



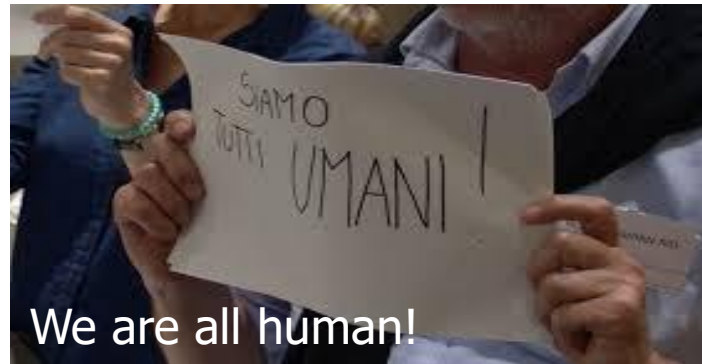
UNIVERSITY OF NEUCHÂTEL

RESEARCH DAYS – 25-26 SEPTEMBER 2025

Tie borders, temporalities and (im)mobility in
understanding the governance of migrants' reception.

Stefano degli Uberti (CNR-IRPPS)

- How to make sense of different and ambivalent treatments towards asylum seekers or refugees ranging from pushbacks and institutional abandonment to grassroots solidarity and reception?

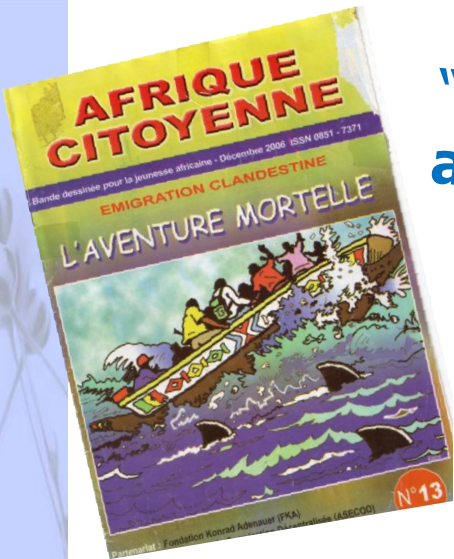


- How can we better understand the factors that drive, for instance, the adoption of double standards of reception of refugees crossing the EU borders after the so-called 2015 and 2022 “refugee crises”?

ARGUMENT

- Spatial and temporal bordering of migrants are process rooted in history and local contexts;
- The variation in the reception conditions experienced by asylum seekers and refugees are tied to the **stratifications and interconnections of different migratory phenomena** in the context in which reception policies are implemented and contested.
- Borderlands emerge as original entry points to explore the **temporalities of mobility** and to develop “**historically thick**” descriptions, beyond an emergency approach and purely geopolitical interpretations.

Brennero-Brenner

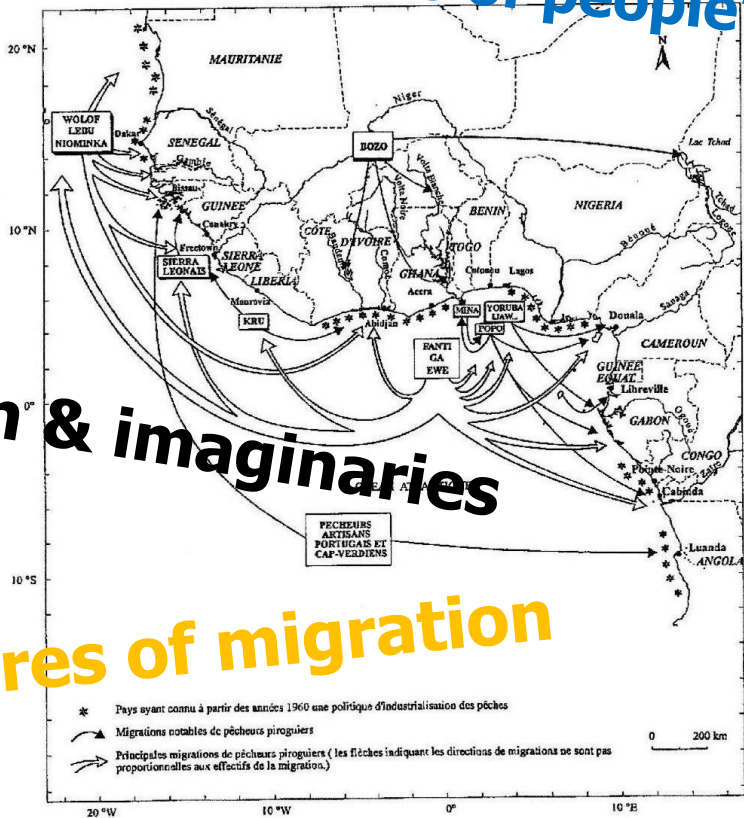


"Mobilities are engrained in the history, daily life and experiences of people" (de Bruijn *et al.* 2001)

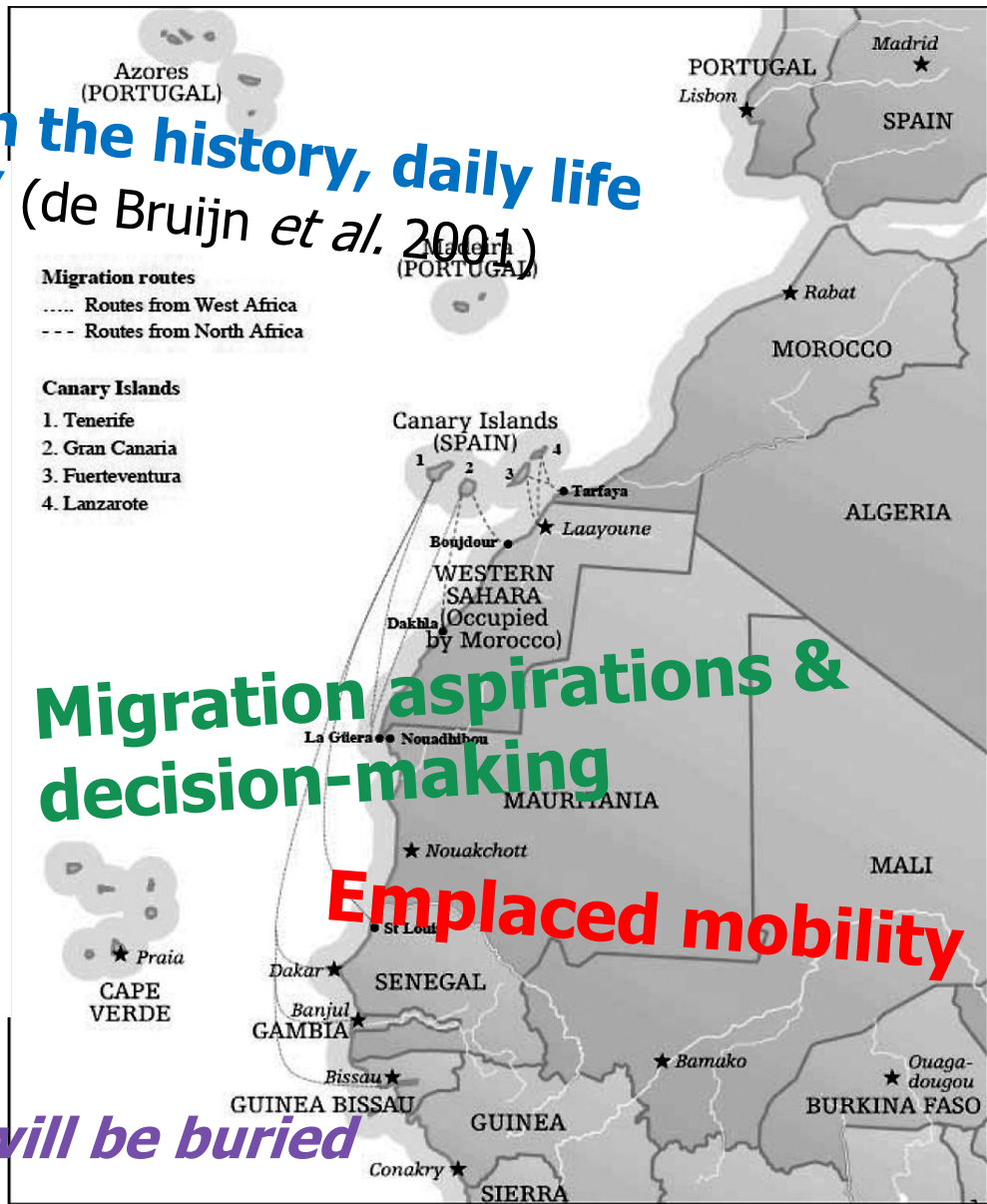
PAST ROOTS...

Imagination & imaginaries

Cultures of migration



The Haalpulaar know where they were born but they do not know where they will be buried
(Haalpulaar proverb)



Migration aspirations & decision-making

Emplaced mobility

...and
PRESENT
RESEARCH

ARCHIVIO
ANTROPOLOGICO
MEDITERRANEO

ANNO XXII, N. 21 (2) | 2019
Dossier monografici e Miscellanea

Anthropology & Critical Border Studies. Connections | Intersections | Crossings

Borders within. An Ethnographic Take on the Reception Policies of Asylum Seekers in Alto Adige/South Tyrol

Borders within. *Etnografia dell'accoglienza e richiedenti asilo in Alto Adige/Südtirol*

Stefano degli Uberti
<https://doi.org/10.4000/aam.1887>

Taylor & Francis
Online

Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies >
Volume 24, 2022 - Issue 3

359 3 Views
0 CrossRef citations to date
Altmetric

Research Article

Editorial. Entangled Temporalities of Migration in the Western Balkans. Ethnographic Perspectives on (Im)-mobilities and Reception Governance

Stefano degli Uberti & Roberta Altin
Pages 429-438 | Published online: 14 Dec 2021

Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies >
Volume 24, 2022 - Issue 3

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Research Article

Placed in Time. Migration Policies and Temporalities of (Im)Mobility Across the Eastern European Borders

Roberta Altin & Stefano degli Uberti
Pages 439-459 | Published online: 15 Dec 2021

Cite this article | <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2021.2015662> | Check for updates

Journal of Modern Italian Studies >
Volume 26, 2021 - Issue 5: The Prism of New Mobilities: The Mobility Trajectories of Refugees and Asylum Seekers Outside the Italian System of International Protection

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583 Views
8 CrossRef citations to date
1 Altmetric

Research Article

Unveiling Informality through Im/mobility. Conceptual Analysis of Asylum Seekers and Refugees at the Margins of the Reception system in Italy

Stefano degli Uberti
Pages 528-551 | Published online: 10 Sep 2021

Cite this article | <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2021.1953777> | Check for updates

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Home > Journal of International Migration and Integration > Article

Historical Layers of Refugee Reception in Border Areas of Italy: Crossroads of Transit and Temporalities of (Im)mobility

Open access | Published: 29 January 2024
Volume 25, pages 1133–1152, (2024) | Cite this article

Download PDF

Exploring the influence of the stratifications of migration in specific places, to capture the complex interconnections between the refugees' mobilities and earlier experiences of migration.



RESEARCH
FOCUS
(aims)

- ❖ To analyze the practices of temporal control enacted by the reception system in South Tyrol **from a long-term perspective**
- ❖ To examine the migrants' experience of time and how local reception governance informs migration temporalities determining **the coexistence of people mobility at one scale with their immobility at another.**
- ❖ To explore how **memories and perceptions of the past mobilities** are interconnected with and affect the reception and incorporation of asylum seekers and displaced Ukrainians in the borderscape of Bozen.

Migrants' displacement and emplacement are as integral to city-making —and to society-making generally—as those who define themselves as natives (Caglar & Glick-Schiller 2018)

"Border waiting is not a static condition but rather a process and a practice" (Khosravi 2020)

"Migratory stratifications concerns the analysis of the sedimentation of differences rather than their erasure or multiplication" (Altin 2024)

OUTLINE



1. Conceptual framework
2. Methodology
3. Background – Migratory stratifications in South Tyrol
4. The Balkan route: forced im-mobilities (2014 –)
5. Displaced people from Ukraine (2022 –)
6. Concluding remarks



MOBILITY STUDIES

(Sheller & Urry, 2006; Carling & Schewel 2018; Salazar 2021)

BORDER STUDIES

(Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Khosravi, 2018).

Time and temporalities of mobilities concern process of ordering as well as negotiation and resistance to policies;

- ❖ **Mobilities and Immobilities** as complementary process (Gaibazzi 2015; Schewel 2019); Importance of taking into account their multiple **entanglements** (Wyss & Dahinden, 2022; Bal et al., 2017)
- ❖ **Temporalities and Choropolitics of (im)mobility:** how institutions and people exercise power and shape the experiences of time in conditions of mobility and immobility (Cwerner 2000; Jacobsen & Karlsen 2023; Tsagarousianou, 2023):

At structural level: how mobility of migrants is controlled and hierarchized through multiple temporal techniques of governance

- ❖ **Labelling** (Zetter 1991; 2007; Fassin 2011);
- ❖ **Differential inclusion** (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013);
- ❖ **Temporal bordering** (Dwyer 2009; Khosravi 2018; Jacobsen et al. 2021) that may translate in means of **ordering & othering** (Paasi, 1998; van Houtum & Naerssen 2002; Brambilla 2015)

At individual level:

how migrants interact with time, experience and challenge different, often conflicting, temporalities produced by power dynamics: acceleration, suspended future, waiting delaying; circularity (Jacobsen et al. 2021; Tazzioli, 2018; Boccagni 2025)

- ❖ **Waiting** as a social fact and analytical lens (Khosravi 2018; Jacobsen et al. 2021): produces a forced conditions of suspension, precariousness, delay but also a state of liminality.
 - **Liminal dimension** (Scalettaris, Monsutti & Donini 2019): transitional dimension where migrants challenge uncertainty and creatively produce their “own temporalities” (past, present and futures are merged).
 - **Limbo**: an indeterminate state of confinement and abandonment (Cabot 2012; Brun and Fàbos 2015; Jacobsen et al. 2021)

Historicity and Migratory stratifications (Ballinger 2016; Della Puppa et. 2024)

- ❖ a synchronic framework of understandings is privileged with respect to the study of **migration temporalities *over*** and ***through time*** (*historicities*);
- ❖ Importance to adopt a '***longue durée***' perspective to highlight the relationships of migratory stratifications produced by historical continuities and ruptures.

An historical ethnography: Autonomous Province of Bolzano: Italo-Austrian border



2015 - 2016

Work as in a centre for homeless people & a reception center for asylum seekers

2016 – 2017

Research & interviews with asylum seekers from “so-called” Balkan route

2021 – 2023

Research & interviews with actors involved in reception of asylum seekers and Ukrainians (e.g. local authorities, social humanitarian workers, volunteers, local population)

Dual role as researcher and social worker: insights into the daily life of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants inside and outside the reception facilities

Secondary resources: policy documents, reports, newspapers, videos, policy and media discourse, informal conversation

Migratory stratifications in South Tyrol

- ❖ Italians displaced after the second world war (1945-1960);
- ❖ Refugees from ex-Yugoslavia (1991–2001);
- ❖ Asylum seekers via the Balkan route (2015 -);
- ❖ Displaced people from Ukraine (2022 -)

South Tyrol/Bozen : self perception and promotion as:
a bridging point between different 'cultures'

- ❖ Land of transit across the Italo-Austrian border;
- ❖ Cosmopolitan character tied to the stratifications of different cultures and the presence of historical-linguistic minorities

*Our territory [...] is **a space of encounter for different populations** and for the two great cultural areas on the two sides of the Alps.*

As a border area, it has been always in touch with different languages and cultures

(Official Website of TAA).



BACKGROUND

The 'Exodus' of Italian refugees from Istria and Dalmatia (1945-1960)

- ❖ 300,000 Italians displaced after World War II;
- ❖ Almost three thousand refugees hosted in Trentino-South Tyrol;
- ❖ For most basic care facilities and sheltered in large centers, military barracks or shacks;
(e.g. military barracks in Piani di Bolzano; the Guella barracks in the town of Laives; a depot of the airforce in Salorno);



"[...] when I sublet a council flat on bail, I was evicted under pressure from the other tenants, despite the intervention of Judge Radnich [...]. If I found a flat, after a lot of ups and downs, I would say it was thanks to a South Tyrolean".

Letter of Arno Tuchtan, Italian refugee, 17 June 1946 in FF-Sudtiroler Illustrierte (25/1995)

Borders, Identities and linguistic minorities

- Internal migration of Italians from other Southern Italian regions, under fascism (1930s) as *colonizers*;
- Italian refugees (1945): “Exiled” compatriots to *Italianize* German-speaking territories or former fascists with unclear identitarian belonging?
- The Italo-German “Option Agreement” (1939) and post-war negotiations on the reacquisition of Italian citizenship;



- ❖ Divided memory (opting/remaining) and social perception of ethnic cleansing;
- ❖ Frozen and separated minority identities: South Tyrolean & Italian;
- ❖ Ambivalent resurfacing of local memories of foreign threat and exodus after 2015 and 2022 crisis;

Refugees from ex-Yugoslavia (1991–2001)

- ❖ 80,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia settled in Italy after escaping the civil war (1991-1995)
- ❖ 85.5% increase in foreign residents from Balkan countries in South Tyrol;
- ❖ Solidarity and network of support among diaspora and local communities (e.g. Serbs, Croats);
- ❖ Grassroots reception (NGOs, civil society, volunteers) without a humanitarian approach (Fassin 2012);
- ❖ Reception in private homes, flats or small accommodation facilities instead of adopting large accommodation centers;

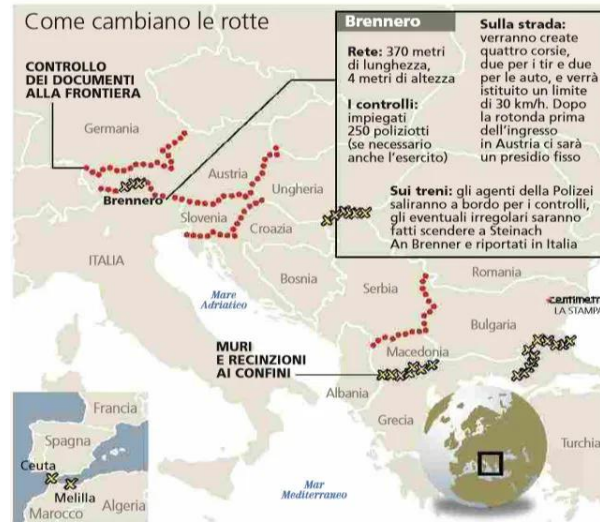
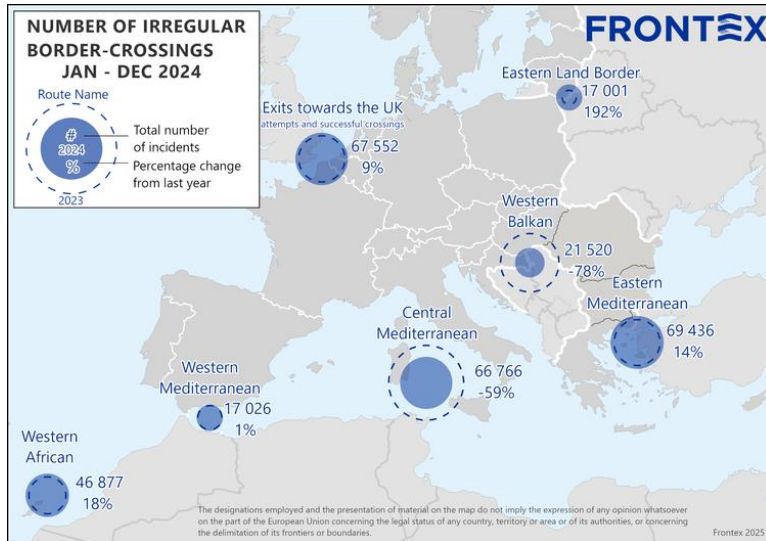


The Balkan route: forced (im)mobilities (2014 –)

2015 – at present

Autonomous arrivals of asylum seekers from the South, the Middle East and Central Asia through Balkan states.

“The Game” : violent use of time and forced (im)mobility pushbacks, captures, detentions, torture, police patrols, the erection of more fences and defensive barriers



Irregular border crossings along Balkans

- ❖ **Frontex:** 78% decrease in 2024 compared to 2023;
- ❖ **Italian government:** 48% decrease at Italy's northeast border.

'The 'Out of quota'

- ❖ Young male adults from Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran and family groups coming from Syria, Somalia and Eritrea
- ❖ Enforcement of the Italo-Austrian border: practices of temporal and body control;
- ❖ More than 400 (2015) and 1600 (2019) asylum seekers suddenly get stranded in Bozen;



Italian Dual system of reception in South Tyrol

- ❖ Ordinary system: long-term integration service (% according to Provincial fund);
- ❖ Extraordinary system based on National Quota distribution system (State fund);

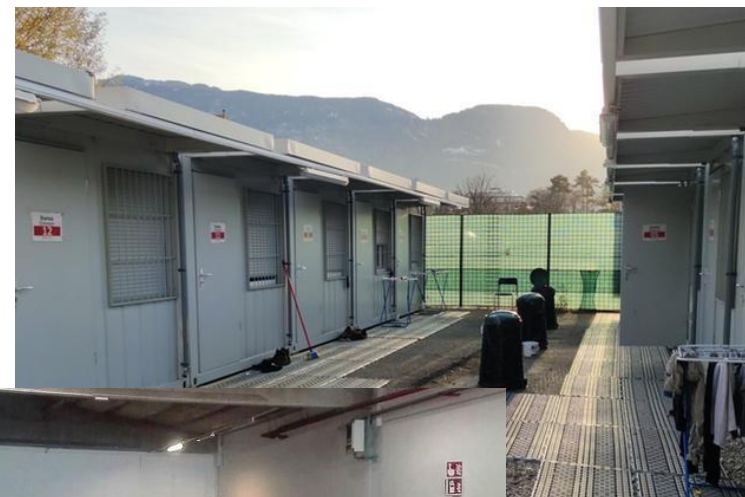
Autonomous Province of Bozen:

- ❖ Full responsibility for the management of reception system.
- ❖ Exclusion of autonomous arrivals from Ordinary system (*Circolare Critelli*);

Out-of-quota refugees: autonomous arrivals not belonging to National quota of people arrived through the Mediterranean route.

Informal settlements: seeking asylum in Bozen

There are always conflicts inside the centre! [...] It's very difficult to think that a person could feel comfortable in a huge industrial warehouse, in the middle of nowhere in the industrial outskirts of the city...[...] Who would be willing to walk miles every day to reach a place where you feel in prison and with set times for every daily gesture? (social worker, 2022)



Practices of labelling and roots of temporal bordering



People "out-of-quota": they are **presumed** asylum seekers
(Salto.bz - 12/2015).

*Out-of-quota. Are they **irregular** and **undeserving**?*
(Salto.bz - 12/2015)

*It is a thorny issue to offer reception services to the out-of-quota migrants . **Our small region can't handle a wave of people if we want to protect our minorities and save the unity of its cultures and customs***

(Member of the Provincial Council, in Corriere dell'Alto Adige 09-2016).



Bolzano overwhelmed by migrants. The councilor is concerned about the 'new arrivals': 70 more people between July and August. 160 are living on the streets
(Alto Adige, 06-2024).

We welcome the homeless not asylum-seekers



Migration policies as bordering device that produces legal and social hierarchization

- ❖ Moral exclusion: illegitimacy of asylum request;
- ❖ Migrants are recognized as “homeless” but rejected as asylum seekers;
- ❖ Provision of basic hygienic and social services but denial of the international rights to apply for protection;

*What about the **migrant people sleeping outside** on the street? "We are doing our best but it has to be clear that in Bozen **we have always had some people sleeping on the street**. There are not more people; perhaps they are only more visible because they are cross the streets of the city-center (member of Provincial administration, 8-11-2016)*

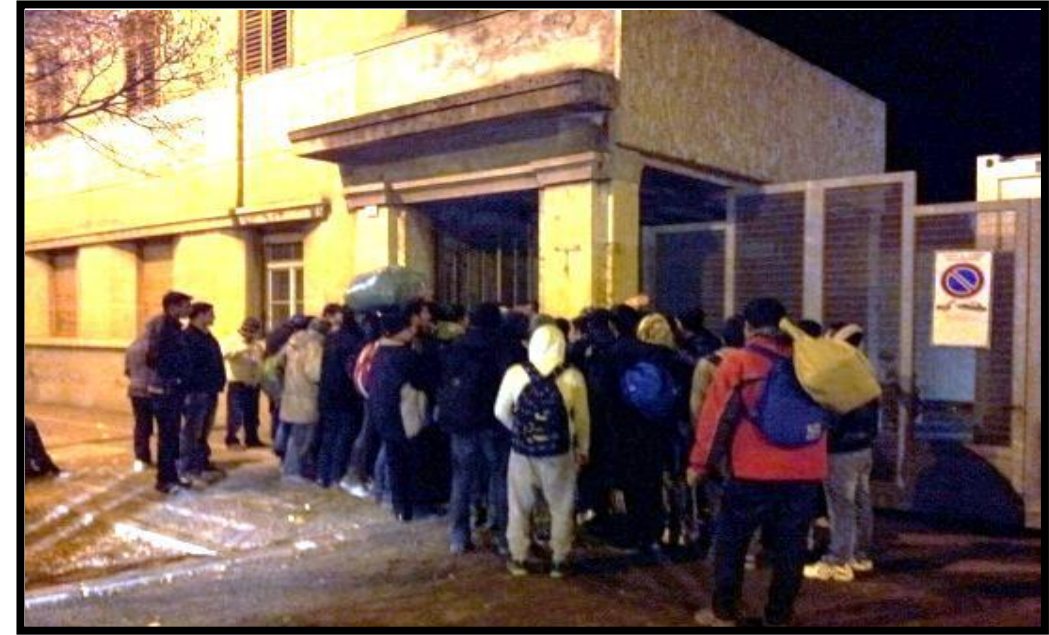
Do you smell this? In this city they do not even allow us to use the toilets of the bus station. There is no way to wash ourselves (in Salto.bz, 05.04.2017).

Imran: out of quota, out of time

I don't understand why I am on the street and other people as me... same conditions...are hosted [fellow migrants already hosted in a reception center]

They have a bed and can have a shower everyday...At last, we are all human beings".

Three days ago I slept in your Centre. I had a chance to sleep inside but tomorrow...who knows! I do not know if I will be on your list...perhaps I will be left out again; it is better to go sleeping on the street" (Imran, 2015)



Out of time

Physical presence erased by practices of temporal control.

- ❖ **Circular trajectory of 'permanent temporariness'**...constantly *in between*;
- ❖ "Containment through (forced) mobility" Tazzioli (2017);

*I asked for protection in Italy. **They told me that I have to wait several months before entering in a reception center.** They can also decide to send me back to Hungary. I'm afraid to go back. **It is hard to say if it is worst now in South Tyrol or before arriving here.***

***I am living in a kind of never-ending limbo.** I do not know my destiny. I just have to wait, like so many others, with no possibilities to change my situation (Samiullah, 2015).*

How come that in Bolzano you have to wait 6 months to be hosted in a reception centre?...In other cities you do not wait more than a month? (Iftikhar, 2015)

Hostile architectures



Past memory and migratory stratifications



*"One year ago, **our city has been handed over to outsiders**. Today it is always more unsecure: the fights among immigrants increase and some **urban areas have become open-air dormitories**.*

(Former member of Bolzano City Council and member of the Italian Parliament, 2017).

*"Euregio is cornered. **Historic Tyrol is at risk**. [...]. Refugees in South Tyrol endanger our territory and several years of work on transboundary cooperation"*

(South Tirolean member of Euregio, in AltoAdige, 2016)

*"**We are at risk of invasion...history repeats itself. We must defend our Italianness just as our compatriots have done, even on the other side of the borders**"*

(Member of the City Council, 2017).

Making domestic time

You won't believe me but at night I prefer to sleep outside or under the bridge with other people, rather than being hosted in a container. At least we are together. (Abdul, 2017).

Here every night freezes but I am not alone. Here we eat together, we pray together, I almost feel at home like in my country (Ghulam, 2016)



*In reception centers, there are many asylum seekers who do not receive any help; since 2016 they are still waiting for a response from Commission...due to COVID, but not only. **In six years, many of them have worked hard and use their time...learned to speak Italian and German and found a stable job!***

***They would have the money to rent an apartment, but they are still waiting for the documents!! Without the documents they cannot reunite the family** (social worker, 2022).*

Making sense of time



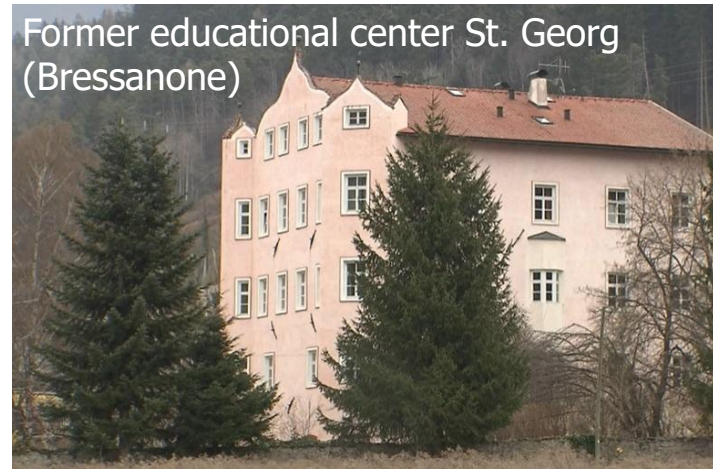
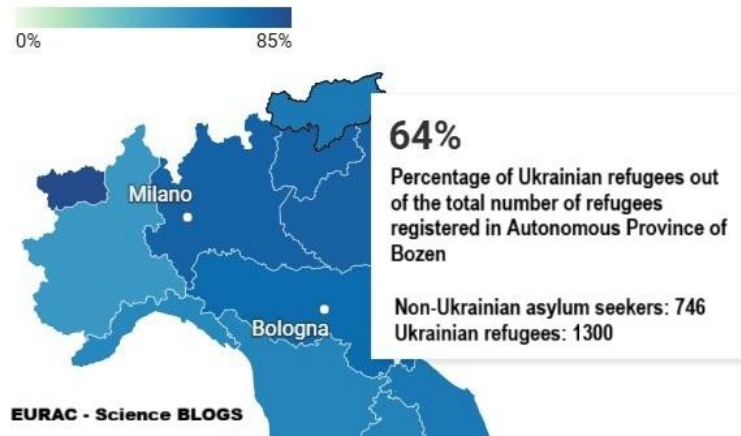
*When I got negative I was very angry and frustrated. It seems like I was no-one, or only someone left to wait and profiting from Italian system. You know well...**I spent time collecting, articles, proofs of my previous life in Pakistan...to see my life rejected as fake.***

*Since then, I've started taking notes **so I don't forget my experiences since I got here...** I think it's useful...**so that every day does not feels the same.***

*Day by day I have noticed that many migrants who arrive in Italy have great difficulties in learning languages. So I decided to make a vocabulary...to support the learning Italian, German, English and Urdu. **My book will be useful to many Pakistanis who want to learn Italian or German... I'm thinking about when we'll start living here!** (Izhar, 2016).*

Displaced people from Ukraine (2022 –)

Ukrainian refugees and other asylum seekers in Italian reception centres
Number of Ukrainian refugees per thousand inhabitants (20 April 2022)



- ❖ 1/3 of 170.000 displaced people crossed the Northeastern borders;
- ❖ 1.300 Hosted in South Tyrol;
- ❖ Multiplicity of social actors involved: Provincial department of Social Affairs, police, Red Cross, voluntaries, charity and humanitarian organizations;

Temporary Protection Directive (Dir. EC 55/2001) and selective compassion



- ❖ Initially one year permit of temporary residence & mobility in EU Schengen area;
- ❖ Strong Solidarity and 'selective compassion';

*We are looking at a **selective compassion**; that proves that it is possible to organize and implement a "non-emergency" and "well-made" reception system also towards asylum seekers*

(social worker 2022)

Grassroots solidarity and hospitality networks

- ❖ Established diasporic network of Ukrainian relatives and friends developed after the 1990s:
- ❖ Pre-existing relationships with compatriots (mostly female caregivers) as a source of trust and solidarity for many Italian families;
- ❖ 'Home-made' knowledge: accommodation in private homes.

It was fundamental to know a bit more about their life and what they had left behind, sharing such intense moments of sorrow. Because when you know, you feel more empathy, you understand people's suffering better. This is also important for our personal and spiritual growth. (Volunteer, 2022)

*Yes, look here, people had heard about this welcome and brought bags full of things: nappies and sanitary products for women, snacks, fruit juices. **Everything was done with so much love and generosity!** Things arrived at all hours, and this moved and amazed us.* (Volunteer, 2022)



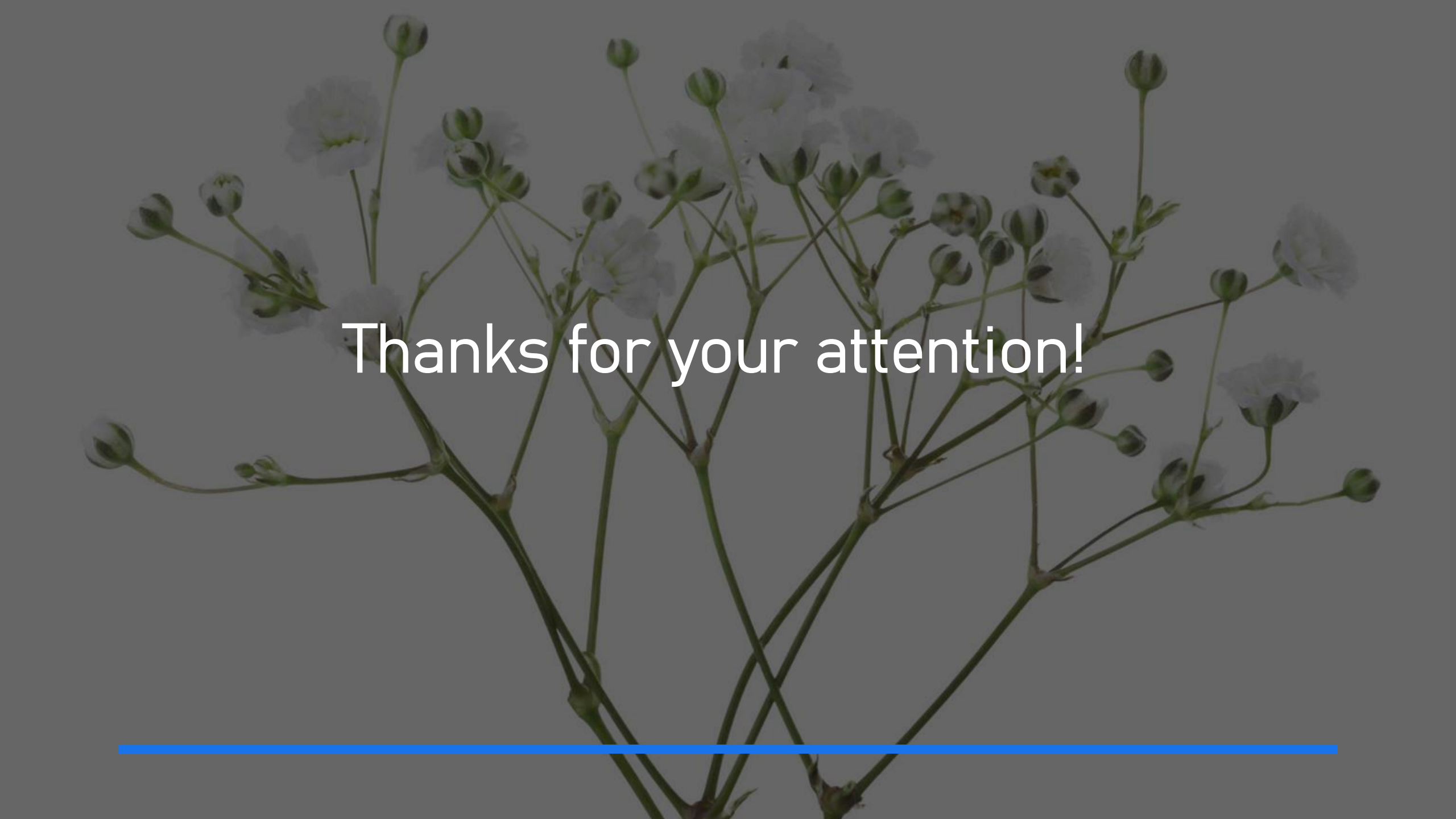
Concluding remarks

To see what borders look like from the other side, we need a radical historicisation in order to denaturalise and politicise an otherwise naturalised and depoliticised current border regime (Khosravi 2019: 422).

- ❖ The empirical evidences shed light on how the different treatments of asylum seekers and Ukrainians in South Tyrol are also tied to the complex process of **historical stratification of reception practices** and the **interconnections with past experiences of mobility**.
- ❖ In relation to specific spatial contexts, such as South Tyrol, memories and experiences of migration are subject to different reinterpretations over time, producing both solidarity and conflicts.
- ❖ **Solidarity is emerged as a temporal, ambivalent experience.**
Do past memories of mobility and the migratory chains that fuel solidarity also determine its hierarchical and unequal application?

Concluding remarks

- ❖ The narratives of waiting of the asylum seekers suggest the coexistence of experiences of temporary (im)mobility with the ability to regain control over one's existence, building a sense of collective hope toward the future.
 - ❖ The adoption of a long-term perspective on the temporalities of migration provides an analytical prism:
 - To move beyond an emergency approach;
 - To challenge the linear conception of time in the understanding of intertwined mobilities, by exploring the role of "disruptive events" (King 2025) and their non-obvious connections.
-



Thanks for your attention!
