddenly be considered as sites of struggle, action and political possibility (Mountz 2011). And yet it should not be forgotten that waiting is a relation process: there are those who wait, but there are also those who make wait. The potentialities of waiting thus depend on the wider context. This is also to say that, when exploring the various forms of activism that can emanate from waiting, the power relations that are at the basis of any form waiting are brought back to us with renewed strength. The three directions taken by scholars working on waiting, which can be summed up under power, phenomenology and mobility, should therefore be all kept in mind when looking at the political, social and religious activism that can take place while waiting.

Panel

South Asian Migrants across the Globe: Political, Social and Religious Activism

This panel will look at various South Asian communities across the world from a common perspective: what kind of activism are South Asians abroad engaging in, be they regular migrants, refugees or members of established diasporas? We are here particularly interested in political, social and religious activities that link migrants with the home country and/or the rest of their community abroad. The panel will open with a theoretical paper on waiting and will continue with a paper on South Asian activism in Canada, followed by two papers on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora (on political activism worldwide and on Tamil Tigers in France).

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