Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands[*]

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Abstract

During the pandemic, due to the worsening of the already weak local economies of different Western African countries (Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal), the impermeabilisation of the Ceuta/Melilla border and the consequent redefinition of the main migration routes, the Atlantic route towards the Canary Islands – which was relevant between the late 1990s and early 2000s – regained significance in undocumented migration towards Europe. The emergency management of this flow of people, which since 2020 has brought thousands of migrants to the shores of the Canary Islands, has continued for months and months, through improvised forms of reception in camps (*Muelle de la verguenza*) and empty hotels (due to the pandemic crisis), until the establishment of migrants' emergency reception centres. Facing the often-inhuman conditions of these centres, as well as the situations of temporal injustice and the risk of deportation, many migrants refuse institutional relocation, leaving the reception system and dwelling in the streets. In this way, albeit in an ambivalent dimension, they break the frame on the public discourse concerning them as mere subjects in need of care and containment, regaining at least partial control of their time and opening up to a series of encounters with the emerging solidarity networks from below. This paper, based on an ethnographic fieldwork carried out, during 2022 and the beginning of 2023, on the island of Gran Canaria, means to explore the complex relation between temporality and migrants' agency, with particular attention to forms of institutional reception and grassroots hospitality.

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1. Introduction. Migration, time, and agency

This article originates from ethnographic research carried out in the migratory context of the Canary Islands. It aims to explore the nexus existing between migration governance, migrant agency, and solidarity, focusing on the idea of time as a social resource for migrants. Time governance depends on power relations, and we argue that for migrants (re)gaining control of their own time means multiplying their own agency, facilitated by a broad coalition of the local civil society supporting migrants in transit, a grassroots solidarity network (Giliberti and Potot, 2021; Birey et al., 2019). The choice to locate the research in the context of the Canary Islands stems from the relevance assumed by the Atlantic route during the pandemic, as a consequence of the restructuring of the processes of impermeabilization of the routes that crossed Ceuta and Melilla, towards Spain. Many years after the *cayucos crisis* of the early 2000s, the archipelago of the Canary Islands became, once again, a sort of obligatory passage for migrations from West Africa. In this way, it assumes a role as a laboratory for testing new policies of containment and segregation of migrants, in space and time.

For several decades now, as part of the temporal turn that has swept through the social sciences and highlighted, among other aspects, how temporalities are influenced by power (Bear, 2016), the interdisciplinary fields of migration studies and refugee studies have been enriched by a growing body of research focused on a temporal perspective. Despite the wide variety of approaches and research methods, the main idea behind studies focused on migrants' temporalities is that the migration phenomenon cannot be considered in purely geographical, or spatial terms, nor can it be thought of as a linear process. Rather, it can be considered as a process embedded in specific spatiotemporal concatenations – sometimes tortuous, recursive and rhizomatic – that are crucial in defining the patterns of inclusion and exclusion of migrants in host societies. Consequently, by bringing the question of the space-time of migration to the forefront (Gabaccia, 2014, 2022; Mavroudi et al., 2017) a wide range of previously substantially under-investigated issues reveal their relevance. In this way, they show how the subjective dimension of migrants' spatio-temporal experiences is deeply rooted in the materiality of their everyday practices, and in the social (and legal) conditions that produce them.

Within this framework, several developments seem worth highlighting. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that migration control policies in the

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

European/Western countries are increasingly focused on controlling the temporality of the migration process. Indeed, Cwerner (2004), reviving and updating Virilio's (1977) doubts on the compatibility of speed and democracy, had already highlighted how the temporal issue – which emerged in the pressure to fast-track asylum applications in the United Kingdom – was bringing about a structural change in reception policies. In this sense, 'the application of speed as a power tool in the time politics of asylum does have detrimental effects on the ethical principles that legitimise the international refugee protection regime' (Cwerner, 2004, p. 85).

Also on this aspect, more recently Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) have highlighted how border regimes are increasingly based on the use of temporal control technologies; both when they operate by smoothing and speeding up border crossings – for instance through the use of electronic passports or biometric controls – and when they operate in the opposite direction, through the imposition of indefinite waiting periods, various forms of detention, repatriation, or forced pushbacks. In this sense, the concept of the temporal border produces a multiplicity of precarious conditions, unfolding incisive consequences on the lives of migrants, "*interact(ing) with subjective experiences and practices to create dissonances, interferences, and interruptions that resonate well beyond the moment of border crossing*" (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 133). Whereas Bourdieu (1977) already recalled that the social distribution of waiting time and the degree of control over it also represent a form of distribution and stratification of power, Khosravi (2021, p. 65) argues that "*keeping people in prolonged waiting is a technique to delay them. Delaying is a technique of domination, making the others time seem less worthy*". In this sense, waiting is configured as a practice of racialisation of time that distinguishes, and encloses, the other/migrant in a different time.

Along these lines, another strand of studies that forms the background to our work is the one on the temporalities experienced by migrants upon access to the reception system. In this sense, one of the concepts most evoked by scientific literature is that of "limbo". A concept used by several authors to highlight a condition of uncertainty prolonged for an indefinite time incorporating social, economic, and political dimensions, making people, as well, unable to make decisions about their future (Hyndman & Giles, 2011; Mountz et al., 2002). A condition in which their lives are not at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unmet even years after their exit from their countries (UNHCR, 2006), but is also an experience of enduring liminality, caused by a situation of protracted displacement (Brun & Fábos, 2015). The concept of "asylum timescape", introduced by Meier and Donà (2021), allows us to represent time as a plural, fluid and contested zone (Fravega, 2023; Fravega et al., 2023). Through this

elaboration, it's possible to bring out the tensions and contradictions qualifying the processes of signification and the struggle characterising it. A space of friction that, however, can open up possibilities for re-imagining oneself and one's migratory path.

Finally, the last avenue for reflection concerns the subjective experience of time and the effects it produces on migrants' biographies. In this regard, Fontanari (2017) shows how institutional devices, in fact, produce the time of asylum seekers, as subjects caged in an exhausting condition of uncertainty, resulting in the loss of control over their own biographical time. The experience of time can, therefore, be compared to that of "being *stuck in the threshold* while wasting crucial time during which they could be accomplishing goals and moving forward with their lives" (Fontanari, 2017, p. 33). Against this theoretical background, through the reflection developed in this article, we argue that time is a social resource, the availability and control of which acts as a multiplier (or demultiplier) of migrants' social capital and, consequently, of their agency. Nevertheless, the possibility to control and dispose of one's time is not randomly distributed but is embedded in specific patterns of reception. Yet, "timescapes" (Adam, 1998) framing social practices, as well as discourses and the affective spheres are everything but homogeneous, rather they are plenty of contradictions and crossed by cracks, and slits, from which alternative possibilities (and imaginaries) can be glimpsed. For this reason, the events that took place on the island of Gran Canaria, during the pandemic, when thousands of migrants decided to leave institutional reception and pour into the streets of Las Palmas, seem particularly significant.

Starting from an ethnographic research work involving us from March 2022 to January 2023[1], we reconstruct a succession of events and moments that punctuated the local chronicle, analysing them in the light of the most recent scientific literature on migration studies and refugee studies. A series of interlinked events, triggered by migrants' need to regain control of their time and lives, has locally transformed the public discourse on migration; on the one hand by exploding the tensions produced by racist and xenophobic movements, and on the other by fostering the emergence of a vast network of solidarity with migrants. A "broad coalition" merging social Catholicism, radical left and anarchism challenged the binary representation of solidarity – based on the humanitarian-political dichotomy – and produced a hybrid and unprecedented alliance (Queirolo Palmas and Rahola, 2020).

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[1] In addition to the authors of this contribution, Juan Pablo Aris Escarcena (University of Seville), and Luca Queirolo Palmas (University of Genoa) also participated in the research.

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

From a methodological point of view, the research is based on an immersive ethnographic approach in key research locations of Gran Canaria, focusing on a popular neighbourhood (La Isleta) where: a) migrants concentrated after they flew from the reception system; b) there is a dense solidarity network; c) there is an emergency reception centre (Canarias 50). Inhabiting in that neighbourhood in various ethnographic stays, we had multiple encounters with inhabitants and migrants, mainly from Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco. Carrying out participant observation in key spaces and moments, we had numerous informal dialogues we gathered in our fieldwork notes. Furthermore, we also collected semi-structured interviews (30 in total) with solidarity actors (10), migrants (8), emergency centre operators (4), and different profiles of the island's inhabitants (8). Consistently to the main literature on visual ethnography (Desille & Nikielska-Sekula, 2021; Pink, 2008, 2013), the production of audio-visual materials collected through the cooperative work of researchers and the research subjects was held throughout the whole fieldwork development[2]. In addition, a generative narrative workshop was carried out, with the participation of a group of migrants and solidarity actors – who knew each other very well[3] – sharing their reflections on the meaning of solidarity and the places that were particularly meaningful to them.

2. The new prominence of the Atlantic route and the Canary reception system

The Atlantic route, already visible in the mid-1990s, has an almost 30-year history in the context of maritime migration routes between Africa and Europe (Carling, 2007; Castellano, 2014). Historically less frequented than other routes, given the great distances and the high degree of mortality that characterizes it[4] (Vives, 2017) – it is perhaps the deadliest migration route in the world – it has recently assumed a new prominence, as a consequence of the COVID-19

[2] A part of the visual material produced has been used for the production of "Mainland", a documentary by José González Morandi, produced by Laboratorio di Sociologia Visuale (University of Genoa), available at the following link: https://youtu.be/XtymmTzKAJk.
[3] The people who took part in the workshop, both irregular migrants and local actors, gravitated around "Atlas", a sustainable tourism association that had taken part in the actions of the solidarity network in La Isleta neighbourhood, with whom we collaborated during the research and the carrying out of the documentary.
[4] The NGO Caminando Fronteras records more than 4,000 victims on the Canary Island route during 2021, which would roughly correspond to a very high 20% of the people leaving on this route.

pandemic, and the new processes of re-*frontierisation* of the world (Delmas and Goeury, 2020). Due to the strategic management of the health emergency on migration policies (Stierl and Dadusc, 2022), the case of the Canary Islands appears emblematic of the contemporary post-pandemic restructuring of migration routes (Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas, 2022).

This is not the first time that this route has presented significant peaks; in fact, it had already happened in other historical contingencies, for example in the mid-2000s with the so-called *Cayucos crisis*. Then, as now, these peaks are linked to the processes of relative and temporary impermeabilisation of certain routes, adjacent to each other, in contingent moments (Godenau and Zapata, 2022; Rodríguez, 2022). Both in the mid-2000s and in the current pandemic and post-pandemic contingency, there has been a progressive closure of the route through the Alboran Sea, with Ceuta and Melilla entering what can be defined as a *state of exception* in migration control policies; a situation that has had direct consequences on the increased viability of the Atlantic route.

The three most relevant contemporary maritime routes of undocumented migration from Africa to Europe – the Central Mediterranean, the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic one – maintain a direct and osmotic connection with each other. As in the communicating vessels principle of Stevin's law, as the flow of one route decreases, the others increase, and vice versa. A sort of *plug effect*, in which the temporary closure or decrease of passage from certain routes (e.g. Ceuta/Melilla) is accompanied by a correlated increase in the others, generating a reconfiguration of the routes. In other terms, the contraction of certain routes predicts the expansion of adjacent routes (Domínguez et al., 2014; Godenau, 2014; Dudek and Pestano, 2019). The pandemic, as an exogenous shock, facilitates a process of border restructuring (Delmas and Goeury, 2021; Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas, 2022), and appears as a "disruption of migratory systems" (Gabrielli, 2021), generating a progressive further increase in the dimension of "migratory turbulence" (Papastergiadis 2000; Schapendonk, 2012).

After around fifteen years in which the Atlantic route has had a marginal role, in 2020 a new record in arrivals has been registered, counting up to 23,029 cases, which means around 30% of the three main maritime routes (Data from the Ministerio del Interior of the Gobierno de España, 2021). A spectacular growth (+756%) when compared to the figures of the previous years: for example, in 2017, it counted for 0.3% of total maritime routes with only 421 arrivals (Frontex data 2021). In the following two years (2021 and 2022), the relevance of the Atlantic route is maintained, with roughly similar figures of over 20,000 arrivals per year.

Looking at the migrants' countries of origin, we observe that the pandemic facilitates the progressive decay of local West African economies, already in

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

trouble, prompting many more people to leave (Ba Palmqvist, 2021); likewise, the strategic use of the health emergency in the management of flows (Stierl and Dadusc, 2020) and the consequent sealing of the Western Mediterranean passage forces people to go elsewhere, according to the *plug effect*. The young migrants we met clearly underline the role of the pandemic in pushing their migratory processes. Babacar and Fallou[5], who both arrived at the key date of November 2020, state:

> When Covid arrived, in Mauritania – where I had emigrated from Senegal for five years already – people could no longer work. The situation had become very difficult because for a long time people had not been able to work. And how was I going to send money to my family in Senegal? That's how I started thinking about the idea of coming to Europe, of crossing the sea. When I first talked about it with my sister, she couldn't believe it: 'Babacar, can't you even swim! "That's true" I tell her... but I then explain that I have no money and no solutions, and I had to do something. (...). My decision to leave was becoming more and more urgent every day and I was more and more convinced that I would take a boat... even though my friends told me that I would not succeed. (...) One day I was at work and a client of my boss, to whom someone had probably mentioned my intentions, asked for me and started telling me that there were many boats going to Europe. I then asked him for more information, and he told me about someone who was preparing to leave. With a friend, who was thinking about the possibility of leaving by boat, we sold everything we had to make the money required for leaving (Babacar, 26 y.o, Senegalese tailor for 5 years in Mauritania, in the Canary Islands since November 2020).

> With the pandemic in Senegal it had become impossible to live and I was finally convinced to come to Europe. I had been thinking about it for a while and one day I saw the possibility of getting on a boat and my journey began. We were 96 people on the boat, we left Dakar and sailed for seven days. And it was only seven because the weather was very good, the route is very long and normally the trip takes several days (Fallou, 34 y.o., Senegalese fisherman in the Canary Islands since November 2020).

The pandemic exacerbates an unspoken need, widening the spectrum of people likely to leave their countries of origin, including individuals who had previously been protagonists of African internal migrations. We are witnessing, therefore, a tension between choices that are somewhat forced by large-scale events (such as the pandemic) and personal decisions of people about their own lives, bringing these people to a shred of Europe, located in the middle of the

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[5] The names of the persons interviewed are fictitious.

Atlantic Ocean. Some of the myriads of islands on the EU's southern border emerge as particularly relevant in the undocumented maritime migration routes due to their relevant geostrategic position, allowing them to reach the European continent while remaining isolated from the mainland (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014). On both Mediterranean and Atlantic routes, islands – and some in particular (Lampedusa, Lesvos, Gran Canaria, etc.) – are confirmed as "hot spots" (Godenau, 2014) in the irregularised mobility from Africa to Europe. In fact, these islands are configured as "buffer zones", framing migrants' life in a hetero-directed and indeterminate waiting condition – a *limbo* – that is part of the racialisation processes of European territories; even though, it does not prevent the development of migrants' agency.

> When I arrived in Gran Canaria, first I was crammed five days on the pier with a lot of other people... and then five months in a hotel run by the Red Cross, without doing anything all day. The days were all the same, I slept, ate, waited, I don't know what, without being able to do anything. Then they wanted to send me to the Las Raíces centre in Tenerife and I decided not to go... a friend who was there with whom I managed to speak beforehand told me clearly not to go, that it was very bad there, that we risked ending up badly, and then I was also afraid of being deported to Senegal. So, I decided to stay on the street and I slept for two months in the Confital area. On the street is not good, but at least I was free... (Fallou, 34 y.o., Senegalese fisherman in the Canary Islands since November 2020).

From early 2021, in response to the new visibility of the Atlantic route, the so-called Plan Canarias took shape, in order to rehabilitate public facilities, such as former military barracks and powder magazines, a disused public school, and a warehouse of a port industrial polygon, as well as former prison precincts, bus stations, etc. The government's reception plan, as well as receiving multiple complaints for human rights violations from international organisations such as CEAR, Medicins du Monde, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (Zapata, 2021), is strongly contested by a significant part of the island's civil society as being inadequate (CEAR, 2021; Godeau and Zapata, 2022).

> Since 2020 we have witnessed a great flux of migrants and the responses have not been adequate. These overcrowded centres, first Las Raices in Tenerife and now Canarias 50 here, are like prisons and from our point of view they don't work... they are very difficult places for the young migrants to live in and at the same time they create difficulties in relations with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. They are run with an almost police-like policy and often people are thrown out of the centres for a thousand reasons. Migrants are a neglected population and many of them are expelled for bad

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

behaviour. The policy preferred this model of macro-centres to the model of smaller neighbourhood centres that we proposed. We had meetings with the government delegate... the politicians preferred this model to neighbourhood intervention, we were not able to discuss and propose a neighbourhood model (Carlos, 75 y.o., spokesperson for the La Isleta neighbourhood residents' platform).

In terms of public policy, as Carlos told us, institutions did not opt for a community model of inclusion involving citizens and local communities, rather they opted for a model of radically hetero-directed macro-centres, proposing a specific asylum time-scape (Meier and Donà, 2021).

3. The breaking of the time

When we opened our research fieldwork, in the early days of March 2022, people arriving with *pateras*, *cayucos* or *piraguas*[6] on the coasts of the Canaries were able, normally within a few months, to move to the *Peninsula*. Until a couple of months before – thanks to the perverse combination of measures to cope with the pandemic and actions to limit the mobility of migrants – even those who had the documents allowing free movement within the Spanish State were forced to stay in the Canary Islands indefinitely. At this juncture, therefore, the governance of migratory movements, within the framework of a strengthened device for controlling personal movements, made the Canary Islands a sort of "buffering zone" (Peutz & De Genova, 2010; Gabrielli, 2021); a spatiotemporal zone that contains and, at the same time, hierarchizes people's movements (Panagiotidis & Tsianos, 2007).

In the following pages, we will reconstruct the succession of events that have made the Canary Islands a site of advanced experimentation of temporal bordering policies and practices, attempting to trace their consequences on the biographical experiences of migrants. Three phases can be distinguished:

February - October 2020. The arrivals of migrants from the sea increase. Almost all of them, once they have expressed their intention to apply for asylum, receive a document allowing them free movement in Spain, and leave the Canary Islands to reach the Iberian Peninsula. With the impermeabilisation of the Ceuta and Melilla border, and the extinction of passages along the

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[6] In Spanish, the term *patera* indicates a 'sea barge' or, more generally, a hull. Specifically, this is the name given to the small boats that arrive on Spanish shores from Morocco. Boats arriving from Senegal - which have a very different conformation (they are very long and narrow boats) - are called 'piraguas'.

Western Mediterranean route, the pressure on the Canary Islands grows (Amnistia Internacional, 2021; Defensor del Pueblo, 2021). To cope with the large numbers of arrivals, a first reception centre, managed by the Red Cross, is organised on the Arguineguin pier[7]. Here, for several months, up to two thousand six hundred people will live crammed together, in camp beds placed under emergency tents, with insufficient sanitary facilities. This is what the Spanish media will identify as *el muelle de la verguenza* (Buraschi & Aguilar-Idáñez, 2023).

November-December 2020. To address this situation, the Red Cross and the government entered into an agreement with local tourist-hotel entrepreneurs whereby migrants would be accommodated in tourist facilities dotting the southern coast of the island of Gran Canaria, which at that time were empty due to the pandemic. In this way, the institutions proceed to empty the *Muelle de la Verguenza* and, at the same time, provide anti-cyclical economic support to the tourist facilities.

January - May 2021. In January, due to the recovery of the tourist sector, the agreement with the tourist-hotel entrepreneurs is broken and, just after (February-March), the deportations of migrants began, firstly towards the emergency centre of Las Raices (Tenerife), then to the centres set up in Las Palmas (El Lasso and Canarias 50). However, thousands of migrants refuse deportation and camp in the streets and beaches of Las Palmas. Their sudden visibility raises social tension: there are many anti-immigrant demonstrations and, in parallel, a widespread movement of solidarity with migrants takes shape. Until May 2021, despite having documents, migrants continue to be prevented from crossing to the Iberian Peninsula.

We arrive in Las Palmas when this whole chain of events has already taken place, but everything the migrants and solidarity actors we met talk about, starts from here. It highlights how time – both the empty time of waiting in reception centres, and the time full of expectations of those who have found a settlement and stable relations in the Canarian context – is a crucial dimension for the constitution of a relation between migration, citizenship and democracy (Baubock, 1998). In this framework, the emergency reception system plays a key, albeit extremely ambiguous, role, because if on the one hand, it allows for the organisation of hospitality for large numbers of people, on the other hand, it configures a vertical relationship with migrants, who are only considered as victims or people in need; or, alternatively, as threats to the social order, in any case as mere targets for reception and/or containment measures (Fontanari and Borri, 2017).

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[7] The main port of disembarkation of migrants on the island of Gran Canaria.

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

When we discuss with migrants about their dwelling conditions, the discourse almost always ends on a time that never passe and that, in some way, isolates them from the rest of the world.

> I was quite sick in the hotel, I didn't know what to do, I was eating and sleeping and didn't understand anything that was happening there. In the end, they left me there for five months, from November 2020 to March 2021. (Babacar, already mentioned)

In this sense, the decision to move migrants from the Arguineguin pier to hotels, if on one hand, it outlines an improvement in the material conditions of reception, on the other does not, in itself, reveals any paradigm shift. Nevertheless, even in the context of reception in hotels, there are experiences that cannot be reduced to this scheme. "*On the first day, after five hours spent with them, my life had already changed*", says Unn, a Norwegian touristic manager who, together with her husband, runs several multi-property hotels, where she hosted migrants, on behalf of the Red Cross.

> Immediately a special relationship was born, even with the hotel workers, and I felt changed as I listened to the stories of these young people. We tried to make sense of that empty time, without tourists: dancing, painting, designing clothes, doing things... what in large institutional centres made of tents and containers does not happen. (Unn, 47 y.o., touristic manager and solidarity actor)

In this sense, it is not the materiality of the living spaces that makes the difference, but rather the framework of relationships that the reception device, in its many forms, builds with people.

The experience of accommodating migrants in hotels ends within a short time. In the first months of 2020, in fact, migrants are transferred to new emergency reception centres. The risk of deportation to the countries of origin emerges and rumours spread among the migrants that the conditions in the centres are bad and difficult[8]. Ilaria, a social worker working at the emergency centre *Canaria 50,* explains the centrality of the temporal issue in the centre's system of discipline.

> The centre is conceived as a prison. When the guys enter, they ask them for their number.... "what number are you?", not "what's your name?" The centre closes at 9:30 p.m. ... and one wonders: why don't they let it open until

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[8] The countries from which most of the migrants arriving in the Canary Islands come - Morocco and Senegal - have signed repatriation agreements with Spain.

11 p.m. or till midnight? I don't know… it's something symbolic, maybe to make them understand that they are in a regime of exclusion. And they are very strict about enforcing it: if they arrive only a few minutes later they don't let them in at all. And if they don't show up for three days, they leave the reception system and stay on the street. Sometimes some of them get lost in the neighbourhood, they arrive a bit late and there is no way to let them in. They are forced to abide by very strict rules imposed on them when these people used to have a life. The mealtime schedule is very strict and even if you arrive a few minutes late you can't eat. If someone who has managed to get a meal wants to share it with you, when you are late, they are not allowed to do it. People must be punished! How not have the feeling that many of these rules are symbolic, they have no concrete reason behind them. (Ilaria, 28 y. o., emergency centre operator).

Moreover, as a group of young people who have experienced life in these centres tell us: "*Nothing, there is nothing… only void time*". In the centres, in other words, you can only wait for time to pass. Even if the length of stay is indefinite and lasts, in any case, much longer than expected – "*according to the law it would be a maximum of one month, but the truth is that people stay even 5 or 6 months*", Ilaria explains – generating effects of suspension, time blocking or temporal reorientation processes (Meier & Donà, 2021; Turnbull, 2016) in a Refugee reception system characterised by the overlapping of control and abandonment (Pinelli, 2018).

It thus happens that many hundreds of migrants escape from reception and camp in the streets, on the beaches (Alcaravaneras) or on the cliffs (El Confital) of Gran Canaria, for weeks on end. An outflow from the reception system manifests itself as a form of resistance and opposition to a regime of extremely tight space-time control. As well as an act charged with symbolic value that, while not resolving the contradictions of the extreme liminality of the figure of the migrant in Canary Island society, operates what Goffman (1974) would define as a breaking of the frame. "*It was not good at all to sleep on the streets and on the rocks, but in any case, it was better than Las Raices… I was at least free to make my life. I have a good relationship with people from Morocco, living with me at the Confital, we helped each other. Here, I met also people from Somos Red, and much of them are now my friends. This changed my life*", Fallou says.

Dwelling in the Confital informal settlements, Fallou ends with the segregated life of the reception system, and this makes it possible for him to encounter new people and to develop an affective social capital (Ahmed 2014). In this sense, with an act not devoid of ambiguity, deciding to camp in the street means making explicit one's presence on the territory and trying to take back one's time, breaking the condition of temporal heteronomy (Cwerner, 2001). In other words, the choice to make one's presence visible – and with it one's

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

marginality – can be read as an act of claiming agency and denouncing a practice of segregation that has both spatial and temporal dimensions. It is an act of implicitly taking a stand on one's own existence, which breaks the cage of the reception system and exposes migrants to encounter, triggering protest movements but, at the same time, also dynamics of widespread solidarity and processes of social capital enhancement; showing, as well, the rooting processes taking shape though the development of an affective relationship.

4. Solidarity as an answer to borderland racialisation

When When several migrants refuse to go to the new emergency centres set up by the Spanish government, Gran Canaria witnesses a new phenomenon: thousands of black people sleep in the street, in various informal encampments spread over the whole island, becoming extremely visible in the public space. The widespread presence of racialised subjects, in precarious and marginal situations on an island devoted to tourism, becomes visible and causes some stir. As a consequence of the racialisation of public space, mainly due to the inadequacy of institutional reception, different segments of Canarian civil society try to provide answers, opening their homes, working to support people on the move and putting, to a greater or lesser extent, their lives at the service of the migrant cause to respond to a local 'reception crisis' (Rea et al., 2019).

As a "battleground" (Ambrosini, 2018), we witness in the Canary Islands the raising of a dualism of positionings (Fontanari and Borri, 2017), characterizing also many other border nodes, where the processes of racialisation of Europe are condensed, as a consequence of border necropolitics (Mbembe, 2016). In this sense, the solidarity experiences of a part of civil society coexist with the xenophobic and racist mobilisations hostile to the migrant presence, demanding further repressive policies. In this divisive context, some of the island's inhabitants become the protagonists of direct action from below, trying to meet migrants' needs. Such practices, carried out without any economic logic, are conceived as support for migrant routes, and in a growing recent literature are conceptualised as 'solidarity' (Giliberti and Potot, 2021; Bauder, 2020; Filippi et al., 2021; Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020; Birey et al., 2019).

Individual and collective actions, in a dimension of "direct social action" (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019) generate broad "coalitions" (Queirolo Palmas and Rahola, 2020; Giliberti, 2020), from social Catholicism to the radical left and anarchism. Thus, challenging classical representations of the dualism of the humanitarian and the political, it produces hybrid alliances, which are increasingly being analysed in the literature in an unprecedented intersection

between the study of civil society and that of social movements (Della Porta, 2020; Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021).

In Gran Canaria, within a scenario of racialisation of the public space, a large number of local people who decided to mobilise for migrants' cause came together in *Somos Red*, a broad platform of solidarity which, in times of pandemic, initially arises online and soon moving to the streets, engaging in direct action.

> When in Las Palmas there were many black migrants sleeping on the streets in many places that's when Somos Red was born... from the response to the guys sleeping on the street... and from there we started to organise. This network was created by people only partially connected to social movements, who became aware of what was happening. Somos Red was an umbrella for civil society action in response to all this. Somos Red arose first and foremost from the individual initiatives of many people who decided not to stand idly by in the face of what was happening. The commitment was completely spontaneous and only a few of them came from a previous social movement experience, for example, Ben Magec-Ecologists in Action. It was a very broad coalition, within it there was everything... Somos Red arose completely spontaneously, trying to transform the frustration we had as citizens of the Canary Islands into unity and empowerment... (Maria, 32 y.o., journalist/communication technician from CEAR, and member of Somos Red).

Julio, an inhabitant of the La Isleta neighbourhood, after getting to know several young people who lived on the streets, decided to open his garage at set times during the week, to allow young people on the move to take a shower or have breakfast with food bought collectively by a group of supportive friends. By word of mouth, dozens of young people passed through Julio's garage, which became a sort of daytime reception centre where Spanish courses and yoga sessions were also held, by volunteers who invested their time and energy in this experience.

> It all started when, walking around the neighbourhood, I saw three black boys hanging around... the next day I saw more and more... We had already seen on television the dock of shame, the massive arrival of small boats.... I asked them if they had showered, and they said no... I became aware that in my neighbourhood there were several new people sleeping on the street. I then discovered that there were many more people sleeping in the mountains and on the beach, and that there were many people sleeping outside on the island... I did not come from social movements, I have always been a like-minded sofa activist, but in this case, I decided to motivate myself. I created a WhatsApp group to collect money to buy food, and water, opening my

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

garage on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings to offer them breakfast, and a shower, trying in turn to motivate the people in my personal network that it was important to take action. From March to July/August, with my personal network alone, I raised around 4,000 euros I organised breakfasts, showers, visits to the doctor... then the Spanish courses started, several people came to give lessons. I used to come and give lessons myself when the volunteers didn't come for some reason... and then I started giving lessons myself, I realised that the level was very low and I could do it. I even liked doing it. And I do it because I feel it, and I felt it more and more listening to the guys' stories. They came here through direct contact or because someone had told them that the garage was open here and that there were Spanish classes, yoga sessions and so on (...) If you live here and you don't know what is going on, I think you are mistaken. Of course, all these activities have changed my life a lot (Julio; solidarity actor; 55 y.o.; ambulance driver for the Public Health Centre).

Julio's life changes radically with this experience, as do the lives of some of the young migrants, who meet the Canarian civil society through this encounter. New doors open for them, in some cases even to the labour market, and there is an improvement in their lives. In Julio's vision, and that of many others who engage in similar experiences, the dimension of solidarity is something that is opposed to the institutional approach or, as he puts it, "*to the big NGOs treating people like flocks/beasts to be hosted in big camps*". Solidarity for Julio is what neighbours produce through encounters and the building of personal relationships. Put in Julio's words: "*it seems important to me this... that in the end we, normal people, are helping normal people, away from any big organisation, with our small possibilities. From below we do things*'.

In some cases, solidarity action implies real cohabitation between local people and migrants. This is the case of Babacar (see before) and Marta, an activist for the ecological and LGBT causes, who approaches Somos Red and over time makes a radical personal choice. Like others, Marta, after some time of immersion in solidarity action, decides to offer Babacar to move into her house. At the time of our meeting, Babacar and Marta had been living together for almost two years and had built a very deep friendship relationship, clearly changing their lives. Within solidarity practices, hospitality represents an experience standing at the intersection between the intimate and the political dimensions (Babels, 2019).

Today we spent all afternoon at Babacar and Marta's house, lots of chatting and the feeling of being in front of a very special story. Marta told us in detail how she decided to make the choice to host someone for an indefinite time in her own home. With Babacar, they got to know each other

slowly; he was one of the boys who occasionally came to her place to take a shower and eat, and gradually they both realised that a very strong affective bond was developing between them. They both repeatedly say: "We have become a family"... "He is my brother", says Marta. "She is my sister", says Babacar.

When – as part of the generative narrative workshop we ran with several participants – we asked to tell us about a moment of happiness they experienced in the last two years... after a few seconds, Marta told: "Happiness was meeting you…", addressing Babacar, who was sitting in front of her... "He's the best roommate I've ever had in my life. We have tried to create a horizontal relationship". Babacar sheltered behind his sunglasses, while Marta told the importance of having met and hosted him at home. 'This has radically changed my life. I never thought I could go to a Spanish woman's house", said Babacar (Excerpt from the field diary, May 2022).

Encounters with solidarity from below, after the previous experience of hetero-direction of time characterising institutional reception – from *el muelle de la verguenza*, to hotels, to emergency centres – represent for some people a partial gaining of control of their time and life. While the vast majority of young people who have arrived in the Canary Islands have decided to go to Spain, those we encountered for this research have instead made the choice to stay in the Canary Islands, having met what they define as "a family". Or, put in sociological terms, having acquired a local, albeit non-ethnicised, social capital:

> I would like to stay and live here, what am I going to the Peninsula, if I don't know anyone? Now I feel I have a family here. The other day we went to the police with Marta and it looks like I will soon be able to start working legally. Here, I have people who support me, who care about me... whereas there I have no one, so I prefer to stay here. Of course, my goal is to regularise my position and I know it will be very difficult, but well... I'm still here. I'd like to work in the Canaries as a fisherman, that would be my dream, although I know it's difficult.... But I can also do any other job, if I can stay here legally... (Fallou, already mentioned).

For Fallou and Babacar, whose temporal vision is strongly focused on present time, the encounter with solidarity actors facilitated the growing of a social capital in the Canarian society, triggering a process of partial recovery of their life expectations, making imaginable their future in Europe. For these young people, Gran Canaria has become the place to stay. Solidarity, as an encounter, can generate a transformative dimension in the lives of the people involved, opening up new spaces of agency and a new personal temporality of their lives.

Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

5.   Conclusions

Within the current contemporary restructuring of migration routes taking place in the pandemic and post-pandemic context (Delmas and Goeury, 2020; Stierl and Dadusc, 2022; Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas, 2021) a key role is played by the new raising of the Atlantic route (Castellano, 2014; Carling, 2007; Godenau, 2014) which, since the outbreak, has once again become a major node of maritime flows from Africa to Europe (Godenau and Busachi, 2018; Gabrielli, 2021; Ba Palmquist, 2021). In Gran Canaria, a particularly poor reception management facilitates the *decision* of a significant number of migrants to leave the formal reception system and camp on the streets, or in informal settlements. After the concentration on Arguineguin's "pier of shame" which became an international media scandal, and the confinement in hotels emptied by the pandemic, the perspective of being segregated in emergency centres is avoided by a substantial segment of people, who prefer the street to the heteronomous time of reception centres (CEAR, 2021; Godenau and Zapata, 2022).

The *choice* of exiting the reception system represents the breaking of a frame and a condition of spatio-temporal hetero-direction. At the same time, it shows the ambiguities of dwelling in the street, exposing people to extreme vulnerability. In such a context, the presence of thousands of black people dwelling on the streets makes visible the 'crisis of reception', highlighting an ongoing process of racialisation of European public space (Rea et al., 2019; Fravega and Anderlini, 2023). The experiences of solidarity emerging from a part of the local Canarian society generate encounters in which some people on the move find themselves as protagonists and part of the general response from below of civil society to the European migratory necropolitics (Giliberti, 2020; Bauder, 2020; Giliberti and Potot, 2021).

Solidarity experiences for some migrants translate into an accumulation of social capital and, in some cases, in the construction of friendship – or "family"– relationships, outlining processes of partial re-appropriation of their own time and biographical paths, as well as housing paths and highlighting transitions from *housing* to *home* (Fravega, 2022). For some migrants, the encounter with solidarity facilitates the multiplication of an affective and emotional capital (Ahmed, 2014) helping them to make sense of everyday life, overcoming the "temporal limbo", generating distinct "teleo-affective structures of practices" and feelings, in a co-presence of temporal structures (Schatzki, 2002); thus, undermining their ability to make decisions about their future, in the development of further emancipatory paths of autonomy in Europe.

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Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

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Contested Time. Migrants' Temporal Practices and Agency in Institutional
Reception and Grassroots Solidarity at the Canary Islands
Luca Giliberti, Enrico Fravega

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