'Not Knowing When It's Going to Happen and What's Going to Happen': The Time Politics of Applying for a Residence Permit in the Czech Republic*

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Abstract: This study focuses on the time politics involved in applying for a residence permit in the Czech Republic, with a focus on non-European Union (EU) applicants. It examines how governmentality and state superiority are represented and performed within the bureaucratic procedure of the application process. Based on the results, I argue that the application process bureaucracy is tied to time politics – practices that govern others through time. The paper is based on research realised in Brno, the second-largest city in the Czech Republic, and uses qualitative, ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews with immigrants from non-EU countries who applied for a long-term residence permit. The paper examines time politics within this process, highlighting its unpredictability, disrupted temporal linearity and chrononormativity. In this context, the respondents describe the waiting period as a moment of being *in between* – temporally, spatially and socially. Therefore, I argue that the time politics experienced throughout the application process significantly influences the lives of applicants. The interviews revealed that the applicants were caught in a liminal position with an uncertain ending, exemplified by the impossibility of moving (temporally, spatially and socially) – a feeling often described as *stuckedness*. Consequently, this time politics and the temporal inequality and disadvantages experienced during the process contribute to exclusion from mainstream Czech society and produce structural invisibility.

Keywords: time politics, waiting, chrononormativity, bureaucracy, migration

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Introduction

Joel, an individual interviewed for this study, described the process of applying for a residence permit in terms of 'not knowing when it's going to happen and what's going to happen'. He highlights the uncertainty and *stuckedness* of applicants during this process. Immigration is experienced and governed differently in different states (territories) and situations. When examining the use of time as a migration control technology and exploring the time politics of migrant deportability, Cleton (2021, p. 3) pointed out, 'The governance of international migration works through time as much as through spatial control'. Temporality thus plays a crucial role in studying the migration process. This time politics has often been studied in the context of irregular migration, focusing on asylum seekers and refugees, who are typically analysed in connection to waiting, stuckedness and time–space disruptions (e.g. Drangsland, 2019; Gasparini, 1995). In relation to migration and the physicality of movement, acceleration has been identified as particularly significant in terms of government policies regulating migration (Griffiths et al., 2013). However, one's experience of time depends on where one is 'positioned within a larger economy of temporal worth' (Sharma, 2014, pp. 8–9); therefore, acceleration does not work for everybody or in the same way. During migration, the experience of time (and its rhythm) can be diverse: slow/fast, active/inactive, full of changes/without changes over a long period and so on. Some migrants often speak about experiencing a time in which change can happen suddenly and without warning. In contrast to this frantic sense of temporality, other migrants experience time as slow and marked by very little change over long periods (Griffiths et al., 2013). Slowness is a typical form of temporality, especially for specific types of migration (such as asylum seekers or refugees), since the bureaucratic process requires official recognition of requests and includes many appeals, hearings and repetitions. In this context, studies have pointed out the role of waiting, uncertainty and keeping migrants 'in between', or in precarious positions, through temporal techniques such as acceleration or deceleration (e.g. Lilja et al., 2017). Moreover, such time politics in the context of place-making can contribute to exclusionary practices (Tefera & Gamlen, 2021).

This study, however, looks at temporality and migration experiences in the case of 'regular', rather 'high-skilled' migration. Specifically, it examines the application process for a long-term residence permit within the category of 'non-EU migrants' in the Czech Republic. Although the migration process when applying for a long-term residence permit is considered an 'ordinary' administrative procedure, this study shows that the time politics within this process may crucially impact the lives of applicants and their integration options. I highlight the roles of waiting and disrupted life paths as aspects of time politics manifested through bureaucratic procedures. *Time politics* can be understood as a wide range of time practices and strategies that express power and govern others through time.

The study explains how time politics is expressed via bureaucracy and the application process and how migrants experience this time politics in the process of applying for long-term residence permits. These issues are examined using

the case of non-European Union (EU) migrants living in Brno, the second-largest city in the Czech Republic and an important university town with a constantly growing number of residing migrants. Brno, in a strategic document, asserted that 'high-skilled' migrants[1] should be seen as a favourable group to attract and keep within the city (City of Brno, 2020). The goal here is to demonstrate how the Czech state voices its power over these immigrants through bureaucracy, creating a specific time politics that produces waiting and uncertainty.

The research revealed that time politics can be observed in several temporal aspects: disrupted chrononormativity and linearity, prolonged waiting and this waiting's effects on applicants' lives, such as stuckedness, a liminal position and uncertainty. Even after obtaining a long-term residence permit, migrants are expected to 'integrate' successfully, which is often underpinned by a linear conception of time that considers the speed of integration an indicator of success. Therefore, these obstacles may contribute to social exclusion and make it more difficult to settle, with both approaches to time, linear and non-linear, possibly explaining such a situation (Tefera & Gamlen, 2021). My research aimed to examine these exclusionary practices incorporated into time politics within the migration regime and a group of relatively privileged immigrants (in comparison to asylum seekers, for example) in the Czech context.

The research was conducted through in-depth semi-structured research interviews with 10 participants from non-EU countries, complemented by ethnographic observations and one research interview with a lawyer focusing on migration law. The article first discusses the local context and continues with an explanation of the theoretical background, which focuses on temporality and time politics, followed by a methodological section. The analytical section is divided into two parts. First, I examine the time politics of the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy (DAMP), which issues the residence permit documents. I explore the role of waiting in the applicants' lives. Second, I highlight other effects that waiting can produce, such as liminality, as a part of disrupted chrononormativity and norma-/temporality. Waiting in this context can be related to subordination, non-citizenship and state superiority.

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[1] There is growing research on the labels of migrants (e.g. De Coninck, 2020; Janky, 2019). In the Czech Republic, irregular migrants, and specifically refugees from Africa and the Middle East, are perceived negatively among the public (Hanzlová, 2018) and in the media (Kovář, 2020) and are frequently described as 'economic' migrants. On the other hand, both the state and the country's cities support incoming 'high-skilled', 'qualified', 'educated' migrants (City of Brno, 2020), also referred to as expats (Brno Expat Centre, n.d.). This approach and its language create a 'hierarchy of Otherness' (Jaworsky et al., 2023). However, highly skilled migrants may also be classified as irregular, and for this reason, I will avoid reproducing this otherness by using the term 'applicants for a residence permit' whenever it is possible; otherwise I use the broad term 'migrants' and 'non-EU migrants'. I am aware that this terminology is not ideal and creates a division based on citizenship in the EU. Nevertheless, the division is important to the residence permit process and the time politics under study.

Migration in the Czech Republic and Brno

Since the Czech Republic has a post-communist history, its immigration system has changed dramatically since 1989. Foremost among the changes has been the need to tackle the growing number of migrants who come to live in the Czech Republic permanently. When 'comparing the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, crossing the border and becoming a resident has become more difficult, but the state has begun to support the integration of immigrants, although only to a limited extent and with a focus on long-term residents' (Klvaňová, 2017, p. 30). In the 1990s, the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy was founded within the Ministry of the Interior to develop migration policy (Jungwirth, 2018). However, the state's attitude toward migration is still evolving. While in 1990, only about 0.3% of the Czech population was foreign-born (Baršová & Barša, 2005), at the end of 2021, 5.8%[2] were migrants (more than half of them non-EU migrants) (MICR, n.d.). The most migrants come from Ukraine, Slovakia and Vietnam (MICR, n.d.).

Migrant residence status is governed by Act no 325/1999 Coll and Act no 326/1999 Coll. According to Czech legislation (see Act no 326/1999 Coll), there are three categories of immigrants. The first includes citizens of the EU, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Lichtenstein. The second counts 'citizens of third countries'[3] (mostly people coming from outside the EU or the European Economic Area). The remaining migrants living in the country, such as irregular or undocumented immigrants and those seeking asylum or subsidiary protection, fall into the third category.

This study focuses on the second category – immigrants coming from non-EU countries. People included in this category may first receive a short-term residence permit (up to 90 days), a long-term visa (from 90 days to a year), a long-term residence permit, an employee card or an EU Blue Card (granted only to highly skilled employees). Long-term residence permits are provided for residency in the territory for more than 90 days and stays of more than a year (e.g. based on having the employee card, working as a freelancer or reuniting with a family member). Migrants must live in the Czech Republic for five years before applying for a permanent residence permit (Act no 326/1999 Coll). Migrants with long-term residence permits based on a reunion with a family member have almost the same rights as Czech citizens in terms of access to the labour market; for other types of permits, the accessibility is more restricted. Generally, they can register with the Labour Office; however, their social rights are limited, and they

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[2] Due to the war in Ukraine and newly arrived Ukrainians, the percentage of migrants had grown to 10.6% in 2022 (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic [MICR], n.d.).
[3] This classification served as the initial basis for selecting the research participants, along with the categorisation used by DAMP, which differentiates between procedures for EU and non-EU migrants, including a separate process for non-EU migrants applying for residence permit.

cannot acquire unemployment compensation. In this context, this article aims to demonstrate that those migrants applyings for *long-term* residency can be put in a precarious position due to the time politics experienced in the bureaucratic procedure.

Brno is a convenient location for studying this process because it boasts the second largest number of migrants (after Prague) in the Czech Republic, a number that has been steadily increasing.[4] Brno also aims to attract highly skilled migrants to work in academia, technology start-ups and the information technology sector (City of Brno, 2020). Consequently, new difficulties have emerged for the city's social services and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focusing on immigrants (SocioFactor, 2020). Brno is also convenient for the study because of my knowledge of its area and broader social networks that allowed me better access to the research terrain and research participants.

The most important institution dealing with immigration issues is the Ministry of the Interior (MICR), which manages international migration based on the control of state borders and, in general, contributes to legislative conception and development in this sector. One of its departments is the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (DAMP), which is responsible for developing policies related to migration and asylum in the Czech Republic, including the state's migration strategy and legislative proposals related to migration. This department has offices in every region and manages the process of issuing visas, residence permits and other documents necessary for individuals to legally enter and stay in the Czech Republic. It also assumes responsibility for granting asylum to refugees and other individuals seeking protection in the Czech Republic and the authority to expel them. It is complemented by the Commission for Decision Making in Matters of Residence of Foreigners, which works as a superior administrative body of DAMP – migrants can submit their complaints about DAMP's inaction, and the commission examines them. At the same time, it is a subordinate administrative body under the Minister of the Interior and an organisational part of the Ministry of the Interior.

This study found that from the applicant's perspective, this institution is often overwhelmed with applications and full of migrants waiting for their residence permits to be processed. The official period for DAMP to process long-term residence permits based on family reunion is 260 days, which can be extended if additional documentation or verification is required (the process is formally stopped pending delivery of the additional documents). For other types of permits, such as those based on employment cards, the period is 60 days. To prolong the residence permit, one must apply no earlier than 120 days before the end of its validity, and the official limit for DAMP to make a decision is 30 days. If these

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[4] Currently, migrants represent 9.8% of the inhabitants in Brno. The number of migrants living in Brno has increased 10% every year since 2015. There were 41,400 migrants (23,800 'non-EU') by the end of 2021 (MICR, n.d.).

deadlines are exceeded, applicants can submit their request to the Commission for Decision Making in Matters of Residence of Foreigners. However, the bureaucracy and administration who oversee the application process are enormous, often unpredictable and not clear enough for the applicants – partially due to the different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of applicants, which create different expectations and attitudes. The overall operation of DAMP is thus integral to the time politics governing the applicants and the state's attitude toward migration policy. However, the city's aim of attracting more 'highly skilled' migrants does not necessarily go hand in hand with the capacity of DAMP to effectively manage all applications.

Time Politics and Migration

Since standardised time is considered one of the most important features of intersubjective reality, time has become a scarce resource (Kellerman, 1989). Yet some groups have more control over time than others (Sharma, 2014), and some populations can be placed 'outside' the dominant time frame (Zerubavel, 1982). In these ways, an Other is created through temporal and spatial distancing, framed here as *chronopolitics*. The Other is seen as someone with a different temporality who must accept the temporality of the society in which they want to participate. Society in this context is 'presented as a cohesive "whole" into which the others have to be integrated' (Van den Berg, 2016, p. 24). Differentiating oneself from others, establishing symbolic and consequently social boundaries between Us and Them, and distinguishing between 'legal' and 'illegal' citizens – these are the fundamental principles of the exclusion and inclusion processes within social groups and national states (for a discussion of symbolic boundaries, see Rétiová et al., 2021). This is how time politics relates to the concept of chronopolitics: the Other is created through temporal and spatial distancing. Thus, chronological time functions as the basis for the control and organisation of social processes.

Approaches to time politics differ considerably depending on the perspectives of particular disciplines, the goals of the politics and even geographical differences within countries; moreover, they are used in diverse situations. For example, time politics has been explored as time–space planning and mobility management in connection with social inequality (Bongfiglioli, 1997; Fernandes, 2011), as a tool for synchronising diverse social and public services (Boulin & Mückengerger, 2005), as a means of improving quality of life and as a source of welfare and freedom (Mückengerger, 2011). Through such an approach, time politics aims to strengthen social cohesion. Time politics within institutional settings and administration is based on the argument that institutions do not build their legitimacy simply by existing but from the requirements of those who utilise them (Mückengerger, 2011). In another context, time politics is also implicated in family, gender and welfare policies (Van den Berg, 2016). In this article, I understand time politics as an institutional technique for governing others through

temporality. Time politics represents another kind of barrier to entering a country. It is implicated in the application process and experienced via bureaucratic procedures representing the state's governmentality and expression of power over its non-citizens (Fassin, 2011). As Anderson states, 'In order to limit people's access to resources and power, they are subject to differential inclusion not only spatially but also temporally through keeping them in a prolonged period of waiting, constantly delaying them, postponing their arrival and future plans' (Anderson, 2010, p. 417).

The Politics of Waiting, Chrononormativity and Norma-/temporality

Waiting is one of the most distinctive features of the application process for a residence permit and has been described as 'inactive activity', 'deviation' or as being 'out of sync with time' (Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018, p. 92). Bourdieu examined time in relation to habitus and argued that 'time is engendered in the relationship between habitus and the social world, between the disposition to be and to do and the regularities of the natural and social cosmos (or a field)' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 208). Thus, the temporality provided through time politics embodies power relations linked to subjective dispositions. From this perspective, Auyero (2012, p. 2) perceives waiting as 'temporal processes in and through which political subordination is reproduced'.

The Western linear conception of time within capitalism accelerates one's lifespan, reproduction and growth. It is expected that growth will follow certain developmental stages at both the macrolevel of global economic interests (framed through neoliberalism) and the microlevel of individual activities concerning education, family, job, health and overall way of life. This normative perception of temporality concerning certain life stages applies to chrononormativity. The concept of chrononormativity was originally used in queer theory and referred to an idea of *right timing* – for example, the right time for education, finding a life partner and starting a family; each activity refers to a specific life period (Freeman, 2010). From a Foucauldian perspective, chrononormativity is related to the organisation of human bodies in time toward the highest form of productivity – a *chronobiopolitics* (Freeman, 2010). Chrononormativity refers to an organising principle that maintains a specific temporal order in various social practices, such as those found in policymaking institutions, companies and schools (Wanka, 2020).

On the other hand, *norma-/temporality* refers to connections between normality and temporality in everyday practices, such as the right time to get up, the right time to work and the right time to have dinner; it is related to age, gender and life stage (Krekula et al., 2017). All these conceptions are structurally and culturally embedded in diverse practices. Chrononormativity and norma-/temporality represent elements of social structures that use seemingly natural inscriptions of time in human bodies and the world around us.

In this context, waiting represents one of the spaces in which chrononormativity can be disrupted. Consequently, chrononormativity produces marginal spaces as effects of power (Jensen, 2017). Therefore, the application process creates temporal asynchronicity and temporal inequality and enforces uncertainty. In the context of requiring a residence permit, temporal differences serve as a tool for identifying the Other.

Closely related to the element of waiting are the fear of deportation and a possible undesirable future – outcomes in which the uncertainty in the lives of immigrants is painfully apparent. Waiting can be seen as a liminal phase. The concept of liminality was originally a temporal concept of individual transformation and social continuity applied to comprehend rites of passage (Turner, 1967). It refers to an undefined phase connecting two clearly defined social statuses or positions. However, the form of liminality experienced in the application process does not have a certain ending and outcome, which is why the present is not experienced as meaningful. 'The present liminal state seems to continue forever without turning into a future' (Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018, p. 103). Thus, powerlessness is incorporated into waiting, which represents a loss of control over time. In this context, a long wait 'is to be the subject of an assertion that one's own time (and therefore, one's social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait' (Schwartz, 1975, p. 856). Therefore, looking at different temporalities in connection with migrants and their post-arrival period is important.

We can observe how multiple time politics produce diverse social rhythms. This further generates points of exclusion and expresses feelings of dissonance. Waiting and experiencing different temporalities exclude some people from the majority and a long-term life course. Therefore, this research aims to reveal these time politics through which immigrants' subjectivities are governed.

Methodology

This study's goal is to learn how time politics is expressed via the bureaucratic and application process and how migrants experience this politics in the process of applying for a residence permit. Qualitative research methods were applied to understand the complexity of the applicant experience in this process and to reveal diverse time politics within the application process.

First, 'pilot' ethnographic observations were conducted, providing the thematic ground for semi-structured interviews as the main research method. Conducting ethnographic observations as a 'pilot study' helped me better understand the situations of immigrants waiting for their residence permit approval. These observations were made during three visits to DAMP, the institution where immigrants apply for a residence permit – and usually revisit repeatedly. The ethnographic observations were accompanied by several informal discussions with people who came from non-EU countries to Brno to study or work at the university. We discussed their experiences with DAMP and the process of ap-

plying for a residence permit. In addition, I followed Facebook groups related to migrants in Brno in which people share their struggles with the department.

This research provided a background for applying the main research method: conducting ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with people going through the application process. When the research interviews with applicants were finished, I conducted another research interview with a lawyer focusing on migration law (and working for NGOs to tackle issues regarding residence permits in Brno) to clarify some aspects of application process. This interview provided valuable perspective on migration and legislative processes and revealed possible barriers faced by migrants applying for residence permits.

The semi-structured interview method allows information to be gathered that is accessible through neither ethnographic observation nor quantitative research methods such as questionnaires. In-depth semi-structured interviews allow researchers to follow and respect participant trajectories in storytelling, enabling participants to express ideas in their own words and apprehend issues that are important and specific. To create an open and trustful environment when conducting the interviews, it was crucial to focus on the interviewees' reasoning rather than on obtaining the answer (Reinharz, 1992). This method permits the study of time and temporality while also allowing participants to describe their subjective experiences, diverse situations and feelings of temporal resonance that may not be anticipated. The combination of ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews as research methods provides advantages since 'the data from each can be used to illuminate the other' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 102).

The interviews with applicants were conducted between December 2019 and February 2020. The respondents were found by applying purposeful sampling. In the end, three men and seven women were recruited; their names have been changed to preserve anonymity. Three respondents came from Indonesia, two from Russia, two from Syria, one from Moldavia, one from India and one from Mexico.[5] The criteria for selecting respondents included their having recent (or ongoing) experience with applying for a long-term residence permit (in some cases for prolonging their current stay), being of productive age, working rather a highly skilled job and speaking English (if not Czech). The interviewees had rather diverse professions, such as language teacher, lawyer, chef and IT specialist. The ages of the respondents ranged from 20 to 45 years, and all interviews were held in English, since the respondents felt more comfortable in that language than in Czech. Before the interviews, I did not have any information on whether the participants' experiences had been negative or positive.

Seven respondents applied for a long-term residence permit based on their partnership with a Czech citizen or a person with a residence permit in the Czech Republic (through the reunion with a family member track). One had been under

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[5] The study did not require a representative sample based on country of origin, as it was assumed that the procedures for non-EU countries would be consistent across all countries within this category.

subsidiary protection for five years, after which she applied for a long-term residence permit. Another had a long-term residence permit based on his job. The final respondent received a permit based on her student visa in the country. The participants were either going through the process (repeatedly) or had recently done so. One respondent voluntarily communicated with me for several months, reporting events in the application process and sharing issues she considered important. The long-term residence permit is valid for more than a year, but the application process must be repeated to renew the residency when some changes happen (in income, residence address, etc.).

I started the analysis by separating the interview data into four main categories related to temporality: type of residence permit, bureaucratic procedure (i.e. which kinds of documents were needed, in which order and for what purpose), experiences with DAMP (its location, communication with employees and feelings inside the institution) and the everyday life consequences of the process. However, the central theme of the interviews always appeared to be *waiting*. Therefore, I further coded for how waiting was related to the rhythmicity of the institution (DAMP) and the administration process. Within the administration process, waiting was recognised as an institutional time politics wherein time is used as a technique for negotiation and governing Others. I then focused on instances in which waiting was related to planning and expected lifepaths. In this section, I used codes for situations of disruption in one's expected life path (chrononormativity), disruption of the common day/week structure (norma-/temporality), feelings of stuckedness and the impossibility of planning ahead or moving forward with a desired life path (liminality).

The analytical section was organised based on two perspectives observed inductively in the interviews. The first explores time politics and the role of waiting at DAMP as well as encounters with its officers. It shows how the rhythm of the application process and bureaucracy influence the lives of applicants. The second section examines waiting in everyday life, its features (such as liminality and disrupted chrononormativity) and the consequences for applicants. This division helped as an analytical tool to better understand how certain time politics work, how they are applied and, especially, how the applicants experience them. Accordingly, the article examines the interconnections of the bureaucratic system and migration regime of the Czech Republic in practice and its impacts on applicants.

Analysis of Time Politics Within the Application Process

Time and its manipulation are among the key symbolic dimensions of political arrangement that can be analysed as time politics. Many applicants experience repetitive procedures with an uncertain ending; moreover, many of them repeatedly go through the process. Although applicants must adhere to obligations and deadlines for submitting documents, the process can be long and complicated,

and in some cases, institutions do not fulfil their duties and exceed their own deadlines. This presents obstacles to receiving the residence permit.

Waiting is an inherent part of most bureaucratic procedures, including applying for a residence permit. However, not everybody has the same experience of the process, and not everyone waits for the same duration. The analysis identifies the features of time politics within the process and its possible impacts. It exemplifies how a prolonged bureaucratic procedure can affect life chances and the daily and long-term decision-making of applicants.

Time Politics in the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy: Waiting

When I asked the research participants about DAMP, they suddenly became passionate and started to talk emotionally about their experiences with the office, which, unfortunately, were often negative. They said that people often wait hours for service at DAMP and may not even get to the service window after a full day of waiting; the next day, they have to return and wait again. Since the capacity of the staff does not allow all applicants present to be served each day, the situation becomes very frustrating for both sides. This frustration, in turn, causes behaviour that appears impolite to applicants. Joel reported about his experience at the immigration office that there were

> a lot of people. They open the place at 7:00 [a.m.]. We came at like 6:40 a.m., and there was a queue already of like 40 people in front of us.

Below, Stasi describes how the waits in and functioning of the institution have changed in recent years:

> It wasn't like that before, but the last two or three years, it's been hell. I won't say that even before people didn't spend the whole day there, but at least you didn't have to come there at 8:00 a.m. I used to go in the afternoon, in the days when the office hours were until 5:00 [p.m]., because I didn't want to wake up so early, and I always got a turn. But now, I have had to go back, go home and come back there the next day. (…) Then the next day when I arrived, I ended up on a different floor, different window, for a different kind of residence, like a half an hour before the end of the office hours. And I had arrived at 8:22 [a.m.].

Waiting for an entire day was not the only issue Stasi described. She further highlighted the difficulties of not knowing when her turn might be. Consequently, the applicants lose control over their time – Stasi does not know how many people are in front of her, so she cannot leave the building and come later. This also shows the unpredictability of the institution's organisation if the applications can be managed at a different office than planned. They cannot do or plan any other activities or structure their days. Thus, the time produced by the institution

clashes with the applicants' social and productive/active time. In this regard, Auyero (2012) used the term 'tempography of domination', referring to how the dominated perceive waiting and temporality. For immigrants and other unprivileged groups, the experience of endless waiting is therefore an encounter with this strategy of domination.

The rhythm of bureaucratic practices and their consequences were further exemplified by Radana, who faced difficulties in getting her residence permit confirmed. She applied for a residence permit based on a 'reunion with a family member', so her application was linked to her husband's previous resident permit application. She had been waiting for the decision for more than a year and still not received an answer. The situation affected not only her but also her family and, especially, her child's future. Here, she describes her application process and DAMP:

> They will tell you that they will call you within three months because your papers will be examined in three months and that they will give you the answer. So, the first three months were over, then the second three months, then four were over. And then I gave birth, and then I had a baby. And this baby is now ten months old, and she does not have anything. (…) Every time I go there [DAMP], they say, 'We don't have an issue with you, all your papers are fine,' or 'all your husband's papers are fine. You are waiting for an answer for your husband, and your husband is waiting for…I don't know why'. So, my husband is waiting for literally no reason, and we are waiting for him.

The length and difficulty of the process are based on the complexity and difficulty of the application itself as well as the institution's capacities and the abilities of its staff. In this case, Radana and her husband's applications were intertwined without apparent denouement, which made the situation irresolvable. This shows how unclear institutional procedures express power over applicants by prolonging waiting and keeping them in an uncertain position with limited life possibilities.

Rini described another example of institutional rhythm and practices below, pointing out the need to 'wait actively':

> Within that three months, we also had to, like, actively ask them, because sometimes if it takes a long time for them to process the application or, maybe, sometimes they forgot or, just, you know, maybe they already have it, but they haven't sent a letter to my house… They say, 'Oh, yes. It is in process'. But then, like, in that time, if you feel you are waiting too long, we have to keep asking them if they are still working on that or not.

This procedure forces applicants to be active, accept the role of patients and 'play the game' of the bureaucratic apparatus. 'The game' involves certain rules that

must be followed to be successful, which in this case means obtaining the residence permit. On the one hand, the role of an applicant is to follow these rules – to be active and patient at the same time and overcome plausible complications during which they may feel powerless and frustrated. This period, as noted by the respondents, can be understood both as hopeful and frustrating. On the other hand, the role of the institution (which represents the state's policy toward immigrants) is to demand that the rules be followed – to express its superiority and domination through several procedural steps and, subsequently, prolonged waiting for the decision. Immigrants are required to patiently comply with changing and often ambiguous bureaucratic requirements. As Auyero (2012) describes in the context of underprivileged people, they know that if they want to acquire the needed 'aid', they have to show that they are worth it by waiting patiently.

Applicants are often aware that they can reduce their waiting time at the institution, as Stasi says. However, they are often in situations that do not allow them to plan that far ahead. Moreover, they reported troubles with the registration system.

> You can also make an appointment ahead of time, but very few people actually do it. Hardly anyone is so responsible as to have everything under control to know at least a month and a half ahead that he will go there. It is not possible to get an appointment sooner usually. (…) Anyway, you feel guilty every time you wait there the whole day in a queue because you couldn't think ahead enough, like, a month before, to get the appointment. Somebody actually does it, but that's not me, definitely. So, I just feel guilty about myself and in front of my boss when I must take the day off because of it. I hate this feeling. But I don't think it's my fault. But I still feel it like that.

Stasi articulating her guilt at having to wait at DAMP to apply or prolong her residence permit exemplifies the tempography of domination. The institution's failure to be more flexible, increase its number of windows to serve more people per day or make any other kind of improvement illustrates the relationship between the state's institutions (and migrant policy) and immigrants. It represents an unwillingness to change the structural aspects that create situations in which applicants experience socio-temporal inequality. The creation of feelings of guilt for their situation can be associated with victim blame, which has already been studied in diverse spheres of social life. Since Western societies are built on liberalism, which upholds the notion of individual rights and responsibilities and, especially, the belief that humans are responsible for their own situation, there is a much smaller focus on structural explanations of aspects that foster this (Wright, 1993).

Another aspect of the bureaucratisation of the immigration process and governmentality is the shifting of responsibility from employees onto the imagined Other. Here, Radana describes her experience dealing with DAMP officers:

> Every time they open my file, they say, 'Yeah, it is a complete file, you have every piece, and everything is here, and they will call you'. The thing is, I don't know who *they* are. It is always *they* will call you, not us…So, we ended up with the words 'we don't know', and now, if you don't know – it is my life you are talking about (…) and I am suffering from that. All my life is on hold for this. (…) It is me who lost a vacation. It is me who lost the stuff. And I am sure that if this employee lost his vacation, he would find someone to talk to, and he would fix that issue because it is not normal for that to be the answer: I don't know – that is not normal. There must be someone who knows. And this person is either not working or either not hearing or just ignoring his work.

The impossibility of finding out who '*they* are', who has responsibility or to whom applicants can complain, recalls what Arendt (1970) described in reference to the depersonification of modern bureaucratic states. She pointed out that 'in a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted' (Arendt, 1970, p. 81). In other words, government employees are doing their jobs while, at the same time, being alienated from the consequences of their actions. Individuals are processed as administrative subjects of the state. Meanwhile, the potential lack of expertise or insufficient number of employees managing these permits within the bureaucracy process can have a fatal impact on the lives of immigrants and present obstacles to receiving a residence permit. On the one hand, applicants should be patiently waiting for the decision, and on the other hand, they are expected to be flexible, to act quickly while responding to documents received from DAMP. This shows that 'power makes context stick, and bureaucracies are the preeminent technology of power in the contemporary world' (Heyman, 1995, p. 262). Therefore, the everyday practices and interactions of (non)citizens and institutions are the meeting points between the structure of the state apparatus, governmentality and personal experience. This power of the state performed via institutional bureaucracy teaches newcomers to adopt a 'client role' – to learn to be 'patients of the state' (Auyero, 2012).

Being In-Between – Consequences of the Application Process and Waiting

Although the research participants were not applying for citizenship but 'only' for a long-term residence permit, they perceived their fundamental rights and security as similar to those included in Czech citizenship. Thus, after obtaining the residence permit, an immigrant can feel like (and be comprehended as) part of the majority, part of society, like the rest of the Czech citizenry, because they have the same rights and the same access to welfare benefits.

The participants often referenced feelings of 'being abnormal' or 'being unequal'. In this context, being 'normal' in the eyes of the respondents means being able to plan their time, have a job, vacation, have a bank account and do all the

things that the majority can do – in other words, to have life under control. Here, Sandra portrays this situation:

> Once I will have this temporary stay, I will get a business licence, and then I will be able to pay these social payments and so on, to live like a white man here. (…) And I will be finally equal, like an ordinary Czech person, citizen maybe. So, the same system will be applied.

The feeling of not being able to do the same things as most of the society is related to a feeling of being outside of common society and a shared social temporality deviating from chrononormativity. The inability to follow an expected lifepath and the linear timeline of society is incompatible with mainstream society and the dominant economic system. Therefore, applicants waiting for their residence permits feel abnormal because of the disruption to their life path – their exclusion from the economic system and the everyday life activities of average Czech citizens. They deviate from chrononormativity and norma-/temporality and, consequently, do not feel like a part of society. Thus, those who find themselves outside the normative time–space system are seen (and experienced) as deviations or abnormalities.

Waiting and the feeling of 'being left out' of the society can, in certain situations also be a form of a liminal period, which is another aspect of a disrupted life path and disrupted chrononormativity. Maria describes her position as being between leaving her home country and settling in a new one, with an uncertain future ahead of her:

> For me, it is really affecting me. Before I got this residence permit, I was kind of in between. Will I live here or not? I did not know. I mean I could not decide the next move for me. I was just still waiting. But now, after I got this, I know I can live here. Then I choose to live here.

Another example, given by Radana, explored how waiting influenced her everyday experience, planning and, basically, her whole life, as it revolved around her residence permit being postponed. Waiting for approval left her stuck in multiple spheres of her life. As a result, she found herself in a liminal position, which complicates even things most people in the Czech Republic consider common or basic.

> Actually, I am a person who is not able to go to work, to do anything because of this paper. I wanted to get my driving licence, and I couldn't because they require my ID, and I don't have ID. I want to take Eli [her daughter] to school – not school, it's like kindergarten, where you take kids and they request an assistant who speaks English. And I was accepted, but I cannot go because I don't have ID. And now my bank is calling me because they request ID. I told them I've applied but I don't have an answer yet, so I now have my bank waiting for it as well. Everything is wating for

it…Everything in my life is literally stuck because I am waiting for them to answer, and they are supposed to answer me within this timeframe by law. (…) When I applied for my baby, they told me 'in three weeks', and that was in April [six months before the interview].

Even though Radana can legally stay in the Czech Republic during the process, many facilities do not recognise and accept her status, which potentially decreases her possibility of following the life path of integration. This waiting can be grasped as a liminal phase of living, with an undefined period of waiting and fuzzy temporality. In the liminal period, the identities of people are temporarily vague, and the experience is, consequently, incorporated into a new kind of person. 'Life is on hold. Liminality eats itself backwards and forwards in the subjectively experienced time of la durée, and the present becomes ever more pressing as time passing' (Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018, p. 103). Thus, the present is felt even more intensely. In other words, migrants are in a liminal position of waiting with an insecure end, which makes the time meaningless. This experience can be very frustrating for applicants, as Joel illustrates:

I was just waiting for news. This…I could say that the feeling I remember the most is just this uncertainty about when it is going to happen and what is going to happen now. So, this not knowing when it's going to happen and what is going happen was the worst, I guess.

As most of the applicants reported, their time is not future-oriented. They cannot make long-term plans. Or, if they do, they cannot be sure when or whether they will be allowed to fulfil them. Thus, informants are more oriented toward 'now'. Their time might be less structured and their rhythms different that those of the majority. Waiting thus represents losing the possibility to decide how things are going to happen, a phenomenon Bourdieu (2000, p. 237) describes as 'waiting for everything to come from others'.

The applicants agreed that they experienced a strong feeling of being stuck while waiting for the decision – not only temporally but spatially. They needed to be attached to a place of living because they were awaiting police check-ups, documents in the mail or the residence permit itself being delivered. This feeling was associated with the impossibility of making a change or progressing in life. This spatial-temporal stuckedness was described by Nady as follows:

During the whole process, I needed to stay in the territory. (…) So, just imagine you don't get an answer for a year; you just cannot go anywhere basically. Maybe you can, and they can give you a kind of bridge visa, something like that, but it is problematic; it is complicated. Basically, you just need to be here, to be in the city as well, because the police can check your house at any time, and if they don't find you there, it can be a problem.

These examples further represent the feeling of 'being left out' – of society, spatiality and temporality. In this respect, the migration regime produces a category of structurally invisible people held captive by institutions that do not recognise their legal status and thus render it impossible for them to obtain a legal job, participate in the formal economy or just take part in everyday activities. This structural invisibility is also driven by liminality, which is not only typified by its uncertainty but also by the feeling of 'being stuck' and the impossibility of participating in society. Time politics within this bureaucratic process creates boundaries for immigrants to settle and live a 'normal' life. Moreover, it potentially keeps them excluded from a common shared reality, chrononormativity, norma-/temporality and, consequently, from the majority of society. In this context, time is a key symbolic dimension through which a state's superiority is expressed: waiting, as a temporal deviation, is an expression of time politics and the power of the state expressed via bureaucracy. The technique of governing incomers involves not only spatial politics but also time politics. The specific experience of temporality plays a crucial role.

Concluding discussion

The article has analysed the role of the state apparatus, surveillance and bureaucracy in the migration regime. Specifically, it examined the perspectives of research participants applying for a residence permit in the Czech Republic as non-EU applicants. As a technique for governing migrants through time, time politics was referenced to analyse this application process. The study examined how time politics is particularly important for describing the migration regime and bureaucracy faced when obtaining a residence permit. The study shed light on this process, which may negatively affect the integration of migrants at the local level and has the potential to produce socio-spatial exclusion and inclusion. On the one hand, Brno's strategic development documents aim to attract 'skilled' migrants to the city and keep them there; on the other hand, the city has limited power over this process since residence permit applications are in the hands of the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (part of the Ministry of Interior, which represents the state's goals). Furthermore, this institutional discrepancy in the aims of migration policy and the processes of immigration and integration impacts spatiotemporal and social exclusion, indicating the importance of studying institutional (time) politics. It also shows that the unusual strength of the modern state, as well as its ability to exclude others and embrace its subjects, lies in the state's infrastructural power.

This study revealed that the waiting caused by bureaucracy becomes a part of time politics whereby the state expresses its superiority and compels non-citizens into a specific position within society. The centrality of time is a key symptom of the inequalities within migration policy. Applicants do not have the same possibility to structure their time and life plans or participate in the pre-

structured temporality of the capitalist work regime. The time of the applicant is full of endless waits for papers and postponements due to institutional decisions, keeping them in uncertainty, disrupting their expected (or desired) lifepaths (as part of chrononormativity) and, consequently, impeding the possibility of finding a job and 'integrating' into society. In other words, they are temporally disadvantaged. For immigrants and the underprivileged, the powerless experience of endless waiting therefore works as an example of a strategy of domination (Auyero, 2012). The position of these applicants in society can then be described as unpredictable, liminal, in between, stuck or structurally invisible. Consequently, time in this phase is experienced as slow and meaningless, as it does not provide any space for personal change, growth or development. It is not a moment of empowerment but an experience marked by powerlessness. On the one hand, during the application process, the state expects the applicant to be patient but also flexible. In another words, as Auyero (2012, p. 14) asserts, 'The state tells its subjects, implicitly or explicitly, with words or actions: "Wait, be patient, and you might benefit from my (reluctant) benevolence"'. On the other hand, the bureaucratic procedure is inflexible in reaction to the diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of applicants, which influence their attitudes and options.

As noted in the interview with a lawyer specialising in migration law and dealing with the applicant process for a residence permit, the current procedures fail to consider the cultural and socioeconomic differences and the experiences of applicants who have been socialised in different institutional and bureaucratic systems. Moreover, the failure in the process is often viewed as an individual responsibility of the applicant rather than a larger, systematic problem. Therefore, the unfamiliarity with the context of the Czech bureaucratic system plays a crucial role in shaping applicants' perceptions of and attitudes towards the process. Although the legal framework for the application process operates at a generalised level, the specific materials required for the procedure vary depending on an individual's situation. Therefore, an intermediate step between the applicant and the official would be appropriate to facilitate a better understanding of the application process and offer the applicant clear explanations of the specific materials required for the unique situation. Intercultural workers employed by the Brno city municipality already fulfil this role; however, their capacity is limited and covers a much wider agenda. This raises the question of whether DAMP itself should not employ people with similar expertise to increase the institutional capacity to administer applications effectively. Inevitably, in the context of the state's migration policy, it would be appropriate to reconsider the importance of the department to enhance its capacity.

This study also opens up another perspective for further research on time politics in which this politics becomes a technique used by people in disadvantageous positions to negotiate their spatio-temporal dispositions. Moreover, it raises the question of the significance of studying different temporalities based on socio-economic and cultural backgrounds when facing new regions and in-

stitutional procedures. This would help identify and propose mechanisms and processes that facilitate better cooperation between these actors.

Although this research highlighted the weak points of the administrative process, the (time) politics of the application process has demonstrated the ability to change when faced with crisis. In relation to the arrival of a high number of Ukrainian refugees to the Czech Republic (300,000 within the first 2 months) (ČTK, 2022), the government established faster periods within which Ukrainian refugees can apply for a job (Chrzová, 2022). This change was made to support their quick integration into society. This demonstrates that migration and integration policy have the potential to implement significant improvements in their functioning.

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