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Temporalities of non-knowledge production – The quest for acceleration in the asylum system

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Abstract

Scholarship in ignorance studies has revealed the relation between expertise, non-knowledge production and decision-making processes, but it has seldom addressed how time is a key component of such relation. To enquire the nexus between time and non-knowledge production, we focus on the so-called «accelerated procedures», which have been introduced in European Member States in order to speed up the asylum process. These procedures apply to established categories of applicants, like people of certain nationalities as well as those who lodge a new asylum application after a rejection. Being eligible for accelerated procedures, these applicants have less time to prepare their cases, to provide relevant evidence and to appeal in case of a negative decision. We argue that, in the interactions between asylum seekers and asylum authorities, accelerated procedures produce non-knowledge about applicants by operating upon two main temporal mechanisms. First, by reversing the temporal relationship between the procedure and the assessment of applicants' asylum cases: applications submitted by certain categories of applicants are deemed to be unfounded *a priori,* and thus channeled into an accelerated procedure. Second, by reducing the timeframes of the asylum process, these procedures hinder asylum seekers' possibilities to collect and produce knowledge about themselves. We introduce the notion of «precautionary underestimation» for referring to this process of non-knowledge production.

Keywords: non-knowledge, migration management, time, asylum process, acceleration

1. Introduction

In the last decade or so, ignorance and non-knowledge production have received increasing attention (Gross, McGoey 2015; Aradau 2017; Proctor 2008; Reyner 2012; Beck, Wehling 2012). The novelty of this approach can be summarized by its ability to move beyond classical epistemological questions concerning what is «not yet known», and to explicitly focus on the «conscious, unconscious, and structural production of ignorance, its diverse causes and conformations, whether brought about by neglect, forgetfulness, myopia, extinction, secrecy, or suppression» (Proctor 2008, 3). Research about

non-knowledge production has revealed how doubts, uncertainty and lack of information can be actively produced in order to shape decision-making processes and to keep scientific controversies open . In so doing, these studies have also revealed the nexus between expertise, non-knowledge production and decision-making: experts can rely and depend on epistemic practices producing non-knowledge (Aradau 2017), which in turn shape the process of design and implementation of policies and political decisions.

Despite a thorough attention to how non-knowledge can reinforce power dynamics, these studies have scatteredly focused on time as a key component of power plays. This paper looks at migration management, and specifically at the asylum procedure, to investigate the relation between non-knowledge production and time. Such a perspective is peculiar in that it complements the more common perspective on migration management as depending on the production of correct and reliable knowledge. As a matter of fact, migration management relies on the continuous production of knowledge about people on the move. Data and information about migrants' trajectories and their identities are produced through several infrastructures. In the Mediterranean Sea, satellites and drones are utilized to monitor migration flows; databases are used to collect knowledge about third-country nationals in order to regulate their access to Europe and to limit their possibilities of movement across countries. Similarly, the asylum process mobilizes different types of knowledge practices (medical, geopolitical, linguistic) to assess applicants' stories and identities. Literature also acknowledges that the data practices and infrastructures supporting the production and circulation of such «migration knowledge» are shaped by more or less explicit temporal goals and demands: the crafting of future-risk scenarios (Broeders, Dijstelbloem 2016; Tazzioli 2018b; Broaders, Hampshire 2013) and the pursuit of acceleration (Bigo 2010; Sontowski 2018; Cwerner 2004; Murphy, Maguire 2015).

The peculiar link between non-knowledge production and time is less investigated, but it is expected to further this field of analysis. In particular, we deem strategic to enquire the relation between time and non-knowledge production by focusing on the so-called «accelerated procedures», which have been introduced in European Member States in 2020 in order to speed-up and streamline the processing of asylum applications. Accelerated procedures are analytically interesting in that they reveal a paradox between the «limbo» of waiting periods that can be draining for asylum seekers and the acceleration of procedures that can impede applicants to produce relevant knowledge. In order to analyze the temporal

goals and assumptions underpinning these procedures and how they affect the process of non-knowledge production shaping the asylum process, we rely on discourse analysis of European Union policy papers and on narrative interviews with asylum seekers, lawyers and social operators.

Drawing on this empirical material, we show how acceleration is depicted in policy discourse as efficiency-related, while it actually creates frictions that challenge migrants' capacity to produce knowledge. We introduce the concept of «precautionary underestimation» to account for the process of non-knowledge production resulting from the application of accelerated procedures. This notion aims to advances scholarship in ignorance studies and critical security studies by revealing how time works as a filter for regulating processes of non-knowledge production. We argue that accelerated procedures produce non-knowledge about asylum seekers by operating upon two main temporal mechanisms. First, by reversing the temporal relationship between the procedure and the assessment of applicants' asylum cases. Applications submitted by certain categories of applicants are *a priori* assessed as unfounded, and thus channeled into an accelerated procedure. This reversal in logical order is underpinned by a precautionary rationale, namely to avoid backlogs and time-wasting in the national asylum systems. Second, by reducing the timeframes of the asylum process, these procedures hinder asylum seekers' possibilities to collect and produce knowledge about themselves. Time represents a precious resource for asylum seekers, as it allows them to self-represent their stories, to collect documents and evidence about their cases and to develop trust with the social actors supporting them throughout the process. By temporally compressing people's possibilities of knowledge production, accelerated procedures tend to devalue and minimize asylum seekers' voices and stories. At the basis of this mechanism, we suggest that acceleration does not allow to negotiate what is to be understood as "legitimate knowledge" throughout the asylum process, and thus it leads to the production of non-knowledge.

Lastly, we suggest that people on the move do not always resist and contest processes of knowledge production, but rather they actively attempt to provide information about themselves in order to reclaim their right to asylum. This is not to deny that asylum seekers also rely on practices of non-knowledge production, for instance by arranging biographical details (Beneduce 2015), or by providing fake documents (Scheel 2018). This is complementary and not in contradiction with the nexus between

non-knowledge institutionally produced and time imposed by authorities, which is the interest of this article.

In the next section, we single out the gap in the current literature in migration and border studies. On the one hand, scholarship has widely discussed the accelerated temporalities of the asylum process without thoroughly addressing what is entailed by such temporalities in terms of non-knowledge production. On the other hand, scholars have revealed how knowledge and non-knowledge production are intertwined in the epistemic practices aiming to make migration and migrants measurable and visible objects of governance, yet they have only partially explored how temporal dynamics influence and transform such practices. In section three, the methodological solutions adopted are discussed, while in section four we analyze the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (COM 2020a) issued by the European Commission. The New Pact recommends an easier and more efficient use of accelerated asylum procedures as one of the tools through which dealing with the challenges faced by the EU. In section five, we analyze empirical data collected through interviews to illustrate how time represents a crucial resource for asylum seekers and for the social actors supporting them. In section six, we summarize our findings by emphasizing how, in the case of accelerated procedures, time and non-knowledge production are used to maintain and foster the distinction between supposedly «genuine» and «bogus» asylum applications.

2. Migration management, time and non-knowledge

Migration management depends on multiple forms of epistemic practices used to regulate the movement of people across borders and to produce knowledge which informs political decision making. As Christina Boswell (2008) has recalled, knowledge, and particularly expert knowledge, holds a legitimatizing and substantiating political function. Such "politics of knowledge" has often relied on information technologies. To name a few sources, Dijstelbloem and Meijer (2011) have mapped the multiple ways in which information infrastructures can produce knowledge about mobility. Dijstelbloem, van Reekum and Schinkel (2017) have discussed how situational knowledge is produced through an apparatus of surveillance deployed at sea, while Pelizza and Van Rossem (2023) have shown

how the apparatus of security produces knowledge in the form of "scripts of alterity" (see also M'charek *et al.* 2014).

Scholars in border and migration studies have also shown how knowledge and also non-knowledge production are intertwined in the epistemic practices governing human mobility. This scholarship draws on ignorance studies, which have brought attention to the multiple meanings, uses and effects of ignorance. The majority of works on ignorance have expanded its understanding and definition by revealing how ignorance is socially and culturally constructed (Gross, McGoey 2015), its productive uses (McGoey 2012), the strategies used by organizations to manage uncomfortable knowledge (Reyner 2012). Several categorizations of ignorance have been proposed (see Roberts 2015). Proctor (2008), for instance, distinguishes between ignorance as a "native state", ignorance as a "lost realm" or "selective choice" and hence as a passive construct; and, lastly, ignorance as actively and deliberately engineered as a strategic ploy.

As pointed out by Frickel and Edwards (2014), a major risk of these taxonomies is to take a conspiratorial logic which tends to assume a strong connection between the production of ignorance and the specific goals of organizations. This is particularly relevant in the field of migration management, where the political sensitivity of the issue can suggest over interpretations. Furthermore, as Mica and colleagues (2021) pointed out, scholarship has mostly focused on what ignorance is rather than on what it does. These two insights allow us to move the focus from the intentional aspects in the production of ignorance to the organizational rationality entailed by policies. We hence prefer to analyze how non-knowledge is produced in the interaction between the several actors (asylum seekers, asylum authorities, lawyers, social operators) involved in the asylum process. Furthermore, while ignorance and non-knowledge are often used as synonyms, in our analysis we will opt for the term «non-knowledge» in order to highlight how different modalities of non-knowing can emerge from the process of knowledge production which characterizes the asylum process.

Focusing specifically on migration and border studies, scholarship has demonstrated how migrants' subjectivities, as well as reports and statistics about migration and migratory events, are constituted through discourses and practices in which non-knowledge can be actively pursued. Bohmer and Schuman (2007) illustrate the dialectic between knowledge and ignorance in the process of asylum

and suggest that political asylum hearings «produce ignorance in the guise of producing knowledge» (ibidem, 606). For instance, applicants might not be aware of the shifting political alliances or of the political motivations of those who committed violence against them, they might not know what happened to their friends and family, they might be uninformed about bureaucracy, from immigration law to social services. Davies and colleagues (2023) have recently suggested that borders are sites of «epistemic violence», where the voices and testimonies of asylum seekers and activists are silenced in order to hide the violent pushback regime from public knowledge. By focusing on errors and fakes in identification practices, Aradau and Perret (2022) illustrate how politics of non-knowledge are played out at European borders. They argue that errors and fakes are constitutive elements of two different regimes of power/non-knowledge/subjectivity which, in turn, contribute to the production of racialized hierarchies of subjectivity. On the one hand, abusive and poorly conducted asylum interviews are configured as «errors» by EASO; on the other hand, migrants and asylum seekers are often suspected of presenting false information or fake documents.

Next to analyzing how migrants' claims tend to be dismissed or ignored, perceived as fake or inconsistent, scholars have enquired how non-knowledge also shapes the production of reports and statistics about migration. Scheel (2021) discusses the relation between migration statistics and non-knowledge by focusing on the quantification and visualization practices illustrating stocks and flows of migrants. He suggests that statistics about the so-called «deportation gap» results from the failure to record self-organized return migration. Krause (2022) analyses the non-knowledge production about refugee accommodation quantifications in UNHCR's Global Trends Reports. He argues that, due to undefined categories, unprecise counting and inconsistent recategorizations the reports present important gaps. Yet he suggests that the non-knowledge produced and presented in these reports convey the «idea of controllability and governability of refugees as data objects» (Krause 2022, 148). Finally, Scheel and Ustek-Spilda (2019) identify the practices used by the International Organization for Migration to produce strategic ignorance about migration statistics. Particularly, they illustrate how the visualization tools enacting migration as a knowable and quantifiable reality available to political decision-making tend to omit, compress, deflect and sanitize data about migratory events and figures in order to produce a single and coherent account.

Despite these contributions have focused on the productive role of non-knowledge, less attention has been paid to address the role played by time in producing non-knowledge. Two notable exceptions are Tazzioli (2020) and Mica *et al*. (2021). Tazzioli (2020) develops the notion of «desultory temporality» to account for the geographically and temporally uneven distribution of knowledge and non-knowledge production, of visibility and opacity shaping bordering practices. Mica and colleagues (2021) analyze the European refugee crisis by explicitly linking strategic and epistemic ignorance to projective and anticipatory forms of knowledge. They argue that regimes of ignorance are closely related to and dependent on forms of anticipatory knowledge informing the policy making infrastructure.

A more significant body of scholarship has discussed the temporalities of the asylum process mostly in terms of speed and acceleration (Cwerner 2004; Tazzioli 2018a; Griffiths 2013; Reneman, Stronks 2021) and waiting (Griffiths 2014, Rotter 2015, Turnbull 2015, Cabot 2012, Jacobsen *et al*. 2020). Cwerner (2004) discussed how a «politics of speed» was implemented in the UK asylum system through the introduction of deadlines and requirements which tend to exclude, or to make more difficult, the submission of asylum applications for certain categories of applicants. More recently, Tazzioli (2018a) has spoken of the «temporal border of asylum» to illustrate how hotspots' accelerated temporality concerns the partition between migrants who are allowed to claim asylum and those who are preventively excluded. This partition works by determining the nationalities eligible for the asylum procedure and international protection, such as Syrian, Iraqi or Eritrean, while «illegalizing» people coming from North and West Africa labelled as «economic migrants». Reneman and Stronks (2021) illustrate how Dutch authorities temporally administer the assessment of asylum requests by prioritizing and accelerating cases with lower chances of success, while slowing down those with higher chances.

These studies reveal only apparently paradoxical dynamics of acceleration and slowing down. On the one hand, asylum seekers are often exposed to prolonged periods of stasis and waiting. Griffiths (2014) describes the *sticky time* lived by people waiting for court hearings to be scheduled, for enactments of judge's decisions, for appointments with embassies, for documents to be sent, or more, generally, for decisions to be made. Similarly, she speaks of *suspended time*, moments of «directionless stasis», of non-cumulative waiting, which result in the feeling of being stopped, of living in an unproductive and endless present. In this respect, Haas (2017) speaks of a dual positionality inhabited

by asylum claimants, who are simultaneously citizens-in-waiting and deportees-in-waiting. This dual positionality leads to a particular subjective state of «existential limbo» (Cabot 2012), in which life is understood as stalled or immobilized during the asylum process. On the other hand, this scholarship has well pointed out how asylum policies have been increasingly crafted in order to channel some categories of applicants into asylum procedures defined by an accelerated temporality, as well. This article aims to contribute to this scholarship with an investigation of accelerated procedures recently introduced at the European scale, and a detailed analysis of how the sociotechnical mechanisms of acceleration contribute to the production of non-knowledge.

As we will show in the next sections, the easier and more extended use of accelerated procedures is depicted by the European Commission also as a means to deal with the delays in the decisions about asylum seekers' applications. Accelerated procedures would, in theory, represent a benefit both for the nation-states, whose goal is to return irregular applicants as fast as possible, and for the applicants, who have interest in knowing their future (Morandi 2020) and avoid limbo situations. What needs to be analyzed, however, is how such accelerated temporality transforms and re-organizes the process of knowledge production about asylum seekers, to the point of structurally producing non-knowledge.

3. Methodology

The data underpinning this paper was collected through narrative and semi-structured interviews conducted in Italy between 2020 and 2022. Thirteen interviews with asylum seekers were carried out to explore their views and experiences on the asylum process; three interviews with lawyers, three with social operators and one with a member of ASGI[1] were conducted to enquire how accelerated procedures have been applied in Italy. The narrative interviews begun by setting an overarching topic and left the interviewees free to point out the issues that were more relevant for them.

Beyond interviews, the paper relies on discourse analysis of two European policy papers. We employed discourse analysis to reveal the rhetorical organization and the criteria used by the European Commission to promote a broader use of accelerated procedures. Both interviews and policy documents

[1] ASGI is the acronym of "Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration", an Italian association which focuses on the legal aspects of immigration (https://en.asgi.it)

were coded, compared and analyzed. Codes were initially inductively derived from the comparison of standard and accelerated procedures and then revised in light of the empirical material. Particularly, by comparing ordinary and accelerated procedures we singled out three temporal dimensions – sequence, repetition, duration – which allowed us to analytically discuss the differences between the temporalities implied by the two types of procedures.

4. The accelerated temporalities of the New Pact on Asylum and Migration

The New Pact on Asylum and Migration (COM 2020a) was introduced in 2020 in order to address inefficiencies in the European multi-layer governance of migration. Time is a central concern of the New Pact. In the EU's proposal, the necessity to accelerate the processing of asylum applications is depicted as one of the main solutions through which the perceived inefficiencies of migration management can be tackled. The Proposal identifies several challenges currently faced by the European Union regarding migration flows: the persistent pressure on external borders and on the asylum systems, the lack of harmonized procedures among Member States, the deficiencies in implementing the Dublin regulation, the weakness of solidarity systems. While the New Pact has already been discussed from several perspectives (Carrera, Geddes 2021, Hadj Abdou 2021, Mouzourakis 2020, Gazi 2021), our analysis focuses on the temporalities therein discussed and problematized and on the Commission's recommendation to facilitate the use of accelerated and border procedures.

The so-called «accelerated procedures» are a special asylum procedure already introduced in the 2005 Asylum Procedures Directive (Council Directive 2005/85/EC) and then reformulated in the 2013 European Directives (Directive 2013/32/EU). The overall goal of these European directives was to develop a common policy on asylum by creating common standards for migration management in the Member States. Within this context, accelerated procedures were conceived as a way to speed up the processing of asylum applications by introducing shorter time limits for concluding the examination of applications, as well as deadlines for lodging appeals in case of a negative decision. The European Directives do not provide a definition of «accelerated procedure», however, it is generally accepted that, in comparison to ordinary procedures, accelerated procedures are characterized by shorter timeframes for a final decision about the asylum request (Morandi 2020). The Directives do not prescribe specific

time limits for the application of the accelerated procedures, but they merely mention the cases in which they can be applied (see Art.31). Moreover, Art. 43 of the Asylum Procedure Directive (2013/32/EU) introduces the possibility to conduct border procedures, allowing Member States to decide about the admissibility and the substance of asylum applications at the border or in transit zones. Border procedures can be considered as a subset of accelerated procedures: they are defined by the same, reduced timeframes, but they are conducted at the borders or in transit zones on people who have been apprehended after having eluded, or tried to elude, border controls.

According to the Pact's proposal the use of the accelerated and border procedures is still considerably limited. The Proposal mentions a list of reasons behind such limited use: difficulties in quickly assessing whether an applicant could qualify for the border procedure; the duration of the appeal procedures, which may entail that the procedure expires before a decision on the application can be taken; the lack of investments and resources that would be needed in order to process applications and to accommodate applicants; the lack of prospects on returning the rejected applicants, which rises doubts on the usefulness of border procedures. Furthermore, the New Pact's proposal singles out some «structural challenges» which currently put Member States' asylum, reception and return systems under strain. Among them, the proposal repeatedly insists on the «increasing proportion of applicants for international protection who are unlikely to receive protection in the EU with a resulting increased administrative burden and delays in granting protection for those in genuine need of protection as well as a persistent phenomenon of onward movement of migrants within the EU» (COM 2020b, 1).

More precisely, the New Pact's proposal frames the current situation as a matter of ratio between the EU-wide number of irregular arrivals (decreasing) and the number of asylum applications (non-decreasing). According to the New Pact, this discrepancy between the decreasing number of irregular arrivals and the still high number of asylum applications depends on three factors: the submission of multiple asylum applications within the same or another EU Member State following unauthorized movements; applications lodged by persons who arrive legally to the EU; applications lodged by those arriving irregularly, without being apprehended at the external borders (COM 2020a, 33). This situation is further worsened by the applications submitted by third-country nationals arriving from countries with

asylum recognition rates lower than 25%. The share of these applications has significantly risen from 2015, leading, according to the Commission, to negative effects on the efficiency of the asylum process.

All these elements are well captured by the following quote, which also reveals the rhetorical strategy used by the Commission to justify the increasing use of accelerated procedures:

> «Processing the asylum claims and finalizing the return procedure of irregular migrants from third countries with a low recognition rate create a significant burden for national authorities, which need to deal with asylum applications that are very often unfounded and lodged merely to facilitate absconding or hamper returns. The increase of unfounded asylum claims from Moldovan citizens (often subsequent applications following a rejection in another Member State), which has been weighting on national administrations and receptions centres at the beginning of the winter in 2019, is a good example of this. While these applicants knew that their chances of being recognized as refugees were low, they also knew that prolonging the procedures would have given them the opportunity to either look for (undeclared) employment or at least receive financial support during their stay in reception centres. Such instances have a negative impact on the duration of return procedures, putting additional pressure on the return authorities» (COM 2020a, 31)

This quote draws a causal relation between applications from citizens of third-countries with low recognition rate and the burden that these applications put on the asylum systems. The rationale is that applications lodged by people coming from non-EU countries with low recognition rate have the effects of flooding the asylum systems, leading to a waste of time and resources which could be employed for other, supposedly genuine asylum applications. Moreover, the quote implicitly frames the lodging of asylum applications as a deliberate strategy used by certain categories of applicants in order to «facilitate absconding or hamper returns».

This discursive framing tacitly presupposes what we define as «precautionary underestimation», namely the production of non-knowledge through temporal mechanisms which hinder asylum seekers' possibilities to collect and produce evidence about themselves by profiling them as «suspicious» and hence channeling them into an accelerated asylum process. As we shall show in the next sections, understanding the rhetorical strategy of the New Pact in terms of precautionary underestimation has the merit of highlighting both the known nature of the risk (i.e., overloading national asylum systems) and the action envisioned to alleviate it (i.e., shortening the timeframes of the asylum process for certain categories of applicants).

To solve these issues, the Proposal suggested some new measures which concern not only the asylum process, but, more broadly, migration management. The main goal of these measures is «to make the border procedure more flexible but equally more effective for the Member States in practice by

adapting it to practical experience and actual flows on the main migration routes» (COM 2020b, p. 14). To make this possible, the Proposal recommends «a coordinated, effective and rapid screening phase, comprising of the adequate identity, security and health checks». The aim is to swiftly identify, at the border or in the Member States territory, the different categories of applicants (vulnerable cases, people lodging abusive or inadmissible asylum requests, applicants from country of origin with low recognition rate, security threats) and then to channel them into the appropriate procedure (i.e. standard procedures, accelerated procedure, border procedure or return procedure). To make more flexible the use of border and accelerated procedures, the assessing criteria must be «easy and quick to apply in practice».

In this respect, the Proposal also expands the categories of applicants who can be subjected to accelerated procedures by introducing the new category of «applicants coming from third-countries with low-recognition rate». As stated by the Proposal:

> «a new acceleration ground is added, which is based on a more objective and easy-to-use criteria, according to which Member State shall accelerate the examination of applications made by applicants coming from third countries for which the share of positive asylum decisions in the total number of asylum decisions is, according to the latest available yearly Union-wide average Eurostat data, less than 20%» (COM 2020b, 13).

Similarly, the application of border procedures is made mandatory for certain categories of applicants, including those who were disembarked after a search and rescue operation and coming from a country of origin with asylum recognition rate lower than 20%. Lastly, the Proposal intervenes on the duration of the border procedure, which is extended to 12 weeks in order to ensure a conclusion within the deadline. If Member States fail to take a decision within that period of time, the applicant should be allowed to enter into the territory of the Member State.

4.1 Unpacking the New Pact's temporalities: temporal horizon, sequence, duration and repetition

To understand what is entailed by acceleration and thus to articulate how accelerated procedures re-organize and transform the process of knowledge production shaping the asylum process we rely on the concepts of *sequence*, *duration* and *repetition*. We have empirically identified these temporal analytical dimensions through comparison of standard and accelerated procedures during the discursive phase of the analysis (see section 3). The articulation of these three temporal dimensions constitutes the temporal mechanisms leading to «precautionary underestimation».

The major and more obvious difference between standard and accelerated procedures is the duration of the process and, more precisely, the shorter timeframes between the stages of the asylum procedure. Accelerated procedures reduce the period of time between the submission of the application and the asylum interview, the time available to authorities for taking a decision about the request is significantly compressed, as well as the time for submitting an appeal in case of a negative decision. Importantly, accelerated procedures do not directly intervene on the possible outcomes of the asylum process (the granting, or refusal, of international protection based upon the assessment of asylum seekers' stories and their credibility) nor on the techniques used in the asylum interview. Yet, as we shall show in the next section, the shortened timeframes significantly interfere with the collection, production and assessment of knowledge about asylum seekers' stories and identities. The production of non-knowledge results from temporal limitations that impede applicants to find, collect and present relevant evidence to integrate their request of asylum. Non-knowledge, in this case, happens by preventing the ability to produce and articulate knowledge, thanks to the duration of procedures being reduced (compressed for applicants and accelerated for officers).

A further temporal dimension implicitly assumed by the New Pact's discourse is repetition. The New Pact's line of reasoning presupposes and tries to tackle a «more of the same» type of situation by suggesting that the asylum systems of Member States must deal with asylum applications which are defined by very similar features: asylum requests submitted by applicants with similar profiles (for instance, nationality), with similar purposes (hampering returns or facilitating absconding) and with similar outcomes (negative decisions).

As a matter of fact, cyclical time and repetitiveness significantly shape the migration regime, including not only migrants' temporalities, but also those of migration officers. For instance, Eule and colleagues (2019) report officers' frustration and feeling of being stuck in repetitiveness: examples are having to deal twice with the same asylum case because the person did not leave the country, or repeated unsuccessful attempts to deport asylum seekers to the Member state responsible for the application (Eule *et al*. 2019, 155-158).

Lastly, ordinary and accelerated procedures are apparently defined by the same sequence of steps: the submission of the asylum application, the interview with asylum authorities, the decision about

the application, the possibility to appeal in case of a negative decision. Yet the criteria for resorting to accelerated procedures seem to reverse the sequence between the outcome of procedure and its assessment. Accelerated procedures should be applied to cases that are preventively assessed as in low probability to be granted asylum. Assessment thus occurs *ex-ante*, rather than *ex-post*. In this regard, the proposal to apply accelerated procedures to people coming from country of origin with low-recognition rate is emblematic as it reveals the short-circuit for which an application is deemed as "non-genuine" before its actual assessment.

In this regard, the type of non-knowledge production emerging from accelerated procedures can be compared to what Reyner (2012, 116) defines as «dismissal», namely the explicit engagement with uncomfortable knowledge, followed by the rejection of such information on the ground that it is considered unreliable, not relevant, imprecise, not timely or on the wrong spatial scale. However, what is peculiar of accelerated procedures is the anticipatory approach underpinning them. Particularly, we suggest that accelerated asylum procedures represent a form of anticipatory action based on precaution (Anderson 2010).

According to Anderson (2010, 279), differently from preemption, precaution acts upon threats that have already been identified but before they reach a point of irreversibility. In the framing of the New Pact, the identified threat is represented by the growing number of supposedly unfounded asylum applications which have the consequence of overloading Member States' asylum systems. To mitigate this situation, accelerated procedures rely on two temporal mechanisms. First, applicants' profiles, purposes and outcomes are statistically assumed (*repetition*) on the basis of assumptions about specific categories of asylum applicants, and hence leading to the temporal reversal (*sequence*) between the assessment and the outcome of the procedure. This precautionary rationale is then combined with a temporal compression (*duration*) that is justified and based on the underestimation of applicants' stories, eventually affecting their possibilities to produce knowledge about themselves. The result is the production of non-knowledge.

As a process of non-knowledge production, «precautionary underestimation» triggers a vicious cycle between repetition, biases and acceleration. On one hand, a negative preliminary assessment based upon previous cases (usually the country of origin, as confirmed by our interviews) can entail biases,

lower credibility and the denial of asylum seekers' knowledge claims. On the other hand, lack of credibility can be worsened by acceleration, which reduces people's ability to collect evidence supporting the asylum claim in a short time frame. In this respect, accelerated procedures can thus be considered a further form of "epistemic violence" (Davies et al. 2023), which is operationally achieved through the temporal modulation of the asylum process.

In the light of our analysis, the New Pact's Proposal can be understood as an instance of what Sontowski (2018) has called *tempo-politics*. With this notion, Sontowski refers to the governance of policy issues in temporal terms. Tempo-politics is defined as the problematization of a given issue in terms of time, which, in turn, might lead to the production of new temporal forms of knowledge, to disputes about the temporal aims of a policy, and eventually to modifications of policies due to their inability to reach those temporal aims.

The Pact, as we have seen, problematizes the challenges faced by European migration management mostly in terms of time: national asylum systems are stuck in the repetitive process of evaluating similar and pretextual asylum requests, with the consequences of having less time to process genuine applications. The Pact's recommendation to solve this issue by increasing and making easier the range of situations in which accelerated and border procedures can be applied is further articulated upon two measures which are eminently temporal. First, a faster identification process at border-crossing points in order to identify the people who can be channeled into accelerated procedures; second, the modification of the timeframes of border procedures due to their inabilities to reach specific temporal aims.

5. Italian accelerated procedures: temporal dynamics producing non-knowledge

In order to further analyze the production of non-knowledge and its effect, the comparison between the temporal dimension of ordinary and accelerated procedures and its nexus with the production of non-knowledge need to be complemented with first-hand experience of asylum seekers about their difficulties in establishing what counts as «legitimate knowledge». By relying on interviews, in this section we analyze how accelerated procedures re-organize the process of knowledge production about asylum seekers. We articulate the relation between time and non-knowledge by identifying three ways

through which «having time» represents a crucial resource for asylum seekers during the asylum process: time as a means for asylum seekers' self-representation; time as a means for collecting socio-material evidence about asylum seekers' stories and identities; time as a means for developing trust with the social actors supporting asylum seekers. We thus illustrate how the shortened timeframes of accelerated procedures make more difficult for asylum seekers to collect and produce knowledge about themselves.

The European directives mentioned in the previous section have been implemented in the Italian asylum system with legislative decrees which have progressively increased the range of situations in which accelerated procedures can be applied, and have set up the relative timeframes that must be applied (Morandi 2020, see table 1).

["Table 1 - Ordinary and accelerated procedures timeframes" here]

Overall, accelerated procedures tend to make navigating the whole process more difficult for applicants. For instance, in the case of the accelerated procedure for reiterated request, the president of the territorial commission in charge of assessing the asylum request proceeds with a preliminary examination of the application. If the request does not present any new element, it is declared as «inadmissible»; if the request presents new elements, an ordinary asylum procedure starts. However, as stressed by our informants, asylum seekers lodging a new request without technical and legal support will most probably be rejected, as they do not know what new elements are required or which documents they need in order to prove their new current condition. To stress the relevance of receiving legal support, one of our informants described the case of an accelerated procedures he encountered:

> «This was the case of a Ukrainian woman, here [in Italy] since long ago and with a daughter. We are close to Christmas. However, before lodging the asylum request, she came to us, and we did the preparation. We explained her, very simply, that the existence of a daughter who went to school in Italy for many years, even though without a permit of stay, is a significant element for the new special protection. We collect, with her, the school report, we ask a report to the associations where the girl goes in the afternoon to make the homework. Thus, we sent her to the Questura with some documents, she enters into the accelerated procedure [for safe country of origin], she was summoned and she got the new special protection. But this person was already here. If this person arrives at the border, possibly to join her daughter who is here, attending school, alone and in need of her mother…what does this person do? Nobody meets her [non la incontra nessuno], nobody sees her. This person enters into the accelerated procedure, and she will most probably be rejected. Because borders…they are zones with lower accessibility, hence there is no possibility of solidarity» (Interview 2, lawyer).

As this excerpt illustrates, accelerated procedures constrain, through a series of temporal and administrative hurdles, asylum seekers' possibilities of action, particularly of the ones who are subjected to these procedures at the border. Within this context, asylum seekers' possibilities of action must be understood as a distributed socio-material network where the epistemic role played by people able to provide legal and technical assistance as well as by documents and certificates supporting one's story is crucial. Accelerated procedures, on the contrary, seem to exploit applicants' multiple forms of vulnerability, like isolation, in order to exclude them from the asylum system. In this regard, a scenario delineated by one informant is particularly significant:

> «Imagine a Nigerian woman, victim of human traffic. She was not assisted during the first asylum request, she did not appeal because she did not know it, and not all the elements of her situation emerged, because it is not a path so easy to represent even to oneself. She gets a removal provision («provvedimento di allontanamento»). At that stage, she might decide to make another asylum request…because she received some information, because she did a [psychological] path, because there are new elements. In this case, she would be channeled in a «more than accelerated procedure» [reiterated requested, see table 1]: there is not anymore the interview, but a preliminary examination of the asylum request by the President of the territorial commission […] It's clear that before lodging another [new] request I ask myself some questions, I balance the opportunities» (Interview 1, ASGI researcher).

This scenario was confirmed by another informant, the director of a cooperative hosting mostly women asylum seekers and women refugees who are victims of human traffic. She illustrates the long, difficult process of acceptance, self-representation and comprehension needed to make certain highly traumatic experiences emerge:

> «There was a rejection of a person victim of human trafficking: she did a psychological path, but she did not say it in the Commission, and she got rejected. The Commission, in this case, argues that the person is not ready. The rationality behind the decision was this one: we cannot give her international protection because if she is victim of human trafficking but she does not quit it, we are not helping her, because with a document she can leave the structure where she is hosted, she will be free, but still involved in the trafficking. It is a mechanism difficult to understand. This person – a young mum – did not understand it and the situation led her to a heavy psychological condition. She left from one day to the other, without telling us anything. Now she is in another European country, and she will be a Dublin case. […] We often tell them «tell your story, at least once». Because also narrating it many times – one to me, one to the lawyer, one in the Commission – is very tiring. Repeating, repeating, also with the psychologist, is very oppressive. Hence this woman who repeated her story many times, she reached the point to say 'stop, I told you in every possible way, then I will say in my way'» (Interview 4, social operator).

The relevance of time for understanding and for acquiring self-awareness about one own' story is stressed also by a lawyer who assisted several asylum seekers in filing an appeal after a first rejection by the Commission.

> «I wrote an appeal for a woman victim of trafficking. She told us her story and for us it was a clear victim, but her story was about «work exploitation», that she was employed as cleaning worker in her country of origin. Two years later, in the judicial hearing, she told a completely different story, and told the judge that she was prostituting herself» (Interview 3, lawyer).

These two women's stories reveal that memories, especially traumatic memories, are defined by complex temporalities, which involve not only remembering, but also repetition and the capacity to narrate one own's story at the right moment and in the right place. It needs time, for people, to become aware of those elements which might be decisive for receiving international protection. Yet the temporal compression underpinning the accelerated procedures significantly hinders this process, and reduces the possibilities to make those elements emerge, and thus to produce evidence-based knowledge. Acceleration, in other words, have the effect of obscuring the past and dismissing people's traumas.

In addition to this, time represents a precious resource for the collection of documents which can support the asylum request and then be taken into consideration by the territorial commission. As illustrated by Author (2021), the processes of identification at the border rely on long chains of translation involving several, heterogenous artefacts and actors. Far from being reduced to biological or pre-given features, migrants' identities are enacted through many socio-technical «spokepersons». Similarly, in our interviews with asylum seekers, lawyers and operators, a variety of documents were mentioned as elements supporting people's stories: pictures, medical and birth certificates, newspapers articles reporting terrorist attacks, police reports from the country of origin. A lawyer, for instance, told us the story of an asylum seeker from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire who fled his country because of political persecution. He was a member of a university student association against the local government and, in his application, he included the card of the association, Facebook pictures of the association meetings he joined, the association statute where he appeared as one of the founding members. These documents are endowed with their own temporalities as they constitute the socio-material proof of events that happened in the past. As such, they are used to support one own's story and they might be decisive in the decision about the case. In the case of the Ukrainian woman discussed above, the school report and the report of the associations testified the current integration of the family in Italy and played a crucial role in the issuing of the «new special protection».

The lack of documents dramatically reduces asylum seekers' credibility. Jerfey, a Nigerian man who arrived in Italy in 2016, was twice refused international protection because the Territorial Commission did not believe his story:

> «They said I was not able to bring the proofs, which is not supposed to be like that. They said to me I should bring the proof from my country, the country I run from, I run from this country, I have nobody there. So, even though I had some proofs, they were taken from me in Libya» (Interview 11, asylum seeker)

At the moment of the interview, he was preparing a third interview with the territorial commission. Following his lawyer's advice, he contacted his brother in order to collect some evidence about his story, namely the killing of his parents which led him to leave his country. Yet, as he notes, his brother is also not safe. Jerfey concludes with a statement which testifies how non-knowledge informs the decision-making process on asylum applicants.

> «No one is saying [what is happening in my country], because there is no light in that village, there is no telephone, no social network. If somebody doesn't see it, they will not know. There is a lot of things that are happening in that country..Nigeria is very big, so there are villages where journalists cannot go, because there is no light..when you go there with stuff like this [a smartphone], you lost network» (Interview 11, asylum seeker).

Jerfey's words reveal how, throughout the asylum process, documents and, more broadly, other forms of institutional proofs tend to acquire epistemological priority over asylum seekers' own voices and narrations.

Time, however, is not only a means for allowing traumatic experiences to emerge or a resource to collect documents that certify asylum seekers' stories. It also constitutes a key resource to develop mutual trust between asylum seekers and the professionals helping them. A cultural mediator, for example, expressed her struggles to translate people's words without having previously met them:

> «I often have a hard time to go directly in the [territorial] commission, without knowing the person, without knowing the lawyer. When they say something, I try to translate as close as possible what they say, but without knowing the story, without knowing the context..» (Interview 5, cultural mediator).

In the rest of the interview, she described her work as a «bridge between two traditions», which is not just about translating - «otherwise we could use Google translate» she noted – but also about filling the cultural distance between the applicants on the one hand and the members of the territorial commission, the lawyers or the social operators on the other hand. The possibility to rely on someone, like mediators, coming from the same place and with the same origin allows closing this gap. This would explain why the fear of being «translated wrongly» popped up several times in our interviews with asylum seekers.

In the light of these considerations, we suggest that the border procedures constitute an exceptionally dramatic situation in which the «temporal sacrifice» of the administrative phase negatively affects asylum seekers. People who arrive at the borders are usually in precarious physical and psychological conditions; they do not have a web of social relations, nor do they speak Italian. Yet they are asked to conduct an asylum interview and, possibly, to provide some relevant evidence for their case seven days after the lodging of the application. Moreover, as stressed by our informants, the judicial phase is also similarly sacrificed, due to the fifteen days deadline for appealing the negative decision:

> «it is difficult [in fifteen days] to find a lawyer, it is difficult that the lawyer can make a meticulous, in depth analysis of the story […] These people come from another country, they do not have anything with them. In fifteen days, with also other things to do, it is very difficult for them to obtain those documents that are needed to convince the Court to give them an international protection» (Interview 2, lawyer).

All these pieces of evidence suggests that, compared to the ordinary procedures, accelerated procedures do not transform the collisions and overlaps between asylum seekers' temporalities and institutional temporalities (Cwerner 2004), but they make it harder, for the asylum seekers, to navigate them. This is due, we suggest, to the dialectic relationship between the asylum territorial commission, the asylum seekers and the other social actors involved in the process. Within this dialectic, what is considered as legitimate knowledge and what is not recognized as such is constantly negotiated in the interaction among the asylum authorities, the asylum seekers, the lawyers and other actors (mediators, social operators, psychologists) involved in the process.

As we have seen, «production of knowledge» must be understood in a broad sense: it includes the collection of documents, the process of remembering and self-representing one's own story, the development of mutual trust with people who can help to collect those documents or who can help to make traumatic past emerge. Crucially, however, being not used to European bureaucracies asylum seekers cannot know what count as knowledge; they do not know that some episodes or memories of their lives might be decisive or relevant for their cases. As a matter of fact, what is considered as legitimate knowledge is not object of the interaction with the asylum authorities, hence configuring the asylum process as one in which non-knowledge, rather than knowledge, is produced about applicants. It is only through the interactions with the several social actors helping them that the asylum seekers progressively become aware of which events can work as knowledge and should then be provided in

order to increase their chances of being granted international protection. Given these conditions, the shortened timeframes of accelerated procedures work as filters which modulate the (im)possibility to collect the right kind of documents, to speak with the right person, to reveal the right episode at the right moment. As shown in this section, these are processes in which time, or, to put it better, «having more time» and «slowing down time», plays a prominent role. Accelerated procedures operate upon the temporal loop between users and producers of knowledge: by compressing the time available to applicants, they hamper asylum seekers' possibilities to acknowledge and assemble knowledge about their lives, hence nurturing the production of «unknowns».

5. Conclusions

Our empirical findings have shown the effects that the application of accelerated and border procedures have on asylum seekers' possibilities to obtain international protection. Particularly, we suggest that the asylum process is defined by the dialectic, interactive relationship between the territorial commission, the asylum seekers and the social actors supporting them. Asylum seekers, however, very often do not know what counts as knowledge, what information about themselves can be valued as knowledge and when.

To illustrate this mechanism, we have developed the concept of «precautionary underestimation» to illustrate how accelerated procedures can be said to produce non-knowledge by operating upon two temporal mechanisms. First, there are *a priori* assumptions about certain categories of people whose asylum applications are considered to be unfounded. This is a judgment based on the «past», on previous asylum cases, which reverberates on the single, individual cases. Second, time is an important resource for asylum seekers: it allows them to better prepare their stories, to collect documents supporting those stories, to find lawyers who can help them to navigate the Italian administrative and legal system, to developing mutual trust and thus for an accurate, thorough preparation of their cases. Moreover, in the light of our analysis, we suggest that time also works as the condition of possibility for understanding *what* knowledge is considered legitimate. Time, in other words, is also a resource for acquiring the implicit meta-knowledge defining the asylum process, to become aware – and thus to be able to provide – what elements of one's own personal story are deemed to be relevant by asylum

authorities. Within this dialectic, the shortened timeframes become a tool for hindering and for making more difficult the access to international protection and thus to facilitate and to speed up their removal for Member States' territory. The proliferation of «exceptional cases» in which accelerated procedures can be applied progressively erodes the right to asylum, transforming the ordinary procedures in something residual.

In light of these results, the New Pact's proposal to apply accelerated procedures to applicants coming from country of origin with a recognition rate lower than 20% is particularly problematic, as it seems to be based on a vicious circle grounded upon the relationship between non-knowledge production and time. Applicants whose asylum requests are deemed unfounded *ex-ante* have less time to provide evidence for their cases. Yet this condition can most probably lead to negative decisions, and thus to further lowering the rate of successful applications, eventually making very unlikely the possibility to reverse this tendency. All in all, by recommending an easier use of accelerated and border procedures and by introducing clearer, straightforward parameters for their applications, the New Pact not only seems to legitimize practices already implemented by Member States, but it also tends «to create a 'hollow asylum seeker' status stripped of its core benefits» (Mouzourakis 2021, 174). In addition to this, the rhetoric used by the Proposal to recommend a more extensive use of accelerated and border procedures seems to repropose a partition between asylum seekers, between "bogus" and genuine applicants. In the context of migration management, this partition is not new, especially for what concerns the use of biometric systems (Aas 2011, Ajana 2013). Yet the case of accelerated procedures shows that time and non-knowledge can contribute to endlessly reproduce this distinction.

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