

Tense times for young migrants: Temporality, life-course, and immigration status

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Presentation Outline

- Introduction
 - the intersection between immigration status, life-course, and the experience of time
- The Research
 - UK-based ethnographic study
- Themes: a messy temporal matrix shapes the lives and experiences of young people subject to immigration control in the UK
 - A sense of waiting and feeling stuck before getting status
 - Paradoxical adulthood transitions throughout the application process
 - Long-term uncertainty produced as a result of the immigration regime
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Time and life-course transitions are profoundly impacted for young people in precarious immigration situations by their constant encounter with the immigration regime.
- Time and temporalities remain little explored in the migration literature (Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths, 2014).
- Emerging themes (Griffiths, Anderson, and Rogers, 2013):
 1. 'the strong relationship between power, the state and management of time'
 2. Migrant subjectivity

Messy times

- Time, temporality, and life-course transitions are complex, non-linear, and contradictory concepts
 - Simultaneous and competing temporalities
- Time and migration ‘temporal zones’:
 - Time as discrete areas: decision to migrate, the journey, the arrival, integration
 - Who is and who is not considered a migrant
 - Over time, migrants accumulate rights
 - Age at migration matters
 - Time as rhythms and cycles in migration
 - Different types and scales of time are in tension with each other
 - Messy experiences and unfolding of time and life
 - Time in bureaucracy and administration: state control
- *Time matters*

Time and control/power

- Young people have varying degrees of control/power over different temporal zones:
 - E.g. school results v immigration application
- Waiting as debilitating and a form of state control:
 - ‘precarious, quasi-legal space’ (Griffiths 2014)
 - ‘temporal straightjacket’ (Back et al. 2018)

Transitions to adulthood

- Culturally prescribed linear timelines to life-course transitions
- Immigration status and life-course transitions:
 - Unaccompanied refugee minors experience accelerated transitions to adulthood while simultaneously being in a state of 'waithood' during asylum claims (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh 2018)
 - Transitions into 'illegality' (Gonzales 2016)
 - Upon turning 18, immigration status as dominant in young people's lives

Tense times

- Three key tensions:
 1. Misalignment between bureaucratic time and individually experienced time as shaped through the encounter with the immigration regime
 2. Young people's transitions from childhood to adulthood are complicated and shaped by their immigration status and the UK immigration regime
 3. Multiple short-term statuses produce long-term uncertainty

The young migrants in this research

- Young migrants who have come to the UK as children with their families, or to join family members already in the UK
 - Often from former British colonies
- Young people with precarious immigration status:
 - Initially can only apply for 'leave to remain – other' (LLR): 30 months, £2,593 (£1,033 fees + £1,560 IHS / £624 per year since 27 Oct 2020, previously £400)
 - Securing this status for the first time took between 5 and 10 years
 - Followed by three renewals, each at full cost (both fees and HIS are regularly increased), which have to be made within a one month window and with long waits for decisions
 - After 4 successful LLRs, eligible to apply for 'indefinite leave to remain' (ILR) at £2,389 (fees only)
 - After 12 months on ILR, eligible to apply for British Citizenship at £1,330
 - Minimum 10 year trajectory to long-term secure immigration status, usually longer
- Not asylum seekers or unaccompanied asylum seekers

The research

- Everyday lives of young ‘undocumented’ migrants
- To gain an in-depth understanding of issues from the perspective of those living them
- 18 months, 2016-2018
- London-based youth-led campaign group for young migrants aged between 18 and 25
- Collaborative ethnographic approach:
 - Observations at meetings, gatherings, campaign activities
 - Nine in-depth, one-to-one interviews
 - Two theatre-based workshops
 - Collation of the group’s published materials (blogs, reports, etc.)
- Thematic analysis

Before status: Waiting (1)

- How does *waiting* on immigration status effect and is experienced by young people?
- Leila, the 'Waiting Girl':
 - Passivity
 - Production of powerlessness and vulnerability

'I felt as though time was just passing by and there was nothing I could do to slow it down.' - Leila

Before status: Waiting (2)

- Waiting:
 - To save money
 - To find lawyers
 - On the Home Office: 'bureaucratic temporalities of immigration applications' (Anderson 2018)

'I'm the kind of person that likes to be in control of [the] things that I'm doing. And I had literally no control over what was happening. - Leila

- To continue education
- 'Waiting symbolizes waste, emptiness and uselessness' (Khosravi 2014)

'I'm still gonna classify as an international student, d'you know what I mean? I have to wait for the three-year legal residence thing... even when you get the status, there's still another hurdle you have to jump over.' - Leila

Before status: Being stuck

- Impacts on the experience of time and ‘temporal angst’ (Griffiths 2014):

‘temporal angst [that] relates to the perceived disjuncture between the temporalities of themselves [migrants] and those around them, and between their expectations of progress and efficiency, and the machinations of the immigration and judicial systems in practice’

- Waiting means feeling stuck: time has stopped or passes slowly
- Moments of activity
- Time speeds up or runs out
- Caught between adolescence and adulthood
- Inability to move on

Present: Growing up too early

- The process of immigration applications affects young people's life-course transitions
- Diverged from collective/societal/cultural life-course transitions
 - Growing up too early
 - Turning 18 curtailed progression to adulthood
 - Non-linear
 - Out of sync with peers

‘prolonged waiting, for papers or deportation, means “not being in-time with others” (Khosravi 2014).

Present: Unable to become an adult

- Being visible or not visible to the state differed and has different consequences pre- and post-18
- Immigration status paradoxically produces:
 - Practical dependence
 - Legal independence
- Age as a border through which the immigration regime is enforced

*‘It feels like...I don’t wanna say like I’m in jail
but...on **probation**’*

Maria on the renewal process

Future: Life on probation (1)

- Relief of getting immigration status is short-lived
- ‘Renewable temporariness’ and ‘permanent temporariness’ (Anderson 2018)
 - Temporariness is a permanent experience
 - Contingency
 - Unknown
 - Uncertainty

‘uncertainty is the mother of all fears’ (Bauman, 2016)

Future: Life on probation (2)

- Power imbalance and lack of Home Office accountability
 - Immigration status is necessary to move on with life
 - Fear of deportation

'it's a renewal. You've already looked at our case before, so what's taking you up to a year to... say yes or no? But that's what we're waiting for at the moment...' - Tobi

- 'Renewal temporariness'
 - Life repeatedly on hold during renewal process
 - Cannot plan short-term, medium or long-term future

*'you can't really plan your future... let's say you do three two-and-a-half years they can still decline it in your fourth one, and you've done close to eight years... that's also the uncertainty of like **even though you have got status you don't have status**, it can get taken away from you just like that.'*

Tobi

Conclusion

- ‘Stuckedness’ (Hage 2009) produced by the immigration regime that results in uncertainty and has significant impacts on life-course transitions
- Forced sense of temporariness
- Pervasiveness of temporary immigration status
- Time and life-course as bordering mechanisms
 - Hierarchies of belonging are ‘also accompanied by an ordering of migrants’ relationship to time’ (Back et al. 2018)
- Intersection of immigration status, time, and life-course produces specific experiences for young people:
 - Waiting, feeling stuck, and unable to move into their futures

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Thank you!