

Waiting

Hanni Geiger

While some people move freely, others experience waiting in a painful way. In the photo series *I Was Younger Yesterday* (2020), artist Thana Farooq reflects on the lives of Lyla, Rahmin, Hafsa, Chaman and Ammar, who experienced much waiting during their migrations (Farooq n.d.). Images of people in cramped living spaces alternate with images of the outdoors (Fig. 1, 2). Glowing golden autumn leaves, a group of trees in winter and white spring flowers suggest the cyclical change of the seasons, while the people remain immobile in dark rooms, enveloped in a tense atmosphere. The interplay of light and shadow transforms the people into the motionless things that surround them, such as opened food packages or frozen balloons, and at the same time lends the scene a dramatic expression. While the earth continues to rotate, people have mutated into still lives with a deceptive sense of tranquility.



Fig. 1: Thana Farooq, *I was Younger Yesterday*, 2020, photographs (© Thana Farooq).



Fig. 2: Thana Farooq, *I was Younger Yesterday*, 2020, photographs (© Thana Farooq).

Farooq visualises waiting in art as a disruption of global connection processes marked by mobility. With a focus on migration movements, she highlights that people fleeing to a potentially new homeland encounter physical and legal obstacles. She particularly emphasises that delays and chronic waiting not only characterise migration routes, but also occur after borders have been crossed (→ **Transborder**). As she shows, waiting for asylum, in government offices, for letters and phone calls or removal is less a relaxed standstill than an uneasy immobility between the countries of origin and arrival. By depicting the frozen, but inwardly restless figures against the backdrop of time passing naturally, Farooq emphasises the temporal aspect of exile and the affective consequences of chronic and tension-charged waiting on the individuals. As such, she illustrates waiting as an existential state of transition between the former and new life that is marked by an unpredictable duration and uncertainty about the future. With artistic means, Farooq refers to the relation and simultaneity of connections and non-connections on a physical, social and emotional level and allows us to understand waiting as an expression of global dis:connections.

Farooq's work leads to the central topic of this contribution which discusses the relationship between the concept of waiting and dis:connectivity. To do this, I use photographs and films by contemporary artists who critically reflect waiting through the lens of migration. So far little attention has been paid to the analysis

of the aesthetic dimension of waiting.¹ Art-historical, historical and anthropological explorations of spaces, architectures, borders and gatherings of people during migration (Khosravi 2021a; Dogramaci 2023; Puff 2023) offer the groundwork for a visual approach to waiting in relation to dis:connections. Art can materialize and aestheticize the invisible and elusive phenomenon. Since waiting always touches the physical senses and emotions (Khosravi 2021b), this visual approach enables both a sensory and ultimately intellectual understanding of waiting. Postmigrant theatre (→ **Postmigration/Migration**) has proven its ability to visually reflect on the absent or processual phenomenon by building on and staging individual experiences (Balme 2023). Taking artistic and migrant perspectives into account in the research on waiting can help to extend academic approaches and challenge dominant (state) narratives. By building on this, the questions to be asked in the following are: How does art focused on migration and fed by individual experiences reflect waiting in relation to dis:connective globalisation processes? What insights into migration, society and globalisation can we gain from analysing artworks that aestheticise, comment on and sensually convey the personal experience of waiting affected by connections and non-connections and their complex interdependencies? In the following, I will analyse the form and content of the chosen works and point to waiting as a transitional state between origin and destination that is marked by physical, spatial, social, legal, temporal and emotional connections and non-connections. Common stereotypes of migration will be questioned and counteracted by an understanding of globalisation that builds on the simultaneity and interaction of entanglements and disentanglements.

Speaking of stereotypes, the depiction of waiting migrants reflected in Faroq's photo series *I Was Younger Yesterday* has already shown that artistic techniques, media and the staging of the motifs can bring physical interruptions during exile and flight to the fore (→ **Interruptions**). The images of delayed movements challenge the stereotypical anticipation of migration spread by the media. Liquid metaphors for migration, such as 'flood', 'wave' and 'tsunami', which suggest constant movement, but also size and danger, become obsolete (Dogramaci 2022, 37–47). Thana Faroq's work thus brings different images into being which question the potent idea of a threatening 'undifferentiated mass' on the move (Rotter 2016, 86). The artist does not anonymise refugees and migrants but reveals their names in her work and asks them intimately about the physical and affective power of waiting in their living spaces. Instead of portraying a faceless or homogenous migration, aes-

¹ The exhibition catalogue *Die Kunst des Wartens* is dedicated to the artistic representation of waiting in everyday life. Although waiting in the context of migration is also highlighted, the uncommented compilation of texts and artworks does not allow any deeper insights into the relationship between waiting and globalisation. See Kölle/Peppel, *Die Kunst des Wartens*.

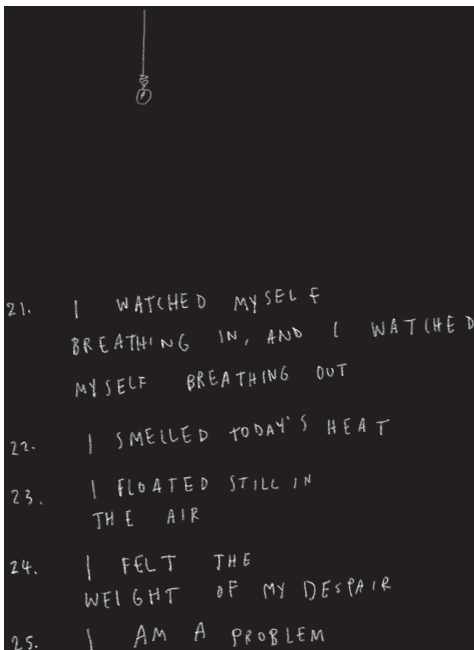
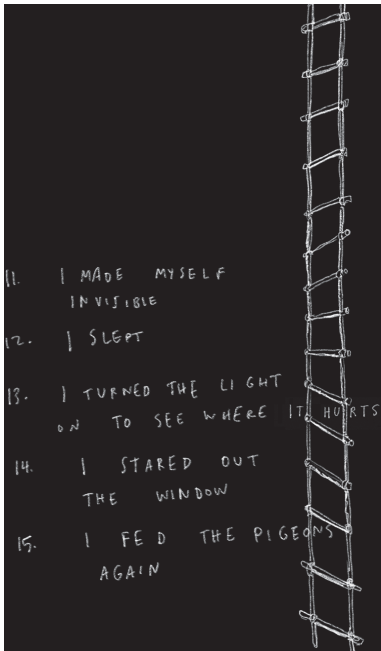


Fig. 3 and Fig. 4: Thana Farooq, *I was Younger Yesterday*, 2020, photographs (© Thana Farooq).

theticised waiting focuses on the individual and their particular waiting situation. The artist not only makes dis:connectivities visible and palpable, but also creates new images that disturb the dominant narratives of migration.

Disrupted connections between the country of origin and the destination cannot be entirely understood without reference to power asymmetries. During or after their flight, migrants are often hindered from participating in their new environment due to state regulations. With their personal fates always in view, the intimate sentences written on a chalkboard by those waiting, such as 'I made myself invisible' and 'I floated still in the air', can be read as a personal limbo (Fig. 3, 4). Waiting for recognition of refugee status or a residence permit, or the threat of deportation creates an unpredictably long and uncertain terrain, where what is hoped for may or may not occur (Bandak and Janeja 2018, 16). As Cathrine Brun points out, such waiting can be perceived as a 'protracted displacement' or a 'permanent impermanence' (Brun 2015, 19). Characterised by doubt, ambivalence, or disorientation (Pikulik 1997; Hage 2003), this condition relates to the anthropological concept of liminality that characterizes the middle stage of a rite of passage, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete (Turner 1967, 93–97). Faroq's work communicates the experience of waiting as a spatial, social, and emotional transit that both connects and disconnects the homeland, previous identities and familiar systems with the new surroundings and their orders. The protagonists feel that they have physically arrived but are unnoticed, feeling forgotten or invisible, and ultimately considered as socially non-existent. The sentence 'I am a problem' intensifies the feeling of a connection to the destination being severed or missing. Practices of inclusion and exclusion that are controlled by laws and other statal instruments of order become evident in this portrayed waiting. According to Pierre Bourdieu, waiting is an experience of power and dominance (2000, 227ff.) and as such ultimately an experience of restricted participation in globalisation processes. While some people integrate, others will be left out. Waiting as a transitional state of (non-)connections to the destination must be reflected in relation to the migrants' agencies. In the series, Faroq lets us share in apparent idleness (Fig. 5). Feeding pigeons, sleeping, watching television, opening letters or feeling the 'weight of despair' can be read as desperate attempts to escape the imposed waiting. Faroq poetically depicts the state of being stuck in migration as discussed in research as a physical and mental incapacity to act (Hage 2003; Wyss 2019). But being trapped, with future notifications and the change of one's predicament always in view, means less the opposite of activity than more an inter-

mediate state that is accompanied by maximum tension (Hage 2003). Faroq places the visualised pseudo-activities in the centre of the picture and auratises them with artistic means. Depicted from the migrants' point of view, the state of being stuck reveals waiting as a mental state of deliberate and concentrated seeing. According to its etymological origin, the Latin terms *videre*, *spectare* or *prospicere* describe a waiting that means attentive looking (Deutsches Wörterbuch 1922; Pikulik 1997, 18). The senses are characterised by a sharpened perception of inner and outer worlds (Coen 2015), as with '[...] a feeling that we have in our hearts in the meantime'. (Masetti 2017; my translation). Faroq introduces the heightened perception of those trapped in migration as an action of revealing state-controlled waiting and counteracting imposed passivity. Thus, she sensitizes the viewer to a waiting that overcomes the active-passive binary of flight and exile (→ **Exile**). This is consistent with social and migration studies that have recognised the danger of biased stereotypical (self-)attributions of passivity in research, and instead argue for strengthening migrants' individual and collective opportunities through action (Brun 2015; Rotter 2016; Bandak and Janeja 2018; Tsagarousianou 2023).

The transitory existence between home and country of arrival in waiting creates a different perspective of time (Glökler 2016, 99), which can be labelled as dis:connective. In the film accompanying the installation *Partenza* (2016),



Fig. 5: Thana Faroq, *I was Younger Yesterday*, 2020, photographs (© Thana Faroq).

the artist Renata Poljak explores her great-grandmother's painful experience of her husband's and other male inhabitants' labour migration from the Croatian island of Brač to Argentina around 1900 (Poljak 2017). In one scene of the initially black-and-white film, female figures stand on a tan pebble beach, turning their eyes towards the vast body of water (Fig. 6). The sharpened perception in waiting directs their gaze into their inner world as well as their immediate surroundings (Coen 2015, 176–182), and the sea and the boundless horizon turn into a space for reflection. Guided by longing, the women's gaze focuses on the distance and the potential return of the migrants' ships. This confirms the fundamentally future-oriented temporal structure of waiting toward a 'not-yet', but at the same time points to the relevance of a 'no-longer-there' (Bellebaum 2014, 231; Glökler 2016, 97). Waiting for news from those with whom connections have been severed by migration involves a connection with memories, just as looking back on experiences together is coloured by missing those who have left and hoping for a reunion in the future. This observation is in line with psychological findings that ascribe to longing a simultaneous reference to the past, the present and the impending, without which reflection and direction is not possible (Felchner 2022). The locally coloured title makes this clear: borrowed from Italian, *Partenza* in the Istrian and Dalmatian dialects does not primarily stand for departure and the rupture of bonds, but for the longing for the absent and a mental (and prospective physical) re-connection with them from a present perspective (Poljak 2017, 33). What was, what is and what will be are not isolated categories and do not follow a sequence, but rather condense and presuppose each other in waiting. Time appears multi-layered, relational and in varying intensities. The simultaneous connections and non-connections between spaces in waiting are thus necessarily accompanied by temporal dis:connections.

Personally, and locally shaped experiences of waiting can help reveal a female and subversive side of migration that research has tended to ignore. Poljak visualises the vulnerable groups, who rarely set off on life-threatening journeys, but whose power in waiting is constitutive of migration.² In the final scene of the film, one of the women dives into a now-colourful underwater world with floating garments that recall the numerous lives lost in contemporary migrations across the Mediterranean (Fig. 7). With this, Poljak refers not only to an understanding of migration as a global, ubiquitous and timeless phenomenon. She visualises migration as experienced in specific micro-sites such as the Adriatic island Brač, which

² Female migration has been on the rise since the 1970s, but it is perceived as economically insignificant compared to male migration and has been underexamined in research. The same applies to the experiences of family members, mostly women, who remained behind in the context of migration, which is only slowly attracting academic interest (Ullah, 2017, 1–15).



Fig. 6: Renata Poljak, *Partenza*, 2016, film (screenshot), 11 minutes, HD (© Renata Poljak).

produce a nuanced understanding of waiting women. She provides the protagonist with the role of a self-empowered mediator who, based on local and personal experience, brings the complexity of global interdependencies and their interruptions closer to the individual observer. The woman's dive into the sea represents a proactive rejection of the traditional portrayal of women as abandoned and desperate waiting figures, which has been a common theme in literature and art. The artist deconstructs the myth of the legendary figure of Penelope, who in classical paintings waits passively for Odysseus to return (although in the meantime she defends Ithaca and her son). Poljak uses art to develop an activist's toolkit against rigid images of migration. As an empowered 'remained-behind' and no longer 'left-behind'³, she recodes the historically feminised category of powerless waiting (Barthes 1984, 27f.) and challenges gender binaries, including the categories of those who stay and those who go and their opposing forces and dependencies (Cortes 2016, 8–9).

Art materialises and visualises the less visible and processual experiences of displacement and the changing living conditions it entails. The viewers are sensitised to emotionally charged interruptions and absences (→ **Absences**) in the physical, spatial, social and temporal connections during their flight to the land of destination. Through the lens of migration, contemporary art finds the means – motifs, media and techniques – to sensually (in)form waiting in relation to the complex interdependencies of connections and non-connections between countries, orders and identities. Aesthetically narrated from a personal and lived perspective, the pieces shape our affective and cognitive understanding of a waiting in relation to

3 Ullah argues in favour of renaming female waiting women 'remained behinds' instead of 'left behinds' to undermine migration narratives of female passivity and dependency (Ullah, 2017, 4).



Fig. 7: Renata Poljak, *Partenza*, 2016, film (screenshot), 11 minutes, HD (© Renata Poljak).

dis:connectivity. Waiting appears to be a tension-charged threshold that simultaneously connects and disconnects notions of movement and standstill, coming and going, inclusion and exclusion, activity and passivity, as ascribed to flight and exile. Conceptualised as a status of liminality, waiting resists and subverts dominant biases and binaries of global phenomena such as migration. Art offers alternative knowledge to discourses on globalisation and displacement.

References

- Balme, Christopher. 2023. "Postfictional Theatre, Institutional Aesthetics, and the German Theatrical Public Sphere." *TDR: The Drama Review* 67 (2): 14–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204323000035>.
- Bandak, Andreas and Manpreet K. Janeja, ed. 2018. *Ethnographies of Waiting. Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty*. Routledge.
- Barthes, Roland. 1984. *Fragmente einer Sprache der Liebe*. Translated by Hans-Horst Henschen. Suhrkamp.
- Bellebaum, Alfred. 2014. "Warten. Über Umgang mit Zeit." In *Unser Alltag ist voll von Gesellschaft. Sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge*, edited by Alfred Bellebaum and Robert Hettlage. Springer: 231–258.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford University Press.
- Brun, Cathrine. 2015. "Active Waiting and Changing Hopes. Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement." *Social Analysis* 59 (1): 19–37. <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590102>.
- Coen, Simon. 2015. *Warten macht glücklich! Eine Philosophie der Sehnsucht*. Translated by Ira Wilhelm. Konrad Theiss Verlag.
- Cortes, Geneviève. 2016. "Women and Migrations: Those Who Stay." *EchoGéo* (37): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.4000/echogeo.14892>.
- Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, digitised version in the dictionary network of the Trier Center for Digital Humanities, version 01/23, vol. 27. 1922. "Warten". <https://woerterbuchnetz.de/?sigle=DWB&lemid=W07482>.
- Dogramaci, Burcu. 2022. "Bilder der Migration – Migration der Bilder?" *Kritische Berichte* 50 (3): 37–47. <https://www.hsozkult.de/journal/id/z6ann-130483>.

- Dogramaci, Burcu. 2023. "Artistic Practices at the Border: Waiting and Crossing in the Context of Escape and Exile." In *Spatiality at the Periphery in European Literatures and Visual Arts*, edited by Kathryn Everly, Stefano Giannini and Karina von Tippelskirch. Palgrave Macmillan: 13–31.
- Faroq, Thana. 2023. "I Was Younger Yesterday", Homepage Thana Faroq. March 2023. <http://thanafaroq.com/i-was-younger-yesterday>.
- Felchner, Carola. 2022. "Sehnsucht". *psychologie*, January 14. <https://www.netdoktor.de/psychologie/gefuehle/sehnsucht/>.
- Glökler, Elena. 2016. "Warten ohne Ende. Formen des Wartens im Exil – an Beispielen aus dem Werk Vladimir Nabokovs, Anna Seghers' und Herta Müllers." In *Warten als Kulturmuster*, edited by Daniel Kazmaier, Julia Kerschner and Xenia Wotschal. Königshausen & Neumann: 97–112.
- Hage, Ghassan. 2003. *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*. Pluto.
- Khosravi, Shahram. 2021a. "Waiting Bodies in Dictatorial and Bordering Regimes." *The Funambulist* 36, June 21. <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/they-have-clocks-we-have-time/waiting-bodies-in-dictatorial-and-bordering-regimes>.
- Khosravi, Shahram, ed. 2021b. *Waiting – A Project in Conversation*. transcript.
- Kölle, Brigitte and Claudia Poppel, eds. 2019. *Die Kunst des Wartens*. Verlag Klaus Wagenbach.
- Masetti, Lucia. 2017. "Attesa". *una parola al giorno*, April 3. <https://unaparolaalgiorno.it/significato/attesa>.
- Pikulik, Lothar. 1997. *Warten, Erwartung. Eine Lebensform in End- und Übergangszeiten. An Beispielen aus der Geistesgeschichte, Literatur und Kunst*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Poljak, Renata. 2017. *Don't turn your back on me*. Verlag für moderne Kunst.
- Puff, Helmut. 2023. *The Antechamber. Toward a History of Waiting*. Stanford University Press.
- Rotter, Rebecca. 2016. "Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty interlude?" *Time & Society* 25 (1): 80–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X15613654>.
- Tsagarousianou, Roza. 2023. "Time and mobility/immobility: the chronopolitics of mobility and the temporalities of suffering and hope in situations of encampment." *Mobilities* 18 (2): 267–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2022.2088297>.
- Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Cornell University Press.
- Ullah, Ahsan. 2017. "Male Migration and 'Left-behind' Women: Bane or Boon?" *Environment and Urbanization ASIA* 8 (1): 59–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0975425316683862>.
- Wyss, Anna. 2019. "Stuck in Mobility? Interrupted Journeys of Migrants With Precarious Legal Status in Europe." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 17 (1): 77–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2018.1514091>.