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Lost in Transition to Adulthood? Illegalized Male Migrants Navigating Temporal Dispossession

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Abstract: The so-called ‘refugee crisis’ has been portrayed as an invasion that threatens Europe and calls its sovereignty into question, prompting exceptional emergency responses. These (re)bordering processes highlight Europe’s uneven, discriminatory, and racialized filtering system. European nation-states sort desired and undesired migrants through sets of precarious administrative statuses that translate into limited access to resources, most notably the formal labor market. European border regimes impose specific spatialities and temporalities on migrants through long-term physical and social deceleration: territorial assignation, enduring unemployment, forced idleness, and protracted periods of waiting. These temporal ruptures interrupt individual biographies and hinder the hopes of a young population seeking a better future. However, some find ways to navigate the socio-spatial deceleration they face. In this paper, I explore how European border regimes affect the trajectory of Sub-Saharan male migrants and how they appropriate such temporal dispossession. I use biographical analysis and participant observations of a squatting organization in a Swiss city to scrutinize the everyday practices and aspirations of a population made illegal and, as a result, denied access to social markers of maturity. I investigate how time intersects with physical, social, and existential im/mobility. I argue that, in navigating spaces of asymmetrical power relationships, impoverished migrants find autonomy in illegality. Neither victimizing nor romanticizing illegalized migrants’ trajectories, this paper offers an ethnographic analysis of the capacities of an impoverished population to challenge European border regimes.

Keywords: refugee crisis; mobility; illegalized migration; time; trajectory; resistance



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1. Introduction

Alice: “How long is forever?”

White rabbit: “Sometimes, just one second”

Carroll Lewis, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

The 2015–2016 ‘refugee crisis’ has been framed as an exceptional event of an erratic flow of people who invaded European territories and threatened their sovereignty by jeopardizing their economic and social equilibrium (Collyer and King 2016). Through intimidating arguments, anxious discourses, and alarmist reports, European nations have sought to depict this challenge as a problem that has to be managed and solved. This paper builds on critical analyses of border and migration studies (Ambrosetti and Paparusso 2018; Collyer and King 2016; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; De Genova 2016; Fontanari 2017; Hess and Kasperek 2017; Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Picozza 2017; Tazzioli et al. 2018) which, on the contrary, see the ‘refugee crisis’ as, on the one hand, merely the expression of the autonomy of migration to bypass the European border regimes and, on the other hand, a European governance crisis—a sign of the fraying of the European project as a transnational sovereign entity.

I do not, however, aim to offer a counter-narrative of this political controversy. Rather, I wish to contribute to this Special Issue by (1) shifting the focus from the ostentatious

border controls and the dramatic event of the 'refugee crisis' to the migrants' experiences of crisis as an ongoing situation; (2) exploring time and temporality as technologies of power; (3) contextualizing the trajectory of an impoverished population through their everyday experiences, gendered expectations, and migratory projects.

Drawing from longitudinal strategy and biographical interviews with young male migrants, I ask how European mobility regimes affect the migrants' trajectory and how they appropriate such spatiotemporal constraints. So, this paper first provides an overview of my theoretical anchor that brings together time as a tool to govern mobility with relational consideration of power regimes. After this, I present a short introduction to the empirical studies that the paper is based on, followed by analytical sections that explore the impact of the European border regimes on the trajectories of migrants and their capacity to thwart them.

I show that European mobility regimes decelerate the trajectories of migrants through territorial assignments and restricted access to formal labor markets, thereby downgrading their expectations and hindering the expression of their masculinity in their ascribed role as breadwinners in a process that I call *temporal dispossession*. Finally, I explore how illegalized migrants navigate such deceleration through hypermobility and marginalization. I argue that, even in extremely subordinate positions, impoverished migrants find resources to appropriate temporal dispossession.

2. Spatiotemporal Regimes of Mobility

European border regimes experienced a huge challenge when more than 1.3 million people claimed asylum in 2015 and almost 1.2 million in 2016 (Eurostat 2021). Within media and political discourses, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as a 'refugee crisis', a terminology that declares the people seeking asylum and protection to be the problem. Crisis claiming has a performative effect and leads to the implementation of exceptional measures (Roitman 2014). Polarizing the public debate, this dynamic has been exploited to advance the fierce nationalism and welfare chauvinism of a right-wing political agenda (Tazzioli et al. 2018). The main means used to defend Europe from an alleged threat of border invasion has been to distinguish between 'real' political refugees on the one hand and 'bogus' asylum seekers and economic migrants instrumentally abusing the asylum system on the other (Ambrosetti and Paparusso 2018; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Picozza 2017). This determination to sort and rank the legitimacy of mobility and to portray immobility as being deserved then justifies the detection, detention, and deportation of allegedly fraudulent migrants.

Some authors have already shown that Europe selectively sorts nationals from certain countries or those with specific skills (Mau et al. 2012). These bordering processes are examples of racial and discriminatory filtering mechanisms (Van Houtum 2010), which create uneven access to mobility and, in fact, reveal not how hermetically sealed the borders are, but on the contrary, how porous they are. (Bommes and Sciortino 2011; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). In this paper, I use a mobility regime perspective and demonstrate that migration policies neither conform to a unified institutional logic nor reflect consistent planning but, rather, represent the messy outcomes of negotiations between state and non-state actors, including the migrants themselves (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Mezzadra 2010; Papadopoulos et al. 2008; Scheel 2018; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). Hence, I pay particular attention to the trajectory of migrants within the spaces of these asymmetrical power relations (Eule et al. 2019).

Moreover, a relational lens allows us to conceptually shift the focus away from the linear definition of 'crisis' as chaotic and temporary events that fragment normality to an exploration of 'crisis' as a pervasive condition of uncertainty and instability (Hage 2009; Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Vigh 2008). Indeed, for the most marginalized, a crisis is experienced as an endemic norm rather than an episodic exception (Tazzioli et al. 2018). I, therefore, fall in with the plea of De Genova (2013, 2016) to move away from the spectacle

of the ‘refugee crisis’ and instead scrutinize discreet but pervasive techniques of border control and their impact on migrant’s trajectories. Focusing on the material and cognitive effects of mobility regimes seems to have been neglected in border studies thus far (Strange et al. 2017), a gap that this paper seeks to fill, at least in part.

2.1. Time as Technology of Power

Previous contributions have shown that mobility regimes, through a dense web of actors, practices, institutions, and technologies, have caused routes to change and often become longer and more dangerous (Andersson 2014; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016). The migrants’ journey is constantly interrupted along the way (Schapendonk 2012) with periods of involuntary immobility, uncertainty, and unpredictability (Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou 2008). The migrants’ journeys are rarely predetermined but evolve depending on opportunities, new relations, and unexpected events along the route (Collyer 2007, 2010; Wissink and Mazzucato 2018).

Calling for greater attention to the spatiality of border regimes, much of this work sought to move beyond the binary poles of mobility and immobility, and instead demonstrate how the fragmented processes of im/mobility interweave and, in fact, nourish each other. Furthermore, these authors critically challenged the implicit methodological nationalism often prevalent in migration studies, which portrayed physical mobility as a frictionless bipolar movement—represented by arrows from a point A (country of departure) to a point B (country of arrival). While those studies mainly focused on material, social, and moral bonds between the two points, authors who study the processes of im/mobility also explore the journey itself, the web of facilitators that support it, and the unexpected obstacles that decelerate it.

While spatial segregation has received great attention, the temporal aspect of European border regimes has not been sufficiently addressed. Following the seminal work of Foucault (2007), some authors have started to scrutinize time as a technology of control and disciplinarianism (Andersson 2014; Fontanari 2017; Tazzioli 2018). These authors distinguish between ‘time’ as a quantitative chronological measure—ranging from the rigid schedule of an asylum camp, the number of days spent in detention, the deadline to submit a legal appeal, the years it takes to receive a final decision on an asylum claim, to short-term legal residency—and ‘temporality’ as an embodied experience of time. Hence, the spatial dimension of border control techniques is always intertwined with the temporal dimension.

Under the European border regimes, time has in fact been developed as a political tool to facilitate a certain kind of mobility under particular conditions and to prevent others. Administrative detention camps and asylum centers, the Dublin regulations, and indeed, even the new Hot Spot system implemented during the ‘refugee crisis’ can be seen as temporal tools that introduce pervasive interruptions and have the effect of slowing certain migratory movements (De Coulon 2019; Eule et al. 2019; Fontanari 2017; Griffiths 2014; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Turnbull 2016). However, while the border regimes’ temporal considerations are mainly felt in situations and institutions of confinement, I argue that temporal dispossession continues beyond and long after the asylum processes themselves, penetrating and interrupting the aspirations and intimate lives of migrants.

While individuals orient themselves on the basis of past experiences, physical mobility is always future-oriented. Hage theorizes this sense of hope that one is going somewhere in one’s life as existential mobility: “We engage in the kind of physical mobility that defines us as migrants because we feel another geographical space is a better launching pad for our existential selves. We move physically so we can feel that we are existentially on the move again or at least moving better” (Hage 2005, p. 470). However, as we will see, migrating to Europe involves repeated interruptions in which the lives of illegalized migrants are put on hold through temporal dispossession. Nevertheless, despite their negative connotations, immobilization and waiting are not merely passive or empty (Hage

2009); they can be opportunities for migrants to rest, gather information and resources, contact fellow migrants, build new relationships, and plan onward movement (De Coulon 2019; Griffiths 2014; Schapendonk 2012; Turnbull 2016). Hence, I argue that young migrants struggling for their adulthood to be recognized are not passively stuck in some kind of permanent waitness (Honwana 2014) but, in fact, use the time to actively develop sets of practices that enable them to appropriate the obstacles they face¹.

2.2. Practices of Appropriation

Migrants constantly contest and negotiate their socio-political condition and force the mobility regimes to adapt and (re)organize themselves (Mezzadra 2010; Scheel 2018; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). It has been shown that it is impossible to fully regulate mobility and that the autonomy of migration is actually stimulated by attempts to control it. However, as Eule and colleagues (Eule et al. 2019) point out, the Autonomy of Migration approach has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the material and cognitive effects of mobility regimes and for romanticizing the experience of the different actors and ignoring the structural constraints that they face.

Contradicting those critics, Scheel (2018) introduces the concept of practices of appropriation in order to stress the creative strategies used by migrants to constantly bypass the constraints that are put on them. In order to avoid viewing the agency of individuals in the abstract, Scheel understands the concrete practices of migrants as drawing attention to the constellation of power relationships within which they take place. Taking place in asymmetrical power relationships, these practices of appropriation can be likened to what Scott (1985) calls the weapons of the weak: daily forms of discreet resistance. Whereas most research in political sociology focuses on highly visible and organized mobilizations (see for instance: Chimienti 2011; Coutant 2018; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2018), the practices of appropriation approach sees the daily practices of an impoverished and dispersed population as silent but nevertheless political acts. By zooming in on the trajectories and the concrete practices of migrants and recognizing them as discreet but real expressions of resistance and struggle against their subjectivization by European mobility regimes, I consider the migrants as political subjects rather than apathetic and passive agents.

3. Methodological Considerations

Given the fragmented and unpredictable nature of my interlocutors' journey, a qualitative and inductive approach seems to be the most accurate way of exploring the trajectory of illegalized migrants. However, precarious migrants are a hard-to-reach population (Dahinden and Efionayi-Mäder 2009), so the first step of my fieldwork relied on my personal network in Switzerland. As an entry point, I chose a squatting association, which makes empty houses available to migrants. The successively occupied buildings vary greatly in terms of size, comfort, and salubrity. Although the number of inhabitants varies over time (from 15 to 50 people) and depends on the limited space available, degree of tolerated overcrowding, and in-house regulations, the profile of the residents remains fairly stable: single men from Sub-Saharan Africa mostly aged from 18 to 30 (although some are aged between 30 to 50 years old).

In order to apprehend the heterogeneity of my interlocutors' administrative statuses, I use the term 'illegalized migrants' to highlight the active role of nation-states in the categorization of certain individuals as being 'illegal' and to underline the constructed (Bauder 2013), potentially temporary, and territorially situated character (Düvell 2011) of 'illegality'. Indeed, the backgrounds, journeys, experiences, and administrative status of my interlocutors are extremely diverse. Some have university degrees, while others are illiterate. Some have lived in Europe for over a decade, while others had only arrived a few months earlier. Most of them arrive in Europe by boat through Italy or Spain, by land through Greece, or directly by plane. Some have a permanent residency document, others have a temporary one of varying length, while others are still awaiting an outcome or have been refused any protection. All of them have experienced extreme traumatizing situations:

seeing friends die during the course of their journey; experiencing starvation; enduring periods of instability and immobilization in informal camps, asylum centers, or prisons; being subjected to abrupt deportations and recurrent physical violence by police officers and border guards; and having to experience protracted situations of homelessness.

The sensitive character (Bouillon et al. 2006) of my ethnographic fieldwork makes it all the more important for me to pay special attention to such ethical issues (Bilger and Van Liempt 2009) as confidentiality and anonymization, informed consent, and secure data storage. I also censor details (such as participants' nationalities) that might identify my interlocutors. The only pragmatic and moral way to approach such extremely marginalized individuals is through deep and trusting relationships, which is why I favor a longitudinal strategy and quality over quantity and, where possible, conduct biographical interviews (Rosenthal 2004). Since 2017, I've conducted an intensive immersion in the squatting association where I use semi-participant observations or shadowing (Quinlan 2008) as a co-presence in everyday life of my interlocutors—giving us plenty of time to play cards or draughts, to get bored, to drink weak tea or cheap beers, and allowing my interlocutors time to chat about their own concerns while I record informal discussions² (Bernard 2011). All field notes and interviews are coded with the help of qualitative analysis software (Atlas.ti), and I follow an inductive approach through successive cycles of coding to structure and triangulate emergent themes (Charmaz 2008).

For this article, I select three interlocutors, namely Felix, Paul, and George, whose trajectories depicted patterns and experiences that recurrently occurred in other people's biography. The analysis of the trajectories of these illegalized migrants with very different precarious administrative statuses reveals that they all experience the same forms of temporal dispossession and end up appropriating the European border regimes by carving out a living in similar petty illegalized activities.

4. Navigating Temporal Dispossession

Through the analysis of the trajectory of three illegalized migrants, the next sections underscore interrelated dynamics of temporal dispossession and means to appropriate it: firstly, the enduring experience of waiting and its impacts on personal aspirations (Section 4.1); secondly, the effects of temporal dispossession on the performance of migrants' masculinities and familial obligations (Section 4.2); thirdly, the pervasive struggle to be socially recognized as an adult (Section 4.3); and fourthly, physical mobility and petty criminality as hope driven to regain control over one's trajectory (Section 4.4).

4.1. Regressive Waiting

After almost one year of travel from his Sub-Saharan home country, Felix finally arrived in Lybia at the beginning of 2012 and soon began to run a car repair business through an acquaintance he made along the road. When the second civil war started in 2014, his premises and the parked cars were burned to the ground. Fearing for his life, he arrived by boat in Italy at the beginning of 2015 and found shelter in an asylum camp in Foggia. Hence, at the age of 22, he is passing through the so-called 'refugee crisis'. When his first asylum claim was rejected, he appealed to this decision. After two years in the asylum camp in Foggia, the Italian authorities stopped granting him alimentary support, and Felix now spent all his savings from Libya to meet his basic needs. One year later, feeling that his asylum process is endlessly pending, he decided to leave Foggia and try and go to Germany, where some acquaintances he met in Libya offer him some work. As his semi-legal situation obliges him to remain on Italian soil, he 'illegally' crossed the border into Switzerland before being deported back six months later. In the middle of 2017, he made a second attempt to cross Switzerland with a view to reaching Germany but was again controlled on the train. The police officers seized his money and released him at a small train station. Determined not to go back to Italy, Felix was to engage in petty criminality and got involved in low-level street drug dealing. Felix is homeless for more than eight months, sleeping "in the bushes" surrounding the city or going back and forth

to different emergency shelters. We both met in one of them before he joined the squatting association. In 2018, Felix spent six months in a Swiss prison for 'illegal residency' before being deported back to Italy. One week later, despite being banned from the country, he was back in Switzerland. In the course of the next two years, Felix circulated regularly between Switzerland and Italy in order to see his asylum process, sign administrative documents, and meet with his lawyer. At the end of 2020, Felix was supposed to make a quick trip to Foggia to meet his lawyer and pay his fees. Unfortunately, during his first attempt to cross the Italian border, border guards stopped him on the train and again seized his savings. At the time of writing, Felix is working as a bricklayer in the slum surrounding the asylum camp of Foggia and is still waiting for a final decision on his asylum process.

When migrants seek asylum, they are trapped in a spatial and temporal bubble while waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. During this waiting period, asylum seekers are parked in reception centers, which are usually placed in remote areas. Their movements are limited and monitored, and they lack any legal status. While waiting for a response to their asylum claim, therefore, migrants are stuck in a semi-legal limbo (Menjívar 2006), whose characteristic features are a limited access to the formal economy, a high degree of inactivity, and protracted waiting periods resulting in a permanent feeling that the future is uncertain (De Coulon 2019; Fontanari 2017; Griffiths 2014; Turnbull 2016). Felix has now been waiting in a semi-legal limbo for more than six years.

When he arrived in Europe and at the beginning of his asylum process, Felix refused to beg for money in public spaces and took various jobs in agriculture but he now has the feeling of being trapped in a situation in which he cannot make any personal progress. Tragically, he feels that his social mobility is getting worse, not better:

Felix: "How could I be so down like that, that I started begging money. I tried everything to get a job. I started to do farm work or I started to pick up snails. [. . .] In Libya I was living a good life, I never expected to pick up snails. I tried to find a job but it's not easy. I tried to have my document it's not easy. Will I kill myself? This is my situation, so I have to enjoy it and carry on with it. We picked up snails, we did farm work, we plugged tomatoes." (Formal interview, 17 December 2019)

Felix's restricted access to the formal labor market in Europe has downgraded the social status he achieved in Libya, has devalued his former work experiences, and has made him face a protracted period of endurance. The lack of legal residency status and the fact that he is banned from the formal labor market block any prospect of social mobility, and Felix experiences this period of waiting as regressive. Even for 'low-skilled' migrants, the protracted journey within the European border regimes results in subordinated social downgrading. Indeed, Fontanari argues that "waiting while nurturing hopes about the future can produce subjective effects of subordination and dependency as well as reinforcing the marginality and compliance of migrant subjects whose legal status is precarious" (Fontanari 2017, p. 33). Downgrading his expectations and accepting harsh work conditions tend to forge Felix's new labor subjectivities. Facing an economical ban or years of being unemployed lower illegalized migrants' expectations and motivate them to take on jobs that are socially stigmatized, less well paid, or even dangerous (Benach et al. 2010).

Unfortunately for Felix and many others, this supposedly 'temporary' waiting period seems endless. At the beginning of 2021, Felix called me several times to ask me to send him financial support to Foggia to pay his lawyer's fees because border guards had stolen his money on his way to Italy:

Felix: "I am tired of this Italian document. Your lawyer tells you to do this, to do that, to pay for this, to pay for that, and I am still waiting. They even talk about a 6-month document. What will I do with this shit? I need a good document to travel to Europe, see my friends, even go back see my family [. . .] I wait and I wait for what? They know that without a document, I cannot apply for a proper job." (Voice message, 13 January 2021)

His limited choices, ranging from begging to uncertain agriculture jobs, and his overwhelming lack of agency blur Felix's future prospects. For more than six years, Felix has experienced existential 'stuckness', a situation in which an individual "suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves" (Hage 2009, p. 98). When Felix was offered a job as a car mechanic in Europe, European regulation made it impossible for him to seize those opportunities. His existential immobility is directly linked to his perception of his own broken-down social mobility, a permanent present and a never-to-come better future; what Carroll (1865) calls 'jam tomorrow'. Not only do these six years of regressive waiting seem to be unending, but his struggle to obtain a legal status could turn to be worthless since the Italian authorities could very well only grant him a six-month short-term document.

The temporality resulting from the ban on work leads to a feeling of powerlessness and of personal stagnation. For Felix, temporal dispossession is experienced through his social downgrading and his incapacity to seize the few opportunities that emerge along his journey. Immobilized in his social and physical mobility, this extended stasis of regressive waiting has major impacts on his individual prospects but also on his familial ascribed role of breadwinner.

4.2. Interrupted Masculinities

While regressive waiting seems to hinder Felix's personal aspirations of social and physical mobility, temporal dispossession also affects the performance of his masculinity and family obligations. Migrating is not solely an individual project but relies on a set of familial investments (emotional and financial) and particular expectations (Boyd 1989). As Felix puts it:

Felix: "[In Libya] I was taking care of my family, my family problems: this one wants to go to school, this one needs to eat, this one wants . . . all this kind of stuff. Because in [my home country] you don't only carry your own problems, you carry the problems of those you are senior to." (Formal interview, 17 December 2019)

Felix's worries about not being able to take care of his family arise from his social declassification and underline the key role of relative seniority in his trajectory. Indeed, seniority, which is supposed to imply authority over and respect on the part of younger kin, also involves the responsibility to fulfill particular gendered expectations: to offer predictable supports to young dependents, who are expected to gradually become more self-sufficient as they transition to adulthood. Such practices are shaped by gender and age dynamics into a normative pattern of kinship, which ensures social reproduction and maintains asymmetrical power relationships (Tronto 1998; Locke 2017). However, being on the move and distanced from those he is supposed to support, the provider finds it difficult to carry out the role of direct supervision of, for example, the education of younger family members who have stayed at home. Despite the physical separation, this social stratification does not dissolve during the process of migration but is actively maintained at both ends through regular phone calls and digital conversations. For Felix, being unemployed hinders him from carrying out his gendered role, and, in the long run, this creates a feeling of emasculation. On an individual level, Felix cannot be financially independent, which impacts his sense of dignity and his expectation of self-determination as a grown-up male adult. On a collective level, his daily-paid jobs in the informal labor market do not allow Felix to save money and send financial support to his family back home. As a result, the deceleration of his trajectory translates into an infantilizing process. His very struggles for financial self-independence prevent him from performing his ascribed role as an adult male breadwinner.

However, it is also true that under certain circumstances physical mobility can lead to a form of agency in negotiating family obligations and appropriating of temporal dispossession, as exemplified by my encounter with Paul.

One afternoon, I ran into Paul in the city center, and we started to chat. Paul is a man from Sub-Saharan Africa aged about 30. He arrived in Europe more than 10 years ago and is married to a Spanish citizen, which gives him a permanent residency status. Paul, therefore, has access to the formal Spanish labor market and can travel throughout Europe for three months as a tourist. Due to the Dublin Agreement, his movements within Europe are narrowed, and by overstaying his three-month visa, Paul slides into 'illegal residency'. Before settling in Switzerland, he spent a few years with his brother in Denmark and in Sweden, where he had construction jobs in the informal market and did some drug dealing when jobs were hard to come by. When I was ready to leave, I remembered that his wife, to whom I have transferred money several times on Paul's behalf, had called me numerous times asking for news. After a thunderous laugh, Paul explained to me:

Paul: "Leave her. I don't want her to know that I am around. I play it like I am dead. I send her a lot of money already. I don't want it to be kind of a monthly duty. When I have some, I'll send some. Every month I send money to Spain for my wife or to my brother, and to my family in [home country]. I show them love. I give them my money, my time, even my body. Yes, I give them my body, don't you see where I'm sleeping?" (Informal conversation, 17 October 2020)

The dispersion of Paul's household and the physical distance between its various members create opportunities for him to negotiate and manage his breadwinner's role. He can reduce the frequency of his remittances by simply not picking up calls. Most of Paul's strong ties are now transnational exchanges, which carry with them a range of tensions and affective expectations. Paul's decision, for instance, to temporarily "play it like [he is] dead" is a way of keeping control of the modality of his breadwinner's role. He prefers to regulate the moral pressure on him by meeting his responsibilities not regularly but as and when he chooses, even at the cost of unmet expectations on the part of those he supports.

The nature of such transnational care work captures and reflects intra-household gendered and aged power relations, which tend to bind family members together through a network of reciprocity and obligations (Baldassar and Merla 2014). For most of my interlocutors, sending remittances to their families remains the main tool with which they, in practice, perform their breadwinner's role and lay claim to their status as the responsible male elder adult. However, again and again, temporal dispossession disrupts all attempts by illegalized migrants to perform their masculinities with the result that they become providers only intermittently.

In regard to the repeated interruptions and ruptures of their biography, temporal dispossession seems to usurp the transition to adulthood that my interlocutors attempt to achieve. For illegalized migrants, the struggle to match their chronological age with their social age is a pervasive condition.

4.3. Enduring Time Dilation

Many of my interlocutors experienced a gap between, on the one hand, the passing of the years and their advancing age, and, on the other hand, the deceleration of their trajectory and how this prevented them from meeting the expectations of their actual age (Simonsen 2018). Like Griffiths (2014), who explores the temporalities of detained migrants, my interlocutors describe their situation in Europe as a "timeless present, whilst the world and the people around them continue forward" (Griffiths 2014, p. 1997). For illegalized migrants, social and chronological aging appear to be permanently de-synchronized. As George, a 26-year-old Sub-Saharan male migrant granted a five-year legal residency in Italy tells me:

George: "You don't have a wife, you don't have a job, a car, or even a house. People keep asking, "What's up?" and it's like you didn't achieve anything. Europe is a long journey. It takes time. We know it since the beginning. You have to sacrifice a lot. You know, if I had stayed in my country, I'd already have a small baby right now. I am telling you, any of us in this room would have his own

son just like you.” (Informal conversation in the parlor of the squatted house, 7 December 2020)

George strives to conform to the gendered norms that are expected of him: financial independence, love and marriage, a first child, a stable housing situation, and the accumulation of positional goods. However, the social deceleration he faces denies him access to such social markers of maturity, and he can only self-represent himself by the lack of them. George, for example, compares and contrasts his own trajectory with his peers who did not migrate, and with me, a white European male close in chronological age. I and they both appear to represent to George an idealized standard of normative masculinity. This specific temporality, where the perception of time is measured through the comparison between one’s social mobility and that of one’s peers, can be called time dilation. Echoing others, George’s temporal stasis is de-synchronized with the supposed signs of social progress of others around him.

However, it is also true to say that agency can be found even in such seemingly tentacular stagnation. Indeed, George’s abnegation (“You have to sacrifice a lot”), Paul’s involvement (“I show them love. I give them my money, my time, even my body”), and Felix’s refusal to contemplate suicide (“This is my situation, so I have to enjoy it and carry on with it”) seem to celebrate their endurance. As Hage puts it, “the heroism of stuckedness lies in this ability to snatch agency in the very midst of its lack” (Hage 2009, p. 4). Hence, my interlocutors’ capacity to “wait out the crisis” (Hage 2009, p. 4) confers them a form of personal dignity that drives them both to patiently endure their seemingly agentless situation and to restlessly keep trying against all the odds.

With the passing of the years, temporal dispossession evolves into a form of time dilation, where my interlocutors feel trapped in a permanent stagnation while peers seem to progress. Nevertheless, impoverished migrants are not passive agents, they do not simply wait in an enduring limbo of regressive present, but, on the contrary, find alternative ways to fulfill their personal aspirations and familial obligation. In the attempt to overcome temporal dispossession, the practice of appropriation my interlocutors develop is a form of what can be called a deviant entrepreneurial journey.

4.4. Potentialities of a Deviant Entrepreneurial Journey

Along with social deceleration, European mobility regimes achieve different forms of physical deceleration. For instance, Felix is obliged to stay in Italy for as long as his asylum procedure is not completed. However, while Paul and George can travel within the Schengen area and stay in a different country for up to three months as a tourist, nevertheless their access to the formal economy is limited to one national territory.

In 2015, George arrived by boat in Italy during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and stayed in an asylum camp near Como for two years. After a negative response to his first asylum claim, he appealed this decision and is eventually granted a five-year residency permit. After more than two years of waiting in limbo, he today has legal access to the Italian formal economy. George applied for jobs and sent his CV but, without any state financial support to meet his basic needs, he is forced to beg. After one year of this, he feels discouraged and decides to move forward. As Wyss (2019) has shown, facing restricted choices, migrants with a precarious status have to remain vigilant and be flexible, and they end up in short-term and spontaneous movements from one country to another, which result from the opportunities that open up along their journey. Such opportunities arise from their personal network and often take place in different countries. Like Paul, George’s physical mobility within Europe is restrained for up to three months, and his access to the European formal labor market restricted to the country responsible for his asylum claim. After six months in Ferrara, George crosses the border into Austria before getting deported back to Italy due to the Dublin Agreement.

George: “Same shit everywhere. And it’s getting worse there. If you go to Vienna, every day all they tell you is, “You are not allowed to be in Vienna.” If I’m not allowed to be in Vienna, where do they allow me to stay? I am a man; I have my

own freedom, you know, to go anywhere I want to go. To walk around anywhere I want to walk. Not to be put as a hostage, told where to go or not to go. So, I don't think I can obey that . . . So I fuck the law. I do what I wanna do." (Formal interview, 13 March 2020)

After his aborted attempt to settle in Austria, what he says remains true: he needs to move to a different country in order to broaden his horizons and finally ends up in Switzerland. From George's point of view, his perspectives in Italy are restricted, and he does not see any glimmer of hope.

George expresses himself as a political subject by physically contesting the territorial assignation that he considers illegitimate. For George, as for many migrants, crossing national borders and looking for opportunities in a country where he is not supposed to represents a practice of appropriation to temporal dispossession. He openly contests the status quo that border regimes try to impose on him and claims the right to im/mobility and a form of temporal justice. Even though he can legally remain in Italy, George prefers to challenge the law in order to seize opportunities that open up along his journey, try his luck wherever he wishes to, and once again attempt to fulfill his project. George, therefore, like many others, creates different practices of appropriation that widen his field of possibilities even if it means adding a layer of illegalization to his trajectory. As a result, the territorial assignation, foreseen in the Dublin Agreement, with its restriction of 'secondary movement', transforms migrants who have been granted legal residency into a disposable mobile labor force (Picozza 2017), which forces them to be "stuck in mobility" (Wyss 2019, p. 5). Indeed, George feels trapped as a "hostage" in Italy and, despite numerous deportations and periods in prison, which of course greatly decelerate his trajectory, tries in multiple attempts to settle in Austria and Switzerland. Called hypermobility by Picozza (2017), these flexible and repeated patterns of physical mobility overlap, for illegalized migrants such as Felix, with unlimited waiting periods. Thus, Felix goes back and forth between Switzerland and Italy to meet his lawyer and deal with the authorities in Italy, costing him energy, money, and time.

As well as contesting their territorial assignation, my interlocutors appropriate their restricted access to the formal labor market by engaging in low-level street drug dealing:

Felix: "That's how I got involved in that, due to my frustration with life. Now there is nothing again to do, no job, no nothing, no opportunities. Are you going to be hungry always? Waiting for people to give you money to eat? That's how I started doing the business. Due to what I was experiencing. That's how I joined them. It is not that today if I have a job in the morning, I go to the job. I can do any job." (Formal interview, 17 December 2019)

Temporal dispossession leads to a feeling of powerlessness and dependency on state support. However, their lack of perspectives and their feeling of stagnation also push my interlocutors to be creative and to take risks in illegalized but available activities. Hence, a deviant entrepreneurial journey is driven by the hope of regaining control over one's life.

Transnational entrepreneurs are defined as individuals who use their personal relations in and experiences of different territories, take advantage of opportunities across national borders to move goods or services, and travel around depending on such opportunities (Drori et al. 2009; Muñoz-Castro et al. 2019). Flexible, creative, determined, pro-active, risk-taking, most of my interlocutors match this description of transnational entrepreneurship, even though they are not publicly admired or even acknowledged, as such, but rather demonized.

While labeled as pure deviant (Becker 1963) in Europe, because they publicly transgress a norm, my interlocutors do not necessarily internalize the subjectivity involved in their deviant entrepreneurial journey but perceive drug dealing as a temporary, medium-term activity that they will drop the day they find genuine opportunities. Hence, they have an ambivalent relationship with their deviant entrepreneurship. On the one hand, they consider it to be legitimate because it is a means of gaining independence from Nation-states regulations and from unbearable existential immobility. They start on their deviant

entrepreneurial journey because European mobility regimes deny them both the opportunity and/or the right to sell their labor force while they are stuck in a time limbo. On the other hand, however, they still perceive it as deviant, do not feel proud of themselves, and, thanks to their physical separation from their household, hide this aspect of their life from their entire family.

5. Discussion: Autonomy of Illegality

While the 'refugee crisis' has been portrayed as a clear-cut period, for those who have passed through its nets, uncertainty and instability seem to be an endless condition of the ongoing crisis.

In order to go beyond an abstract study of power relationships, scholars would do well to take the daily experience of bordering in the trajectories of migrants and the long-term impact of enduring temporalities seriously. Different authors, for instance, [De Coulon \(2019\)](#) in reception centers for rejected asylum seekers or [Griffiths \(2014\)](#) with detained migrants, have scrutinized how spatial confinement is experienced as an indefinite stagnation. In parallel, I have shown that temporal dispossession is a durable condition that ruthlessly extends well beyond asylum or carceral institutions and permeates the intimate lives of illegalized migrants. The restricted access to formal work and to physical mobility represents discreet border techniques and is experienced by my interlocutors as a form of hybrid captivity.

While physical distance makes them able to negotiate their breadwinners' role and manage the rhythm of their remittances, it also allows my interlocutors to filter the information they choose to share with their families, for example, their involvement in petty criminality. They perceive their transnational entrepreneurial journey as exceptional due to their current situation and, hopefully, short-term. Through local deviance, they attempt to fulfill transnational family obligations and manage to enact a form of normative masculinity through these unconventional paths. Illegalized in their movement and financial activity, starting a deviant entrepreneurial journey is a way of broadening their field of possibilities and opening up new avenues to achieve existential mobility.

Other authors have argued ([Andersson 2014](#); [Fontanari 2017](#); [Tazzioli 2018](#)) that European border regimes use time as a technology of power to slow down and regulate certain mobilities, which generate effects of containment and filtering. As I have shown, such decelerations translate into a subordinated process that downgraded migrants' expectations and aspirations to realize their migratory projects and fragmented their biography. The gap between their chronological and social age thus creates prolonged transition situations of what is experienced as an extended youth in enduring liminality. Their resulting feeling of hopelessness in their situation pushes them to seek available alternatives, and it appears my interlocutors have accepted the illegalization of their trajectories as a form of normality. As [Picozza](#) highlights, "although it comes with a price, there is a certain freedom or autonomy to be found in 'illegality'" ([Picozza 2017](#), pp. 74–75). The migrants' deviant entrepreneurial journey is marked by harsh working conditions, stress and humiliation, violence and detention, and the small benefits they manage to draw from them make the migrants stick to excessive precarious situations. My interlocutors do not refuse to be part of a subordinated, malleable, and docile labor force but seem to be excluded from it and are pushed into dangerous and illegalized activities, in which repeated deportation and prolonged detentions are more than probable. Hence, if there is some autonomy in illegality, the room of maneuver is particularly narrowed and seems to be dead-ended.

Regardless of their administrative status, Felix, George, Paul, and many other illegalized migrants, face a form of temporal dispossession. Dependent on state social support, emasculated by the lack of economic opportunities, and infantilized in their gendered aspirations, my interlocutors feel trapped in temporal stasis and have to put up with a situation in which their life is put on hold with no glimmer of hope of a better future. Thus, engaging in a deviant transnational journey is a means for illegalized migrants to contest the regressive waiting to which they are condemned, to negotiate their interrupted

masculinities, to endure time dilation, and, in this way, to attempt to regain control over their trajectory against temporal dispossession.

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Notes

- ¹ In this paper, I follow a constructivist approach to life trajectories. Hence, I take into consideration my interlocutors' subjective experience of aging and not institutionalized categories of chronological age. As Honwana argues: "Rather than defining youth on the basis of age categories (for example 15–24 or 14–35), this paper understands youth as defined by social expectations and responsibilities and considers all those who have not yet been able to attain social adulthood, despite their age, as youth" (Honwana 2014, p. 29).
- ² For accuracy and transparency, I directly transcript those informal interviews on my smartphone in front of my interlocutors to show them that the topic of the conversation is recorded and represents an interest for my research project.

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