The Anthropology of Temporal Resistance: Globalization, Urbanization, and Linear-Progressive Time

Idil Yaktubay

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University of Toronto

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Abstract *Emerging out of the intersection of globalization and urbanization, linear-progressive time has been theorized by social scientists in the last couple of decades as the dominant organizing temporality of urban life across the world. With this understanding, anthropologists and other social scientists have closely examined people's everyday experiences with linear-progressive time in a variety of urban locations in the Global North and in the Global South. This paper reviews and identifies three major trends within this body of work: first, the existence of discrepancies between dominant linear-progressive temporalities and people's on-the-ground temporalities in urban contexts (temporal discrepancy), second, the role of linear-progressive time as a mechanism of marginalization and thus a source of emotional and physical suffering for disadvantaged urban populations (temporal suffering), and third, the benefits of deviating from linear-progressive time in terms of environmental and individual consequences (temporal deviation). Yet, largely absent from this body of work is careful anthropological attention to forms of deliberate resistance to linear-progressive time in urban contexts. With this in mind, the paper proposes that the study of such forms of resistance with close attention to how and why people living in urban locations may resist linear-progressive time must be of priority for future anthropological research on urbanization and globalization. To do so, it further draws on the existing but strikingly minimal anthropological research done on this topic to emphasize its theoretically generative potential.*

Keywords *deliberate temporal resistance, linear-progressive time, temporal (discrepancy, suffering, deviation)*

Introduction

Emerging out of the intersection of globalization and urbanization, *linear-progressive time* has been theorized by social scientists in the last couple of decades as the dominant

organizing temporality of urban life across the world. With this understanding, anthropologists and other social scientists have closely examined people's everyday experiences with *linear-progressive time* in a variety of urban locations in the Global North and in the Global South. This paper reviews and identifies three major trends within this body of work: first, the existence of discrepancies between dominant linear-progressive temporalities and people's on-the-ground temporalities in urban contexts (temporal discrepancy), second, the role of linear-progressive time as a mechanism of marginalization and thus a source of emotional and physical suffering for disadvantaged urban populations (temporal suffering), and third, the benefits of deviating from linear-progressive time in terms of environmental and individual consequences (temporal deviation). Yet, largely absent from this body of work is careful anthropological attention to forms of *deliberate* resistance to linear-progressive time in urban contexts. With this in mind, the paper proposes that the study of such forms of resistance with close attention to *how* and *why* people living in urban locations may resist linear-progressive time must be of priority for future anthropological research on urbanization and globalization. To do so, it further draws on the existing but strikingly minimal anthropological research done on this topic to emphasize its theoretically generative potential.

This scholarship review is divided into three sections. First, drawing on some of the articles that will be reviewed, I explain briefly how linear-progressive time has emerged out of the intersection of globalization and urbanization. Second, I unpack the three major trends that I have termed temporal discrepancy, temporal suffering, and temporal deviation, all of which appear in existing scholarship on the topic of linear-progressive time – in anthropology and beyond. Third, having argued that there is a lack of anthropological research on forms of deliberate resistance to linear-progressive time in urban contexts, I draw on existing -though

minimal- research on this topic to show that future scholarly attention given to it can contribute to anthropology's understanding and use of broader concepts such as subjectivity and emotions and thus expand the discipline's theoretical toolkit.

Globalization, Urbanization, and Linear-Progressive Time

With globalization, the enactment of policies in the Global South has largely been in the hands of not the nation-states themselves but powerful actors in the Global North. Moreover, in our quickly urbanizing world, some of these policies have been largely concerned with urban planning and development interventions in the Global South (Koster 2020). What many of these interventions have in common is a "linear, progress-oriented temporality of planning" (Harms 2013, 349), symbolized and arguably put forward initially by the mechanical clock, which perpetually moves units of time in a forward direction (Bradbury and Collette 2009, 353). Further, with the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs), linear-progressive time has not only come to organize global temporality as forward-moving, but also significantly increased the speed of this movement (Nadeem 2009, 20). In return, this sped-up linear-progressive temporality of ICTs has come to significantly influence specific aspects such as mobility, spatiality, sociality, and activity of urban spaces (Yousefi and Dadashpoor 2020). Mirroring these urban processes, contemporary cities have been defined as "manifestations of networks and information flows" (48) and thus spaces occupied by "information societies" (48). With the information society approach, scholars have revealed that ICTs, by removing spatial and temporal constraints from urban spaces, enhance the dynamic interactions between various geographical locations within and between urban centers (58). Most importantly, the temporality created by ICTs and this constraint-free system of interaction is a symptom of technological "timelessness" (53), which is an alternative way to describe the high speeds at which linear-

progressive time has come to flow in global and urban contexts. Hence, in the remainder of this essay, the term 'linear-progressive time/temporality' refers to 1) the linearized flow of time, 2) the progressively forward-moving tendency of this flow, and, in some cases, 3) the high speed or the 'timelessness' of this flow.

A Review of Existing Scholarship on Linear-Progressive Time

I. Temporal Discrepancy

Scholars have shown that the introduction of a timeless linear-progressive temporality by electronic globalization has failed to align with people's lived temporalities. Hassan (2003) argues that linear clock time, as an invention of the Industrial Revolution, has marked the beginning of a new "knowledge epoch" (225), characterized by a distinctive mode of knowledge production. Further, he shows that the intersection of neoliberal globalization and the introduction of ICTs has resulted in a new temporality, one that he refers to as "network time" (225), that emerges out of this knowledge epoch (225). He explains that some scholars consider network time, as a result of electronic globalization (i.e., globalization due to and alongside the spread of ICTs), to "no longer [have] anything to do with our concrete presence in the world" (232) as it destroys present time by "isolating it from its here and now" (232). In other words, in network time, not only does each *individual* event happen linearly and progressively, but *all* events happen simultaneously and timelessly (232). However, as people's actual existence in the socio-cultural world constitutes a patch of "too varied, too disconnected, and too interpenetrative" (233) temporalities, the perfectly linearized and fast-flowing organization of network time remains inadequately aligned with people's messy, and sometimes unprogressive, temporal lives. Moreover, although Hassan's detailed review of theoretical discussions on linear-

progressive network time provides a great explanation of what I mean by *temporal discrepancy,* existing ethnographical/anthropological work take this discussion a step further.

Koster (2020) studies the discrepancies between the temporality of urban planning projects in Brazil and the temporalities of people displaced by these projects through ethnography. Specifically, he argues that, unlike the inherently "linear, progress-oriented" (188) temporality of urban development, or "project time" (185), resident temporality, or "people's time" (185), involves "waiting and uncertainty" (188), which is a source of anxiety for affected residents. Importantly, Koster emphasizes the value of ethnography in complementing critical urban studies because of its ability to put in the foreground the lives of residents affected by urban temporal discrepancies (185). Because of this, ethnography has the potential to guide urban planning interventions in ways that removes or mitigates the risk of, through a clashing of different temporalities, marginalizing certain groups in the process of development (185). Further, although Koster refers to city residents who have been marginalized by urban planning interventions as "agentive" (185) despite the constraints imposed on them by these interventions, he largely leaves out discussions of how exactly these residents remain temporally agentive. Do displaced residents have ways of deliberately resisting the linear-progressive time imposed on them to mitigate the anxiety that arises from the discrepancies between project time and people's time? Is this what makes them "agentive" (185) in the midst of temporal marginalization? This is an unanswered question among many that emphasizes the need for anthropological inquiries into forms of deliberate temporal resistance.

An autoethnography by Layne (1996) highlights the discrepancies between linear-progressive time and the experiences of patients in a hospital setting in the Global North. She argues that the process of "knowledge-making" (624) about her newborn, who was being treated

in a neonatal intensive care unit at the time, follows a non-linear temporality usually described metaphorically by medical staff as a "roller coaster" (624) despite the staff's underlying belief that the baby would progressively get better. Layne takes a dominantly interpretive medical anthropological approach in studying people's experiences of linear-progressive time, which, in her own case, involves lots of uncertainty and confusion due to temporal discrepancies. She also briefly contextualizes biomedicine's obsession with linear progress through a historical discussion of Western faith, technology, science, and globalization (629). Overall, this article shows Layne's resistance to non-linear time through her faith that the baby would get better with time, and to linear time through her engagement with various metaphors that acknowledge the nonlinearity of time in the illness context. Therefore, this article represents an example of how people can deliberately resist temporal discrepancies when faced with uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion. However, in Layne's case, linear-progressive time still remains the dominant temporality in her efforts to deny the reality that her baby's health condition simply does not follow a linear-progressive timeline.

Shahjahan et al. (2022) argue that faculty members in Bangladesh's universities embody complex temporalities that consist of contradicting interactions between linear-progressive time and non-linear time, in most cases due to movement back to Bangladesh after living in the Global North for long periods of time. In Bangladesh, urbanization has led to temporal constraints that make it difficult for faculty members to predict and control their future plans due to factors such as traffic, forcing them to experience a "hybrid time" (247) that is simultaneously linear and non-linear, progressive, and non-progressive. As a result, this allows study participants to resist productivity and linear trajectories in their careers (263). Overall, Shahjahan et al. highlight the fact that although linear time is considered to be the dominant organizing factor in

neoliberal spaces in the Global South, people's on-the-ground practices constitute forms of temporal resistance in order to overcome the constraints of the city. Further, this article is among the very few existing anthropological works that capture people's deliberate resistance of linear-progressive time in urban contexts; it gives the discipline a glimpse of what can be learned from such forms of deliberate temporal resistance. However, the article also constitutes a need for anthropologists to explicitly incorporate factors derived from urbanization and globalization into their analyses when presenting ethnographic findings.

II. Temporal Suffering

Anthropologists have found that temporal discrepancies as described in the previous subsection can result in many forms of emotional suffering for those affected. For example, Jeffrey (2010) argues that in their experience of temporal limbo due to unemployment, many young men in the Indian city of Meerut have devised ways to pass time that can simultaneously be constructive of and damaging to their masculine identities. He explains that as a "central feature of globalization" (465), unemployment exists in the historical context of postcolonial development institutions imposing "Western ideas of linear time in the global South" (467). As a result of their misalignment with this hegemonic temporality, unemployed men in Meerut suffer from feelings of being "left behind" (477), as well as anxieties due to an "overabundant unstructured time" (477). Further, they consider their failure to incorporate themselves into spaces of modernity and development to have a demasculinizing effect (477). Because its primary method is ethnography, this article is an excellent example of how anthropological inquiry can reveal important consequences, such as emotional suffering and insecurity, of the temporality of globalization and urbanization that other research methods (i.e., armchair research

as in the cases of my other sources) cannot. Moreover, similar forms of temporal suffering can be seen in different urban contexts.

Mains (2007) argues that with urbanization, young Ethiopian men started to view the socio-economic progress in one's life as inevitably tied to the linear passing of time (665). As a result, men who have failed to linearly (with time) achieve such progress in Ethiopia chose to migrate to other countries, hoping to better their lives elsewhere with the linear flow of time (660). To elaborate, Mains places the cultural expectation that the lives of educated men in Ethiopia must progress linearly with time in the contexts of terrestrial globalization and urbanization (663). Specifically, residents of Jimma, who received land after Italian occupation were able to attract others into their village, establishing it as a permanent city over time (663). As a result of this dual process of European expansion into and urbanization in the Global South, a culture of urban opportunity that prescribed educated young men the responsibility to progress their lives over time was created (663). Further, although globalization has been defined as a driver of linear progressive time in the beginning of this essay, this article shows that linear progressive temporalities can be a driver of globalization in return – as shown by Ethiopian men's desires to migrate in order to achieve progress. Similar to the arguments of Jeffrey (2010) and Koster (2020), this article shows how anthropology can shed light on specific forms of temporal suffering resulting from the dominance of linear-progressive time in the Global South.

The timelessness of linear-progressive time in the context of electronic globalization and ICTs, as described previously, has engendered forms of temporal suffering different from what has been identified by Jeffrey (2010) and Mains (2007). For example, Nadeem (2009) argues that transnational corporations strategically make use of the effects of globalization on temporality in order to reduce outsourced labor costs – a process he refers to as "time arbitrage" (21).

Specifically, he claims that electronic globalization, with the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs), has not only "sped up the pace of life" (20), but also created a capitalist-network temporality that has a "linear […] rhythm" (35) that proceeds in a "forward march" (22). In this temporal system, transnational corporations that outsource labor in India for web-based professions such as "customer service, transcription [..] graphic and content development" (22) exploit global time to extend offshore workdays and to accelerate labor processes (21). Further, as a result of the discrepancy between the linear and forward-marching temporality of transnational corporations and the "natural and pre-existing" (20) cycles of everyday life in India, outsourced workers suffer from health problems and desocialization (21). Not only does this article explicitly contextualize linear progressive time as a result of globalization, but it shows how individuals can suffer from this temporal system. Moreover, this type of suffering intersects with previously discussed work by Yousefi and Dadashpoor (2020), as Indian remote workers' mental and physical health deteriorates due to the ICTs' organization of urban space and activity as timeless (i.e., the removal of temporal constraints from urban spaces). Hence, Nadeem (2009) illustrates a type of temporal suffering specifically related to the shrinking of linear-progressive time with ICTs.

Similarly, Widerberg (2006), by reviewing different types of temporal organization and their effects on people, argues that the way time is organized can have emotional impacts on people, which are usually manifested as physical signs of tiredness. She explains that through structural forces such as the organization of workplaces that require "more [to be] done in less time" (114), middle classes in the Global North have been socialized into celebrating their own exploitation "in the name of progress" (115) towards a more developed future. She claims that this temporality is entrenched in a "globalized capitalist economy" (114), elements of which are

now parts of daily urban life. Further, the consequences of this socialization include stress and exhaustion from "embodied time" (117), which, although Widerberg does not explicitly refer to it as such, is a linear-progressive type of time, and the disintegration of relationships (118). To make these claims, Widerberg draws on her findings from a previous research project involving inquiries made with surveys, employee questionnaires, and interviews (106-107). This article implicitly points to another question: what are the consequences of people's inability to resist the linear-progressive, fast-paced, and in some sense timeless, temporality of urban life? According to Widerberg, the answer to this question is long-term emotional exhaustion, which is a form of temporal suffering.

III. Temporal Deviation

So far, the articles that I have discussed have mostly shown that as people experience temporal discrepancies and suffering in relation to linear-progressive time, they find themselves *unwillingly* deviating from or being pushed out of this temporality. However, very few scholars have also argued that there is a need for a collective and *willing* deviation from linear-progressive time. Darier (1998) argues that contemporary environmental concerns must be contextualized within the subjectivity of the modern individual, whose selfhood has been shaped by the linearity of time ever since the invention of the clock. By reviewing a 1983 pamphlet by Paul Lafargue that advocates for shorter workdays, Darier claims that reducing the modern subject's productivity is desired in terms of environmental benefits that can potentially emerge from decreased rates of capitalist production. Further, Oian (2004), through ethnographic research, argues that although the temporality of people's daily lives is no longer fully organized unidirectionally, the concept of linear time and how people interact with and realize it can still be used as analytical tools to conduct studies of late modernity in relation to self-identity and

individualism. He explains that in contrast to Europe's industrial era, people's temporal experiences in modern times involve changing directions and discontinuities due to the technologies of globalization (175). However, Oian maintains that, specifically in the case of unemployed youth in the Norwegian city Oslo, these changes are simply instances of temporarily "step[ping] out of the linear stream of time" (179), and in some cases, returning to it. He further claims that people's contemporary experience of linear time is a way for them to craft their self-identities in relation to the linear progression of their lives towards the future (175). For example, a high school drop-out named Linda, while she is out of the linear stream of time, constructs her self-identity in relation to the future careers she aspires to have – nurse, cosmetician, 7/11 cashier. Hence, although she experiences a prolonged temporal discontinuity, she continues to realize her selfhood as "mirrored in images of one[her]self in the future" (175). Linda's willing "*drop out* from a linear career" (179) illustrates an example of a metropolitan individual willingly resisting the linearity of time, while still engaging with it to reflect on their subjectivity. Moreover, Oian defines "good time" (192) as one's removal from the flow of linear time that dominates aspects of urban life such as labor (101-192). Hence, when combined with Oian's explanation of the temporal construction of subjectivities, Darier's (1998) argument suggests that resisting the linearity of time (i.e., reducing the modern subject's linear productivity in clock time) can alter the selfhood of the modern individual, which, according to Darier, can have fruitful results such as the protection of the environment for future generations (194). However, without ethnographic inquiry into how such forms of deliberate temporal resistance can be/are practiced, this process remains a black box.

Note on Emotions, Subjectivity, and Anthropology

Lutz and White (1986) review the anthropological research on emotions that has been done roughly between 1976 and 1986. They unpack the rising interest in emotions in socio-cultural anthropology in relation to the previously dominant view of humans "as mechanical 'information processors'" (405) as well as the need to incorporate personal experience into culture theory (405). For example, in the interpretivist approach, emotions are considered to be "a central aspect of cultural meaning" (407) as they are deeply embedded in the social/relational contexts of their existence (408). This entanglement suggests that emotion can be a valuable lens through which one's socio-cultural context can be studied. As Widerberg (2006) argues, the dominant linear-progressive time of modernity (which I have contextualized within urbanization and globalization; see Jeffrey 2010; Koster 2020; Hassan 2003; Nadeem 2009; Yousefi and Dadashpoor 2020) has emotional impacts on individuals (arguments suggesting similar emotional consequences include Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2007; Koster 2020; Layne 1996; Shehzad 2009). This article, then, offers concrete anthropological perspectives as to *why* we should care about the (emotional) consequences of individuals' inability or willingness to resist linear-progressive time and why anthropology should help fill this gap. Moreover, scholars widely recognize the theoretical importance of subjectivity for a critical anthropology (Ortner 2005, 37). As Oian (2004) and Darier (1998) make clear, the ethnographic/anthropological dimensions of individuals' deliberate temporal resistance to linear-progressive time in urban contexts need to be studied next in order to uncover new understandings of the notion of subjectivity as an important theoretical tool for anthropology.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have situated linear-progressive time at the intersection of globalization and urbanization as the dominant temporal system across a rapidly urbanizing world.

Specifically, I have emphasized the roles of global policies such as urban planning projects as well as information and communication technologies (ICTs) in rendering linear-progressive time the dominant organizing temporality of our world. In my review of scholarship in social sciences, specifically in anthropology, I have revealed that this dominant organizing temporality results in 1) temporal discrepancies, 2) temporal suffering, and 3) (mostly unwilling) temporal deviations. Existing scholarship on temporal discrepancies and temporal suffering entirely involves lives of people who have been forcibly pushed out of the stream of linear-progressive time, whereas discussions on temporal deviations involve highly limited anthropological inquiries on people who deliberately resist linear-progressive time, as in the case of Bangladeshi faculty members. Therefore, current scholarship reveals that deliberate temporal resistance in relation to linear-progressive time remains underexplored by anthropologists studying the effects of urbanization and globalization. Aside from the lack of anthropological attention paid to this topic, some scholars emphasize the importance of collective and willing temporal resistance as a way of cultivating new modern subjectivities that are less harmful to the environment. However, as long as anthropological research on this topic remains scarce, people's currently practiced methods of deliberate temporal resistance to linear-progressive time in their everyday lives will go unnoticed, confining this environmental hope within the realm of theory. Moreover, the consensus among anthropologists on the importance of the notions of subjectivity and emotions suggests that, as a process giving birth to emotional changes and new ways of subject-making, deliberate resistance to linear-progressive time in urban contexts is certainly a priority for future research within the discipline.

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