

Waiting as a redemptive state - The 'Lampedusa in Hamburg' and the offer from the Hamburg government

Abstract

This paper explores an offer of possible legalization that the Hamburg government gave to a group of 350 illegalized West-African migrants in 2013. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2017, when the majority of the migrants who accepted the offer were still awaiting its redeeming, I explore the offer as an instrument of governing and as a lived timespace. Taking this route, this article seeks to contribute to the debate of waiting and the relation between time, space and government in present border regimes. In particular, I argue for the need to pay attention to how waiting, as a technique of governing migrants, works through linear and periodized temporal frameworks. Drawing on feminist critiques of temporal linearity and periodization, and on Povinelli's (2011) work on techniques of 'temporal bracketing', I investigate how violence and redeeming are coordinated spatially and temporally in the offer. I argue that temporal frameworks intertwine with territorial imaginaries in ways that allow waiting to appear as redemptive state. Moreover, I suggest that by attending to multiple and relational temporalities, the coordinates of suffering and redeeming in the offer might be redrawn.

Keywords

Waiting, Duldung, Migration, Borders, Temporality

Introduction

In the spring of 2013, the political movement known as 'The Lampedusa in Hamburg' brought the European border to Hamburg. The around 350 men forming 'the Lampedusa' had travelled from different West-African countries to Libya to work. Then, with the Libyan war in 2011, they fled via the Mediterranean island Lampedusa to Italy, as many other West-African workers (Paoletti, 2014). The men acquired temporary Italian residency permits; however, they found no work and little public support in Italy. As many others, they travelled north to other European countries, often with the encouragement of the Italian government (Niess, 2018). According to the European Dublin regulation however, they had no right to work or reside more than three months in another European country. Finding each other in Hamburg, the men formed the movement 'the Lampedusa in Hamburg', and claimed a collective residency permit. To solve the perceived political and humanitarian 'crisis' sparked by their visible hardship and political actions (Niess, 2018), the federal government gave the men 'an offer': If they gave up their Italian papers, they would not be deported, but get the peculiar

German status of the Duldung. The Duldung, or 'toleration permit', regulates a suspension of deportation for an indefinite period, due to legal or factual reasons. It is as such a condition of unlawful, non-sanctioned residency (Mitrić, 2013: 25). Moreover, the offer came with the conditional promise of a future residency permit for those who managed to prove 'good integration', defined in consistence with German Duldung-regulation as economic self-sufficiency and language skills.

This article presents an ethnographic exploration of the offer, based on fieldwork in Hamburg in 2017, when I acquainted some of the men who accepted it and who were still awaiting its conditional and uncertain redeeming. They were still 'living in the offer', as one man said. An offer, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is 'an undertaking to do an act or give something on condition that the party to whom the proposal is made do some specified act or make a return promise' (Merriam-Webster.com). It thus implies a particular temporal structure, shaped by a conditional promise of postponed future redeeming. One of the pressing, painful questions haunting my conversation with 'the Lampedusa'¹ in 2017 was: 'Is it worth the wait?' Exploring the contested and entangled framings of the offer by the migrants, humanitarian actors and the government, the question 'is it worth the wait', serves in this text to open the event of waiting to the problematic of how present harms and future redeeming are coordinated (see Povinelli, 2011). In other words, it invites an engagement with how future redeeming and the violence of waiting acquire meaning in relation to each other within and through certain spatiotemporal frames.

Taking departure from this question, the article seeks to contribute to the debate of waiting and the relation between time, space and government in present border regimes. An emergent scholarship have highlighted how (illegalized) asylum seekers and labor migrants are subjected to temporal suspension, spatial immobility and uncertain juridical status in present processes of bordering (Tazzioli, 2018; Rotter, 2016; Andersson, 2014). This literature has underlined the imposition of a temporality marked by uncertainty and arbitrariness in the governing of migrants (Karlsen, 2015). Moreover, scholars have explored the governmental effects of conditional promises of future inclusion in regularization schemes or labour migration programs and how these make migrants vulnerable to exploitation (Bryan, 2018). While literature has highlighted the organizing logic of territorial nation-states in producing and legitimizing migrants' waiting, less attention has been paid to how this spatial imaginary is imbricated with temporal frameworks (yet see Ramsay, 2017a; Barber and Lem, 2018). However, such frameworks situate migrants in time and space in particular ways and shape political and epistemological judgements on migrants' waiting. In this article, I argue for the need to pay attention to how waiting, as a technique of governing migrants (Foucault, 2007), is implicated in progressivist frameworks of temporal linearity (Ramsay, 2017b; Bissell, 2007) and works through periodization and future promises. Such attention is crucial I suggest, in the context of European states increasingly grounding decisions on legalization and social and political rights in notions of 'good integration' that migrants have to prove over time (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016).

The offer, I suggest, makes an exemplary site for such an investigation. Drawing on feminist engagements with temporal linearity and periodization (Povinelli, 2011; Bastian, 2011; Browne, 2014), I explore the offer as a technique of governing migrants, and show how linear and periodized temporal frameworks intertwine with the social imaginary of territorial sovereign states (Brenner and Elden, 2009; Valverde, 2015). Moreover, I draw on Povinelli's (2009; 2011) work on how practices and discourses of governing work to 'bracket' present violence through promises of a time in the future when it will have been redeemed. I show how the offer is framed as a transitional period, and how the violence inflicted through waiting is judged as 'worth it' from the perspective of its future redeeming. From this spatialized future perspective, I argue, waiting becomes apprehensible as a redemptive state. Thereby, migrant illegality is naturalized and political and economic power relations concealed. I use the notion of 'redemptive' to designate the 'teleological scheme' (Balibar, 2014) that makes waiting apprehensible as a process that tends towards a better future and that simultaneously gains its meaning from the perspective of this future. Moreover, it signals the Christian ethos underpinning the offer as a humanitarian intervention. However, while the offer is a technique of governing migrants, it is also a lived and embodied timespace. Drawing on feminist engagements with multiple and relational temporalities (Bastian, 2011; Browne, 2014; Massey, 2005), I explore the migrants' embodied experiences of waiting. From this perspective, dominant ways of coordinating violence and redeeming in the offer is both illuminated and disrupted.

Setting the ethnographic scene

Some weeks into fieldwork, I met Matthew, one of the men who accepted the offer in 2013. As we sat down in an outdoor café in the city center, I thanked him for meeting me. However, he interrupted me, indicating there were more important things at stake than my gratitude: 'We have to tell before it is too late. The hardship is too much', he said. He spoke rapidly, in a worried tone. 'We need to talk about this. This Zeitarbeit (temporary agency work)', he continued. 'They sign you for forty hours a week, but at the end of the month, you have worked no more than fifty hours. It is always a fight about hours. There is no future in Zeitarbeit'. At the cafe table papers piled up: vacancies, applications for working permits, and letters from the federal Employment Agency. Guiding me through them, Matthew pointed at the hotels rising towards the sky around us; 'There and there...' he said, naming them, 'we are working there, washing those buildings'.

Several authors have described the exceptional response the Lampedusa engendered in Hamburg in 2013 (Meret and Della Corte, 2016; Benigni and Pierdicca, 2015; Niess, 2018). The hardship the men endured, their poverty and homelessness, sparked a public uproar in the city (Niess, 2018). The Lampedusa framed their hardship in political terms and demanded the right to work and a collective residency permit (§23 Residency Act). Numerous political and humanitarian actors such as labor unions, neighborhood groups and left activists, mobilized around their claims. Amongst the

supporters, the Hamburg church took a leading role, due to a faith-based humanitarian calling. The church supported the movement materially, affectively and strategically, and utilized its position to negotiate a solution with the government (Niess, 2018). The federal government of Hamburg saw the men's presence as illegal and negotiated their deportation with Italy. However, while the territorial imaginary of sovereign states made them unable to appear as political subjects with legitimate claims (Noll, 2010; Arendt, 1973), their visible hardship sparked a call for a humanitarian solution also amongst leading Hamburg politicians. As the efforts to deport the men proved futile, the government, represented by the Immigration Authorities and the State Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs and Integration, agreed with the church on an exceptional procedure (Sonderverfahren) for the Lampedusa. The agreement rendered 'inoperative' (Agamben, 2005) normal legal practice. It granted the Lampedusa the right to apply for a residency permit in Hamburg, and promised that they would not be deported before any final decision was made. Moreover, it stated that those who managed to prove economic self-sufficiency and learn German² during this time could acquire a residency permit. The agreement was enabled by the flexibility of the Duldung regulation, which grants discretionary power to the federal level. The toleration permit regulates exceptions to deportation according to the Residence Act, §60a. It is mostly applied in cases of pregnancy and sickness, but since its introduction in 1965, it has also functioned as a substitute to a humanitarian residency permit (Mitrić, 2013). While meant to be of short-time duration, many live for years in this condition that Mitrić describes as being 'suspended in time and space' (2013: 25). The government framed the agreement as an 'offer', and urged the men to accept it and trust the government's good will (Niess, 2018). Accepting the Duldung however, implied a prohibition on the men to travel to Italia to renew their residency permits (Permesso di soggiorno). The offer thus entailed 'a great risk', as Matthew once said. As our conversation above will illustrate, weaving through the subsequent analysis, the offer produces a particular timespace of waiting, shaped by its conditional and postponed redeeming.

This paper is based on eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork in Hamburg (August 2017 - June 2018). As part of a broader study on border temporalities, I conducted participant observation in two asylum camps and two church-based organizations working with irregular migrants. In one of these organizations, I met men who had accepted the offer and actors who had negotiated their cases with the government since 2013. In addition to observation on different arenas, informal talks and analysis of media and government documents, I conducted interviews (in English) with twelve men who had accepted the offer (aged 25-40), six of whom I met several times.³ I also interviewed two of their lawyers, one bureaucrat and three men who declined the offer. Moreover, the Lampedusa case often came up in interviews I conducted with bureaucrats and activists as part of the broader study. The majority of those who accepted the offer came from Ghana, as did my interlocutors. By December 2017, around thirty men, including three of my interlocutors, had obtained a temporary residency permit. During fieldwork, I joined demonstrations by the Lampedusa movement, supporting their

claim for rights *now* and their critique of the racialized European bordering regime. Yet, I also engaged affectively in my interlocutors' struggles and celebrated when somebody acquired a residency permit, sensing my own imbrication in the power relations compelling them to wait as well as my privileged position as a white, Norwegian woman. Within this complexity, the question 'is it worth the wait', arose as an affective, epistemological and political question.

Bordering, waiting and temporality

The offer is a particular condition. However, it highlights a more consistent theme running through my study. Since 2005, the German government has opened various pathways to regularization for tolerated migrants, due to criteria of economic self-sufficiency and language skills. These revisions form part of a broader tendency in German migration policy of grounding decisions on residency in notions of 'good integration' (see for example Holmes and Castañeda, 2016; Chauvin et al., 2013). An example is the 2016 Integration act, which issued a toleration permit for deportable subjects who start vocational training and entails a promise of future residency given its successful completion. In the autumn of 2017, a core topic amongst migrants I met was how to relate to training and the promise of a German future (Drangsdland, forthcoming). While Hamburg's politicians and activists framed the offer as exceptional, it articulates with present practices and rationalities of governing migrants in Germany.

The offer links regularization to economic usefulness, and, as I elaborate below, illustrates the connections between German migration management and labour market and demographic demands (Goodman, 2007; Schultz, 2018). Indeed, the reshaping of borders as states today strive to 'reconcile sovereignty with economy' (Johnson et al., 2011: 64), has been central to border studies the past decades (Paasi, 2012; Walters, 2002). Control of time is essential to such processes of bordering, evident in temporary work schemes, conditional regularization programs and in practices of detention and deportation (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Barber and Lem, 2018; Tazzioli, 2018; Andersson, 2014). The offer, and Duldung-regulation more generally, illustrate how states deploy techniques of delay and tempo to 'facilitate migrants' desired economic and political "integration" into society (Clayton and Vickers, 2018: 5) and to pursue a more efficient 'filtering' of migrants on economic terms (Barber, 2018; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013).

The 'incitement to wait, to be patient' (Povinelli, 2011: 190) is central to how power is organized in such processes of bordering (see also Hage, 2009). Several scholars have highlighted migrants' experiences and negotiations of waiting (Griffiths, 2014; Bendixen and Eriksen, 2018; Rotter, 2016) and explored the production of suspended futures through border controls, regularization schemes and labor regulations (Andersson, 2014; Barber and Lem, 2018; Sætermo, 2018; Bryan, 2018). Yet, while migration scholars have explored how migrants relate to uncertain future promises and how these articulate with neoliberal economic and demographic imperatives (Barber and Lem, 2018), there has

been less research on the topic that interests me here. Namely, on how future horizons, and temporal techniques more generally, work to define and legitimize the violence of waiting in particular ways, and naturalize its conditions of production (yet see Ramsay, 2017a; Çağlar, 2018). To explore these questions, I find Povinelli's (2011) work on how temporal discourses and practices function to 'bracket harms' useful. Povinelli has been interested in how governing actors legitimize harms produced by neoliberal interventions and welfare cutbacks directed towards various racialized and colonialized others. Researching how temporal techniques work to coordinate or frame suffering and redeeming in time, she shows how the harms inflicted by temporal suspension of rights, economic welfare and recognition are legitimized by being narrated from the perspective of future redemption. That is, present harms are read from a point in time when suffering 'will have been redeemed'. When judged from this future perspective, she argues, present harms might appear as 'worth it', and are 'bracketed' in time and space.

Povinelli (2009) has explored Christian discourses of redemption and techniques of bracketing in relation to eschatological war-rhetoric. While I touch upon Christian discourses in my analysis, I focus more on how 'temporal bracketing' in the offer work within a teleological model of migration (Çağlar, 2018). As scholars have argued, conceptualizations of migration within policy and scholarship, are framed within the spatial imaginary of territorial nation-states (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002; Brenner and Elden, 2009) and often entail assumptions about temporal linearity (Ramsay, 2017a; Robertson, 2014). The spatiotemporal framing of migration as a linear process that tends towards inclusion into a new nation-state, has been questioned by scholars on conceptual grounds (Ramsay, 2017b; Çağlar, 2018), and through ethnographic engagements with transnationalism (Sætermo, 2018) and 'multiple timescales' (Robertson, 2014). These critiques recall arguments by feminist scholars on how temporal linearity work to efface difference and install singular visions of the future (Bastian, 2011; Massey, 2005; Hutchings, 2018). I draw on such critiques to explore how temporal linearity, that is, the 'notion of time as a linear succession of isolated instants' (Bastian, 2011: 155), frame understandings of violence and redeeming in the offer. The offer, I suggest below, acquires meaning as a 'transitional period' through linear discourses of integration (Çağlar, 2018; see also Bastian, 2011) and within a teleological model that ties the tolerated migrant and the German population to the same future through discourses on demographic change. Central here is, I suggest, a technique of periodization, that function to carve up time in a before/after the offer and before/after its redeeming. Importantly, periodization not simply pertains to 'the drawing of an arbitrary line through time', but to a process of conceptualizing categories, 'which are posited as homogeneous and [] validated by the designation of a period divide' (Davis, 2012: 3). Periodization, as a way of defining the present in relation to the past and the future, is a technique of governing (Chakrabarty, 2004; Freeman, 2005).

I show below how the 'truth of the [] harms' of the offer come to be 'deferred into the future' (Povinelli, 2011: 28). Yet, by exploring how the men endure in the offer, I also seek to show how

dominant ways of coordinating suffering and redeeming in the offer might be disrupted. For Povinelli, attending to what she calls the ‘durative present’ is a way to rupture conceptions of waiting as defined by a redemptive future. This involves, she argues, insisting, ‘this is what it is. No future will have made it anything else’ (Povinelli, 2007: 28). In my analysis, this insight is a point of departure for an exploration of how the offer is lived within multiple and relational temporalities and spaces (Chakrabarty, 2000; Massey, 2005). As feminist scholars have long argued, attending to time as multiple and relational disrupts assumptions of temporal linearity and the organizing logic of periodization (Bastian, 2011; Browne, 2014).

The offer as a ‘road’

In the following section, I zoom in on the offer from a perspective highlighting its promise of future redeeming. Contextualizing it within German migration policy, I show how waiting becomes apprehensible as a period and developmental trajectory that tends towards and acquires its meaning from the perspective of the future residency permit.

After settling the agreement, the church counselled those amongst the Lampedusa who wanted it individually. While the church supported the groups’ claim for a collective residency permit, central actors came to see the agreement as the only possible solution, and accordingly advised the men to accept the government’s offer. One of their lawyers told me, while reflecting on their counseling work in the autumn of 2013: ‘We told them “we have no guarantee whatsoever. We do not know. What we can promise you is protection and the possibility to do something here”’. As tolerated migrants, the Lampedusa would acquire the right to shelter and a monthly economic support. Further, the agreement opened the possibility for the men to get a working permit. This right is exceptional, as the Residency Act states that tolerated migrants from Ghana; defined as a so-called ‘secure third country’, underlie a work-ban. The lawyer’s comment illustrates a shared conception, amongst the negotiating parties, of the agreement as a solution to the perceived humanitarian crisis. Moreover, while the actors negotiating in favor of the Lampedusa acknowledged the uncertainty of the offer, as it was conditional on political support and a changing legal framework, they underlined it as a possibility for the men to pursue a future in Germany.

Scholars have mostly approached the toleration permit as a condition of social and legal exclusion that enforces a particular sense of time marked by indeterminacy and uncertainty (Mitrić, 2013; Fontanari, 2015). Indeed, for the more than 160 000 tolerated migrants in Germany in December 2017 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018) the Duldung enacts exclusion along several lines. Yet, the Duldung also enacts a ‘filtering function’ (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). To understand how the offer could be deployed to open a future in Germany, it must be contextualized in relation to past years changes in German migration regulation and policy discourse. I have discussed elsewhere how legalization for tolerated migrants through work or training has been lobbied for years by the craft sector and the

Social Democratic Party who have framed their concerns within a discourse of demographic change and labor shortage (Drangsdland, forthcoming). As Schultz (2018; 2015) argues, German migration policy has increasingly been ‘reframed’ through a ‘demographic rationality’, in which a population-resources epistemology combine with methodological nationalism. In 2015, the German Employers Association for example released a position paper addressing the issue of demographic change under the heading ‘Make future-oriented use of labor market potential of asylum seekers and tolerated residents’ (Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände, 2015). The quote illustrates how tolerated migrants are recognized in terms of ‘unused economic potential’ (see also Bundesrat, 2019), in a teleological scheme that ties the German population and the tolerated migrant to the same future. Hamburg has taken a leading role in the national negotiations regarding the right to employment-based legalization for tolerated migrants.⁴ According to the professional actors supporting the Lampedusa, this political line was crucial to the realization of the agreement. It becomes visible how the offer articulates with notions of progress in large-scale biopolitical discourses on the German future and population. In other words, as a lived and embodied timespace, it ‘is embedded in the timescale’ (Robertson, 2014: 5) of the German population and economy. Recall how Matthew narrated the surrounding hotels into his story, making visible the entanglements between his embodied hardship and the globalized German economy.

Important for the present argument is how the aforementioned policy discourse situate tolerated migrants in space and time in a particular way. As Çağlar (2018) argues, the framework of ‘integration’ situates migrants in a linear and sequential process, where their present ‘becomes a transition into’ and is viewed from the perspective of a future ideal state of full integration (Çağlar, 2018: 26; see also Bastian, 2011). While the agreement granted the Lampedusa the exceptional right to apply for a residency permit, its central stake was not the application as such.⁵ The crucial point was that by filing an application the men would enter a legal and bureaucratic process, which would give them time to prove good integration. As one lawyer told me during a coffee chat:

‘We never believed we would win these cases in court. It was an opportunity for them find work, to learn the language, to reach good integration during this period. It was not a nice road, but it was the only one’.

The lawyer highlights the offer as an opportunity for the men to defer the government’s decision on their deportation in order to fulfill the criteria of ‘good integration’. It is worth dwelling on her use of the linear metaphor of the road, which recalls Bakhtin’s (1981) discussion of the timespace of the road in the novel. Following Bakhtin, the metaphor of the ‘road’ signals a timespace of movement, which ‘fundamental pivot is the flow of time’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 244). The road, he clarifies, ‘is a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 243-244). Narrated as ‘a

road', the offer becomes intelligible as a developmental trajectory, where the men's efforts will find their denouement in a residency permit. Temporal suspension in the timespace of the offer takes on meaning as a 'productivist and means-end form of suspension' (Bissell, 2007: 282) in relation to the anticipated future redeeming. The offer, I suggest, function a 'time-reckoning device' (Nielsen, 2014: 167; Munn, 1992: 96), that periodizes time in relation to waiting's (singular) end. Periodization functions here to narrate the deferral of rights and material goods 'as a promissory note of future redemption' (Olund, 2013: 231). Importantly however, the men must become laborers and citizens suitable for the awaited future during this time, which take on character as a transitional period.

For the Lampedusa however the stakes of the offer were high. While they saw life in Italy as unlivable, their Italian permits secured their right to stay in Europe.⁶ Moreover, many members of the group opposed it on political grounds. They upheld their claim for a collective residency permit, contesting the notion of the offer as the 'only road'. Importantly, they framed their situation as produced through a malfunctioning European asylum regime, and by Western economic interests and warfare. As a response to these contestations, the government kept the offer 'open' for months. Before they closed it, hundred men had accepted 'the government's favor', as one man said. When I asked people about their decisions, a common thread of their answers was the lack of work in Italy, and the possibility to pursue a future in Germany. As Matthew once said: 'It was trust. Based on what they said, I could see the future. I knew we had to wait, but I knew they would not deport us'. Similar to many others, Matthew spent months deliberating and had numerous conversations with his lawyer, before he came to his decision. His comment highlights how the men understood their decision as a choice to invest in and 'wait' for a future. A future produced in their conversations with the NGOs, recalling Andersson's (2014) exploration of the joint, yet uneven, production of promised futures by migrants and bordering actors in Ceuta. They seemed to share the understanding that the offer, while 'not a nice road', opened a path to a future that made waiting 'worth it'. Moreover, Matthew's comment amplifies the shared 'periodization narrative' of the offer. However, in 2017, the encoding of time in the offer as progressing towards future redeeming intertwined with my interlocutors' experiences of being slowly killed as they struggled to fulfill its conditions and endure the double indeterminacy of deportation and of its suspended redeeming.

'Living in the offer'

When we met for the interview that sunny October day, Matthew had not found work in two months. This struggle and the exploitative working conditions were the core matters he hastened to address 'before it is too late'. There are several obstacles to work built into the Duldung, in addition to the mere fact that the men are deportable. During the first four years of toleration, migrants are solely eligible for a restricted working permit, and have to apply to the Employment Agency for a specific permit related to every concrete position. In the autumn of 2017, the majority of the Lampedusa still

awaited the global working permit. The stated intention of the regulation is to secure proper working conditions. In practice however, it contributes to the tolerated workers' precarious status, as the bureaucratic procedure often takes weeks, which equals time without income and might result in lost job offers. Moreover, the Duldung specifies that the migrant must live in Hamburg, which limits available positions. Matthew's struggle accordingly was not unique, but an urgent topic amongst the men and the non-governmental professionals supporting them. Many labored under exploitative conditions for temporary employment agencies (cleaning, construction work), often to find that 'at the end of the month', as Matthew put it, the hours worked or salary paid were below the required level.

Matthew's story highlights how the struggle to accumulate the hours required proving self-sufficiency structures life in the offer. Every month, he explained, the government would count his hours. In the spacetime of the offer thus, the saying, 'time is money', takes on a particular character. That is, hours equals taxation money, which is the path to the future in which the men have invested. On this background Matthew's comment, 'there is no future in Zeitarbeit', thickens with meaning in relation to his notion of the 'too late'. As I asked Matthew what he meant with 'too late', he outlined the conditions of the offer, while relating them to his status as deportable. In the 'too late', a threatening future appears, which seems to be coming at him in the form of deportation. However, its coming is indeterminate. The agreement states that deportation is suspended to the end of the court process. Nevertheless, the men have to renew their toleration permit on a six-month basis, which is the upper time limit of toleration defined in the Residency Act. This imposes a particular temporal rhythm and a sense of uncertainty. Moreover, they do not know how long the court process will take. Matthew's reflections highlight how the indeterminacy of deportation gave the present a painful urgency. In this timespace of conditional redeeming, the present took on quality as a time that continuously had to be 'prized open' between past hardship and the future, and to be used in particular ways, to allow the redemptive future to arrive before the coming of the 'too late'⁷. The continuous struggle to fulfill the conditions of the offer, the uncertainty of how much time remained to do so, and the indeterminacy of its redeeming, produced anxiety and stress. People were going 'crazy' from waiting, the men often said. From this perspective, waiting becomes visible as an event that 'takes up all [] energy and being' (Diski in Bissell, 2007: 285).

At the same time, the indeterminacy of its redeeming seemed to lock the men in the offer and its particular future horizon. Isak had managed to find full-time work. We met several times, and I enjoyed his sense of humor and his sharp analysis of the offer as a tool for controlling migrants. Sometimes during these conversations however, anger and stress would overwhelm him, rupturing his speech. Once we talked, he smashed his identity card on the table, pointing at the red line that the government stamps over the ID-cards of tolerated migrants: 'Look at this red line', he said. 'I did what

they said. I followed their regulations. They are lying. Why? They are helping me, so they are killing me. They should say yes or no. Then we are free’.

In Isak’s words, the offer appears as a ‘zone of indistinction’ (Agamben, 2005) between yes and no, a promise and a lie, death and life. The fact of having invested in a promised future, not knowing when or whether it would arrive, or what it would take to make it arrive, generated a sense of being trapped. His framing of the offer as a ‘helping’ that ‘kills’, recalls the ‘weak forms of killing’, that Povinelli (2011) explores in governments’ cutbacks in social welfare for the purpose of making people ‘proper citizens’ (see also Berlant, 2007). Isak was ‘struggling’ along, as he put it, ‘following their regulations,’ on the ‘road’ of the offer. Yet, similarly to Matthew, he also insists on the offer as a violent, exhaustive and corrosive condition. Drawing attention to the cumulative and corrosive aspects of life in the offer, they challenge the linear conception of time moving forwards through discrete ‘nows’ that annul each other (Bastian, 2011).

The NGOs working for the Lampedusa recognized the hardship they endured, and negotiated their conditions regularly with the government. In January 2018, central actors arranged a ‘team spirit’ meeting for the men. Opening the meeting, the organizers addressed the harsh working conditions, the men’s tiredness and fears and urged their audience to ‘not lose hope’. ‘Your hope is the most important thing we have now’, one speaker said. Another speaker addressed the hardship of 2013, and then referred to the thirty men who had already obtained a residency permit. Having established these narrative frames of a past marked by hardship and a future of politico-legal inclusion he said: ‘It is kind of a miracle. Step by step you find your way’. The contrast of the timespace of ‘miracle’ to the violence embodied in Isak’s ruptured talk and Matthew’s cascade of words, was striking. The Christian miracle is associated with a sudden and arbitrary temporality that suspends normal order and opens new futures (Davis, 2012: 114; Vogler and Markell, 2003). As a miracle, defined by a periodic break in time (before/after the offer), the offer takes on meaning as an exceptional and redemptive state that delivered the men from the spectacular hardship of 2013. However, the temporal logics of the miracle entangles here with the linear and developmental time of integration. In the time-space of this miracle thus, the men move ‘step by step’ towards politico-legal inclusion. While the speakers recognized the hardship the men endured, they seem to judge it as ‘worth it’ from the perspective of the spectacular hardship of the winter of 2013, and from a future when the men will have acquired a residency permit. This future horizon is forged within the territorial imaginary through which states, following Brenner and Elden, ‘naturalize [their] effects upon socio-spatial relations’ (2009: 353). In the timespace of this miracle, political and economic relations productive of present and past hardship are ‘bracketed’.

The times of beard, blood and babies

As Bissell suggests in his exploration of the corporal experience of waiting, ‘the event-of-waiting weave[s] and fold through multiple temporalities’ that are bound-up in each other and produce waiting as an affective state of being (2007: 295). In the following, I focus on how the suspended redeeming of the offer takes on meaning in relation to biological time, understood as the time of the aging and socially situated body (Lem, 2018: 189). Attending to biological time conjures into sight multiple and differently spatialized future horizons, and thereby disrupts the periodization narrative of the offer.

In December 2017, I met Foster in his home. As the majority of the Lampedusa he lived in an asylum camp, in a twelve square meter barrack that he shared with a roommate. We sat on the two beds and I asked him about his situation as a tolerated migrant. A little flyer was pinned to the wall behind his back, depicting a dressed up visiting pastor from Ghana. ‘2017, the year of our next level’, it said. In the kitchen, somebody had hung the job-market pages of a Hamburg newspaper. ‘I have been living five years in this offer now. I am still travelling, but not moving. A lot of years in Italy, a lot of years in Libya’, Foster told me. He listed possible years to come of ‘not moving’, and then pointed to his beard: ‘Look at this beard. It is growing white. With fifty years, you are finished for this world. Your blood is coming down from thirty years go. It is different for the young, they still have their future.’ He twisted his finger at the side of his head signaling his tormenting thoughts: ‘Thinking about marriage’, he said, ‘In Ghana you will have a lot of problems if you do not have children. I am making money for useless’.

Foster’s reflections that day, at the last leg of 2017, painfully intertwined with the promising words that he had pinned to his wall. His words illustrate the sense of existential immobility or ‘stuckedness’ (Hage, 2009) that characterized life in the offer, and that entangled with what Hage calls ‘bad movement’, signifying a sense of not being able to settle (Hage and Papadopoulos, 2004). The sense of being stuck in unsatisfying conditions and not being able to move according to personal and social expectations, has been amplified in scholarship on irregular migrants and asylum seekers (Griffiths, 2014). What particularly interests me here, is how ‘stuckedness’ in the timespace of the offer acquired meaning in relation to biological time.

The majority of my interlocutors had reached their middle thirties. Their coming of age was an organizing point of their narratives of life in the offer. Foster’s comment about the ‘beard growing white’ and the ‘blood coming down’ depict a body changing shape and losing capacities as it moves in time towards death. Moreover, Foster’s concerns illustrate how the men related the time and rhythms of the body to social and gendered expectations regarding marriage and birth, which many highlighted as crucial in order to make the transition from ‘boy’ to ‘man’ (see also Adinkrah, 2012). Similarly to Foster, the older amongst the men would often depict the time spend and money made in Germany as ‘useless’ in relation to an imagined future when their chance of marriage or getting children had

passed because of old age. Many saw the uncertain future prospects and their precarious material conditions in Germany as an obstacle to marriage.

The men's concerns recall research by feminist scholars on how waiting is shaped by gendered expectations about work, care and family obligation (Hyndman, 2010; Mountz, 2011; Lo, 2015; Gray, 2011). Moreover, Foster's comment about life in Ghana amplifies how life in the offer is produced through spatial, temporal and social relations stretching beyond Hamburg, recalling the critique of methodological nationalism in studies of migration and waiting (Çağlar, 2018; Mains et al., 2013). Most of the men had relatives 'back home'. The longing for, as well as emotional and economic obligations towards their family, crucially shaped the experience of waiting (see Bryan, 2018; Lo, 2015). Some dreamed of 'moving back' when they had managed to earn enough, and, as Foster put it, feared a future 'in Africa' without children to take care of them (see also Owusu, 2003). They engaged in relations to people and places with their own (relationally shaped) rhythms and times (Massey, 2005). As I spend more time with Matthew for example, I learned that his fear of the 'too late' also was related to the fact that he had a son in Ghana that was aging without Matthew being able to support him, emotionally and economically, through his education. The desired future that emerges in his statement, 'there is no future in contract work', also appears as his son's future.

As shown above, the dominant framing of the offer (which my interlocutors shared) is as an indeterminate, yet delimited, period of waiting that will end at some point. Yet, while periodization was one of the temporal experiences of my interlocutors, I argue that an exploration of waiting should attend to how periodization, as technique of governing, is normative, interpretative and productive (Browne, 2014: 114; see also Freeman, 2005). In other words, the carving up of time in specific periods work to frame how the world is apprehended and thereby might legitimize political ends (Klinke, 2013; Davis, 2012). Attending to biological time disrupts any clean-cut periodization of time in a 'before' and 'after' waiting as well as the temporalization of the offer in terms of a linear, forward-oriented movement. It shows how waiting is lived in a transnational social field, forged in a web of spatiotemporal relations, and highlights, that for those 'living within the[] waiting room' (Povinelli, 2011: 77) of the offer, life does not wait. From the entangled meanings that the 'too late' take in the narratives of Foster, Isak and Matthew, a central question arises: What will the redeeming of the offer be worth in the relational timespace of the 'too late'?

Conclusion

For many people waiting in detention centers, asylum camps or homeless shelters, European border practices entail few promises of something better to come. Indeed, the predicaments of irregular migrants have led scholars to define their temporal experiences in terms of a 'revocability of the promise of the future' (Carter, 1997: 196). Nevertheless, and while acknowledging these predicaments, this article has argued for the importance of exploring how waiting, as a tool of

governing, is imbricated in linear and progressivist temporal frameworks, and work through periodization and ‘temporal bracketing’. The offer to the Lampedusa is ‘maximally tensed towards the future’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 207) and provide an exemplary site for such an exploration. However, as this article suggests, such frameworks are operative in humanitarian and policy discourses on migrants’ waiting more broadly, as exemplified in the changing regulations for tolerated migrants in Germany (see also Andersson, 2014). Moreover, as Ramsay (2017a) has argued, assumptions about temporal linearity often frame scholarly engagements with less ‘progressivist’ forms of waiting in the context of migration.

To explore the work of spatiotemporal frameworks in the offer as a technique of governing migrants and lived timespace, this paper took its point of departure in the contested question that weaved through my fieldwork: ‘Is it worth the wait?’ During fieldwork, I spent time with men who struggled in the relational timespace of the offer and non-governmental actors working towards it redeeming. I met people who opposed the offer by claiming other futures for themselves, and people who long for a bed in a camp or some hours work - what the offer could have provided if they were the chosen recipients. Moreover, attending to the timescale of German migration regulation make it visible how the offer articulates with biopolitical imaginaries of a progressing German future and population. Within these entangled spatiotemporal horizons and scales, the question ‘is it worth the wait’ enforces affective, epistemological and political engagements with how to frame and coordinate future redeeming and present violence in the offer. That is, rather than demanding an affirmative or negative answer, the question opens for engagements with contested spatiotemporal framings of life, violence and redeeming.

In this article, I have argued that waiting in the spacetime of the offer is framed as a redemptive state or condition. By this term, I seek to capture how the offer becomes apprehensible as a developmental trajectory towards future redeeming, and as a homogenous ‘period’ that will come to an end. Moreover, by defining life in the offer from the perspective of its conditional future redeeming, the harms and violence it inflects are ‘bracketed’. In other words, the violence inflected on the men are understood to be ‘worth it’ from the perspective of a future when the offer will have been redeemed. In the offer, temporal frameworks intertwine with the spatial imaginary of territorial sovereign states so that the power relations that produces irregularity are concealed and the offer might appear as an act of state benevolence.

I suggest that ethnographic engagements with ‘lived time’ might be one fruitful avenue for exploring and disrupting the dominant spatiotemporal frameworks of waiting in migration policy, humanitarian discourses and scholarship. In this article, I have pursued to show how such engagements enable a redrawing of the spatiotemporal coordinates of violence and redeeming in situations of enforced

waiting. 'Life in the offer' is structured in relation to its conditional and indeterminate redeeming. The offer appears as a timespace characterized by urgency, where progress and violence entangle in complex ways. Moreover, by attending to how the event of awaiting the redeeming of the offer weaves through multiple and relational temporalities and spaces, I suggest that the 'periodization narrative' of waiting might be disrupted.

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Notes

1. I refer to my interlocutors and the men who accepted the offer as the Lampedusa. While few of my interlocutors was actively engaged in the movement in 2017, they defined themselves as the Lampedusa in the setting of our encounter. For the Lampedusa in Hamburg, see <https://www.facebook.com/lampedusainhamburg/>
2. A1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language
3. All interlocutors are anonymized.
4. Based on interviews with political, economic and humanitarian actors.
5. Due to the legal situation, the men did not apply for asylum.
6. This is not the place to enter into discussion about the men's relation to Europa. See for example Graw and Schielke (2012).
7. Thinking about this temporal experience I am inspired by Bayly (2013).

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