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Temporalities in 3D: Speeds, Intersections, and Time Sequentialities at the Portuguese Border

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This article addresses the Portuguese border control regime by looking into the relationship dynamics between inspectors and foreign citizens at the first line of inspection. Through the lens of temporality, I consider how the presence or absence of certain bureaucratic records presented by travellers functions as a control device that produces three temporal dimensions which intersect with each other during the check, as exercised by inspectors. The way in which certain documents result in different speeds of document control (microtemporalities—advances, retreats, and hesitation); subsequently, I reflect on the elasticity of time, looking at the intersection between the past, present, and future; finally, I analyse how inspectors shift their gaze from the documents to the details they are composed of, thus introducing a sequential dimension to their assessment. This article argues that the uncertainty experienced by travellers reflects the instability and inconsistency of the state, caused by the contingency that permeates their encounters at the border where time operates as a technique of power. The study is based on 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2021 and 2022, centred on the daily life of the inspectors of the Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service at an airport in mainland Portugal.

Keywords: anthropology of the state; external border; temporalities of migration; control devices.

Introduction

The call to consider the multiplicity and complexity of the temporal dimensions of borders and migration has been raised by several authors (Cwerner 2001; Griffiths 2014; Jacobsen et al. 2021). Migration is tendentially imagined as a spatial process, though, nevertheless, time emerges as a critical element in the definition of who counts as a “migrant” (Anderson 2020). Jacobsen and Karlsen (2021, 1) state, in this sense, that “migration involves human mobility through political borders, but also covers complex, multiple and layered temporalities”, which may reveal themselves in the contingency produced during

border control. Temporality is the manifestation of time in human existence (Griffiths 2014; Hoy 2009), with time as a social process rather than a linear sequence (Machinya 2021; Shubin 2015; Tazzioli 2018) that measures and regulates life. It can be ordered and lived in different ways (Griffiths et al. 2013). Thus, “proper attention to the temporalities of migration highlights the asynchronies between the subjective experiences of time and administrative requirements” (Anderson 2020, 62). One way to investigate these complexities is through “paper trails, the social life of documents” (Heyman 2020, 230).

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In this article, I aim to analyse the temporal dimensions of the Portuguese border regime by looking into the discretionary power exercised by the inspectors of the Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service (hereafter SEF), the state agency responsible, from 1991 to 2023,¹ for regulating the entry, stay, exit, and removal of foreigners from the national territory.² To achieve this purpose, the goal of the article is twofold: to understand how the authority of inspectors and the agency of travellers' are contemporized, highlighting the broad spectrum of subjectivities involved and reinforcing contingency as a central element in the decision-making process; and to examine the different border temporalities produced during these encounters between inspectors and foreign citizens. An appreciation of time provides insights into understandings of border control (Griffiths 2014). In order to reflect on these issues, it is necessary to examine how inspectors interpret the bureaucratic records carried by travellers, which, as we shall see, work as a control device that produce different paces, intersections, and temporal sequences at the Portuguese border. Contrary to some authors' proposals regarding the need for the democratization of borders (Agier 2016; Balibar 2004), the border reacts differently to the diverse subjectivities of people on the move. Consequently, we observe how it produces hierarchies (Anderson 2020; Tazzioli 2018) and different forms of access (Bastos et al. 2021; Heyman 2004; 2009; Horton 2020). Time appears as a central variable and tool used by policies and practices of mobility control (Cwerner 2001), manifesting itself in complex and unpredictable ways (Griffiths 2014).

The article draws on ethnographic fieldwork data from my doctoral research, conducted between June 2021 and April 2022, in an airport on the Portuguese mainland, where I followed the daily routines of SEF inspectors, encompassing different groups, shifts, and functions. For the scope of this article, I reflect only on the episodes I observed and experienced inside the glass booth, where I spent a significant amount of time. Like others facing institutional barriers, access to the field was obtained after two years of negotiation through the establishment of an institutional protocol between my university and SEF. The data illustrates how the different temporalities give form, density, and intensity to SEF's police and bureaucratic routines, concretizing and implementing them without, however, determining them. The ethnographic challenge lies in understanding how these temporalities are produced at the border throughout the bureaucratic documentation that mediates the encounters between SEF inspectors and foreign citizens. All names have been pseudonymized.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first section, I outline a theoretical reflection on the "intimate relationship" (Abarca & Coutin 2018, 9) established between the state and foreign citizens, whereby the latter must navigate the fine line between the absence, sufficiency, or excess of documents to be presented. In

the end, I briefly introduce the context that makes the Portuguese border stricter towards Brazilian nationals and then focus on the necessary requirements for entering Portugal. The second section explores an interaction between an inspector and a traveller. This encounter was chosen precisely because of the volume of documents presented and will serve as the basis for the subsequent development of my analysis. The objective was to present the dimensions of contingency and discretion that dictate the entire decision-making process. In the third section I analyse, through the lens of temporality, three of its dimensions, namely: the way in which certain documents result in different speeds of document control; how inspectors stretch time, resorting to the past and the future during the present moment of their analysis; and how inspectors shift their gaze from the documents to the details they are composed of, thus introducing a sequential dimension to their assessment. Lastly, I will give my final remarks.

Context: Navigating the Fine Line between Absence, Sufficiency, or Excess of Documents

As has been mentioned by several authors (see Abarca & Coutin 2018; Fassin 2015; Foucault 2008; Gupta 2012; Hull 2012; Jacobsen & Karlsen 2021; Lipsky 2010), the state is not a configuration that exists regardless of its relationship with citizens, foreigners or not. At least, it only exists partially through this relation. It is therefore "at any moment a product of its time" (Fassin 2015, 4). It is the unpredictability of these relationships, produced in the daily encounters, which will generate doubts or evidence about those who wait at the border every day, longing for formalization of their entry. The encounters between travellers and inspectors produce identities based on "lives, found by chance" (Foucault 2003), which can generate questions for the border guards and thus the need for them to resort to other control approaches beyond the travel documents. The border is therefore likely established or demolished based on what the passengers say and what the inspector is intuiting. The first border to overcome may be the bureaucratic wall that many must face to gather the documents that they travel with.

From the observations made at the Portuguese border, it is clear that there are also several interpretations of the value of documents: there are travellers who simply have the documents, showing no great concern in terms of organization, while some reproduce the practice of bureaucracy: documents in a folder, separated and identified by a divider or label with the name of the respective document, to make them easier to reach if necessary. Horton (2020) says that the different relationships of migrants with their states of origin, in combination with the relative intensity and duration of surveillance in the receiving states, shape different attitudes towards documentation and the state power that it incorporates. As mentioned to me in my first

week of fieldwork inside the glass booth by a group of three inspectors: “Too many papers and bulky folders are signs of suspicion”, and: “If [travellers] give you a lot of papers [...] it’s a bad sign”.

The interlocutors of Abarca and Coutin (2018) and Boehm (2020) carried shopping bags or folders full of worldly and bureaucratic records in order to meet the state’s requirements. This anticipation on the part of the passengers, in preparing for their interaction with the state, reveals the way they perceive it: an avid consumer of paper, as well as unpredictable. This perception results in careful practices of registration maintenance, which, as noted by Boehm (2020) and Coutin (2020), attest to the power of the institution and the effectiveness of the state’s disciplinary practices in shaping the behaviour of migrants. On the other hand, this anticipation is only possible due to the intimate relationship that foreign citizens develop with the state (Abarca & Coutin 2018). Here lies an incoherence: foreign citizens must navigate the fine line between absence, sufficiency, or excess of documents, as some can compromise their entire effort.

According to Abarca and Coutin (2018), the unequal relationship between foreign citizens and the state produces a kind of double life: passengers and their lives in conjunction with how they look to the imagined external gaze. Moral imaginations are creative, but they extract ideas about personality and the evaluation of surrounding social relations, as explained by Heyman (2000). This double existence produces layers of identities and documentation, as foreign citizens try to manage their visibility and invisibility, creating “partial representations of who they are and what they want to become” (Berg 2015, 14). Documents are not only part of oppressive bureaucratic processes (Gupta 2012), but also have a performative element (Abarca & Coutin 2018; Freeman & Maybin 2011), since certain foreign citizens try to fit the profile of a tourist in order to avoid questioning. Gathering documents and other resources is a response to legal uncertainty (Coutin 2020) and an attempt to prove that they are deserving (Abarca & Coutin 2018).

Therefore, documents and their analysis are useful elements with which it is possible to analyse power relations between the state and migrants (Abarca & Coutin 2018; Horton 2020; Wissink & Van Oorschot 2021). It is through them that the bureaucratic process begins, giving the state some kind of materialization. As artefacts (Freeman & Maybin 2011; Hull 2012), they embody the “material expression of the status” (Anderson 2020, 55) of those who are socially imagined as migrants. They also offer a window into the creation and reproduction of social inequality, since, as mentioned by Heyman (2020, 241), “the documents and the status they transmit matter for life projects and opportunities”. Thus, the paperwork and other personal resources of the travellers, such as their mobile phones,

will be viewed as control devices that “incite, raise and produce” (Foucault 2003) temporalities derived from perceptions and representations, which ultimately grant or deny access to Portuguese territory. These particularities are used to develop an interpretative history of the passenger, the “plausible histories” (Heyman 2001; 2004; 2009). These stories use factual points, but also other narratives: for example, certain national stereotypes. It is true that most stereotypes contain real elements, however they are also forms of domination (Heyman, 2000).

The distinctions between travellers reveal different “levels” of access to mobility and reflect inconsistent hierarchical structures and processes linked to nationality, gender, race, and class (Teschfahoney 1998). During my fieldwork, I realized that the border was stricter towards Brazilian citizens. There is a widespread belief that these travellers, namely the ones perceived as being part of lower social classes, enter Portuguese territory as tourists and subsequently submit their “expression of interest”,³ which enables them to regularise their status as residents. For this reason, they are the ones who present themselves supplied with a substantial folder—in volume and diversity—of documents.

In addition to a travel document recognized as valid,⁴ third-country nationals who wish to enter the Schengen area for touristic reasons and who do not need a suitable visa⁵ for this purpose must—as provided for in Article 11 of Portugal’s Act 23/2007 of July 4 (of 2007), also known as the Foreigner’s Law—have sufficient means of subsistence. If they do not have this, they must have a letter of sponsorship and, as described in Article 13, “whenever deemed necessary to prove the objective and conditions of stay, border authorities may require adequate proof from the foreign citizen”. What this tells us is that there are no evaluation criteria that the inspectors are required to use, leaving it up to them to decide which documents, or other items, to ask the passengers for whenever is deemed necessary, “making the police discretion legally admissible” (Fassin 2013, 91). The law, in these cases, doesn’t anticipate what circumstances and what documents the traveller must present, these being decided on the spot by the person exercising control (Machinya 2021). El Qadim et al. (2020) argue that it is important to understand how inspectors morally and ethically interpret the border and immigration policies they implement. However, although some consider that what they do during their work is exclusively an application of the law, Article 13 leaves room for discretionary practices. This is indeed in line with what has been observed regarding state policies concerning immigration: they are often ambiguous and open to interpretation (Bigo 2009; Gilboy 1992; Horton 2020). The law itself is already discretionary, as inspectors “make the law, so to speak, rather than enforcing it” (Fassin 2013, 72), turning citizens’ experiences into a “legislative administrative jungle” (Fassin 2014, 9).



Notwithstanding having repeatedly heard that "here [at the border] we only assess entry conditions", these conditions mean that standard paperwork constitutes a new bargaining chip for passengers: on the one hand, it is valuable evidence about their work history, family life, and moral character (Abarca & Coutin 2018; Horton 2020), and, on the other hand, these records can be a blunt instrument (Coutin 2020) due to their transformative value, depending on the interpretation of each inspector. The transformation of a document depends on a series of practices related to its materiality (Wissink & Van Oorschot 2021). Having access to the state from inside, through ethnography, opens up the possibility to observe the interpretation that is made by inspectors about bureaucratic records and how they work as control devices that grant or deny access to the Portuguese territory.

At the Glass Booth: Encountering State Contingency at the First line of Inspection

"May I see what else you have there?" asked inspector Maria. Without waiting for the passenger's consent, in an automatic gesture she pulled at the transparent blue folder, sliding it across the countertop on which it was resting, towards her hands. Placing the folder on her computer keyboard, she began to search, sure of what she would find. Antônio, the passenger, incredulous and scared, looked expectantly through the glass barrier separating them. The "else" in Maria's question indicated her suspicion that the folder, despite being transparent, concealed other documents that would reveal the true reason for Antônio to travel to Europe. The passenger claimed to be a tourist; however, what had caught the inspector's attention was the fact that, when he approached her glass booth, he had presented a letter of sponsorship⁶ issued by one person but signed by another. It was also Antônio's first time in Europe.

Maria began leafing through the man's passport in a noticeably slower way, verifying that the Antônio had a US visa valid until 2027. This slowdown in the pace of document control at the first line of Portuguese border control is common when certain inspectors want to reinforce the asymmetry of power in the relationship that is created during the encounter between those who try to cross the border and those who define the limits to their passage. The stamp in the passport is the administrative act that formalizes the entry of third-country nationals into the Schengen area. In the case described here, the delay in this border crossing indicated that Maria doubted the declared reason for the trip, and it was this prelude which led to the search for other indicators that would substantiate the decision of the person conducting the check.

After establishing her slow pace, the inspector looked at me and, marking the visa page in the passport with her thumb, mentioned without apparent concern that

the passenger was also listening to her: "This doesn't interest me, they [Brazilian citizens] are now coming here. I know it's very difficult to get [a US visa], but I don't care". When checking the folder in which Antônio had organized his documents, Maria found not only his birth certificate but also a PB4 document (guaranteeing Brazilian nationals care in the Portuguese public health system).⁷ The inspector then began to prepare an interception form and, since the documents she had found helped to corroborate her suspicion, certified that the passenger was not coming to Portugal for a vacation, but "to stay".

She started her enquiries by asking Antônio if he had a return ticket to Brazil. He said yes, showing her a ticket that looked rather like a supermarket receipt. The inspector looked hesitantly at the document he was showing. She asked me, as well as her colleague who was in the same glass booth, if we had ever seen anything similar. We both answered no. The passenger, realizing the increasing distrust, included himself in the conversation, saying that the ticket had that format because his brother worked for Azul, a large Brazilian airline, and therefore had the privilege of getting considerably cheaper travel. Antônio didn't think the format of the document would be an issue.

I watched Maria pick up the booth's landline and call the second-line Support Unit (SU).⁸ She started by asking: "How's it going in there? He [passenger] even looks good ...", then abruptly interrupted herself, not finishing the sentence, when she noticed that payment for the return ticket was split into 12 instalments. At that moment, she said to her colleague at the other end of the phone line: "Look at this one trying to deceive me". She decides to take the passenger in, to the SU, so her colleagues can check the situation in-depth.

Even though the Antônio had a US visa in his passport, and this frequently works as a device that favours and accelerates entry into Portuguese national territory, his other documents consolidated the first-line decision-making process. In this case, the letter of sponsorship was the document that prompted the unfolding of all the scrutiny, since the sponsor himself would be responsible for the traveller⁹ and, in the case of Antônio, the name on the sponsorship document was not the name of the signatory. However, Maria did not verbally acknowledge this indicator, but kept it hidden, despite it having provoked her decision to investigate further. Her suspicions grew with the discovery of the birth certificate and the PB4. At the border, the idea persists that those who come for tourism do not need to bring a birth certificate, nor a PB4. However, up until that point, the inspector was still undecided as to whether to fill out an interception form, since the passenger "even looked good", and she was giving him the benefit of the doubt.

The brief assessment Maria made of his "profile", based on his clothes and his way of communicating,

did not indicate a so-called “migratory risk”. What made her make the decision not to grant entry was realizing that his economic situation was uncertain since, when she looked more closely at the return ticket to Brazil, she noticed that the payment was divided into 12 instalments. As she told me: “It’s a sign that he doesn’t have enough money to be a tourist. He’s probably coming to try his luck in Europe”. That is, the fact that Antônio did not pay up front for his return ticket gave Maria the necessary confidence to proceed with an interception. In her understanding, there was a probability that the passenger would stay. Her perception of the documents that the passenger was carrying formed the basis for the decision that he was not a tourist, despite him claiming that he was. Bureaucratic documents and records “constitute biopolitical technologies that help transform migrants into particular types of subjects” (Horton 2020, 13), build their moral value, and, therefore, their worthiness (Abarca & Coutin 2018). These last two authors, through the reports of their interlocutors, show how migrants must still “fit” the state’s understanding of merit, reflecting the state’s voice with their actions. In the case Antônio, would he have been intercepted if his trip had been paid for up front?

The reported encounter, between Maria and Antônio, was chosen precisely because of the volume of the documents and their respective particularities. These are revealing elements of the role of contingency during the process (Gupta 2012; Heyman 2020; Walters 2015; Wissink & Van Oorschot 2021), which begins when the passenger, equipped with his documents, walks towards the glass booth. It was also revealing that the inspector who I accompanied interpreted certain documents and their particularities as control devices (Foucault 1994; 2003), having made use of them for an exercise of power. Documents “are valued and presented as evidence of personal histories, as well as being results of such changes” (Heyman 2020, 232). This last aspect suggests the diversity of the indicators that intersect with the logic of the inspectors, allowing them to make a particular assessment of who can, or cannot, enter Portuguese national territory. This particularization of moments and stories embedded in everyday banalities has an extremely intimate dimension, as it guides those who are travelling to not only discover unique aspects of their existence, but also, in this case, to have to reveal information about their family members.

Contact with bureaucratic agents involves the exchange of information, like any other social encounter (Graham 2003). In the case described, even though it was not sufficient to prevent the interception, Antônio had to justify the irregular nature of his return flight, revealing his brother’s profession—an aspect that, from the point of view of bureaucracy, is not related to his entry into national territory. He involved his brother in the evaluation, making him visible there, even though he was absent and far from the border.

In the end, what determined the obstruction to the entry of Antônio was a value judgement on his possible economic condition, which cast suspicion on the real reasons for his desire to enter Portugal. In this regard, “documents mark, periodize and shape life courses” (Anderson 2020, 56). They are not just a fixed status, but “constitute a ‘moment’ in the processes of agency and power” (Heyman 2020, 231). Although the state exercises control over passengers through opacity and arbitrariness (Boehm 2020; Coutin 2020), travellers do not passively submit to its power. However, despite being prepared with paperwork, travellers do not control the process. As we saw, moments of sovereignty persist in border regimes, despite their control being fundamentally associated with the “governmentality of migration” (Walters 2015).

Temporalities in 3D at the Portuguese Border

The previous episode is explicit regarding the dimension of contingency that permeates the decision-making processes: it is characterized not only by a series of spatial mechanisms, but also by temporalities composed of specific and unequal rhythms and a multiplication of temporal borders (Tazzioli 2018). The cadence of the following subsections will be guided by the three dimensions of temporality mentioned above. In the first subsection, I try to rehearse the various speeds imposed by the inspectors when analysing the documents. In the second, I aim to analyse some situations where, in the present, the inspectors turn to the past by intersecting it with the anticipation of imagined futures, suggesting a certain elasticity of time. Lastly, I observe how the inspectors shift their gaze from the document to the various details that compose it, thus introducing a sequential dimension to their analysis. My attempt to “separate” these three dimensions—speeds, intersections, and time sequentialities—is solely related to organization effects of the present article, as fieldwork suggests that they constantly cross with each other.

Microtemporalities: Advances, Retreats, and Hesitations in the Exercise of Control

In the encounter, the slow flick through of the passport booklet by Maria was done to destabilize the ease that Antônio initially showed, trying to “break him”, to force him to say what she considered to be the truth about his reasons to come to Europe. Although the passenger had a US visa—which under similar circumstances usually acts as an entry accelerator—other elements had entered the analysis, overlapping the logic of control, namely that Antônio had brought his birth certificate and the PB4 with him, which, as already mentioned, are indicators that the passenger is “coming to stay”. These were already disrupting the decision-making process



when finally the discovery of the instalment payment plan for the return ticket accelerated the interception of the passenger. This encounter makes it possible to understand that the advances, retreats, and hesitations of inspectors are shaped into a rhythmic cadence by the doubts that emerge, or dissipate, according to the documentation provided. These moves are what I call "microtemporalities". They are, as analysed by Little (2015), the different speeds at which changes occur in the various control settings. In this case, the documents that the passenger provided were stalling the control process until the moment the inspector finally decided to deny his entry.

As noted earlier, according to the Foreigner's Law, confirming means of subsistence is one of the objective criteria that must be applied by inspectors at the border. The law specifically refers to a minimum monetary value, fixed by decree, that the passengers must have with them and that will support their stay. In order to carry out this verification, inspectors use an official tool that allows them to calculate the value that passengers must present depending on their country of destination in Europe. While there are rare cases where passengers do not have the required amount for their stay, the investigation of this criterion is more directed towards certain passengers. One morning, while we were discussing the possibility of the US joining the Schengen area, the inspector with whom I shared the glass booth mentioned that: "We [inspectors] do not care about these [Americans], because they have money". The "We do not care" indicated that there are no questions posed to these foreign citizens since inspectors assume that they are always holders of economic capital, contrary to the scrutiny applied to certain Brazilian citizens. Being an American citizen allows for a faster entry into Portuguese national territory.

To check the means of subsistence, inspectors refer to passengers' bank applications, bank statements, cash, and, in some cases, the type of credit card they hold. Very occasionally, I observed passengers counting their money on the countertop of the glass booth at the first line of inspection. Inspectors seem to rely on the monetary values fixed by the law. However, in certain cases, presenting a credit card seems to become an important criterion for accelerating documentary control. This was the case for a Brazilian couple travelling to Paris, whose stay would be approximately fifteen days. The inspector requested the return flight details and their hotel reservation. While the passengers had previously reported that the stay would be fifteen days, the inspector discovered that the hotel reservation was just for two nights. The passenger explained that he had not been able to book the hotel of his preference. He first wanted to check if he liked this one and then decide later. The inspector proceeded to ask about his occupation in Brazil and he said he owned a supermarket. He was also asked if he had paid for the hotel reservation with a credit

card. The passenger said yes and voluntarily showed his credit card. I noticed that the inspector's posture immediately changed to a more cordial one. While the inspector stamped their passports, and the passenger concerned himself with putting the documents back in his backpack. Out of curiosity I asked the inspector about the profession of the passenger. I thought this must have been the evaluation criterion that led to the consequent change of posture of the inspector. He explained: "He owns a supermarket and has a platinum credit card. It's because he has money".

Gilboy (2008) and Heyman (2004) also realized, through their interlocutors, that credit cards get people into countries quicker. Following the same logic, after confirming the hotel reservation and the return flight ticket of one young passenger, the inspector asked her if she had a credit card. She opened her wallet and showed two cards: a gold and a platinum. The inspector gave her immediate passage and explained to me that "the platinum is above gold, it is because she has money". This request to see a passenger's credit card may still be accompanied by a focused look at other details, as was the case for a transit passenger going on vacation to London, where the inspector examining her credit card verbalized "It's an old card. It was not got for the trip", implying that the passenger was telling the truth. Frequently, inspectors assume that bureaucratic records and other documents, including credit cards, when issued close to the date of travel were obtained solely to lend credibility to the travellers' narratives. In the inspectors' view, this may be evidence suggesting that the individual is not a "true tourist" but someone intending "to stay" and seek employment in Portugal.

In the case presented, the inspector not only introduced a sequential dimension to his analysis by looking at the credit card's date of issue, but also intersected the past with the present, with the age of the card revealing the reputation of its bearer. Ultimately, the card accelerated the passenger's entrance into Portugal. Credit cards, although they do not reveal any monetary amounts unless the passenger shows the banking app on their mobile phone, seem to function as tools that inform inspectors about class status, a structural aspect of the life of passengers which suggests that they are "real" tourists. In the examples analysed here and in so many others I witnessed, a credit card seems to accelerate documentary control as it generates confidence in its holder on the part of the inspector.

Elasticity of Time: Coexistence of the Past, Present, and Future

The intersection of the past, present, and future emerged as a second dimension of temporality on the Portuguese border. Time appears as a dimension that is possible to stretch. Returning to the account with which this article begins, a major informer of the decision-making process

was the fact that it was the Antônio's first time in Europe. As inspectors mentioned often during my fieldwork, “the passport tells a story”. In this case, the absence of stamps for entry into and exit from Schengen materialized the (lack of) history of the passenger in the continent, as they had no evidence of being compliant with European entry/exit rules. As noted by Hurd, Donnan, and Leutloff-Grandits (2016, 4), “imagined futures coexist with lived presents, with people navigating different temporal regimes, across the course of the day in a bordered space of parallel and multiple temporalities”. The economic fragility of Antônio—as perceived by Maria due to the instalment payments for the trip—along with the absence of stamps from the Schengen area predicted what she considered to be the passenger's intention: becoming an “overstayer”. We then realize how time is multiple and “different meanings of future, present and past coexist and interact simultaneously” (Page et al. 2017, 3) in complex and contradictory relationships (Griffiths et al. 2013).

Given that my fieldwork was significantly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic—a context in which new documents were required to cross the border (such as vaccination and test certificates) and wherein travellers had these in digital format on their mobile phones—in a way, I normalized the fact that inspectors looked at the mobile devices of the passengers. I did not imagine that in some cases they would use the phones for other purposes. It has been clear that there are control dimensions apart from health which depend on the passenger's mobile phone. Reading the exchange of messages was one of these dimensions, which emerged with considerable frequency during my time in the field.

One passenger, a Brazilian citizen, claimed to be coming to visit his mother, a legal resident in Portugal. He had a letter of sponsorship signed by his mother. This being a common situation due to the degree of kinship, all indications were that the passenger would receive a stamp in his passport and promptly enter into Portugal. But, after a few moments, the inspector's tone of voice became more audible. I turned my attention to her and noticed that she was scrolling through the passenger's WhatsApp messages, while confronting him with the question: “If you are not coming to work, why is your mother telling you that you will apply for the taxpayer identification number (TIN)?” I realized that the inspector was reading the conversation between the passenger and his mother. He insisted that he was not coming to work—he had a business he could not leave in Brazil. The inspector did not give up and asked: “Did your mother get you a job?” The passenger again denied this, and for about 10 minutes the inspector tried to “break” him before deciding to take him in to the second line of inspection. When she returned to the glass booth, she told me: “He wouldn't admit it. I was already losing my patience”. In this case, it was the personal messaging conversation that the passenger had in the past with his mother—specifically, the fact

that she mentioned that he would apply for a TIN—which led the inspector to approach the passenger with the certainty that he had come to Portugal with the intention of working, and thus resulted in his interception. The inspector intersected the passenger's past, materialized through the exchange of messages with his mother, with the possibility of his coming to stay. Despite the passenger having the letter of sponsorship whose signatory was his mother, a legal resident in Portugal, for this inspector, the document was not enough. It was the exchange of messages that supported her decision and prevented his entry across the border.

It is not only the presence but also the absence of messages that can generate distrust. In another interaction, an inspector asked a passenger to see the Facebook messages she had exchanged with the signatory of her letter of sponsorship. Moments before, the passenger had mentioned that she didn't personally know the signatory. The inspector checked the social media profile of the sponsor, however, it was already deactivated, and the messages exchanged had been erased. Even without messages that could compromise the passenger, the endless list with the phrase “message deleted” was enough to arouse suspicion. The inspector continued to vehemently insist that the passenger tell the truth about her trip to Portugal until, under the pressure, she confessed that she was trying to work as a cleaner and was then intercepted at the first line of the border. It was the focus that the inspector put on the passenger's past—in this case, a past erased from the Facebook messages—which raised doubts about her situation. The absence of the messages that had once been sent indicated that there was something to hide. As noted by Horton (2020), illegibility is often the only remaining source of power, and is therefore a strategy for passing the border. However, it was also what catalysed the interception of this passenger.

The information written in certain documents also enables inspectors to investigate travellers' pasts and histories. This serves as evidence to assess whether an individual is likely to become a future overstayer. For example, at certain times, I observed inspectors questioning passengers about their family and professional situations and whether they had sold their possessions, like their houses, to have money for the trip. If passengers were divorced, single, and unemployed, these circumstances were indicators that alerted inspectors to the possibility that the individuals intended to enter Portugal to work rather than for leisure or pleasure. The perception inspectors have of their clients' social class is crucial for understanding the elasticity of time at the Portuguese border. As they often mentioned, their control work “is not rocket science, but a set of factors” that helps them understand who is standing before them at the countertop of the glass booth. It is knowledge acquired through daily practice and experience. Therefore, their discretionary

power as well as the attention to the particularities of travellers produce temporalities whose dimensions are impossible to anticipate, turning uncertainty into a rule.

Sequentiality: A Multidirectional Analysis

Lastly, each document has certain specificities that become more or less visible depending on the gaze of each inspector. These can therefore, if inspectors do not impose limits on their own autonomy, introduce a sequential dimension to the exercise of control once the gaze moves from the document to the details that compose it. This attention to detail comes in the shape of multiple temporal orders (Pfoser 2020) put in place by inspectors and unfolding in multiple directions, contrary to the exclusivity of a possible chronological order. This multidirectional aspect further highlights the unpredictable nature of the decision-making process. Generally, the documents that are consistently requested from passengers who come to Portugal as tourists are their hotel reservation, their return flight ticket, and, as already addressed, if they cannot provide evidence of means of subsistence, a letter of sponsorship. Although not criteria established by the Foreigners Law, there are resources that inspectors make use of to verify the truth of the stories they hear, such as the return flight ticket and hotel reservation. Assessing the return flight ticket, according to one inspector, "is a criterion for ascertaining the reason for the visit and can be used to substantiate a desire to stay, instead of tourism".

With rare exceptions, passengers always bring these documents with them. However, inspectors know that, in many cases, reservations can be cancelled. Thus, whenever there are doubts on the part of the inspectors, they pay attention to other details. In the case of a stay in a hotel, it is not only the fact of having the reservation, but also where the hotel is, if it allows free cancellation, the number of stars it has, and the number of people per room. In one encounter at the glass booth, a Brazilian citizen was coming on vacation for a week and his hotel was on the outskirts of Lisbon. The inspector asked how he was going to travel from the outskirts to the centre of Lisbon, since all the tourist places the passenger had mentioned were in the centre. The passenger replied that he would call an Uber, and I heard the inspector murmuring: "If you told me you would take the train it would facilitate my decision". The traveller ended up entering Portugal, since the inspector had "nothing to catch him for". The passenger had a return ticket and fulfilled the criterion of the means of subsistence for his stay. However, for this inspector, the fact that the hotel reservation was far from the centre made him hesitate, as did the question of the type of travel the passenger would use. Probably based on his knowledge of the geography of the Portuguese capital, his personal experience, and his idea of being a tourist, the inspector felt the train, not Uber, would be

the correct option. Although the reservation had been paid for, when introducing a sequential dimension to the analysis, it was the location of the hotel that was the generator of suspicion.

Another aspect that inspectors can pay attention to is whether the hotel booking can still be cancelled. One morning, the inspector I was with intercepted a passenger who was coming to give a lecture in a church. He did a Google search, typing the name of the hostel where the traveller would spend the night, and after a few seconds said: "That hostel is one of the first that appears in searches as having free cancellation". Distrustful of the passenger, he asked him if he had an invitation letter from the institution, to prove the reason for his trip. The passenger replied in a simple way that he did not, but that he had with him a degree from a university of theology. Even though the passenger fulfilled the requirements of the Foreigner's Law and the inspector did not know whether or not the reservation had been cancelled, he ended up intercepting the passenger based on the generic internet search, and accompanied him to the second line of inspection. In this case, there was not only the sequential dimension when noticing that the reservation could be cancelled, but also the intersection with the future. The inspector simply projected the possibility that the reservation might be cancelled and the traveller would become an overstayer.

Inspectors can also look at a hotel's star rating, or how many people the passenger will be sharing a room with if the reservation is in a hostel. For example, in the case of a reservation in a room for six to 12 people, made by a middle-aged Brazilian traveller who is unemployed or in an occupation seen as "disqualified", all these elements are considered indicators that the person is not coming for tourism but looking for a job. Therefore, here, not only the intersection of Brazilian nationality and social class, but also the age of the passenger, are factors to be considered. After my fieldwork, I continued to keep in touch informally with some of my interlocutors via messaging. Venting, an inspector revealed to me that he had recently intercepted a passenger who was in transit to Madrid. When questioned, the person, a Brazilian national, did not know what he wanted to visit in that city, and only had 500 euros in cash. The minimum amount fixed by decree for the neighbouring country of Spain was 900 euros. However, what caught my attention in our conversation was the fact that the inspector also mentioned that "even the hotel only had two stars". I asked how he knew, and the inspector said that he had checked the passenger's reservation, adding that this element was "data and a way of evaluating". The hotel's star rating established a parallel, extending to the inspector's assessment of the passenger. That is, in this logic, the lower the hotel classification, the lower the chances of the passenger being a tourist, due to the projected perception of his social class. The passenger ended up being intercepted at the first line.

The return flight ticket also has some specificities which may become more visible to agents who do not set limits to their autonomy. As we saw with the encounter between Maria and Antônio, not only the format of the ticket but also the payment in 12 instalments were details to be considered by the inspector in question. Attention may also fall on the airline the passenger intends to return with, or if he came with one airline but will return with another, or even whether he has the same luggage registration going back as the arrival luggage registration. And, as with hotel reservations, the fact of whether the return flight is already paid for, or whether it can still be cancelled, also seem to be decisive factors for border control agents. In most cases, especially with passengers who use travel agencies to organize their trips, the return flight is already found to have been cancelled. The inspectors go to the airlines' websites, inputting the flight reservation number to verify the veracity of the story. Even if the trip has already been paid for, this may not yet be a condition for passing the first line of inspection. The inspector's attention may fall on the luggage, and they will check whether or not it is registered for the return trip. The inspectors are constantly using a sequential dimension to their analysis. The attention begins to fall on the details of the document. Essentially, through their analysis of the passenger's profile, they may determine that this is not a tourist and decide to go in search of indicators that corroborate the decision to make an interception.

A specific example was given to me by one inspector. She explained that when she sees return flights on Air France it “sounds an alert” for her, since according to her experience “these are already cancelled”, indicating that the passenger intends to stay. Another case was that of a citizen who had already been to Portugal twice. The first time he came, he stayed seven months, overstaying without getting his situation regularized, but on a later visit to Portugal he only stayed two weeks. As we saw earlier, “the passport tells a story”, although in the case of this passenger, his story ended up being counterbalanced since he had first been a “transgressor” and later “compliant”. The passenger said that he was now visiting a friend and begged the inspector: “Please let me in, Inspector. I'm here because I miss my friend”, to which the inspector replied: “Why don't you have your luggage registered for the way back?” The passenger said that he didn't know and that maybe the airline had made a mistake. He complied with the objective criteria of the law: he had more means of subsistence than necessary for his stay—more specifically, 1,400 euros and an international credit card for a two-week stay. The inspector was hesitant, saying “Let me think about your case”, and suggesting that the passenger stand back and wait while he proceeded with the document control of other passengers. A few minutes later, he called him back and when he stamped his passport he said in a dramatic tone: “I am giving you my vote of confidence, but you have to return [to Brazil]”. Here, the inspector's motivations for

possibly proceeding with an interception were related to the facts that the passenger had previously been in Portugal “illegally” and that his return luggage had not been added to the reservation. He is aware that many passengers make the investment in the cost of the return trip to make their “cover story” more credible, but, in order not to have additional expense, they choose not to add the cost of baggage since they have no intention of returning. In this case this was the criterion, albeit informal, that made the inspector hesitate, thus delaying his decision to allow entry.

Final Remarks

This article has dealt with how the study of documentation and other resources is a social field (Bourdieu 2011) that is particularly fertile for analysing the temporalities that intersect the encounters of foreign citizens with the Portuguese state. The discretionary practices carried out by inspectors, and the divisions they create, highlight the inconsistency of the state itself as a segmented, constantly changing, historically situated entity (Abrams 1988). The uncertainty experienced by travellers describes the instability caused by the contingency that permeates their encounters in the glass booth. As noted by Heyman (2020, 232), “immigration statuses and the documents that materialize them are changeable, offered and removed, anticipated and prevented, provisional and incomplete, with strange contradictions, ambiguities and delays”. They complicate our idea of a sovereign state exercising ultimate authority over a single person. By reflecting on these inconsistencies, with this article I aimed to reflect on the Portuguese border regime and how “paper trails” (Horton & Heyman 2020) produce different temporalities which often intersect with each other. Looking at the ordinary aspects that make up the day-to-day lives of foreign citizens at the border is a fundamental configuration that inspectors do not ignore when undertaking their checks. Attention to the mundane questions of life, structural and circumstantial, of the various protagonists that constitute the stories told at the border and materialized through documents seems to be essential for those who do the passport stamping.

The complexity of the process—due to the intersections and overlaps of the categories that matter in the control operation, where issues of nationality and class loom more frequently—should also be noted. The border, and crossing it, are more challenging for Brazilian citizens of lower social classes. These two factors of nationality and class, taken together, suggest that inspectors include them in the category of what they call migratory risk. Therefore, these are the passengers who most often must prove the reasons for their trip; for them, the bureaucratic process is more opaque, and in it we often find a clash between dimensions of law and dimensions of practice. Later, the role played by

the presence—and sometimes the absence—of certain documents in the bureaucratic circuit of border control is unpredictable and contingent. Contrary to what the classic bureaucratic logic suggests, documents are subject to interpretation: their value as a control element, and the possibility of them resulting in either an entry stamp or an interception form, depends on the view of each inspector. The documents are, therefore, interpretive and transformable. Their properties and interpretations can be unlimited, for certain people. There is an unpredictability about the materiality of the bureaucratic encounter at the border. This issue (which seems to be an indicator of state sovereignty, as more and more documents are requested) also makes travellers more cautious as they prepare for the entry process, furnishing themselves with appropriate, or extra, documentary evidence in response to this unpredictability.

Through the various documents and more diffuse records of the passengers, I analysed the production of microtemporalities, that is, the possible paces generated at the moment of encounter at the glass booth. It seems that the border is guided by accelerations, retreats, hesitations, and denials. Success in crossing the border stems from the speed imposed by the inspector during the checks. Subsequently, I reflected on the elasticity of time, namely how the inspectors, based on their previous experiences, draw on the past of passengers or carry out future projections, depending on their perception, as a result of their inspection of the records carried by passengers. Finally, I focused on the sequential dimension of the analysis, that is, on the shifting of the inspector's gaze from the document to the details that compose it. From the observation I carried out, this seems to contradict an exclusively chronological order, since it is multidirectional. As mentioned by Cwerner (2001, 17) "the complex world of migration cannot be subsumed under a single analytical perspective, and the same can be said about its times", highlighting the fact that these three dimensions do not operate in isolation. They intersect with each other, coexisting at various points with other indicators in the decision-making process and working as a "technique of power" (Griffiths 2014, 2005).

Uncertainty and instability are central characteristics for understanding the operation of the Portuguese border regime. An assessment of time helps illuminate not only the documentary sources and the interpretations, judgments, and evaluations conducted by inspectors, but also the contingency and unpredictability experienced by travellers. As a control device, the documents and their specificities allow the continuous production of indifference to practices and their respective arbitrary results (Gupta 2012), due not only to the legislative administrative messiness, but also to the discretionary power inherent in the functions performed by these agents. As I have analysed, the border works both to allow passage and

to deny it. However, the fatality of these outcomes hides the production of the various temporalities. With this article, I have aimed to contribute to the debate concerned with the temporalities of borders and migration, revealing some of the possibilities that allow the use of temporality as a practice of control at the Portuguese border.

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Endnotes

- 1 On March 12, 2020, Portuguese media reported the assault and death of Ihor Humenyuk, a Ukrainian citizen, held in custody by SEF at Lisbon Airport. Ihor's death led to the trial and condemnation of three SEF inspectors, which in turn drew public attention to the SEF. By the end of 2023, the Portuguese government dissolved SEF, a radical organisational change that alarmed the European Union politicians, migrants, border and security professionals, and society. When SEF was dissolved, its responsibilities, both police and administrative, were distributed among several police departments. Nowadays, the airport border is controlled by the general-purpose police force.
- 2 Act 23/2007 of 4 July, also known as the "foreigner's law".
- 3 Article 88 of Act 23/2007 of 4 July. Foreign citizens had to own evidence of a regular entry in Portugal and own a valid contract of employment or a promised employment contract, among others. This legislation was revoked on June 4, 2024. My analysis relates to the previous situation.
- 4 Article 9 of Act 23/2007 of 4 July.
- 5 Article 10 of Act 23/2007 of 4 July.
- 6 Article 12 of Act 23/2007 of 4 July. In the case of not having means of subsistence, "the third-country national may, alternatively, deliver a letter of sponsorship signed by a national citizen or by a foreign citizen entitled to legally stay in Portuguese territory".
- 7 The PB4, also known as PT-BR/13, is the medical assistance certificate that results from a bilateral agreement between Brazil and certain other countries (Portugal, Italy, and Cape Verde). It is requested when Brazilian nationals are moving to one of these countries and allows them to access the public health system.
- 8 This is where, among other offices, the second line of control is located. It is where inspectors conduct, for example, more in-depth interviews.
- 9 Acceptance of the letter of sponsorship, as referred to in point 2 of Article 12 of Act 23/2007 of 4 July, depends on proof of the financial capacity of the respective signatory and includes a commitment to ensure the conditions of stay in national territory.

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