Introduction

Minding the Gap in the Meantime

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This book has taken shape in one of the most dramatic "meantimes" of recent history, and that experience has indeed shaped the book. Although initiated well before, it came together during the Covid-19 pandemic, a time when many of us were living a suspended life, locked down in our homes, our exterior lives put on hold as we waited for the pandemic to loosen its grip as a result of the emergence of a vaccine or through simple exhaustion. Some of us lived almost entirely alone during that time; others crowded into bubbles of constant, sometimes too-close interaction. We learned, in that time, how waiting is filled with anticipation of pleasures to come but also dread of the deaths of loved ones, as well as anxieties over lost jobs or careers put on hold and the seeming impossibility of recovery. Was life postponed—weddings, holidays with family, reunions with old friends, fieldwork and in-person conferences for anthropologists like us, or just drinks and dinner out—or was a "new normal," which was certainly not normal, lurking in our future? We learned, too, how differently different people managed the forms of waiting that were new to us and old forms that had been newly recast: waiting in lines for Covid tests, waiting to purchase basic foodstuffs or necessities that disappeared from store shelves, waiting for and watching medical data ranging from global daily case and death counts to the oxygen levels and bloodwork of hospitalized relatives. We discovered not only the camaraderie—the communitas—of patient waiting as we stood together in lines at testing or vaccine clinics, but also the fractiousness, anger, and violence that erupted when people competed for scarce toilet paper or refused to wear masks on planes. And at this moment, as we revise

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our final draft, it looks like there is no return to "normal"; instead, the pandemic, with its ever-mutating Omicron variants, is endemic, and the experience of the meantime has reshaped our futures in unanticipated ways, as well as reshaping the final form of this book.

If the current moment has taught us anything, it is that such "meantimes" rarely, if ever, amount to a period of stilling or stasis—waiting is not a "dead" moment when nothing happens. Indeed, in a flurry of sometimes too many activities (rediscovering cooking, reconfiguring the home, renegotiating domestic relations, starting home-based businesses, devising new ways of working and teaching on Zoom), people reorganized their lives, renavigated their relationships to the past, and rethought possible futures. As close relationships were reworked—parents homeschooling their children, families adopting pets, survivors living with losses that could not be managed through traditional forms of mourning and support—broader fields of empathy, disinterest, and solipsistic possessive individualism were also refigured. If the wait was partly filled with purpose and direction, people also contended with restlessness, frustration, a loss of former purpose, and boredom. Many lost the sense of scheduled time produced by work commutes, school hours, appointments, and other temporal rigors of capitalism, yet found little relief in unscheduled but demanding needs. The meantime was filled with divergent feelings and temporalities, where the dynamics of reworking the everyday were combined with devising what was now possible for the future. With the suspension of temporalities, people reevaluated what it means to live in a society whose sociality is finding, and indeed in need of, new alignments (Ulfstjerne 2020).

The wait that was more than a wait—for it was also a conflation of times between suspension, overwork, emptiness, frustration, and anticipation—revealed itself as a space of potential. It is precisely the potential nested in that space of deferment, the gap between what is suddenly past and an unknown future—elusive, promising, or feared, but possible—that this edited collection wishes to scrutinize through a series of ethnographic case studies of what we call "the meantime." Waiting is usually understood to be a gap, a space between the past and the future where activity might flourish, but where all that doing is ancillary to a desired, or possibly dreaded, future. The past is pushed aside or is now envisioned as, indeed, past; the future is rife with expectation, discernable through its promises, even when it is known to bring surprises as well as that which is anticipated. We extend that idea with the meantime, usually understood as the gap between promise and affirmation, the wished for and the actual; it is also a space in the convergence of, and not just the divergence from, the past, the present, and the future. The

contributions in this book see this gap as a space of experimentation, "of reconfigurations of the conditions of possibility for the afterlives of now time" (Fischer 2018: 3). As the contributors attend to the temporalities of emergence, they explore the meantime as a space of "the possible" in which calculation coexists with uncertainty, imminence with deferral or delay, and where the now must be brought into conversation with the past and the possible. By focusing on the possible, they put the stress on the potentialities of waiting—the temporal tactics, social commitments, material connections, dispositional orientations, and "affective circuits" (Cole and Groes 2016) that emerge in—but also make—the meantime even in the most desperate times.

Some waiting is directed, as in waiting *for* something, suggesting a clear anticipated or unwanted event that marks the end of waiting. AbdouMaliq Simone (2008) has suggested, by contrast, that when the moment that has been waited for is not easily demarcated, waiting emerges as an attitude or predisposition rather than a clear trajectory, dispositional and affective at once. We see the meantime as characterized by its own kind of temporality, an ever-shifting tangle of past, present, and future, and we are interested in the multiple, intersecting, and often cross-cutting, modalities of engagement that waiting entails—the overlapping affective temporalities ranging from longings for ever-receding horizons of possibilities to efforts to keep life projects alive to more ordinary struggles to navigate uncertainties, to stitch together discordant temporal regimes, or, in the meantime, to "mind the gap." Recognizing the multiplicities of temporality that intersect in that gap, we see it neither as a "suffering slot" nor as a bright space in which to locate "the good" (Robbins 2013), but as a space to be approached through rich ethnographic engagements offering careful, critical understanding of a complex world (Ortner 2016). And we are aware that this gap, the gap of not-quite-understanding and of revising and reworking the past with the now and with what is possible, is also a gap that allows anthropological ethnography to take place and, indeed, grow, an issue we return to below.

Scholars have argued that it is in the gaps, pauses, and contradictions that the otherwise can be contemplated, unfettered from classic teleologies and other tools designed to predict and prophesize. In this way, they press far beyond the "liminal" space popularized in Victor Turner's work—a liminality that operated only to reassert the core social values that kept society functioning, where "the eternally rebellious individual is converted . . . into a loyal citizen" (Turner 1967: 43). In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing (2015: 20) writes that "indeterminacy, the unplanned nature of time, is frightening but thinking through precarity makes it evident that indeterminacy also makes life possible."

How indeterminacy makes life possible—how the seeming suspension of a predicted future is what allows undetermined futures to emerge—is what the volume sets out to trace through a consideration of waiting as an experience "kept open by the presence of futuristic possibilities within it" (Hudson, in Anderson 2004: 750).

Writing against dominant productivist narratives that privilege speed, movement, strategic plans and assessments, and progress, the contributors attend to the meantime of waiting, the period before the future and after the past, a phase that is temporally more marked than the simple present, as an object with its own affordances and constraints, its own subjectivities, temporalities, and ecologies. At a time when large swaths of the world's population, including refugees, irregular migrants, flexibly employed workers, entrepreneurs whose small business ventures fail, the sick, the unemployed, and those living in war zones, feel excluded from the progressivist time of modernity and its associated project of (capitalist) growth, tracking how people inhabit "slow time," how they navigate delays and disruptions, and how they engage with the institutional structures and temporal regimes that consign them to a meantime is itself a matter of urgency. In the remainder of this Introduction, we situate our approach to this distinctive temporality within the existing body of anthropological literature on time, waiting, duration, and futurity, relating it to recent anthropological concerns with thwarted life courses and precarious futures, elaborating on the modest contribution we make to the field, and discussing how each contributor deals with the gap as a form of engagement and a space of possibility.

Awaiting Wait Times

At the dawn of twentieth-century anthropology, in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Bronislaw Malinowski stressed that a Kula gift that a Trobriand man gave to his trading partner and the counter-gift he received could not be exchanged at the same time. The two transactions must be "distinct in time" (Malinowski [1922] 1961: 353). Even if a gift exchange took place during the same Kula event, Malinowski noted, "there must be an interval between the two gifts, of a few minutes at least" ([1922] 1961: 353). The interval was what distinguished the Kula from *gimwali*, ordinary trade, and what allowed Kula items, the armshells and necklaces that went on circulating into the future, to accrue value. By setting the gift apart from the counter-gift, the "time between" framed the two transactions as discrete *happenings*. Since the partnership uniting two men was a lifelong affair and ownership of Kula valuables was

invariably momentary, each transaction was inscribed in a larger pattern of give and take that encompassed numerous island communities. The so-called Kula ring could be pictured as two flows of equivalent objects streaming in opposite directions, even though it was composed, for the participants, of a series of individual strategies and events.

Temporality, it is worth noting, was not one of Malinowski's concerns, and yet it pervades his monograph, in the discussion not only of Kula, but also of gardens and their magical encouragement. The "time between" remained an unscrutinized dimension of the Kula, even if the waits were described as being filled with variously directed activities, all aimed at forging and reworking socialities in time and space. Malinowski was more interested in documenting the reasonableness of Trobriand lives, their love of display, their use of magic, their ambitions, and "the substance of their happiness" ([1922] 1961: 25), yet one cannot read *Argonauts* without picking up on the omnipresence of waiting in Trobriand lives, its relational character, and its directionality. A Kula expedition to another island, we learn, was the culmination of months of planning. Long before the scheduled visit, communities were "alive with preparations" ([1922] 1961: 149). These preparations began in the gardens, where surplus yams were planted and carefully fostered with industry and magic ahead of the next Kula season; they engaged affines, kin, and other partners, redirecting those relationships in their particular overlapping spatiotemporal spheres. Festive dresses were fashioned. New canoes were built and old ones repaired: the painstaking process, blending social networking, technical effort, artistic talent, and magical rite, concluded with a ceremonial launching and a trial run. Months before a party was set to sail, Malinowski ([1922] 1961: 148) wrote, "the hopes and anticipations grew bigger and bigger." Men caught up in the excitement of their next expedition talked of traveling further than anyone else had before, even though, in the end, they never did. In sum, ordinary life seemed to revolve around planning, forecasting, and speeding up, or, alternatively, delaying, Kula.

Though Malinowski did not set out to examine temporality, he hinted at the centrality of anticipation in the experience of Kula: people waiting for a fleet of canoes to turn up on their shore, loaded with goods; a man planning to relinquish a Kula valuable while enjoying the prestige derived from its temporary ownership; a sailing party feverishly preparing to depart for a distant island, and so on. Much of this waiting was hopeful, agentive. It corresponds to *kairos*, the Greek term for the time of opportunity, when conditions are right for action. In other words, it was lived time, unconstrained by clock or calendar. On the other hand, when a man held on to his Kula valuable for too long, leading to spats,

perhaps even a feud, with a trading partner, the waiting endured by the frustrated partner was more akin to dead time, or what the Greeks called *chronos*, that is, the (frequently long) stretches of sequential time that feel empty, ordinary, burdensome. Put simply, waiting was and is unevenly experienced. While Trobrianders manipulated time, delaying expeditions, taking their time to hand over a valuable, and so on, they were also forced to cope with the delays imposed by others.

In the following half-century, anthropologists examined the temporalities of anticipation, planning, postponing, and passing time, but waiting was rarely the focus of their analyses. Since it often signaled a lack of agency—a mode of doing nothing, with action being taken by other agencies—waiting belonged to that part of human experience that went unremarked because it was deemed unremarkable (Ehn and Löfgren 2010). Owing perhaps to the discipline's predilection for exposing the cultural basis of that which seemed only natural, there was limited anthropological interest in a human experience as ubiquitous and universal as waiting. This remains an entrenched perspective in some quarters. When, in 2017, we applied for funding from a national organization to hold a conference on "waiting," we were told that the exhaustiveness of the concept, its capacity to include not only a plurality of experiential phenomena but also diverse affective states ranging from hope to doubt and dread to boredom and much more, made it impossible to pin down as an object of analysis. Put bluntly, waiting was not a "serious" topic of anthropological investigation in the way that more clearly defined problems, such as exchange, migration, precarity, or even futurity, were. And yet it is precisely the multiplicity of temporalities entailed in the meantime, including those that sort out a past, a present, and a future as well as those that overlap and converge in the moment, and the sheer diversity of its affective and dispositional character that make waiting a compelling, and serious, topic.

Ironically, the idea that waiting, the gap between things, is a fundamental constituent of human experience, the exploration of which can yield important insight into the workings of society, has long been present in social anthropology. It was Marcel Mauss who initially suggested that by attending to practices of anticipation and speculation, and other modes of future-making, analysts would be able to contemplate social facts not as static elements but rather "in motion," just as "we observe octopuses or anemones in the sea" (1967, in Reinhardt 2018: 117). Though Mauss (2016) recognized that there are countless ways to invest in the future, he turned his attention to gift exchange, showing that time stabilized what was essentially an open-ended, future-oriented form of relational engagement by giving it a cyclical dimension (in the process, he critiqued

Malinowski's focus on the individual rather than social dimension of the exchange). In sum, time was the substance of reciprocity.

Pierre Bourdieu later fastened on this gap—the necessary gap in which the return or outcome was always uncertain, in which things could happen, and in which relationships and values could be extended or suspended—to discover a history that included not only a "genesis amnesia" (1977: 79) (of those "structuring structures") but also space for improvisation. Annette Weiner (1976) and Nancy Munn (1986) traced how, in the Kula ring, these gaps were orchestrated by men striving to insert themselves into a transformed future space that needed constant planning and maintenance, lest they disappear into an unremembered and unexpansive past. Nevertheless, Mauss's major insight into the temporal economy of society—his recognition that anticipation and future-making were critical dimensions of human experience—was largely ignored by anthropologists, for whom, until recently, "time was the handmaiden to other anthropological frames and issues" (Munn 1992: 93), as is well exemplified by E. E. Evans-Pritchard's (1940) subordination of Nuer history, ecological time, and life trajectories to an atemporal structure. There was especially limited acknowledgment that to live in society is to wait for and with others and, circumstances permitting, to make others wait, as part of temporal social dynamics.

Things are changing. Perhaps it was the "end of history" announced by Francis Fukuyama (1992; he has since recanted the idea)—at the very least, the end of a structured history and the concomitant limitation of ideas like "social reproduction"—that woke us up to the complex ambiguities and open-endedness of waiting, as opposed to waiting for the inevitable. If the flurry of recently edited collections on suspension, anticipation, and chronopolitics (Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2021; Janeja and Bandak 2018; Kirtsoglou and Simpson 2020; Singer, Wirth, and Berwald 2019) is any indication, there is a growing recognition that waiting is implicated in some of the important issues of our time. When deployed as an analytical device, Ghassan Hage (2009b: 5) argued, waiting has the capacity to shed new light on dimensions of human experience that might otherwise be overshadowed or entirely hidden. Studies on the politics of waiting have yielded valuable insight into the temporality of hope (Miyazaki 2004), the ethics of anticipation (Gaibazzi 2012), the capacity to focus on long-term aspirations (Appadurai 2013), the economics of emotion (Illouz 2007), and the reworking of problematic pasts (Vigh 2006), among other issues. By attending to the ways that people wait, anthropologists have produced illuminating analyses of the experiences of refugees and migrants (Bendixsen and Eriksen 2018; Ibañez-Tirado 2019; Turner 2015), the sick (Lee, James, and Hunleth 2020; Ferrie and

Wiseman 2016), and the dying (Kaufman 2006). Whether experienced as an existential crisis (Ralph 2008), a sense of being-in-the-world (Chua 2011), a preemptive action (Fox 2019), a pious watchfulness (Robbins 2004), or a form of unpaid labor (Kwon 2015), waiting contains the seeds of transformational praxis. In this edited volume, we take another look at the "time between," which we call the meantime, focusing on often-ignored aspects of waiting—the tensions that emerge between different temporal demands, the diverse modalities of "time work," the forms of sociality it produces, the contingencies or dependencies it yields, and the ways in which it customizes temporal experience (Flaherty 2003)—to determine what they tell us about the contradictions of living.

The meantime is frequently referred to as "waiting," a designation that reduces it to a period of suspension to be endured. By contrast, we understand it as a temporal space of possibilities to be managed, a present to be lived in one way or another, and a way of relating to the past. Recognizing that living in the meantime is "the human condition" (Arendt [1968] 1993), we argue it cannot be reduced to frustrated hope or the forlorn hollowness of waiting for Godot (Beckett [1954] 1982). Building on the recent interest in waiting as a social experience characteristic of late modernity (Hage 2009a; Jeffrey 2010; Sharma 2014), the contributors to this edited volume consider the meantime, not in the straightforward and obvious sense of how people fill the gaps between the events of their lives, but as a more complex, capacious, and variable space in which time is constituted in the act of waiting and by the world around. In using the term "meantime," we draw attention to how waiting is a mode of inhabiting—and constituting—a temporality that is often cross-cut with diverse temporal orientations and projects, and how, within it, waiting in its various forms is socially produced. As Munn (1992, 2013) made clear, we live simultaneously in a myriad of temporal modes, from the existential and phenomenological to the institutional and structured to the imaginative. As a mode of engagement in and with time, waiting is necessarily entangled with other temporalities and other projects, thereby contributing to the occasionally puzzling complexity of the meantime. How waiting coexists with, but also rubs against, other experiences, what is produced (or conversely erased) from these social and material entanglements, and what textures time takes on in the space of the "not-yet" even as other things are happening are the central analytical concerns of this collection.

Possibility in the Meantime

The "time between" has long been described in anthropology as a critical period for the making of hegemonies and creativity. Perhaps most familiar is Turner's corpus on liminality (1967, 1969), a period of "betwixt and between" necessary to effect a transition between social states. Turner (1967: 99) described the liminal as a period of structural invisibility, detachment, and ambiguity during which a person "is neither this nor that, and yet is both." While Turner's model celebrated the communal anti-structure of between-times, found in rites of passage, millenarian movements, carnival festivals, and hippie communities, it was essentially redressive, resolving social contradictions and stabilizing structure: the liminal suspension was the necessary companion to predictable structure, the meantime the necessary companion to standard time, inverted spaces of uncertainty the necessary companion to conviction. Yet, Turner did also suggest that liminality was a "realm of pure possibility" (Turner 1967: 97), though he did not pursue that possibility.

Bourdieu (1977, 2000) turned his attention to the ways people created the gap, intentionally "playing" with time. "Quite the opposite of the inert gap of time … [where] nothing *but* time is going on" (Bourdieu 1977: 6, 7), the meantime was the product of work and strategy. Holding back a gift, putting off a payment, delaying revenge—in short, making the recipient wait—were tactics of temporal gamesmanship, critical to the unfolding of power between individuals and collectives, a power we all feel when, forced by another to wait, we experience "nothing but time." From this perspective, time was a resource rather than an impediment to action, and "to abolish the interval [was] to abolish the strategy" (Bourdieu 1977: 6)—and to proscribe the possible.

While Turner looks at liminal space as something that is created by circumstances external to the agent, and Bourdieu examines the way in which agents create the gap, we see the meantime as encompassed by both, where a time frame is imposed upon the agent who then makes and remakes it in order to aspire to, and perhaps achieve or suffer, a future. Making time and experiencing time is also work on the self, a form of self-making perhaps closer to Turner's vision than Bourdieu's. Valeria Procupez (2015) describes how the demeanor of "patience" was cultivated among activists and families living through a housing crisis in Buenos Aires, how recognition of one's "in-between" position was fostered among unemployed young people, and how some created or confronted the routinization of waiting. Occupying the meantime, making it into a gap or a wait, hinges on socialized dispositions, which might restrain people from queue-jumping in particular contexts or

allow such queue-jumping for certain kinds of persons. While Vincent Crapanzano (1986) described long waits under circumstances beyond one's control (such as White South Africans resignedly awaiting the end of apartheid) as a kind of "existential waiting," people also can, as Hage (2019c) describes, "wait out the crisis" in a test of valued fortitude and perseverance. Because other things go on in such gaps—feeding oneself and others, awaiting the imminent release of a popular movie or book, celebrating a calendrical date (birthdays, Eid al-Fitr, the victorious end of a war)—meantimes are dense times for configuring a multiplex and multitemporal selfhood.

Making Time

In this volume, we address the relationship between individual experience, on the one hand, and collective engagement on the other. The contributors look at how the condition of waiting, not as suspended animation but as living in a meantime, is socially constructed as ordinary or abnormal, productive or thwarted, and filled with possibilities that are rewritten as they are anticipated. In probing the meantime, we treat waiting as a "total social fact," a phenomenon that is enmeshed in all domains of social life yet is also intimately experienced by individuals (Mauss 2016; Valeri 2013). This is not simply a move to valorize waiting as an analytical object. It also stems from a recognition that the experience of waiting, enmeshed as it is in wider configurations of power and production, can shed light on how capitalist and other techniques of time enact and continually reinforce the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and of becoming and belonging. Mauss understood social life to be inherently dynamic. In his formulation, the concept of "total" gestures not to a positivist vision of society but to "a perpetual state of becoming" (2006, in Kasuga 2010: 103). As we shall see, it is precisely that sense of emergence that we seek to foreground through situated ethnographies of how people in occupied territories, dialysis centers, tourist towns, haunted buildings, and countless other contexts variously apprehend the meantime.

The equation of waiting with inactivity can be traced to changes that, in modern Europe, led to the perception of time as both a fixed grid, which regulated human activity, and a finite property, to be carefully budgeted, saved, and spent, like money. These changes were not just technological but also moral. Not to make good use of one's time was essentially to waste it (Graeber 2018; Thompson 1967; Weber [1905] 2009). Punctuality was thus an important dimension of working lives

while inactivity constituted failure, failure to produce things. The equation of idleness with wasted time still permeates our language. In legal terminology, "dead time" is the length of time a defendant has been institutionalized, which cannot be deducted from that person's sentence. Its literal French translation, "*temps mort*," refers to the pause during athletic competitions to allow athletes to rest or receive advice from their coaches. In English, that pause is referred to as "time out," to mark it as time outside of game play. By the same token, the lives of irregular migrants waiting in refugee camps or detention centers are said to be "on hold," suggesting that their futures have been suspended. In contrast, speed, mobility, access, and constant productivity are associated with progress and valued accordingly.

Following the same logic, late modernity has been characterized as a period of "compressed space-time" (Harvey 1990; Massey 1994) in which technology and global capitalism have radically transformed the experience of both space and time, speeding things up and yet forming horizontally shared experiences of time. Recent years have witnessed the glorification of "creative destruction" associated with neoliberalism, corporate raiding, and the heady exuberance of Silicon Valley's "disruptions," in which patience and experience of the present—indeed, the gap—is forgone. The introduction of time-saving technology has led to the fragmentation of experience: time, divided into ever-decreasing units, eventually ceases to exist as duration, turning instead into a jumbled array of deadlines (Eriksen 2001).

Yet modernity is not all quicksteps. Capitalist growth inescapably coexists with the regimentation and bureaucratization of time. Rejecting models that view movement, access, and speed as hallmarks of modernity, scholars (Leccardi 2003; Parkins 2004) have examined how waiting is intricately "woven through the fabric of the mobile everyday" (Bissell 2007: 277), producing diverse temporal regimes and yielding diverse modes of productivity. People wait in lines to buy goods or apply for things that they must then wait to receive; commuters sit on buses and trains—catching up on sleep, dreaming, observing, using their devices; patients wait for the doctor to examine them. The end of the month with its paycheck looms farther away as due dates for outstanding bills pass by; patients count the days until results from a biopsy are delivered; grandparents await the longed-for visit of teenaged grandchildren whose time is devoted to racking up activities that will get them into college. Americans wait to turn sixty-five, when they become eligible for Medicare, government-sponsored health insurance, and entire nations wait for the result of elections or for legislation that is promised but never passed.

Although everyone waits, some people wait more than others. Business-savvy kinetic elites zoom through VIP spaces, avoiding lines and making "efficient" use of their time. On the other hand, economic liberalization and the creation of "spaces of exception" and zones of exclusion from dominant expectations of development have had a catastrophic impact on people's livelihoods, trapping many in situations of chronic waiting (Appadurai 2013; Biehl 2005) and turning them into disempowered "patients of the state" (Auyero 2012). For most of these people, the hope that functions to keep people in a state of suspension, orienting them toward the future (Miyazaki 2004), has turned into despair or quiet resignation. This has generated experiences of longing or boredom as "suspended" time (O'Neill 2017) and led to the relative evacuation of the near future in evangelical Christianity (Guyer 2007). Meanwhile, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants who are subjected to repeated, endless waiting, as if their time were somehow less valuable than the time of citizens, struggle to engage in future-making even as they try to avoid becoming stuck (Khosravi 2021). There, as Madeleine Reeves (2019) shows in her ethnography of un- or insufficiently documented Kyrgyzstani migrant workers navigating Russian bureaucracy, waiting is sometimes less about making things happen than it is about maintenance, a "keeping-things-going" form of engagement in the face of deep uncertainty.

Indeed, waiting seems to have become a sign of our times. Currently, entire nations, such as Syria, Myanmar, or even Scotland, are waiting for an elusive future (Bayart 2007; Wirth 2019). Yet, even in the face of dark political horizons, people continue to build homes, have children, and send them to school, even if they must do so in the most precarious conditions, in refugee and migrant camps, for instance (Mountz 2011). Whether people choose to "wait out" crises (Hage 2009c), retreat into nostalgia (Ferguson 1999), use waiting time to build skills and networks (Masquelier 2019), make plans for futures that will never be realized (Chu 2010), or actively plan to avoid dreaded futures (Samimian-Darash 2016), the meantime is an important site in people's struggle to grant meaning to lives caught between precarious presents and expectations of progress. By turning our attention to stalled life trajectories and suspenseful states, we seek to recover temporalities that have been flattened by the propensity to assess contemporary experiences strictly through the lens of mobility, productivity, and intensity.

Waiting as Becoming

Recent anthropology has asked that we shift our attention from forms of "being" to ongoing "becomings" (see Biehl and Locke 2017). We argue, following Michael Fischer (2018: 4), that coming to terms with the multiple, entangled temporalities and orientations of waiting necessitates inhabiting the meantime, for only an anthropology in the meantime can attend to the emergent, that gap between "visions and implementations, . . . , theory and practice, . . . speculation and artistry," which we cannot always see, despite confident predictions and expert models. In this volume, we approach waiting as a mode of becoming to "see what happens in the meantimes of human struggle and daily life" (Biehl and Locke 2017).

A focus on becoming can assume different forms and inflections. Age categories have often been looked at as states of being (childhood, youth, adulthood, old age), each with its own distinctive character. At the same time, studies of youth sometimes contrast a period of "becoming" with the "being" of adulthood: although the becoming was frequently seen as period of experimenting with possible selves, people "knew" the endpoint, adulthood and its structural inscriptions of marriage, house, and career (see Durham 2017). A shift in focus from structure to practice, the predictable to the indeterminate, "the fixed conditions of possibility" to "lines of potential" (Stewart 2007: 2, 11) helps us recognize how the "becoming" reforms not just the moment but the multiple possibilities to be contemplated. As people devise possibilities, in conditions of poverty or rapid social change, they reinvent futures, including creating new forms of adulting in the place of adulthood (Durham 2021). Michael Jackson (2013) writes of how African migrants living in Europe engage in strategic shapeshifting, stitching together various parts of their past and present selves to become "others" as they navigate impossibly complex bureaucratic rules.

Writing against the commonalities of "waithood" that inform countless studies of youth in the Global South—its "stuckedness" (Hage 2009c: 97), its boredom (Honwana 2012; Singerman 2007)—Claire Dungey and Lotte Meinert (2017) show that in Ugandan schools, waiting is not a waste of time but a moral disposition, cultivated precisely for its capacity to prepare young men for the uncertainties of adulthood. Attending to the temporalities of the "loaned life" in Chile, Clara Han (2012: 31) traces the entanglements of debt, dependency, and care to reveal how the poor continuously strategize to preserve the future, however precarious. Anna Eisenstein (2021) describes how Ugandan women deliberately punctuate their movement through the life course with periods of patient waiting,

delaying marriage and motherhood in order to improve their economic opportunities. Her work recalls Jennifer Johnson-Hanks's (2002) study of how Cameroonian women move into and out of life stages instead of progressing through them. Creating the wait, delaying, is not limited to youth, of course. In a discussion of Japanese elders who prepare for death by getting rid of material possessions, Anne Allison (2018: 185) characterizes the affective and practical strategies taken to minimize the possibility of "dying badly" as "active not waiting" to stress that it is the future, not the present, that these elders wish to be freed from.

Whether they examine the tempo of social engagements or the potentialities nested in the liminal, these studies highlight people's capacity to act even in the face of severe hardship and limited autonomy. On the other hand, seemingly productive and purposeful forms of waiting may lead nowhere and may be retrospectively assessed as wasteful. Indeed, for some, the sense of "doing nothing" (or nothing "productive") may define the wait, while others may realize that they were waiting as much in retrospect, or through the lens of the anticipated future, as in the experience of the moment.

Attending to the contingent and the possible, the relation of the past to the future, through a focus on meantimes reveals how interstitial spaces "overflow with shifting aggregates of desire and power" (Biehl and Locke 2017: 6) as people strive to realize their dreams and aspirations. Put differently, waiting is not just a "gap" but also a critical path to the unfolding of possible futures and, as in the case of the Japanese elders, the reorganization of the past. Rather than seeing waiting as an intermission, an interruption between events anticipated as a sequence of events, it can be studied as part of "duration," the experiential aspect that involves a range of emotive orientations (Dalsgård et al. 2014). Setting their sights on the domains of the unforeseen, the unexpected, the incomplete, Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman (1995) discussed how people in structurally adjusted Cameroon confronted hardship and privation in contexts in which "crisis" no longer referred to an emergency of circumscribed duration, with a beginning and hence an end, but was instead synonymous with an endless temporal horizon. When crisis becomes normalized, "emergency" takes on a double meaning. It refers to the seemingly never-ending period of suspension in which people find themselves when the futurity previous generations took for granted dissolves. Paradoxically, it also gestures toward *emergent* life forms and practices aimed at rescuing the future, what Mbembe and Roitman describe as the "routinization of a register of improvisations" (1995: 326), widely known as entrepreneurship.

The concept of entrepreneurship, we note, derives its signification from its embeddedness in the contingent and the unplanned. If capitalism is all

about business plans, carefully rational investments, and hedges against loss, the new fad of entrepreneurship draws attention to its instabilities and creativity and focuses on the individual instead of corporations and (infra)structures. A loan word from the French, it refers to opportunistic forms of engagement at the intersection of risk-taking and innovation. The term *entrepreneur* was allegedly coined by Jean-Baptiste Say, a liberal economist who expounded the doctrines of Adam Smith and advocated for free trade and competition, to describe those intermediaries in the production process who anticipate needs while bearing the market's uncertainty. Composed of *entre*, "between," and *prendre*, "to catch, to take, to grasp," and derived from the Latin, the related verb *entreprendre* hints at the importance of the interval, as a space of potentiality, for the undertaker who is ready to try something new. In this regard, it shares with Michel de Certeau's (1984: 37) "tactics" a willingness to act by "seizing on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment." Like tactics, entrepreneurship depends on the judicious use of time, or, more precisely, the interval of time that seems ripe for intervention, as George Paul Meiu and Michael Alexander Ulfsterne make clear in their respective chapters.

In contexts of economic uncertainty and labor flexibilization, many people are forced to operate within unpredictable time frames and engage in a wide array of small projects to ensure that at least some of them will come to fruition—a form of entrepreneurship Craig Jeffrey and Jane Dyson call "zigzag capitalism" (2013: R1) to call attention to the multidirectionality of the meantime. Characterized by an improvisational approach and frequent goal recalibration, zigzag capitalism relies on tactics of improvisation to secure "interstitial livelihoods" (Jones 2014: 223) and is evident in the "gig economy" emerging in the United States. People navigate a risky landscape of fluctuating opportunities, running from one short-term goal to another and calculating how to make the most of the gaps, or *kairos*, that inevitably open between such goals. Indeed, as described in Deborah Durham's chapter, the tempos of the entrepreneurial zigzag do not all move toward an optimistically transformed future, yet the interstices of planning and doing can be better than the "deadline"; people sustain many crisscrossing waits, which run counter to each other, and make a life.

Tracking waiting at the intersection of microdynamics and macroforces requires that we attend to the tentative, nonlinear ways in which people, confronted by arbitrariness and contingency, orient themselves in uneven, shifting landscapes of opportunity, projecting their paths, crossing thresholds, encountering dead ends, making breakthroughs, holding onto the meantime in the face of an unwanted ending, or languishing in

waiting spaces, physical or otherwise. A focus on the meantime, as both a temporality and an analytical device, helps us remain attuned to the plasticity and promise of people's projects, small and large, by paying close attention to the emergent, the becoming, the unresolved and, at times, by acknowledging less obvious "empirical" findings. Even as they aim to clarify the qualities and textures of human engagements with the "not yet," our ethnographic works cannot, and should not, be definitive. They must remain, of necessity, partial, open-ended. At the same time, their very raison d'être springs from the recognition that "while these openings may ultimately lead nowhere, and futurity always struggles with futility and a sense of the inevitable, people can simultaneously be stuck and do things, and this is not nothing" (Biehl and Locke 2017: 21). As we look at the not-nothings people do, as they carve out a meantime between what now seems like a past and that uncertain future, we must be careful in our diagnostics of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) not to allow belief in futility to override their hope, creativity, resolution, and unforeseen attainments.

Orientations

Anthropology, Marilyn Strathern (2022) reminds us, takes place in gaps: our field research is always at some distance from our writing about it, spatially, socially, and temporally, and ethnography is the space between. This is especially true of collective projects like this one. The present collection emerges out of "Waiting," a series of discussions held at Tulane University in March 2018. One of the outcomes of this was a coalescence around the concept of the "meantime" through a critical examination of waiting as "emptiful" duration (Hudson, in Anderson 2004: 750) whose open-endedness gestures to the possible, the otherwise. *In the Meantime* reflects the contingent nature of human projects, including editorial ventures. Some participants did not contribute a chapter to the volume. Several scholars joined the project at a later stage. We opted to include essays of different lengths, interspersing succinct works among longer analytical pieces, with the shorter works offering the reader many possibilities and the longer ones moving the ethnography toward analytical conclusions.

The short essays function, too, as interruptions, while reminding us of the fullness of the meantime. We refer to them as *entretemps* to mark their interludic role, while also gesturing to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's equation of the meanwhile (*entretemps*) with *devenir*, becoming ([1991] 2005: 149). These interludic pieces are situated more closely in the

moment of waiting, where the meantime is full of the possible, anticipations, unknown temporalities, and the uncertainty that comes with these. If anthropology and ethnography take place in a temporal gap, as Strathern wrote, the gap is closer in these interludes; although written after the events described, they focus on the experiential, the feeling of the moment. While the longer chapters seek to resolve the dilemmas of the meantime with reference to an array of phenomena and contexts, as anthropology does, the *entretemps* return us to the irresolution of life in the meantime.

June Hee Kwon, in her chapter, analyzes the intersecting life trajectories of two Korean Chinese men caught up in "the Korean Wind," the massive migration of Korean Chinese to South Korea for better employment opportunities. Kwon traces the divergent pathways of the two men's waiting, illuminating the legal and political temporal regimes structuring the experience of migration. Though distinct, the two men's meantimes spring from historically specific forms of hope and fear—collective aspirations emerging from the Korean Wind, as well as concerns that dwelling on possible futures may erode these futures' promises.

Michael Alexander Ulfstjerne shows that the boom and bust in Ordos, China, is not necessarily correlated with hardship and uncertainty, the predominant concerns of anthropologies of waiting, and does not have easily demarcated temporalities. Though prolonged waiting did become a hallmark of the city's bust, as financially strapped residents waited for debts to be repaid, businesses to reopen, and life to return to normal, people had, even before the bust, been waiting, planning, scheming, and strategizing how they could make the most of seemingly inexhaustible urban growth. By attending to the places made through waiting, which he calls the "meanspace," Ulfstjerne traces the materialities of waiting that are reoriented but not given up in conditions of both certain boom and uncertain bust.

In the first *entretemps*, Misty L. Bastian describes how paranormal researchers in the United States convene in rumored haunted locations, set up complex technological equipment, and wait for ghosts to make their presence known. "Ghost hunting" requires patience and an ability to sustain attentiveness through the meantime. Some researchers wait for years for evidence of paranormal activity. Waiting is so embedded in the pursuit itself that most ghost hunters consider the ability to wait a sign of true commitment to the field.

Sabia McCoy-Torres, through an analytical focus on the intersecting temporalities of waiting in Puerto Viejo, a Costa Rican beach town, traces how the mostly Afro-Caribbean residents navigating the ebb and flow of the tourist economy "make time." When the tourists are gone, cash levels

are low, and time is plentiful, local residents play with the configurations of social temporality, bending them to suit their needs, even when temporal agency is in short supply. Smoking marijuana in the downtimes and composing music, intrinsic forms of Rastafari world-making, they "overstand" their past and their present, with conflicting hopes and expectations of the future.

Mark Drury discusses how Sahrawi militants mobilized for an elusive political future are effectively suspended between war and peace. Since a ceasefire was signed in 1991 between Morocco and the Polisario Front, the politico-military organization opposing Moroccan control over the former Spanish territory of Western Sahara, little has happened to move the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, a state-in-exile based in Algeria, closer to self-determination. Many Sahrawis are committed to the nationalist cause even if the end goal—Sahrawi sovereignty—seems unattainable, sustaining a meantime directed toward a highly unlikely future.

In the second *entretemps*, Janelle S. Taylor and Ann M. O'Hare discuss how dialysis prolongs life, but the time patients with kidney failure gain involves much waiting, including waiting for the machine to filter their blood. For providers, kidney failure is an "end stage" of a disease with low rates of long-term survival. It requires anticipating the worsening of patients' health. Yet, this is precisely the kind of future many patients try to avoid. The time they spend on dialysis is a wait for a healthier future, as they wait for organs to become available.

Adeline Masquelier has spent much time waiting with jobless young men in Niger. Though they often claim to be "just sitting" as they wait for stable jobs that do not materialize, a closer examination of the forms their waiting takes at the *fadas* (tea circles) they join reveals how social immobility, through time management, is deployed as an asset. Masquelier discusses the *fadas* as infrastructures of anticipation where waiting has its own rules, regulations, and rewards. Through a focus on the nocturnal side of *fada* activities, she describes how young men, by branding themselves as neighborhood sentinels, turn the act of sitting, which elders denounce as a sign of slothfulness, into a form of labor.

Antibiotic-resistant wounds may take months, even years to heal, if they ever do, defying the promise of biomedical curative technology. Through a focus on the meantime of the chronic skin wounds of disabled gunshot-injured patients, Daniella Santoro shows how living with chronic wounds is a place of strained mobility experienced in the protracted state of waiting to heal. By examining the management of these wounds through the lens of "crip time," a temporality that unsettles the hegemony of curative time, Santoro alerts us to the need for slower-paced, nonjudgmental approaches to human experience.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the impending lockdown in Denmark initially produced a sense of urgency before giving way to boredom as lockdown routines set in. In the third *entretemps*, Martin Demant Frederiksen compares these temporalities with the early days of the 2008 Russo–Georgian war, when Georgians were readying themselves, and the post-war period, when young men left jobless experienced boredom. Though not as economically disruptive as elsewhere, the Covid meantime in Denmark nevertheless shares similarities with the meantime of jobless young Georgian men waiting for things to happen, even as nothing changed.

Deborah Durham discusses how the time of waiting in Botswana is connected with—and connects—past, present, and future, and how, for youth especially, it is a time of things happening and opportunities being created. In Botswana, people spend a lot of time waiting for things to happen, from waiting for people to show up for events to waiting for debts to be secured or called in. Yet these delays, referred to locally as "African time," are not experienced as deprivation or frustrated anticipation to be endured. They are moments to be enjoyed, sought out, or expanded for the promises they offer.

George Paul Meiu, in his contribution, examines what waiting practices reveal about the production of value when "the rush," the urge to make things happen fast, shapes life. Mtwapa, a coastal town known as Kenya's "Sin City," has witnessed a rush of investments, commodification, and people. But one cannot grasp the rush, Meiu argues, without examining how people inhabit "slow time." Besides waiting *for* the rush, people devise new ways to *wait* it *out*. Since "rushed money" never lasts, they engage in diverse projects "to make the money wait," extending its durability and waiting out the urgency.

In his Afterword, Thomas Hylland Eriksen summarizes some of the key concerns of this edited collection, ranging from the concept of the entrepreneur navigating temporal gaps, to the relation between fast and slow time, to the potentialities embedded in the uncertainties of the meantime.

This volume was not rushed once the discussions ended; since then, many of us have learned more about the recently popular temporalities of "slow living" during the pandemic. We remember rush-hour commutes, the flights that took us back and forth in the course of our work, the insistent calls from children needing to be picked up *now*, stopping to pick up takeaway because we had no time to cook. We developed new ways of temporal living, less tied to clock time but often with multiplying demands of home and (at-home) work. We also found the meantime to be rich with rethinking and revising, as a consequence of which the

results of our project, as they came to fruition, were more resonant and insightful than anticipated. We can use the meantime to reorient our temporalities and extend our empathies to a larger social space. At the very least, we hope that this volume makes it abundantly clear that in the meantime, convergent and divergent temporalities are the very means of living.

Adeline Masquelier is Professor of Anthropology at Tulane University. She has conducted extensive research on gender, religion, and health in Niger. She has authored three books, including *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Indiana University Press, 2009), which received the 2010 Herskovits Award and the 2012 Aidoo-Snyder prize, both from the African Studies Association. Her latest book *Fada: Boredom and Belonging in Niger* (University of Chicago Press, 2019) was a finalist for the Best Book Prize from the African Studies Association. She has edited three books, including *Critical Terms for the Study of Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 2019). She is coeditor of *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

Deborah Durham has engaged in research in Botswana since 1989 and has published many articles and chapters based on that work, covering issues from minority life in a liberal democracy, to love and jealousy, to bodiliness and civic virtue, to youth. She has also published more generally on youth and "adulting." Having been a professor of anthropology at Sweet Briar College for many years, she currently teaches at the University of Virginia, is an editor at HAU Books, and is deputy editor of *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

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