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4 Filling the apps

The smartphone, time and the refugee

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In the burgeoning academic literature on waiting (see e.g. Hage, 2009; Bandak & Janeja, 2018), little attention has been devoted to the significance of new communication technologies; and conversely, although there is a keen interest in temporalities in the literature on the Internet and the smartphone (Hassan & Purser, 2007; Horst & Miller, 2012; Wajcman, 2018), *waiting* is rarely discussed as a smartphone temporality. On the contrary, much of the latter literature is concerned with speed and acceleration rather than the empty, flexible time usually associated with waiting. This chapter aims to bring these topics into dialogue by applying them to research findings on smartphone use among undocumented refugees in the Levant and Mediterranean during the so-called Syrian refugee crisis in 2015–2016.

The tiny multimedia computer, spoken of as a polymedium by Madianou and Miller (2012), was only launched as recently as 2007. It is a slim, sleek rectangular object of metal, plastic and silicone equipped with an eminently swipable and thumbable touchscreen instead of a keyboard, which fits snugly in the inner pocket of a dinner jacket, the front pocket of a pair of jeans or a woman's handbag. While advanced pre-iPhone mobile phones such as Blackberries had already had Internet options, they nonetheless lacked important features associated with smartphones today, such as maps and social media applications. The smartphone compresses, accelerates and miniaturises the user's relationship to the external world, and such is its penetration into the lives of millions that it may well be regarded as a bodily *extension* in McLuhan's ([1994]1964) sense. And as people lamely joke, 'they say you can even make calls with it as well.'

Drawing on my own current research on smartphone use in general and recent fieldwork-based studies carried out by others, I shall raise some questions about the significance of the smartphone for refugees hoping to make a European country their new home. I will particularly emphasise the ways in which this minuscule, rectangular electronic device affects temporality, rhythms and gaps during indeterminate periods of waiting. There is little doubt that the smartphone has transformed everyday life around the world, but it is no less obvious that these changes have taken place in different ways, for reasons of economy, social organisation, network types, political

regimes, scale, cultural values and the situation in which actors find themselves. We should always be wary of simple generalisations, and as pointed out by Vokes and Pype (2018), it cannot simply be assumed that the Internet leads to time–space compression. Rather, time–space *expansion* is also a way of looking at it; when we use the Internet the social space is expanded, and time becomes flexible in new ways. Indeed, when social micro-coordination (Ling & Yttri, 2002; Ling & Lai, 2016) is mediated by smartphones, clock time becomes less important. Delayed responses are built into the social media platforms and text messaging to the extent that the simultaneity and constant calibration of arrangements in the near future (e.g. social encounters) tend to replace fixed temporal categories with more flexible ones. '11:15 a.m.,' for example, becomes 'in five minutes.' The coordination of a broad range of social activities can now take place as an ongoing flow of minute exchanges, not as done deals finalised days or weeks ago.

By integrating their lives into the temporalities mediated by mobile telecommunications, refugees planning to flee, on the move or having arrived at a detention centre are no different from everybody else; their lives have changed, and they have become reliant on smartphone apps for manoeuvring the social and cultural fabric of their surroundings. At the same time, their precarious, liminal situation may seem to imply significant differences as compared with settled populations with a legal status, fixed abode and stable daily routines. Strangers in a strange land, severed from filaments of belonging, linguistically impaired and condemned to open-ended, debilitating and humiliating periods of waiting, these people – whether huddled together in the hull of a barely seaworthy vessel, in a tent erected by volunteers or an non-governmental organisation (NGO) on a Greek island or on the streets of Hannover – may offer a privileged site for an exploration of the ways in which the smartphone is transforming the social world and its temporal regimes.

Refugees without a legal status are typically described as inhabiting a liminal space, living in a legal limbo, the bearers of an anomalous, interstitial present radically separated from aspired, possible futures. In their case, the question 'when exactly *is* the future?,' which can rightly be addressed to technological dreamers and apocalyptic pessimists, raises itself with especial urgency. The possible futures imagined by migrants waiting for their legal status are not simply 'put on hold'; rather, they are actively being sabotaged and usurped through the biopower enacted by bureaucratic sluggishness in institutions of Kafkaesque opacity and Byzantine complexity. This observation is not an original one. Bourdieu (1972) commented on Kabylian temporalities and the ways in which they clashed with the linear, progress-oriented colonial ones, while Schwartz (1974) described how the right to other people's time, through making them wait, constitutes a significant form of power in a society where time is linear, can be measured and is seen as a scarce resource. In the case of migrants waiting for work, housing, family reunification and/or legal documents, there is nevertheless a gap

between the relentless ageing of the body and the lack of a corresponding development in their lives (see Drangsland, 2020, and Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018, for a fuller discussion). In their waiting, they oscillate between 'stalking a prey' (Corcoran, 1989) and 'doing nothing in particular' (Frederiksen, 2018) as an existential condition.

In most cases, refugees – be they from Afghanistan, Mali or Syria – waiting to cross into Europe, waiting for asylum applications to be completed in a refugee camp or waiting for their application for a work and residency permit in a new country to be decided upon, possess smartphones and use them for such diverse purposes as social networking, communicating with family members in the country of origin and simply 'making plans.' The refugees' reliance on the smartphone was graphically and powerfully illustrated in a photo taken at the main railway station in Budapest in the summer of 2015 and reproduced in newspapers worldwide, depicting a long row of men lying on makeshift mattresses on the floor near a wall, trying to rest amid the flickering, bluish light from the screens of smartphones being charged from wall outlets behind them.

As much as it may be mitigated by smartphones enabling instantaneous communication and filling gaps with networking, games and media consumption, a primary mode of existence for migrants in a legal limbo nonetheless remains that of waiting. So, let us consider the existential condition of waiting before proceeding. A pioneering anthropologist of 'nothing in particular,' Frederiksen (e.g. 2018) points out that waiting is contextual. It does not exist in and of itself. It is a social fact, not a natural one. Reading Frederiksen, one soon starts to wait (sic) for the first aside about Beckett, and it appears soon enough. Like Estragon and Vladimir, Frederiksen's Georgian interlocutors do not expect that anything in particular will happen. Rather, they consider waiting as a permanent existential condition. In a complementary reading of Beckett, Cash (2009) identifies a point-zero of waiting where there is no expectation that anything will happen. Citing a contemporary review of *Waiting for Godot*, Cash (2009) discusses the view that Beckett performs the almost superhuman feat of keeping the audience rapt and enthralled during a play where nothing happens, twice (in the first and second acts). However, Cash adds, something *does* happen; a tree sprouts four or five leaves in the interval.

Hage's (2009: p. 97) much quoted term *stuckedness* refers to 'an existential immobility.' He argues that a certain way of being stuck is seen as an asset in the contemporary world, the stuck person being a celebrated figure who 'is waiting out,' heroically enduring in the face of adversity, be it climate change or the neoliberal devastation of local communities. Yet in the present context, it is worth remarking that being stuck is exactly what refugees try to avoid, while at the same time, some of their potential collective power lies exactly in their ability to wait for a change in asylum policies, visa regulations or facilities offered to refugees in European countries. Stuckedness here becomes a potential source of collective power because refugees might

say, '*We* can wait'; a strong statement to an overworked and stressed bureaucrat living in a protestant temporality wherein time is a scarce resource.

Waiting may quickly turn into a permanent existential condition. Many refugees are young men, and phenomenological time passes faster for young than for older people. This implies that when their life is placed on hold, as in an asylum process, opportunities seem to pass by quickly, like so many handfuls of sand. In a study of waiting in Macedonia, Schubert (2009: p. 108) mentions that if someone is not married by the age of 25, they have lost the race since they have already begun to lose physical appeal. Hage (2018) speaks of Lebanese migrants who initially spend years waiting for their visa application to be approved, but who, following migration to Australia, say that they 'cannot wait' (sic) to return to Lebanon for a visit. The lack of a regular, cumulative rhythm in life is implied by the shifting temporalities of the migratory process, where long periods of stasis are punctuated by quick bursts of movement, inactivity interrupted by the flurry of movement or the sudden appearance of new opportunities for work or residency. As previously shown (Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018), and as shown by several chapters in this book (e.g. Rozakou, 2020; Jacobsen, 2020), the clash between temporalities can be identified in many of the situations refugees engage in: The regimented clock time of the bureaucracy and the NGO world of support and volunteering; the indeterminate, empty time of passive waiting; the urgent, precious temporal window of sudden opportunities for further mobility, work or residency; the slow, degenerative time of ageing; the fast time of instant messaging, and so on.

Whereas the smartphone does not transform the inert structures of work, housing, residency, bureaucracies and policing, it does offer tools to deal with them. Conceptualising waiting as analogous to 'stalking a prey' (Corcoran, 1989) redefines it as an active pursuit of an elusive goal. The affordances of the smartphone in the hands of undocumented migrants have the potential of shifting the weight of waiting from the emptiness of Vladimir and Estragon to the fullness of the patient hunter who, like the undocumented migrant, has no train to catch or meeting to attend. The smartphone represents an antidote to the empty time of waiting; it enables the migrant to engage more efficiently with social (virtual) networking and personal entertainment, take care of collective and individual memory work, using location apps to procure services, meet friends and connecting with volunteers, among many other things. The smartphone fills temporal gaps which would otherwise have been left empty.

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During the heady summer of 2015 and later, mainly Syrian refugees have routinely been scolded in tabloids and online forums, and not least by European politicians of certain persuasions, for having the nerve to seek refuge in Europe when many of them are demonstrably able to afford expensive

smartphones. However, Syrians fleeing their country did not do so in order to escape poverty; they did it because of war and destruction. A survey indicated that 86% of the Syrian refugee households in Lebanon had mobile phones, with an additional 6% having access to one (Göransson, 2018). We may thus assume that people embarking on the perilous journey, with its many dead ends, dangers, frustrations and privations, also have smartphones. According to Marie Gillespie (2016), even the poorest refugees generally have access to a mobile phone, albeit not a state-of-the-art model.

Although time budgeting is not a main preoccupation in the recent research literature about refugees in the Mediterranean basin, the significance of the smartphone for temporal coordination and shifts in temporal orientation should not be underestimated. In a not too distant past, when a transport of refugees (as this is called by the people known from the media as 'people smugglers') did not arrive, the person at the receiving end simply had to wait at the site designated by his network. Now, he can ask the so-called smuggler directly why he is late; he could even scold and pester him in real time. He would later also use the GPS to locate himself accurately, message his uncle in Munich about being on his way, ask his cousin in Düsseldorf if he still has a job for the arriving refugees in the informal sector and receive live updates on the military and police presence in Mediterranean hotspots or on European borders. The existence of these possibilities is empowering to people who cannot rely on formal means of coordination and information, and contribute to the time–space compression described by David Harvey (1989) decades before the Syrian war and the invention of the smartphone.

During and after the so-called Syrian refugee crisis of 2015–2016, several groups of researchers have studied the significance of the smartphone for contemporary refugees (Gillespie et al., 2016; Eide et al., 2017; Göransson, 2018; Leurs & Smets, 2018). Media reports also occasionally shed light on the issues, as in this quotation from *The Economist* may elucidate:

> In a camp near the French city of Dunkirk, where mostly Iraqi refugees live until they manage to get on a truck to Britain, many walk for miles to find free Wi-Fi: according to NGOs working there, the French authorities, reluctant to make the camp seem permanent, have stopped them providing internet connections. Some of the residents buy pricey SIM cards brought over from Britain, where buyers need not show an ID, as they must in France. A lucky few get airtime donations from charities such as 'Phone Credit for Refugees and Displaced People.'
>
> (*The Economist*, 11 February 2017)

It speaks volumes of the importance of smartphones for refugees that the 'Phone Credit for Refugees' charity even exists. Its volunteers collect money and top-up phones for undocumented refugees in Paris and elsewhere, prioritising unaccompanied adolescents and other vulnerable groups.

As several researchers and journalists have reported, some refugees state, in no uncertain terms, that a functioning SIM card, Wi-Fi access and power outlets for charging are their first priorities, well above and beyond the need for food and water. This observation brings to mind the following quotation from the *Irish Times*:

> Ramiz (20) from Afghanistan is not the oldest member of his group, but his smartphone and online social network make him a typical leader in this great, modern migration, in which technology and the ability to use it play key roles. 'The last group didn't make it,' he mutters, studying and swiping the screen of his phone.
>
> (*Irish Times*, 2015)

A young woman, freshly arrived on a Lesbos beach and taking a selfie – smiling, flawless teeth, wavy hair, sunglasses – became a poster child for groups and politicians in Europe who wished to delegitimise the refugees. What she was actually doing, however, was not tantamount to an attempt to collect likes on Facebook or hearts on Instagram. Rather, with the selfie she was communicating to her relatives that she had survived the journey and was safely, at least for now, in EU territory. As a matter of fact, she was being criticised for the mere possibility that she behaved like most Europeans of her age would.

The smartphone has improved internal intelligence services among migrants, knowledge of physical location and options for further mobility, as well as continuous contact with those who were left behind or disappeared at an earlier junction. Efficiency is enhanced; social networks are maintained and expanded; awareness of rights and whereabouts is improved. The Europeans who see the smartphone as a luxury item, associating it with leisure and convenience in the smoothly functioning neoliberal information society, misinterpret the ubiquity of smartphones among refugees as signifying that they belong to a leisured class. As I stressed earlier, bona fide refugees do not flee from poverty; they may well have belonged to the global middle class before being forced to leave everything behind. Among Gillespie et al.'s (2016) informants are a well-travelled businessman, an accountant, a shop owner, a technology student, a surgeon's assistant, an accountant, an administrator with a law degree and an international salesman in the clothing industry. They did not escape economic hardships, but violence and insecurity. They are you and me, and their access to smartphone affordances is urgent and crucial, even if they may sometimes, incidentally like Norway's prime minister, be caught playing Candy Crush to fill gaps or kill time. Why shouldn't they, as long as the cushioned and smug majorities do the same thing?

Few of the Syrian refugees interviewed by Göransson and collaborators owned a smartphone when they crossed the border to Lebanon in 2014 or 2015, but they were likely to purchase one soon after arrival, seeing it as

essential for their new lives (Göransson, 2018). As a matter of fact, the exponential growth in global smartphone ownership and use coincides with the currently eight years of war and displacement in Syria. Although, as Gillespie (2016) found, 80% of the refugees in their sample owned a smartphone, the gender disparity was – unsurprisingly – considerable, with 94% ownership among men and 67% among women. There is nevertheless almost universal saturation, since a neighbour is exceedingly likely to have a smartphone if you don't. In order to begin to understand the radical transformation in question, it may be useful to keep in mind that as late as 1960, just 9% of the UK population had a landline, translating into roughly a quarter of British households. The majority of the working class and rural Britons accordingly relied on neighbours or the pub for urgent calls in or out. In other words, notwithstanding the development of a great number of platforms and services for the Internet-enabled touchphone, simple phone coverage is also better in a Syrian refugee settlement in Lebanon than in the United Kingdom of a generation ago.

Having set the stage, we can now move on to a consideration of the implications of the smartphone for temporality in a context of uneven rhythms; from the repetitive and slowly unfolding time of open-ended waiting to the speed and frenzy of sudden movement between locations on the road, from the languid inertia of the port or camp to the exhausting trek across unknown hills or dangerous drama on the high seas. The smartphone frames waiting in particular ways, but it may also function as an antidote to waiting by accelerating communication and social connectivity, thereby filling temporal gaps. My focus is mainly on the social implications of the gadget, not its cultural or cognitive aspects.

Three interrelated affordances enabled by the smartphone are *location*, *networking* and *micro-coordination*. I am using the word affordance deliberately and consistently with its initial coinage by the environmental psychologist James Gibson (1979; see also Ingold, 2000), who sees it as the opportunities and constraints offered by a particular environment, often unacknowledged by the actors but inscribed into their bodily actions and intravenously shaping their perceptions of their environment, albeit in different ways since different persons (or animals, in Gibson's analysis) draw different resources from their surroundings contingent on their perceived needs and intentions. Analogous to engagement with a biotope, the information ecology enabled by the smartphone is understood and acted upon in a variety of ways depending on the actor's circumstances and motivations. It is a miniaturised world and a complex system irreducible to a formula.

Location

Jordan Frith's *Smartphones as Locative Media* (2015), based on the author's PhD dissertation, is one of the few book-length studies of the smartphone as a GPS device. Studying his interlocutors' usage of Google Maps and its

competitors, Foursquare and other locative services, Frith shows that although mutual surveillance among friends, that is, exact knowledge of each other's location in real time is now available (think the Marauder's Map of Hogwarts in the world of Harry Potter), it is less common than the author had initially expected, possibly because of a widespread unwillingness to reveal one's whereabouts owing to concerns about surveillance by little brothers as well as the big ones. Several refugees interviewed in the material drawn upon here report that they were reluctant to keep the location option on continuously, although it was necessary to enable Google Maps, for fear of being intercepted by hostile governments. Following the entrance of refugees into Europe, law enforcers have been known to confiscate phones in order to trace the movements of the people detained. State representatives check content, browsing history, messaging and so on, sometimes even smashing mobile phones with batons in the awareness that these devices can be empowering for their owners (Kjærre, 2019).

The smartphone map and other location-enabled apps (from workout applications to travel sites) place the user at the centre, quite the opposite of the case with the conventional map, where the task of finding one's physical location can be a major challenge. With smartphones, refugees are always aware of their location; you are the centre of the universe, and the task consists in understanding the location of other places. An inbuilt feature of Google Maps is time-geographical, since it tells you how long it will take you to get to any location with different modes of transportation, from foot to bus, ferry, train and Uber. Locative affordances are thus also temporal.

Gillespie (2016) found that over a third of the refugees her team had interviewed in camps (38% of them, to be precise) used Google Maps routinely. Obviously, they knew where they were, but were also exploring the surrounding area, and not least procuring options for escaping into Europe proper. In this way, distance becomes tangible; as it is filtered through virtuality, place is paradoxically becoming more specific and less abstract; while distances, activities and options are easily converted into duration. On Google Maps, everybody can become his or her own time-geographer. Time and space are not, thus, compressed in this particular instance, but turned into workable chronotopes, tangible and specific.

Other stories are more dramatic. A news report from 2015 tells of an Afghan boy who was sitting with others in a container somewhere in England when it gradually became hard to breathe. He sent a text message to a volunteer he had met in Calais, alerting her to their predicament, writing in broken English that they were running out of oxygen. The group of five survived because the volunteer could relay her message to a British colleague, who in turn contacted the police, who were able to locate the car and save the refugees trapped in it (*The Independent*, 2018). Another story concerns a boat on its way from the Turkish coast to Samos. At night, at sea, in January, the engines failed. The waves were high, and the boat was dilapidated.

On Google Maps, some of the passengers were able to locate the nearest island, and made it there by rowing with their hands (Eide et al., 2017: p. 39).

Another group of refugees had ended up in an uninhabited and remote part of an island. Eide et al. (2017: pp. 41–42) tell the story: 'They were tired and uncertain about the direction. From a mountaintop, they could access Turkish mobile internet, using GPS to find the way to the nearest village, a few hours' walk away' (my translation). The same authors also speak of a Syrian refugee who had initially paid traffickers to lead him from Budapest to Germany, but by accessing Google Maps in the bus discovered that they were in fact on their way to the Romanian border.

The accuracy of GPS location, a practical application of Einstein's general theory of relativity, is a double-edged sword. It helps you to locate yourself and others, but GPS signals can easily be intercepted by outsiders. Indeed, the astonishingly precise, uncannily updated traffic information that can be accessed on Google Maps and other designated location devices, mainly relies on the density of mobile phone signals: The shorter the distance between each mobile phone, the denser the traffic. It provides information not just about space, but about time–space.

Aware of this duality of transparency, some refugees are advised to lose their phones upon arrival, enabling them to compose a story of flight that might give the appropriate form to their asylum application. Yet, divesting yourself of your phone may be more serious, at an existential and practical level, than chucking your passport and other identity papers into a bin. One of Eide et al.'s (2017) informants speak of his smartphone as his cultural memory. It is filled to capacity with photos, music and digitalised memorabilia from his previous life. To him, the phone miniaturises, encapsulates and compresses his biography and thereby frames his current, indeterminate waiting period in a life story which represents a temporality which is longer, slower, cumulative and connected to place in a way that cannot be achieved in the indeterminate liminal phase. Cloud services may be helpful as a means to disembed content from a physical gadget, making it easier for people to keep the content while removing it from the body.

Networking

Summing up the social transformations enabled by the smartphone, Ling and Lai (2016) state:

> Perhaps the most fundamental function of the mobile phone is to make us individually available to one another, thus facilitating coordination. Indeed, they afford us constant and ubiquitous connectivity. We can call one another to just chat, or to arrange (or rearrange) our plans. Until the rise of the smartphone and the mobile Internet, this was mostly limited to dyadic interactions. We could call and text to one other person at a time. Thus, we could micro-coordinate (or hyper-coordinate;

> Ling & Yttri, 2002) our interactions, but with only one person at a time. With the coming of smartphones and messaging apps, it became possible to expand this horizon. We are able to quickly construct groups of varying sizes to just chat or to coordinate specific tasks.
>
> (Ling & Lai, 2016: p. 834)

The smartphone accelerates networking and enables a new rhythm and intensity in social interaction. With a basis in interviews with refugees in camps, Latonero et al. (2018: p. 3) conclude: 'It is clear that mobile technologies, such as smartphones, messaging apps, translation apps, online maps, and mobile banking all contribute to an unprecedented degree of connectivity for refugees.' Several researchers and commentators point out that the smartphone is indispensable in the camp for enhancing social capital through various forms of networking on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Skype and, in some cases, LinkedIn, as well as mobile payment services enabling transactions between kin and others in the home country. Many use the less widespread networking platform Viber, which has superior encryption features, making detection and interception difficult. In the camp, the smartphone is used both for the maintenance of primary networks, which may be spatially fragmented following the exodus, and for the development of growing secondary networks (weak ties in Granovetter's, (1973), seminal analysis), which may facilitate ventures into the housing, educational and employment markets. Smartphones are also used extensively to communicate with NGOs, often through dedicated apps but also by using common platforms like Messenger, texting or WhatsApp.

The smartphone enables a renegotiation, and often an implosion, of the relationship between space and time. The time -space compression afforded by the mobile phone has often been commented upon. The implications for refugees en route, in camps or in temporary housing in the host country are important in the effort to conjure up, spider-like, some of the silvery filaments of social ties that were abruptly severed at the moment of flight. As a colleague once quipped, with reference to contemporary white-collar work, 'it no longer matters so much whether you're on time, as long as you're online.' Movement, long or short distance, planned or spontaneous, enforced or voluntary, which is often necessary for refugees, is choreographed, managed and monitored in new ways with smartphones. News may only be trusted when they are relayed by friends (a few obviously are trustworthy filterers).

The term social capital needs to be considered in this context, in Coleman's sense rather than Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1972; Coleman, 1988), which refers to returns on investments in others. Social capital, in this intellectual tradition, may be defined as the sum of other people's obligations to oneself. The often frantic networking and incessant messaging, liking, swiping and thumbing engaged in by denizens of the smartphone society in general may be triggered by a never fully satisfied yearning for the attention of others. For undocumented migrants, the situation is more urgent and critical since

their very existence is at stake: physically, existentially, socially, culturally. The affordances created by smartphone apps enable not only quotidian networking but also the establishment of weak ties via intermediaries, often directed towards the formal sector. An ex-refugee interviewed by Gillespie and her collaborators (2016) describes his route from being stuck in Tripoli, Libya, to regular employment in a skilled job in Beirut through networks partly exploited, partly established, with his phone, online. Without the availability of instantaneous communication, this job offer would not have been possible.

A range of apps, most of them multilingual, have been designed to aid refugees, offering information about social services, NGOs and volunteer networks, meeting places, language courses, application procedures and local information in general. On the other side of the *Mare Nostrum* (often no more distant than the narrow straits separating the Turkish mainland from the Greek islands gained, or recovered, following the 1913 Balkan Wars), the informal transport companies (people smugglers) advertise their services online, using WhatsApp or Facebook. One of the people involved in this transport service tells Eide et al. (2017) that his work would have been impossible without a smartphone. As a matter of fact, boat refugees crossing the Mediterranean or part of the Atlantic to Europe were not unheard of before the smartphone revolution. The logistics of transport were different then, more sluggish and unpredictable, and less efficient for both parties. Many smugglers solicited their services in person, and their prices and offers became known through word of mouth. The wait in the village and in key ports was longer, but in the end, the boat left the shore. In this respect, the effects on smartphones on the refugee movement from A to B are consistent with its effects in mainstream society, namely to enhance efficiency and logistics. Granted that sending an emoji to your sweetheart is not the same as asking an acquaintance whether it is safe to cross a border, the underlying principle and the infrastructure on which it depends are identical.

Micro-coordination

Micro-coordination consists in the continuous, instantaneous communication of future social activities on a dyadic or larger-scale relationship, enabled by apps on the smartphone. The consequences of micro-coordination include changes in the phenomenological experience of time as passing, instantaneous or enduring, structured or unstructured, accountable or fleeting. When activities can be coordinated continuously, they can also be tweaked, shifted temporally or even postponed at short notice. The rhythm of micro-coordinated living is faster and tighter than that of the previous era of the clock and landline, but it is also more flexible, less certain and easier to manipulate.

A question that needs to be raised in this context is whether the micro-coordination enabled by the smartphone generates, for example, an

improved sense of autonomy, increased job opportunities and primary social control (e.g. of women left at home during the day)? Does it work as an antidote against the potential emptiness and directionless character of the monotony of the long wait?

Research in the field (such as Gillespie et al., 2016; Leurs & Smets, 2018) shows how the smartphone creates affordances which were formerly non-existent. As pointed out by Ling and Lai (2016), people with smartphones are now individually available regardless of their location. Notwithstanding the difficulties of acquiring local SIM cards without a fixed address and identity papers, refugees on the move in Europe have, in the space of just a few years, become dependent on the phone for a range of essential activities. It reduces waiting time because activities can be planned and coordinated in real time, it increases knowledge of anything from local geography to the whereabouts of family members or the informal job market in Amsterdam, enables calls for assistance or casual encounters and makes temporal markers like 09:30 am irrelevant. In this, the temporal flexibility afforded by the smartphone, reducing the importance of universal clock time, contrasts with the formal asylum apparatus, which assigns appointments at fixed hours, where delays cannot be mitigated through micro-coordination, and where the temporal regime remains stuck in a mid-twentieth century rhythm based on the assumption that clock time reigns supreme and that appointments must be fixed long in advance. Migrants accustomed to the flexibility of instantaneous 'timeless' time (Castells, 1997) may find the rigid temporal regime of the bureaucracy stifling, inflexible and oppressive. The certainty of assigned appointments coupled with the fundamental uncertainties of the migrants' situation confirms Bandak and Janeja's general assessment of what waiting consists in: 'Waiting is not to be found merely in the absence of action but in an uncertain terrain where what is hoped for may or may not occur' (Bandak & Janeja, 2018: p. 16).

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To many who live in the affluent North Atlantic world, the smartphone is – among other things – an entertainment machine, a bottomless and endless source of encyclopaedic knowledge, a news service, a gossip generator and a weather forecaster. It is in this regard a younger, miniaturised and deterritorialised relative of the newspaper, the cinema, the game arcade and the television set.

To refugees in one of their several liminal phases, the smartphone is to a greater extent a descendant of the landline and the phone booth, the letter, the postcard, the coffee shop and the physical encounter at the railway station or in other locations where recently arrived immigrants typically meet. It has turned Wi-Fi and outlets into precious, scarce resources, precisely because it is a multipronged lifeline. The implications of this framing of the smartphone for temporality are many. It creates instantaneity and

compresses time and space by enabling regular, instantaneous contact with relatives and others in any location. It also expands space and personalises time by creating the possibility of building and maintaining networks in the form of 'imagined communities' of people who may not know each other personally but have a shared agenda and similar backgrounds. It also enables new forms of autonomy and monitoring of circumstances, holding out a promise of a horizontally networked social world as an alternative to the hierarchically structured one, by facilitating non-state, grassroots, informal networks operating in real time. Owing to the instantaneous communication obliterating spatial distance, it certainly becomes important as a medium for personal networking to people who, before the flight, had an indifferent relationship to it.

Yet the virtues of the smartphone as a flexible networking tool are also some of its limitations for people with an interest to stay under the radar of the state and other institutions bent on controlling their mobility. In the space of just a few years, the smartphone has become indispensable, like the air we breathe, but for people wedged between a rock and a hard place, that air often carries with it a foul smell.

The difference should not be exaggerated. Much of the time, refugees just use the smartphone to fill the gaps created by the long wait with enter- or infotainment apps, such as games, music or news sites.

In addition, the smartphone is a repository and an archive, freezing previous moments and storing half-forgotten memories, essential for people who have been forced to leave not only belongings but also persons behind. The smartphone is not a phone, it is a miniaturised, but enormously powerful, time-capsule enabling the storage, expansion and compression of time.

Stories about refugees and smartphones do not merely signal a series of changes in the situation of persecuted and precarious people on the move: from the boy who saved his life and that of his friends by urgently texting a volunteer about oxygen depletion in the car booth to the professionally skilled refugee who negotiated a job in Beirut from a camp in Libya, or people reaching out to relatives and friends left at home or in another European location or the use of apps to manoeuvre through the urban jungle of a foreign place. These testimonies say something about a new world, where the refugee and the smartphone fit seamlessly into a larger narrative about the destabilisation of time and place, horizontal or sideways scaling of the social, deterritorialisation and the permeability of all kinds of boundaries. It may be the case, as Urry (2000) once suggested, that the sociology of a place is giving way to a sociology of mobility, but it is probably more accurate to conclude that all that is solid indeed melts into air, if not merely in the way envisaged by the influential Victorian thinker Karl Marx.

There are affordances involved but no technological determinism. People use the phone in ways which were not imagined by their designers. It can be used to tweak time in a multitude of ways. As I have shown, it typically compresses time and accelerates communication and activities. However, time

can also be slowed down deliberately with this technology. As Nicolescu (2014) shows in a study of Romanian teenagers, many deliberately used text messaging rather than messaging apps in order to introduce a slight delay and reduce the normative pressure of responding immediately.

It is worth keeping in mind, at the end, that notwithstanding the accelerating affordances offered by smartphone technology, empowering and in many ways helpful for people on the move, their situation remains one of uncertainty and waiting, their time less cumulative, less structured and less directed than they would have wished for. The smartphone sugars the pill by facilitating the filling of temporal gaps and accelerating social communication, but it does not spirit away the more inert and sluggish structural conditions shaping the unstable temporal conditions under which undocumented migrants live.

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