

Participatory research in and against time

Rachel Rosen 

Social Research Institute, University College London, London, UK

Qualitative Research
2021, Vol. 0(0) 1–17
© The Author(s) 2021



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/14687941211041940

journals.sagepub.com/home/qjr



Abstract

The staccato rhythms of experiential time remain obscured in much of the literature on participatory research, where time is treated as a reassuring constant – a backdrop for human activity. This article addresses the discordances between lived temporalities and existing theorisations of participatory methodologies. It takes participatory research with lone child migrants as a particularly rich case to think with, given the proliferation of contradictory and often punitive applications of time these young people encounter in their interactions with migration and welfare regimes. The core argument developed is that unless temporality is given due theoretical and methodological attention, aims of contesting and unsettling inequities through participatory research will have limited success and can wind up reproducing exclusions and oppressions. In response to these critiques, the paper temporalizes participatory research through three reconstructions: working with and against time, de-centring shared time and collectivising the time of participatory research.

Keywords

change-oriented research, migration studies, participatory research, separated child migrants, temporality, time, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Introduction

Hawre closed his eyes and lowered his head into his hands to convey his exhaustion across the virtual distance that separated us. He had just joined an online meeting with two university-based researchers and two other ‘Young Researchers’ involved in the Children Caring on the Move (CCoM) participatory research project. We shook our heads in

Corresponding author:

Rachel Rosen, Social Research Institute, University College London, Room 301, 18 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0NR, UK.

Email: r.rosen@ucl.ac.uk

sympathy as he outlined his day. Already tired from a week spent balancing work and college, he was woken at 7.30 a.m. by a phone call from the Personal Adviser at the accommodation provided for him as an ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking child’.¹ ‘Can you come over to the other house right away?’ She had asked Hawre. ‘We really need some help with translation.’ Hawre recounted how he had spent the day helping a newly arrived young person with precarious immigration status navigate the complexities of college applications in an unfamiliar language.

As one of the university researchers present at the meeting of our participatory research team, I was struck by Hawre’s matter of fact description of events. Caring for another young person, through translation and advice, seemed to be simply ‘what one does’; attendance at the research team meeting was not questioned, even if it meant arriving late and fatigued. And yet, the injustice of the situation was glaring. A private, for-profit accommodation provider, commissioned by the local authority as part of its statutory duties, was passing translation work on to an unremunerated young person in their care. The other separated child was reliant on Hawre’s time, goodwill and ability to translate technical information from a language that he had been speaking for just over a year himself. Hawre found himself in a situation where saying ‘yes’ to a call for help felt rewarding and important. Yet, from my vantage point, saying ‘no’ may not have been an option: the request was posed by someone whom he was reliant on for housing, access to education and positive assessments for his asylum claim.

All the while, I was aware of my own impatient and unwanted thoughts intruding, disrupting imaginaries of myself as a respectful participatory researcher: Would we have to reschedule our ‘actual’ research meeting? Would all these incontestable requests mean that Hawre might become too busy or tired to be part of the research team? Would we ever be able to meet the commitments so confidently outlined in our funding application? Time was not on the side of the research team and was definitively not under the control of the young people who were integral members.

These frustrations and productions of time pervade the everyday lives of young people on the move alone. Time beyond control has also stretched, shifted, and quickened our best laid plans for participatory research (PR) on the CCoM project. Yet, the staccato rhythms of time remain obscured or erased in much of the literature on PR, where time is treated as a reassuring constant, an empty space which spirals of planning, action and reflection smoothly transverse. It is this discordance, where lived experience and research practice jar with existing theorisations of participatory methodologies, that this article speaks, asking: What is the importance of time in how we conceptualise and conduct PR? How does attention to temporality help us to reimagine participatory methodologies?

In responding to these questions, the example of PR with separated children on the move is a particularly rich case to think with. As elaborated further below, their lives revolve around a proliferation of contradictory and often punitive applications of time in migration and welfare regimes (Allsopp et al., 2014; Chase and Allsopp, 2013; Kohli and Kaukko, 2017).

Hawre, whose experience opened the article, is a ‘Young Researcher’ on CCOM, an ESRC-funded project investigating separated child migrants’ experiences of care, and caring for others, as they navigate the complexities of the immigration-welfare nexus in

England. This project, which I co-lead, provoked the original discomfort to which this article responds and offers rich experiences for the analysis and reconstructions offered.

CCoM sits against the backdrop of rising numbers of children who have been separated from primary carers during migration and conflicting state rhetoric in the UK: protecting children on the one hand and immigration control on the other. In 2019, 3580 young people applied to the UK for protection as ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’. Despite the impact of COVID-19 on mobility, 2868 applied in 2020.² Local authorities in the UK have a duty to look after and support unaccompanied children, and currently, English local authorities look after 5000 unaccompanied children with varying quality of care (Wade, 2011). Some young people have their age disputed (782 applicants in 2019).³ If they are assessed as adults, they lose rights to care, education, accommodation and legal representation as children. Many, although not all, young people apply for asylum, and wait an average of 586 days for a decision.⁴ For unaccompanied young people who are 18, when they receive an asylum decision, refusal rates are high: 39% were refused in 2019.⁵ The CCoM project involves interviews with adult stakeholders in combination with an analysis of the cultural political economy of separated children’s care. However, at the project’s core is a participatory model of research design and practice with two teams of young people with migration experience in the West Midlands and London (UK). These two teams have refined research questions, designed methods and are in the process of generating data with young migrants who have arrived in the UK alone. Our participatory approach is motivated by an ethic of ‘nothing about us, without us’, treating the co-production process as critical for providing meaningful insights from those who are the protagonists of the research and as an ethical practice of shifting control over what knowledge counts, and how it is generated and disseminated.

In what follows, I begin by situating my arguments in relation to the literature on PR, highlighting both axiological and epistemological commitments to such approaches and my simultaneous concerns about the erasure of time’s complexities in their methodological conceptualisation. To address this, I elaborate on contemporary theorisations of plural and contradictory temporalities, demonstrating the complex, and often punitive and controlling, conditions they create for people on the move, and therefore the ways in which the smooth flow of time envisioned in the literature contradicts lived experiences of migration and the practice of doing PR. This article is also driven by a reconstructive impulse. As such, I offer some tentative reimaginings of PR deriving from critical insights on temporality and the young people with whom I have had the privilege of researching with.

My core argument is that unless temporality is given due theoretical and methodological attention, aims of contesting and unsettling inequities through PR will have limited success and, moreover, can wind up reproducing exclusionary and oppressive social relations. While my focus is on PR and the case of children on the move alone, as these bring the methodological erasure of temporality into sharp relief, the implications of the argument are broadly relevant to any methodological approaches committed to the well-being of participants and social justice more broadly.

Participatory research

I situate this article within a body of scholarship that, while committed to PR, seeks to develop and extend understandings through productive critique and dialogue. PR is a loose term that has been used to refer to research which invites participants to 'take part' in creative and engaging research methods through to more radical visions in which research design and analysis is co-constructed by researchers and participant collaborators. Such distinctions are related to the different traditions from which PR has emerged. The case of the former might be seen as rooted in utilitarian Northern traditions oriented to making improvements to existing social orders through participatory *methods*, while the latter relates to more expansive Southern traditions, where PR is a *methodology* oriented to knowledge production for the emancipation of impoverished, marginalised and (formerly) colonised people (Cordeiro et al., 2016).

These approaches have much in common from a technical perspective, but it is the second I focus on here. PR of this school is perhaps best defined and distinguished by its goals, which are 'large' and laudable, albeit 'not easily achievable' (Kindon et al., 2007: 23). Ontologically and axiologically, PR is characterised by efforts to decentre the power of the 'expert' researcher and the powerful more broadly, addressing those who have traditionally been marginalised from knowledge production. This includes both children and migrants (Cahill, 2010; Tisdall, 2015). An epistemic process of 'decolonising', this involves challenging modes of knowledge production which are dominated by paternalistic and Western thought (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), valorising 'knowledge from below' (Bain and Payne, 2015). For instance, in Cahill's participatory action research with young people involved in the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective, the intergenerational research collaboration questioned existing framings of immigration in the USA which defined immigration as a problem for settlers rather than one for migrants. Their PR generated new insights, namely that 'power lies in controlling not only how you are defined, but how you define the "problem"' (Cahill, 2010: 158).

Core here is ensuring that the beneficiaries of research are participants and their communities. This is contrasted with extractive models of research which are seen to primarily advantage researchers, through promotion and status; charities and humanitarian organisations, through justification of their existence without changing the conditions of dispossession, violence and exploitation which necessitate their presence; and the state and its representatives, through enhanced means of governing the marginalised (Bain and Payne, 2015; Kindon et al., 2007; Sinha and Back, 2013; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2012). In contrast, PR is understood as an axiological stand with critical and emancipatory aims. These involve identifying alienating and unjust conditions which cause negative impacts on the lives of marginalised people's lives, including child migrants. In its guise as participatory *action* research, it is also about acting collectively on the basis of this new knowledge to transform conditions of suffering (Kemmis et al., 2015).

Since opening up knowledge production and addressing conditions of oppression are its central principles, it is important to understand how these actually manifest in PR practices. Along these lines, PR has been subject to critique, most notably for simultaneously being valorised as the 'best' form of knowledge production (Gallacher and

Gallagher, 2008) and losing its more radical edge to questions of technical application as it spreads in popularity (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). In contrast to rejections of PR as a ‘tyrannical yet bland orthodoxy’, I am persuaded by Kindon et al.s (2007: 2) response, considering ‘ways in which such critique can fortify and transform our practice’, rather than rejecting PR outright. Their work focuses on spatialising PR. Recognising that PR does not take place in power-neutral places and socio-spatial relations, they argue that such reflections ‘can enable the emergence of associational modes of interaction’ (Kesby et al., 2007: 24).

These insights about spatiality have prompted important methodological developments and helped to advance theorisations of PR. However, to my knowledge on the basis of extensive searches, there is little to no conceptualisation of time and temporality within the PR literature (although see Montreuil et al., 2020: who use Heidegger’s work to argue that past, present and future horizons are collectively fused in PR). Time remains largely untheorized or erased from view, resting on a series of taken-for-granted assumptions about both temporality and its relation to space. In what follows, I discuss three implicit assumptions about time in the PR literature, and then, in the following section, I consider their discordance with the temporalities of young migrants’ lives. This is a thematic rather than comprehensive review of all PR literature, with illustrative examples to ground my arguments. While each study is unique, these exemplars should be ‘recognisable’ to PR scholars.

The first assumption is that co-researchers will be co-located over *an extended period of time*. This is perhaps most evident in participatory rural appraisal, a form of PR where co-researchers work together in local areas across time to both assess and organise community-based development projects. But it is also evident in the mode of inquiry advanced in PR: repeated research cycles variously termed as ‘a constant spiral cycle of self reflection (planning, acting, observing and reflecting)’ (Cordeiro et al., 2016: 396), ‘action-reflection’ (Bain and Payne, 2015) and ‘cycles of interpretation... through three phases: explorative, critical-reflective and constructive’ (Ponzoni, 2016). While these cycles of action do not theoretically require physical proximity, there seems to be implicit assumptions in the literature that they will. As Ponzoni (2016: 558) puts it: ‘Often the envisaged social change is understood specifically as the improvement of the participants’ situation, that is, “local change”’. Participation over the long *durée* of a research project, whether physically proximate or not, is often treated as ‘authentic participation’ rather than ‘partial participation’ (Rix et al., 2020: 2) or ‘de-participation’ (Bain and Payne, 2015).

A second connected assumption in much of the literature is that of progressive temporal development of participants and their lives. At a more abstract level, this is evident in practices in PR which advocate reflection on a shared past (e.g. identifying and analysing a common problem) and a sense that futures can be imagined and therefore enacted. For instance, in the words of Chatterton et al. (2007: 221): ‘Beginning this journey [for transformational change in PR] means denouncing how we are living and announcing how we could live’. Likewise, Montreuil et al. (2020), in offering one of the only temporal discussions about PR, emphasise a process of creating a shared history and building ties that last beyond the research proper. Assumptions about the uniformity of temporal developments are also apparent in the rapidly expanding literature on PR with children which often focus on whether children are developmentally competent enough

to engage in PR (critiqued in [Tisdall, 2015](#)) and value PR for its promotion of children's individual learning and development (critiqued in [Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008](#)). This literature tends to take a distinction between 'children' and 'adults', bridged by a progressive development march, for granted rather than socially constituted category boundaries. Ideas about who children are (e.g. learners) and the temporalities of childhood (e.g. normative developmentalism) are based on idealised Western childhoods, quite distinct from those of separated children as I discuss below.

A final assumption about time is more implicit, but nonetheless central to most PR approaches. This is the valorisation of slowness: a deliberate, prolonged process of reflection. While concerns about the extended timeline of academic publishing are considered problematic, in that they can exclude ([Bain and Payne, 2015](#); [Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2017](#)) or be antithetical to addressing the pressing and immediate challenges facing marginalised communities, the emphasis in most of the literature is on taking time to analyse carefully together before acting. To take one example, the [International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research \(2020: 10\)](#) frames PR as a 'slow burn': 'Making time to return to issues in the light of new knowledge, to create multiple loops in a research process, shapes a recursive process where new strands of knowledge and learning can be unearthed and critiqued'. An exception here is the growing use of 'rapid' PR methods, which operate with an opposing temporal logic. The broader point then is that PR has produced a thicket of valorised, yet contradictory, temporalities, which – as I go on to discuss – can make unfulfillable demands on separated children and other marginalised co-researchers.

In outlining three core, yet largely implicit, assumptions about time in the existent literature, my point is not to dismiss this important work nor to reject *in toto* their valuable contributions. Instead, in an effort to temporalise PR, in the following section, I critically engage with these unexamined assumptions against the lived experiences of young people on the move.

Temporal disconnections: migration time and participatory research time

"When you come into the country and you are under 18, they say to you, 'You are safe.' They give you everything. But when you turn 18, and you're still asylum seeker ... [they] say to you, 'If you get refused you have to go out and you have to go homeless,' or they kick you out from the college, GP and house anyway..." Hawre commented passionately during another team meeting. "If you said that to me when I come, I was leave your country straightaway. I'm going to live somewhere else."

Hawre's words echo those of other separated child migrants for whom support lies at the precipice of a time-limited legal status. As 'unaccompanied asylum-seeking children', Hawre and others are entitled to education, accommodation, health care and social services support under a raft of provisions informed by the UK's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such protections, however, are not guaranteed beyond 18 years, to the extent that an adult interlocutor on CCoM commented that for many their '18th birthday was the worst day of their life', a sentiment that resonates with Hawre's frustrations.

Hawre's comments contrast the experiences of unaccompanied young people over and under 18 years for understandable polemic purposes. However, children under 18 years also face limited control as to where they are placed for care, uneven provision across local authorities and providers (Wade, 2011), and conflicts between stated policy aims and young people's own desires and experiences (Chase and Allsopp, 2017). Further, their age is often subject to contestation through an assessment process experienced as hostile and punitive for those who have undergone it (Crawley, 2011; Hopkins and Hill, 2010) with the outcomes significantly affecting the types of support available. For others, time becomes stuck or suspended, a period of wait-hood in anticipation of decisions on asylum claims and requests for unsafe or inappropriate accommodation to be addressed.

Time, as migration scholars have been increasingly identifying, can be understood as a 'border technology' (Newberry and Rosen, 2020) bound up with the exercise of power (Griffiths, 2014) by appropriating migrants' time (Andersson, 2014) and inflicting 'slow violence' (Mayblin, 2020). As Allsopp et al. (2014, p. 165) note in relation to separated children in the UK: 'Time is perceived as a tactic of state control, imposed through chronological age markers, time-limited legal statuses and bureaucratic process rhythms in which time is inevitably never on their side'. Young people may attempt to use 'tactics of time' (Allsopp et al., 2014) to contest state control or simply need to adjust to the changing rhythms to which they are subjected.

Importantly for this article, time also shapes the lives of young migrants in ways that fundamentally clash with the opaque temporal assumptions of much PR literature. Physical co-presence over an extended period, a central assumption in conceptualisations of PR, rarely forms part of the imaginaries of separated children who are often unsure where they will be next month, let alone next year, aware that such decisions lie largely out of their hands. 'A year is a long time to be here', responded a few young people to explain why they would not become Young Researchers. Their reflective reluctance echoes the impossibilities of co-location over time. Lone child migrants are moved across the country by the Home Office through the National Transfer Scheme, shifted out of foster care and into semi-independent accommodation including to other local authorities, deported or made homeless – a form of non-location that haunts Hawre's telling. Others may 'go missing' from care, as part of smuggling or drug-trafficking rings, to become invisible to the state as threats of deportation loom, or to reconnect with other young people from whom they were separated by the state system of 'care' (Humphris and Sigona, 2019; Rosen et al., 2021).

In other words, co-location can be sporadic, short-term and unpredictable, largely out of control of young migrants. Indeed, recognition that sedentary methods of data collection are fundamentally inadequate for the study of migration has led to the development of a plethora of 'mobile methods' and a complicating of scalar assumptions, often informed by critiques of methodological nationalism (Amelina and Faist, 2012). Taking this a step further, what I seek to develop here is an awareness of the impossibilities of the extended, shared space-time that inhabits most articulations of PR.

Hawre's words do not just rub up awkwardly against assumptions of co-location, but also the sense of linear development across a homogenous space-time. Contra to assumptions about the inevitable march of progression from childhood to adulthood,

separated child migrants may be age contested, shifted from the legal status of childhood to adulthood, and back and forth, often from one day to the next. These processes confirm that childhood/adulthood are socio-legal categories, rather than immutable biological facts. Further, for young asylum-seekers, these processes represent the non-linear progression of time. For young migrants, time zig-zags, moves sideways or even ‘suspends’ (Baraitser, 2017). Steps towards futures they may dream of (as they succeed in studies, work, relationships, gaining status and the right to remain) meet barriers, redirections or undertows (as their asylum claims are rejected or as their care placements breakdown).

“I’ve been waiting for three and a half years now for a response [to my asylum claim],” explains Cevdet, a Young Researcher. “It’s kind of really affected my life in some ways. It doesn’t make me feel good at all, but I don’t feel like there is much I can do, so... But it affects my life in some ways, because you know when you don’t have a response, you don’t know where to focus on, like, if you have a status or something, you... I know that I’ll go into education, like, further with it, but sometimes I don’t feel like I want to go to school at all.”

Suspended time and repetition, the feeling of constantly having to start anew, is ever present for lone child migrants. Without diminishing the sorts of dreams and tactics that may emerge, or the care and ‘stilling’ of ‘the capitalist everyday’ that occur in rhythms of repeating and enduring (Baraitser, 2017: 2), such diverted futures surely demand a reconceptualization of PR cycles of planning, action and reflection as smooth movements through linear time. Developmental directions are multiple and unpredictable, and temporalities are plural and often conflictual for individuals and collectivities.

Perhaps one of the most pressing and precarious temporalities in the UK’s border regime is that of enforced *waithood*, a time to endure while asylum claims are evaluated, papers are processed, and life, as Cevdet, a Young Researcher, puts it, is out of ‘focus’ and filled with anxiety. ‘Let me tell you my story’, another Young Researcher on CCoM comments one day. ‘You know like we came here like ten person, right? The Home Office brought us here from France. Right? ... All of us in the status... which is three and 4 months. I got my status after 2 years, not 3 months. I was worried, I was worried like you, you know? I was like, “Why? Why? Why?”’

Slowness in research, then, may feel like a form of anxious *waithood* or a distressing sense of being ‘stuck in time’. At the same time, young migrants cannot necessarily choose to slow down: when an asylum application is denied, time rockets forward (Kohli 2014). Rather than valorising particular temporalities, as much PR literature does in relation to slowness, I am suggesting that temporal rhythms are imbued with significance and meaning in situated and subjective ways. Neither speed nor deliberately moderated rhythms are essentially good nor bad.

In short, the presumed and idealised subject of PR (developing individually and within a community, emplaced in time, living with predictable temporalities and embracing slowness) clashes with separated children’s lived temporalities. These contradictions can make it difficult to take part in PR, and may, however, unintentionally, marginalise young people on the move – despite and against the laudable goals of PR.

Reconstructions in time

If young migrants' experiences jar so evidently with the literature's temporal assumptions, how might we reconceptualise PR with time in mind? To begin this process, I turn to contemporary theorising of social time, before attempting three 'reconstructions' of PR.

In much social theory and empirical research, time has been treated as 'deceptively straightforward' or 'little more than a quantitative measurement of duration and pace' (Rosen, 2017). Bear (2014: 3), therefore, advocates a 'rigorous rethinking' so as to make explicit the 'epistemology of time' which guides social science scholarship.

Various efforts to address the problem of time are indicative, not only for their specific insights but because of the conflicts that are apparent when examined together. Time can be understood as a tactic of state control and simultaneously a weapon of the weak. Against conceptions of the 'end of time' or 'cancellation of the future', reminiscent of waithood and sticky time discussed above, Adkins (2017) conceptualises the future as speculative, riven with infinite possibilities, albeit ones funded by debt, including those undertaken to finance migration. David Harvey's proclamation of globalisation's 'compression of time-space' contrasts with Katz's (2004) argument that for some it is more apt to talk about 'time-space expansion'. This is apropos of many children on the move where border regimes force extended and circuitous migration routes.

Taken together, these debates evidence the multi-dimensionality and plurality of social time: in interpretation, experience and technique. Diverse instantiations of time have considerable import for children and young people subject to immigration control, where time can be understood as a political tool, used to regulate, control, surveil and differentiate. Time can be phenomenologically experienced and represented differently depending on our subjective and contextual experience, as well as social positions. Waiting for an asylum determination may feel longer or shorter, depending on how the time is 'filled' (Allsopp et al., 2014).

Invoking multiplicity here is also to point to the 'thickening of time' which takes a great deal of labour to navigate and mediate as diverse rhythms clash (Bear, 2014). Yet, such labour is unequally distributed (Sharma, 2014) and, as Newberry and Rosen, 2020; Rosen and Newberry, 2018 argue, temporal conflicts are often mediated by inscribing divergent rhythms of appropriation on to different groups, exacerbating old hierarchies and producing new ones. Indeed, social time 'is a central site for social conflict and a symptom of the inequalities within capitalism' (Bear, 2014: 20).

Yet, time remains an unremarked backdrop or container for human activity in much of the PR literature. Insights about social time as plural, multi-dimensional, and bound up with inequalities have much to offer efforts to temporalise PR. Here, I mobilise these insights to offer three 'reconstructions'.

Reconstruction 1: Working with time. As the preceding discussion has highlighted, children on the move experience a plurality of temporalities, which are deeply uncertain, contradictory, disjointed and often out of the control of young people themselves. As a result, rhythm and pace do not remain consistent throughout a piece of research. There may be peaks and troughs, silences and bursts of energy dictated by different aspects of their lives.

Yet, funding applications for research expect predictable and steady timelines, which often extend for long periods given the gap between application and final publications. Projects which deviate from pre-set plans or which work with the ebbs and flows of participants' lives rather than funders' demands are often viewed suspiciously or as though they are badly managed. Further, most researchers have been schooled in ideas of research rigour which rate systematized plans highly. Even though PR grounds itself in ideas of co-production and participant involvement, its cyclical formulation anticipates a punctuated and predictable temporality of co-location over time.

The cumulative effects are such that it is often co-researchers who wind up mediating conflicting temporalities. For many of the Young Researchers on CCoM, like Hawre, this has involved attempting to stay on top of research activities at the same time as frantically completing paperwork for a new asylum claim; studying for exams and qualifications in hopes of making a future in the UK, including one that is recognised as qualifying them for settlement; applying for housing or benefits to avoid destitution; and working to save money for the means of life, transnational families, or to pay off migration debts. Others may bear the 'failure' of PR's unreflective temporalities themselves, feeling that they are not able to commit to a project or that once they have stepped out, because of the psychic burden of waithood or because they are dispersed to a new location for instance, they may not be able to step back in again.

The point here is that without reflecting about time and its assumptions in PR, for instance, by simply sticking to a predictable cyclical model, university-based researchers can end up reproducing a punitive, exclusionary or controlling set of temporalities and foisting them on co-researchers in ways which mirror their experiences of the state's use of time. This is clearly quite the opposite of PR's emancipatory and axiological inclinations. Social time cannot be 'thinned', with contradictions flattened or erased. Researchers can, however, be answerable for the mediation of contradictory temporalities. At very least, we can endeavour to share this labour rather than obscure it, an erasure which effectively inflicts the responsibility, and therefore potential failing, on to co-researchers. Doing so requires an active and engaged approach to temporality: *working with time*.

Sharing the labour of mediating contradictory temporalities could involve making time a central point of reflection and dialogue with co-researchers: How does time shape the conditions of possibility for co-production? How is PR implicated in the use of time as a technology of control? How do we ensure the rigour of a piece of research where predictable temporalities and pre-set timelines are impossible and even exclusionary? How might PR be used to unsettle assumptions about time and to promote more inclusive forms of engagement? Such dialogue is a way to collectivise understandings of how time inflects both daily lives and research practice, and can enable sharing of the labour of mediating, or challenging, particular temporalities.

In CCoM, such discussions have led us to both speed up and slow down our initial research design. Our original plan followed a typical, 3-year funded-research cycle, where year one is design and recruitment, year two is data generation, and year three is analysis and dissemination. Given the impossibilities articulated by young people of committing to a 3-year project, we condensed the research into 1-year cycles where we would work more

quickly, but where the possibility of staying on for longer continued to exist. At the same time, we slowed down our research time together. Rather than operating with the abstract logic of clock-in-clock-out capitalist time, we approach our time together with an emphasis on ‘being with’ each other. Meetings are an intensive time of sharing food, conversation and our lives with each other. This is an effort to displace, or at least share, the mediation of contradictory social time, a discomfort palpable in my own anxieties in the opening prelude of the article.

Representing the challenges and adjustments taken because of temporal mediations, rather than offering only sanitised versions of the research process, can promote dialogue about temporalities within the scholarly community. Reflecting publicly on the challenges of negotiating time out-of-sync and asynchronous rhythms of research and migration time can be part of a process of theorising time in PR, including developing convincing rationales for flexible, responsive, and temporally-aware research designs.

Working *with* time can also involve working *against it* as a modality of control and surveillance of marginalised co-researchers, making it a foci of change-oriented knowledge production. Here, there is much we can learn from the Young Researchers in CCoM. For instance, they counter punitive time (in the form of resources denied) by sharing bus tickets provided by the project with those who have ‘aged out’ of qualifying for transportation support through other sources. They provide encouragement to each other and project participants to help with waithood including sharing stories which de-individualises the challenges and providing concrete advice about ‘navigating the system’. Taking these lessons into research practice, we have not imposed an arbitrary calendrics on childhood, which we felt would simply amplify the suspicion and hostility surrounding age-contestations. We have rejected the imposition of an explicit age-boundary around childhood for both co-researchers and participants, despite the focus of the research being on ‘children’, leaving this instead as an open question.

Reconstruction 2: De-centring shared time-space. As I have noted above, much of the PR literature operates on the assumption that co-researchers are in the same space for an extended period. Yet physical co-presence is impossible to promise or achieve in the context of the UK’s “hostile” migration environment where deportation and dispersion loom large, both rhetorically and in concrete manifestation (Chase et al., 2019; De Genova, 2010; Rosen et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has made the difficulties of co-presence clear more widely.

The normative centring of physical co-presence also fails to consider the increasing use of digital technologies and connectivities they enable. Importantly, in the context of young migrants’ lives, there is abundant evidence of the prevalence of transnational relationships with kin or others, such as the ‘ummah’, a transnational embodiment of Muslim communities (O’Toole and Gale, 2013). In other words, there are both the tools to enable, and examples of, collective projects across space but in shared time. There is no doubt that physical co-presence is limited by available resources and controlled through exclusionary state practices, nor is there any doubt that such inequalities should be challenged. Certainly, physical, virtual and imaginary forms of co-presence are also not

experienced in the same way.⁶ The point is that *co-presence* as an ontological state does not necessarily require *physical* co-presence (Baldassar and Merla, 2014).

As a result of these insights, even before the COVID pandemic, we began experimenting with digital technologies as ways of developing our research team in shared time across space. This was a hybrid engagement, spanning virtual and in-person encounters, which together amplified our feelings of co-presence. For instance, during a long gap between in-person meetings we piloted a photovoice method using WhatsApp. Each person in our research team, including Young Researchers and university-based researchers, shared a 'day in their life' with other members of the team. At our first meeting following the online engagements, the Young Researchers arrived unusually early exclaiming: 'We couldn't wait to see everybody!' and 'I loved seeing your pictures and all the places you go. I felt like I was with you!'

In building on the growing body of literature on transnational relationships, and in light of the explosion in online research, what I am suggesting is that the insights of this scholarship have not sufficiently been brought to bear on PR. This literature challenges assumptions about the necessity of shared space-time and offers generative approaches to 'building shared projects apart'. Without such attention, university-based researchers risk excluding co-researchers who are unable to be physically present, thereby undermining PR aims of building knowledge from below and excluding those it purports to include.

Reconstruction 3: Reimagining individualised time. One of the frequent debates in the PR literature relates to the question of just how much participation, and of what tenor and type, qualifies research as participatory. We see this in Hart (1992) 'ladder of participation' to critiques of the 'loose' usage of the moniker 'participatory research' when those effected have not been involved in all stages of the research (Tisdall, 2015). Notably here, there is considerable worry over 'attrition' of co-researchers (the partial or de-participation discussed above).

Certainly, these debates raise important questions *for researchers* given issues of power, hierarchy and tokenism surrounding processes of knowledge production across often unequal social positions. They prompt reflection on how research might cause attrition through practices which alienate or silence. However, they do something else simultaneously when considered from the perspective of co-researchers. They imply that to 'count' as a co-researcher in PR, an individual must be present and active throughout the course of a piece of research. These unspoken assumptions diminish contributions which are sustained for only short bursts, as well as those with sporadic, staccato, or interrupted rhythms. They imply that the 'proper' co-researcher is a steady, consistent subject across time.

Time itself is individualised in these accounts. An emphasis on how long a participant stays with the project, or how many hours they commit, produces a calculus where participation is reduced to a measurement of the percentage of time spent in relation to the overall life of a project, where nothing but 100% ever quite measures up. Yet, such expectations cannot be farther from what is possible for young people on the move given

the contradictory and controlling temporalities they endure. As a result, co-researchers may inadvertently be viewed as never quite measuring up.

I want, then, to suggest a move away from individualised time to conceptualising participation as a form of collective or distributed time. This is not to diminish individuals' contributions or the benefits they may take from participation. Nor is it intended to stop researchers from asking ourselves if we are excluding participants. It is, however, to propose an idea of the time of PR as one that is not possible without individuals but is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Just as a river is dependent for its existence on individual raindrops or glacier melts, these may enter at different points in the river's flow, changing the character of the river for everything downstream, regardless of whether they evaporate or get channelled off. But core to this metaphor is that in the river they are no longer individual waterdrops. The river is of a fundamentally different order than its sources.

The movement of PR in collective time can be viewed in a similar manner. Co-researchers may come and go, and return again, because of bureaucratic capture or expulsion through techniques of time – urgent issues in their own right. For my purposes here, the point is individuals leave “bits” of themselves (ideas, subjectivities, relationships and practices) even if they are not directly involved down-river and these “bits” combine to become something shared, larger than an individual person. For instance, pilot studies and collaboration with young migrants and their organisations led to the initial CCoM research design. Young migrants in Calais who spoke about ‘trying, trying, trying’ to get to the UK, and organisations’ attempts to stop them from making dangerous crossings into inhospitable environments, led us thinking about the way that care relationships from a distance are ever present in dreams and decision-making. We were told over and over that young people were driven to get to England because of things they had been told by family members before or during their migration journeys. This contribution meant that it became important in CCoM to investigate care relationships in both proximal and distal scales. Even though many of these individuals are not directly involved in the research today, their input has made the research what it is. Similarly, one of the Young Researchers involved in the first year of the project played a crucial role in the research. His ideas and input were picked up and taken forward through the project, even though his sustained participation was ultimately curtailed by the legal and institutional structures he was subjected to.

In short, conceptualising time as collective and distributed ensures that the antecedents and tributaries which make PR are not erased from its telling or practice.

Conclusion

My core argument in this article has been that unless temporality is given due theoretical and methodological attention, aims of decolonising knowledge production and contesting inequities through PR will have limited success or ambiguous impact. I have suggested that although theorisations of time are limited within PR literature, it is filled with implicit temporal assumptions that sit in tension with the proliferating, multi-dimensional and often punitive experiences of time in migration regimes. Drawing on reflections from PR

involving young people with migration experiences, I have offered three ‘reconstructions’ – ways of theorising time in PR and temporalizing PR.

I have focused here on PR using the example of co-research with young migrants, but these points are relevant more broadly. Temporal complexities and contradictions mean that research is anything but a straight-forward journey in time. Research necessarily involves negotiating contradictory and out-of-sync temporalities and their attendant inequities. Temporalizing research practice will not resolve such injustices, but I have argued that to erase time from view – theoretically, methodologically and ethically – can further entrench them. In so doing, I have made a case for the urgency of working with and against time in research practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Children Caring on the Move (CCoM) research project, without whom this article would not have been possible. Special thanks go to Elaine Chase, Veena Meetoo, Lucy Leon, Sarah Crafter, and all the Young Researchers for their feedback on this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article is part of the CCoM project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/S001980/1).

ORCID iD

Rachel Rosen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9916-5910>

Notes

1. People under 18-year-old, who migrate without parents/primary care givers, are referred to in UK policy contexts as ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’. In this article, I use the broader terms ‘lone’ or ‘separated’ child migrants to highlight that many children maintain transnational relationships or reunite with primary carers at various points in the migration process, are often accompanied by other adults and children, and will not necessarily apply for refugee status.
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#age-disputes>.
3. <https://refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Asylum-Statistics-Annual-Trends-Feb-2020.pdf>.
4. 2019 case R (MK) v Secretary of State for the Home Department ((2019) EWHC 3573 (Admin)).
5. <https://refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Asylum-Statistics-Annual-Trends-Feb-2020.pdf>.

6. For a discussion of different experiences of co-presence in CCoM, see <https://covidrealities.org/researching-poverty/participatory-new-normal/>.

References

- Adkins L (2017) Speculative futures in the time of debt. *The Sociological Review* 65(3): 448–462.
- Allsopp J, Chase E and Mitchell M (2014) The tactics of time and status: young people's experiences of building futures while subject to immigration control in Britain. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28(2): 163–182.
- Amelina A and Faist T (2012) De-naturalizing the national in research methodologies: key concepts of transnational studies in migration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(10): 1707–1724.
- Andersson R (2014) Time and the migrant other: European border controls and the temporal economics of illegality. *American Anthropologist* 116(4): 795–809.
- Bain AL and Payne WJ (2015) Queer de-participation: reframing the co-production of scholarly knowledge. *Qualitative Research* 16(3): 330–340.
- Baldassar L and Merla L (2014) Locating transnational care circulation in migration and family studies In: Baldassar L and Merla L (eds) *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*. New York: Routledge, 25–58.
- Baraitser L (2017) *Enduring Time*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bear L (2014) Introduction: doubt, conflict, mediation: the anthropology of modern time. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20(S1): 3–30.
- Cahill C (2010) 'Why do they hate us?' Reframing immigration through participatory action research. *Area* 42(2): 152–161.
- Chase E and Allsopp J (2013) 'Future citizens of the world?': *The Contested Futures of Independent Young Migrants in Europe*. Reportno. Report Number[, Date. Place Published|; Institution|.
- Chase E and Allsopp J (2017) Best interests, durable solutions and belonging: future prospects for unaccompanied migrant minors coming of age in Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* online first.
- Chase E, Rezaie H and Zada G (2019) Medicalising policy problems: the mental health needs of unaccompanied migrant young people. *The Lancet* 394(10206): 1305–1307.
- Chatterton P, Fuller D and Routledge P (2007) Relating action to activism: theoretical and methodological reflections *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods Connecting people, participation and place*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.216–222.
- Cooke B and Kothari U (2001) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed.
- Cordeiro L, Soares CB and Rittenmeyer L (2016) Unscrambling method and methodology in action research traditions: theoretical conceptualization of praxis and emancipation. *Qualitative Research* 17(4): 395–407.
- Crawley H (2011) 'Asexual, apolitical beings': The interpretation of children's identities and experiences in the UK asylum system. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37(8): 1171–1184.
- De Genova N (2010) The deportation regime: Sovereignty, space and the freedom of movement. In: De Genova N and Puetz N (eds) *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space and the Freedom of Movement*. London: Duke University Press.

- Dickson E and Rosen R (2020) Punishing those who do the wrong thing”: Enforcing destitution and debt through the UK’s family migration rules. *Critical Social Policy*, online first. doi: [10.1177/0261018320980634](https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018320980634).
- Gallacher LA and Gallagher M (2008) Methodological immaturity in childhood research?: Thinking through ‘participatory methods’. *Childhood* 15(4): 499–516.
- Griffiths MBE (2014) Out of time: the temporal uncertainties of refused asylum seekers and immigration detainees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40(12): 1991–2009.
- Hart R (1992) *Children’s Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF United Nations Childrens Fund.
- Hopkins P and Hill M (2010) Contested bodies of asylum-seeking children. In: Hörschelmann K and Colls R (eds) *Contested Bodies of Childhood and Youth*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 136–147.
- Humphris R and Sigona N (2019) The Bureaucratic Capture of Child Migrants: Effects of In/visibility on Children On the Move. *Antipode* 51(5): 1495–1514.
- International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research (2020) *Position Paper 3: Impact in Participatory Health Research*. Reportno. Report Number[, Date. Place Published|: Institution|.
- Katz C (2004) *Growing up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children’s Everyday Lives*. Minneapolis, Minn, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kemmis S, McTaggart R and Nixon R (2015) Critical theory and critical participatory action research. In: Bradbury-Huang H (ed) *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*. SAGE Publications.
- Kesby M, Kindon S and Pain R (2007) *Participation as a Form of power. Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.19–25.
- Kindon S, Pain R and Kesby M (2007) *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kohli RKS (2014) Protecting Asylum Seeking Children on the Move. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 30(1): 83–104.
- Kohli RKS and Kaukko M (2017) The Management of Time and Waiting by Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Girls in Finland. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. doi: [10.1093/jrs/fex040](https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex040).
- Mayblin L (2020) *Impoverishment and Asylum: Social Policy as Slow Violence* London: Routledge.
- Montreuil M, Fréchette J and Sofronas M (2020) Bringing people back to the future: the role of hermeneutic temporality in participatory research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19: 160940692094589.
- Newberry J and Rosen R (2020) Women and children together and apart: Finding the time for social reproduction theory. *Focaal* 86: 112–120.
- O’Toole T and Gale R (2013) *Political Engagement Amongst Ethnic Minority Young People*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Plgrave Macmillan.
- Ponzoni E (2016) Windows of understanding: broadening access to knowledge production through participatory action research. *Qualitative Research* 16(5): 557–574.
- Rix J, Carrizosa HG, Sheehy K, et al. (2020) Taking risks to enable participatory data analysis and dissemination: a research note. *Qualitative Research*. DOI: [10.1177/1468794120965356](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120965356).

- Rosen R (2017) Time, temporality and woman-child relations. *Children's Geographies* 15(3): 374–380.
- Rosen R, Crafter S and Meetoo V (2021) An absent presence: separated child migrants' caring practices and the fortified neoliberal state. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(7): 1649–1666. doi: [10.1080/1369183x.2019.1608167](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2019.1608167).
- Rosen R and Newberry J (2018) Love, labour and temporality: Reconceptualising social reproduction with women and children in the frame. In: Rosen R and Twamley K (eds). *Feminism and the politics of childhood: Friends or foes?* London: UCL Press, 117–133.
- Sharma S (2014) *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sinha S and Back L (2013) Making methods sociable: dialogue, ethics and authorship in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research* 14(4): 473–487.
- Sukarieh M and Tannock S (2012) On the problem of over-researched communities: the case of the Shatila Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. *Sociology* 47(3): 494–508.
- Tisdall EKM (2015) Participation, rights and 'participatory' methods. In: Farrell A, Kagan SL and Tisdall EKM (eds) *Sage Handbook of Early Childhood research*. London: Sage.
- Tuhiwai Smith L (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books.
- Wade J (2011) Preparation and transition planning for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee young people: a review of evidence in England. *Children and Youth Services Review* 33(12): 2424–2430.
- Wilkinson C and Wilkinson S (2017) Doing it write: representation and responsibility in writing up participatory research involving young people. *Social Inclusion* 5(3): 219–227.

Author biography

Rachel Rosen is an Associate Professor in the UCL Social Research Institute. Her scholarship focuses on unequal childhoods, migration and social reproduction. She is co-leading an Economic and Social Research Council (UK) funded-research project: Children Caring on the Move, which involves participatory methodologies exploring separated child migrants' experiences of care. She is also the principal investigator on Social reproduction in the shadows: Migrant mothers and children with NRPf and a co-investigator on SOLIDARITIES: negotiating migrant deservingness. Rachel is co-author of *Negotiating Adult–Child Relationships in Early Childhood Research* (2014, Routledge), and co-editor of *Reimagining Childhood Studies* (2019, Bloomsbury Academic) and *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* (2018, UCL Press).