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# Chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification: Territorializing Venezuela's communes

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## Abstract

Time is wielded as a socio-political tool to regulate people's (im)mobility. This article examines how the moral framing of space–time functions as migration governance. In Venezuela, where outmigration is taking place on a large scale, the government has devised a moral discourse based on a specific construction of the past, present, and future. In so doing, it has formed a 'chronotope of containment' that attempts to minimize the emigration of government supporters to safeguard its stability and claim to power. Socially constructed boundaries and categories emerge from the chronotope, naturalizing sedentarism through the control of affects, habits, and the formation of subjectivity. Based on interviews with government supporters, government statements, and documents, I identify three 'chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification' within this chronotope that generate immobility among government supporters: 1. Spatio-temporal acceleration, 2. Commune (De)territorialization, and 3. Geographies of terror. By identifying how these discursive mechanisms operate, this article shows how chronotopes of containment produce immobility in a context of large-scale outmigration where staying put is not the default but a complex and politicized choice.

**Keywords** immigration; immobility; space; temporality; Venezuela.

When government supporters emigrate, Venezuela's ruling party loses not only numbers but also the political legitimacy that comes from popular support. This weakens its base and international credibility, increasing the risk of regime change, which would end political and financial support for allied groups such as socialist communes. Consequently, the government and its supporters stigmatize mobility. To do so, they employ a 'chronotope of containment' (Landau 2019) to produce immobility—staying put within the borders of one's country of origin—to preserve political and economic power in a context of large-scale outmigration.

A third of Venezuela's population has left the country in recent years,<sup>1</sup> forced by two decades of poor macroeconomic planning, economic sanctions, endemic corruption, political violence, and the erosion of democratic institutions. This has caused an unprecedented crisis in the country (Neuman 2022; Lizarralde 2024). Over time, difficulties in accessing essential services such as healthcare, transportation, water, electricity, and food made life unbearable. Regardless of political affiliation, Venezuelans have been forced to emigrate to neighbouring countries like Colombia, Peru, and Chile (Devis-Amaya and Palma-Gutiérrez 2023) in search of livelihoods, a form of mobility that can be described as 'survival migration' (Betts 2010). In this setting, staying put is not a default. It is a negotiated choice as complex and politicized as leaving, making it a revealing case for the study of immobility (Mata-Codesal 2015).

Through interviews with members of government-affiliated communes, known as *Comuneros*,<sup>2</sup> and analysis of official government documents and declarations referenced by my interlocutors, this article analyses how the government's chronotope of containment propagates and naturalizes the notion that people have a natural attachment to their land. I call this the production of sedentary subjectivities. The article introduces three discursive logics that I call 'chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification'. They are Spatio-temporal Acceleration, Commune (De)territorialization, and Geographies of Terror. Implemented by the government and *Comuneros* to manufacture an immobile future, such mechanisms seek to naturalize sedentarism through the management of affects, habits, and the production of subjectivity. They represent an effort to influence people's perceptions of reality and, by extension, their aspirations to emigrate.

In recent years, an increasing number of migration scholars have examined how time is used to control people's movement through practices of waiting (Elliot 2016, 2021; Achtnich 2022), deferral (Lori 2019; Shah and Lerche 2020; Yeoh 2020), stuckedness (Hage 2009; Gaibazzi 2015), and forced immobility (Dunn 2014). This temporal turn in Migration Studies has demonstrated that time is a constitutive dimension of mobility control as important as space in the study of human (im)mobility (Cwerner 2001; Griffiths et al. 2013; Baas and Yeoh 2018). This article contributes to that literature but takes a different approach aimed at unsettling the linear temporal logics that still shape some of this research (Landau, Lori, and McNevin 2025). Rather than viewing time solely as a technology of migration governance operating at bureaucratic or physical levels, it explores how people's own conceptions of time produce 'inner, self-regulating borders' (Vammen 2022: 3). By using the chronotope of containment as a theoretical framework, the article offers a nuanced analysis of the central role of morality in discourses surrounding time, space, and emigration in Venezuela. This configuration enables political actors to imbue (im)mobility with socio-political meaning in a context of large-scale outmigration. Research on this migration crisis has largely focused on those who leave and the impacts their arrival has on host societies (e.g., Gandini, Lozano Ascencio, and Prieto 2019; Alvarez et al. 2022; Paez 2025). By centring the active production of immobility at the country of origin, this article contributes to Migration Studies' effort to challenge what some migration scholars (Schewel 2020; De Haas 2021) have referred to as the 'receiving country bias', the study of migration exclusively in destination countries, which risks neglecting some of the multiple intersecting factors underlying the migration experience.

Venezuela's socialist communes are grassroots organizations in which members of a community organize themselves to manage their territory with the technical and economic assistance of the state (Ciccariello-Maher 2016). They provide an optimal case to study the government's containment chronotope because: 1. This group identifies as government-aligned. 2. Its ideological and economic ties with the government make them particularly receptive to the government's discourse, particularly in a context of economic crisis. 3. Its

sustainability is strongly threatened by emigration so they perceive the immobility of its members favourably and try to produce it. 4. Their space is deeply charged with political and social meaning as it is connected to spatial rights and perceived as a national project of inclusion of the historically marginalized working class (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2008). This fact imbues (im)mobility with socio-political meaning. And lastly, 5. *Comuneros* are good interlocutors because most of them are politically engaged and, even though they support the government, they are critical of some of its policies, corruption, bureaucracy, and inefficiency.

The article proceeds in the following steps. First, I set out the chronotope of containment as concept and analytical framework. Second, I reconstruct the Venezuelan government's chronotope of containment and show how its two core components, *el Pueblo's* new political agency and temporal anxiety, serve to immobilize government supporters. Third, I introduce Venezuela's socialist communes and explain why this case is appropriate for studying the chronotope of containment in the context of a migration crisis. Fourth, I explain my methodological approach. Then I proceed to present the chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification that stem from the government's chronotope and through which *Comuneros* moralize and produce immobility. Finally, I reflect on the theoretical implications of the article in the conclusion.

## 1. Chronotope of containment

Socio-temporal discourses on collective time constitute what Bakhtin (1982) called a 'chronotope': a specific constellation of space-time consisting of an interpretation of the past, a vision of the future, and a present moral world that (in)forms a specific spatio-temporal trajectory into the imagined future (Blommaert 2017: 95–96; Landau 2019, 2021). The moral world generated by the chronotope imbues human behaviour with meaning in a specific social context. Such projects of pastoral governance legitimize socio-political measures that would otherwise be deemed morally unacceptable by society. Under this pastoral mode of power, the Venezuelan government casts itself as a shepherd that provides guidance and surveillance over its followers—the flock. It promises progress towards the promised socialist future only when the flock abides by the collective rules. Staying put in times of severe crisis is one of those rules, framed as patriotic attachment and bravery. The chronotope is a particularly useful analytical lens for studying (im)mobility in Venezuela because it links spatial arrangements with temporal imaginaries, making visible how immobility is actively produced, moralized, and experienced in the context of an emigration crisis. Here, space cannot be treated as a static backdrop but as a social product constantly being made through the interplay of social hierarchies, power relations, cultural imaginaries, and political practices (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994). Socialist communes in Venezuela provide a compelling case study for examining how the temporalization of space becomes a political instrument of governance, as the government and the *Comuneros* deploy future-oriented promises to contain people within a moralized spatio-temporal national project.

Rather than treating immobility as natural, the chronotope of containment reveals how staying put in Venezuela is embedded in temporal narratives, while mobility is cast as an immoral act of betrayal that slows the arrival of a promised socialist future by weakening both the commune and the government's power. These temporal narratives are not only moral but also affective: they intertwine ideas of right and wrong with feelings of hope, fear, and belonging. Immobility is sustained by hopes and promises (Pine 2014), while emotions circulate to attach supporters to the government's national project (Ahmed 2014), mobilizing fear (Pain 2009), patriotic attachment (Bissenbakker 2019; Robins 2022), and aspirations of

belonging (Aradau 2016). Through these affective dynamics, spatio-temporal narratives become technologies of governance: they regulate mobility not only through force and law but also by shaping personal aspirations and emotions (Mountz and Hiemstra 2014; Carling and Collins 2018; Smets 2019; Watkins 2020; Watkins and Van Dessel 2025). Across different contexts, such containment efforts—underpinned by moral narratives—take several forms: they depict space as crisis zones to justify intervention (Brachet 2016; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020; Cobarrubias 2025); they frame containment as humanitarian<sup>3</sup> (Rodríguez 2019; Williams 2020; Vammen 2022; Novak 2025); as a public health issue (Ye 2021); as ‘orderly’ migration policies that keep the poor and the racialized ‘Other’ outside the Global North (Landau and Freemantle 2022); or as warnings that mobility threatens national development through ‘brain drain’ (Bakewell 2008). In the Venezuelan case, the government’s containment efforts tie immobility to patriotic affect, moralizing loyalty and stigmatizing those who leave the socialist national project. The chronotope of containment gives form to this configuration, shaping how (im)mobility is perceived and experienced by *Comuneros*. Their self-containment emerges from affective and moral attachments grounded in temporal imagination. In this context, spatial restriction and physical coercion becomes unnecessary in the governance of migration.

The Venezuelan government is not the only one that has generated a chronotope of containment to govern mobility through sedentary subjectification. Throughout history, political actors have often regarded emigration as a release valve for social tension (Hirschman 1970), yet others have sought to contain human mobility to safeguard specific political projects and imagined futures. This pastoral desire to control mobility reveals how space and time are mutually constitutive dimensions of political life—relational, and constantly produced and reconfigured (Massey 1994). This means that mobility is not merely physical but ideologically and affectively situated (Salazar 2019). This has led to the implementation of exceptional measures to control people’s mobility, enabled by designing a chronotope of containment. Some reasons for devising such a chronotope for the pastoral management and governance of populations include preventing the loss of skilled workers, preserving ideological purity, protecting the gene pool, or manufacturing an aura of sovereign power for the (inter)national community. Some governments try to conceal the diminution of their sovereignty this way (Brown 2010). They fear that emigration compromises their legitimacy to govern their people in the eyes of the international community. In other cases, emigration could pose an imminent existential threat to the state. For example, in Latvia, the state and its people are mutually dependent, and if people emigrate, both the state and its population’s existence are threatened (Dzenovska 2021). In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a chronotope of containment justified, and even moralized, the construction of the Berlin Wall. The containment of its population was supposed to allow political actors to retain the labour force for national development and achieve important degrees of ideological ‘purity’, as well as isolation and independence from the capitalist world. Those citizens who stepped out of synchronicity by emigrating and/or ‘contaminating’ themselves with capitalist ideology were to be punished and ostracized for slowing down the arrival of the communist future for those in sync. In this context, the chronotope imbued (im)mobility with socio-political meaning. While leaving was an immoral act of selfishness and asynchronicity according to the chronotope’s morality, staying put was not a passive state of being but a conscious decision that involved political solidarity and temporal synchronicity (Brubaker 1990).

In the case of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez created a chronotope as he saw ideological synchronicity as fundamental to the success of his socialist revolution (Anselmi 2012). Synchronicity fosters cohesion and collective identity through the cultivation of shared visions of the past and the future, and the establishment of synchronized and coordinated

actions in the present among community members (Griffiths 2021). Such alignment (in)forms a political intersubjectivity among Chavez's followers rooted in collective beliefs that shape individuals' perception of reality. In the case of the commune, synchronicity is grounded in socialist values like communal property, participatory democracy, solidarity, and equity. Synchronicity is central to the government's commitment to fostering collective cohesion through a 'new historical subjectivity' (Vargas Arenas 2021). The new historical subject is an agent of social transformation of the nation, responsible for advancing the spatio-temporal expansion of socialism.

To produce synchronicity, Chávez warned his followers that 'if we are not aware of a common past that pushes us and binds us, if we do not have common objectives for the future, we cannot say that we are a "Pueblo"' (Vargas-Arenas 2021: 5). For Chavez's followers, 'Pueblo' is the embodiment of a new political subject opposed to 'la Burguesía' (bourgeoisie) (Eiss 2010). In Marxist terms, Pueblo is the proletariat and la Burguesía the capitalists. Whoever is considered 'Pueblo' must subscribe to a common past, common objectives in the present, and to a collectively imagined future. The government's chronotope is therefore not composed by any past or any future but by a selectively constructed past that morally justifies the collective actions in the present that will lead to a socialist future. After Chávez's death in 2013, his successor, Nicolás Maduro, reinforced the chronotope to strengthen a collective notion of national time and coordinate actions among Chávez's supporters. He said, 'Hugo Chávez brought the original project of the homeland. He awakened a "Pueblo" and a "Pueblo" with roots is capable of anything; a "Pueblo" with conscience is capable of making its own future' (MPPP 2020). A common concept of time is key to coordinate the collective actions necessary to advance toward the socialist future Chávez envisioned. Without an 'anticipated future' to strive for, people find it challenging to invest themselves in the present (Anderson 2019: 11).

In the chronotope of the government (Chávez and Maduro), the past is associated with the political and economic domination of the bourgeois elites and the lack of civil rights and political and historical agency of the poor (Lander 2005). The chronotope promises a socialist future where the poor, organized in communes, will be political protagonists, and the communes will replace the bourgeois, liberal state. The moral world of the present is framed by a class struggle in which demographic and electoral decline represent a threat since the bourgeois elites could return to power and turn back the clock, eliminating the commune and the political and historical agency of the poor. This narrative generates existential anxiety among government supporters. The socialist government assures them that it can protect their agency only while in power. To avoid a return to the past, and to guarantee the arrival of the socialist future, it is necessary to prevent the departure of the government's supporters. The government's chronotope becomes a chronotope of containment as it causes the social stigmatization of emigration in communes while it generates an existential panic that demands the synchronicity of government supporters: working in the commune to accelerate the arrival of the Communal State.

This existential anxiety is reinforced by the government's discourse on emigration, which has oscillated over time between silence, deflection, vilification, and securitization. Maduro has repeatedly urged migrants to return from what he calls 'economic slavery' abroad, deriding those who left to 'clean toilets elsewhere' (Euronews 2018) while attributing departures to U.S. sanctions, which he claims push emigration by economic war. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his administration accused returning migrants of being 'bioterrorists' who threatened to spread infection, and state-led campaigns encouraged citizens to denounce them, intensifying stigma and justifying harsh treatment of returnees (Herrero, Faiola, and Zuñiga 2020). At the same time, the government has downplayed the scale of emigration or

claimed—often without evidence—that ‘thousands’ seek to return, portraying the exodus as reversible and caused by foreign hostility rather than government failures (DW 2018). This combination of vilification, public health fear-mongering, and denial reflects an official narrative designed to deflect blame, discredit emigrants, and diminish the broader crisis, while also producing a chronotope that stigmatizes mobility as an individualistic and anti-patriotic act of betrayal to the nation. Yet emigration has not decreased. On the contrary, departures have intensified after the presidential elections of 2024, widely considered a sham despite Maduro’s claim of victory (GZero 2024).

In the following section, I explain how the two fundamental components of the government’s chronotope—el Pueblo’s new political agency and temporal anxiety—serve to immobilize government supporters.

## 2. Government’s chronotope: El pueblo’s new political agency and temporal anxiety

During a visit to Venezuela’s communal councils in 2007, Marxist geographer Doreen Massey was struck by the ‘process of political education’ she witnessed (2009: 410). One conversation with a Comunera in a slum particularly stood out to her, where the Comunera stated “‘qué voy a hacer con todo este poder?’” “What am I going to do with all this power?” ... “antes de darnos,” “before you give it to us”, “hay que enseñarnos”, “you have to teach us” (ibid.). This episode narrated by Massey reveals two social phenomena sparked by the government’s chronotope. On the one hand, people historically marginalised by the country’s bourgeois elites—who ruled the country until Chávez took power in 1998—felt they had the political power to change their reality for the first time. Chávez’s government provided them with civil rights such as the right to land and decent housing, as well as economic resources and technical assistance for the community to self-govern its territory according to the ‘new socialist model of society based on equality, equity and social justice’ (Official Gazette 2009). On the other hand, the Comunera expressed the need for political education. This process of what Massey (2009: 410) called ‘popular pedagogy’, deeply informed by the government’s socialist ideology, played a critical role in the emergence of a new political identity among the poor rooted in the Marxist notion of class struggle (Anselmi 2012). The two phenomena—empowerment of the poor and their political education—translated into political and historical agency for the formerly marginalized Pueblo.

The Comuneros I interviewed refer to themselves as el Pueblo, in emic terms, and the commune is a concrete manifestation of their political and historical agency. This agency is seen as a fundamental historical victory of el Pueblo over la Burguesía in the context of a class struggle. The commune is a symbol of this agency while also rendering el Pueblo politically recognizable and capable of agentive action (Reeves and Bryant 2021). Yet, as other studies on grassroots politics in Caracas show, Pueblo is a ‘multivocal’ concept mobilized in diverse ways, and Comuneros take heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory positions (Strønen 2023). While the government’s chronotope has allowed the emergence and promoted the development of el Pueblo’s agency, it has also instilled temporal anxiety in it. Since it took power in 1998, the government has disseminated the idea among its supporters that la Burguesía, represented by the opposition coalition, wants to overthrow it and impose a neo-liberal model on the country *a la* Washington Consensus with the help of USA. Even though in the opposition coalition coexist competing and contradicting political discourses, the opposition formed a coalition that has tried to overthrow the government twice (once in 2002 and the other time in 2019) with US support (Pozzebon 2022)—which includes economic

sanctions (Rodríguez 2023).<sup>4</sup> According to the government and all my interviewees, the coming to power of the opposition coalition would be ‘terrible’, as Alicia told me, because it would imply a return to the past in their view. State economic and technical assistance to communes would be cut, as would el Pueblo’s institutional recognition and political legitimacy (Reeves and Bryant 2021). The government’s chronotope holds that the political existence of el Pueblo—its agency—depends on the government remaining in power. Only in power can the government lead el Pueblo to the socialist future and protect them from la Burguesía which, along with the ‘Yankee empire’, yearns to return to the past when it could exploit el Pueblo’s labour force and its oil. In that sense, the chronotope is articulated through a class struggle characterized by competing collective Spatio-temporal trajectories for the country.

The temporal anxiety created by the chronotope is an effective tool of temporal governance because it works at the collective level as well as at the individual level. It is used to mobilize el Pueblo when the government identifies a threat to its stability. During elections, temporal anxiety is used to mobilize people to vote for the government (López Maya 2016). The government mobilizes its supporters to participate in pro-government demonstrations when there are anti-government protests. In some cases, it even mobilizes them to violently repress anti-government protests (e.g., Meléndez and Martínez 2018). It also uses the chronotope’s temporal anxiety to ask el Pueblo to tolerate the economic crisis by reminding them that worse would be a return to the past (Koselleck 1985). In this way, the government heroizes the suffering involved in staying put by painting it as resistance to the attacks of la Burguesía and the ‘Yankee empire’. For example, the Minister of Communes and Social Movements, Jorge Arreaza, said in 2022 that Comuneros lead ‘the most beautiful, heroic resistance against the [US] blockade’ (Pacheco Torres 2022).

In the next section, I introduce Venezuela’s socialist communes and explain why this case study is appropriate for studying the chronotope of containment in the context of Venezuela’s socio-political and economic crisis.

### 3. Venezuela’s socialist communes

Space is not a neutral backdrop but a dynamic and relational process shaped by social interactions (Massey 2005). It is produced through power relations, social practices, and economic activities, reflecting the ongoing interactions and competing interests of society (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2008; Massey 2005). In this sense, space is always under construction, contested, rather than a fixed and static container of social activity. At the same time, space permeates subjectivities thus having an effect on people’s views and actions. In this context, spatial transformation has a fundamental role in the class struggle since, as stated by Lefebvre, ‘to change life is to change space; to change space is to change life’ (Lefebvre 2006: 108). The government seeks social transformation through the creation of a new subjectivity—embodied by the ‘new historical subject’—forged by social and economic relations in spaces of communal socialism. This way, the more space el Pueblo conquers from la Burguesía, the production of the new historical subjectivity will be faster and faster will arrive the socialist future.

Socialist communes in Venezuela represent Chavismo’s most ambitious effort to produce socialist space, where socialist subjectivities and ways of life can be cultivated and sustained (Menéndez 2013). The communes offer an optimal case study to identify a chronotope of containment because they represent a Spatio-temporal trajectory towards the Communal State—a socialist future where they supersede the liberal state as the primary mode of social organization. These participatory organizations (Avritzer 2009; Alves et al. 2016; López Maya 2021), in which community members come together to manage their territory with the

technical and economic assistance of the state, aim to address the significant social inequalities in the country, which have a notable spatial dimension (Massey 2011, 2012; Ciccariello-Maher 2016; Centner 2020; Jarman 2023). More importantly, they offer a future to those who have been politically and spatially marginalized. This is why el Pueblo has widely embraced them. Since their official implementation in 2007, communes have brought about a significant change in the political and geographical landscape of the country. According to the government, by 2022, there were 3,641 communes in the country (MPPCMS 2023). Such spatio-political change has helped create the political identity of el Pueblo, which is intimately linked to the chronotope of the government. However, López Maya (2021) argues that communes are a government strategy to extend the reach of the state and penetrate a wider segment of society, which enables it to 'locate and lay claim to people and goods [...] in order to extract resources and implement policies' (Torpey 1998: 224).

In the next section, I present the chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification that stem from the government's chronotope of containment. Each mechanism isolates a distinct spatio-temporal operation through which *Comuneros* moralize and produce immobility: 'Spatio-temporal Acceleration' builds upon Lefebvre's concept of space as social production (1996). It captures how the occupation of private property and its rapid transformation into communal spaces generates employment opportunities for *Comuneros*, while also producing socialist spaces that (re)produce socialist subjects, fostering synchronicity with collective time and the government's chronotope, and instilling moral obligations to remain. '(De)territorializing the Commune: Territorializing the *Comunero*' shows how de-territorializing discourses situate the commune within transnational imaginaries while simultaneously rooting *Comuneros* to the local territory as the only site of political agency. Such spatial-temporal extension (Munn 1986) provides the cosmopolitan sense of 'inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different beings simultaneously' (Pollock et al. 2002: 11) without the need to move from Venezuela. Paradoxically, whoever leaves the commune to emigrate, give up their political and historical agency and place in the global community (Bauman 2011). 'Geographies of Terror' traces how collective imaginaries of danger like xenophobia and labour exploitation abroad create internalized borders that discourage departure. Building on what Vammen (2022) calls affective borderwork—the circulation of emotions and moral judgements that regulate mobility—this mechanism mobilizes fear to naturalize sedentarism within the commune. These mechanisms stem from the government's chronotope of containment, which provides the moral world in which they take shape and are rendered morally acceptable. By framing such practices as patriotic, the chronotope situates them within the class struggle against the *Burguesía* for the future of the country.

## 4. Methodological approach

Inspired by Doreen Massey's ethnographic approach to the study of spatial politics in Venezuela (2008; 2009; 2011), I conducted seven semi-structured online interviews with active *Comuneros* in rural, urban, and peri-urban areas of the country between January and May 2023. To capture diverse perspectives on emigration among *Comuneros*, I selected interlocutors from communes with varying characteristics, dispersed across the national geography. Follow-up questions developed into ongoing dialogues with the interviewees. This had a positive effect in terms of data collection robustness but also in negotiating cultural legitimacy and building trust (Adler and Adler 2001). As an educated, middle-class Venezuelan living abroad, the *Comuneros* might have held suspicions that I was an opponent of the government seeking to damage the image of the communes abroad, or an 'educated fool', whose affinity with their own culture is viewed with suspicion due to their education and

social class (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Sustained communication not only helped me dispel possible suspicions but also granted access to nuanced and sometimes contradictory discourses on emigration within communes. It further encouraged interlocutors to feel at ease and confident in expressing their thoughts and emotions around class, mobility, and the future. This process enabled me to better grasp how they articulate and politicize such ideas and feelings, consistent with my epistemological approach. Drawing on feminist human geographers who emphasize that people engage with the world through affect and emotion (Rose 1993; Bondi 2003, 2005; Pain 2009), my methodology assumes that these dimensions are central to how space is lived and given meaning, while maintaining awareness that space is produced through action (Anderson 2016).

Additionally, I interviewed a Venezuelan researcher who has written extensively on political power and agency in the communes to help me understand its political relevance and historical significance for its members and for the government. I also interviewed a former Minister for Communes and Social Protection to compare the government's and the communes' perspectives on emigration. I met both of them during another research project on Doreen Massey's time in Venezuela, on which this article builds (Moreno Superlano, Freitez, and Iturriza 2023). They agreed to put me in touch with the initial *Comuneros*. After that, I implemented the snowball method. I have assigned pseudonyms to interviewees for security reasons in a context of increasing state-led political persecution and censorship.

My digital fieldwork had certain limitations that should be noted. For instance, I was unable to observe the collective dynamics of the communes in person or how emigration affected them materially. Being at the research site would have also allowed me to see potential discrepancies between what *Comuneros* feel, say, and do. If I had been present at their meetings, I would have had access to useful information, including non-verbal data (such as gestures, tensions, and performances). Additionally, some *Comuneros* lacked access to computers or had very limited internet access. Some of them expressed interest in participating in my research. Still, they were unable to do so via video call due to poor connectivity, particularly in rural areas like the Amazon region. Unfortunately, this resulted in some interviews being postponed or interrupted. The same happened due to power outages. These structural challenges ultimately limited the size of my sample. The seven interviews with *Comuneros* that I used for my data were completed in full; however, partial interviews, although they seemed to support the data collected, are not included. Another limitation worth considering is that the discourse of the *Comuneros* at home was not complemented or compared with that of *Comuneros* who emigrated. The perspective of those who have navigated the chronotopic mechanisms would likely enrich our understanding of the government's chronotope, particularly regarding its effectiveness and reach. Their perceptions of the country's socio-political reality and of emigration could further strengthen the conceptualization of the chronotopic mechanisms.

Discourse is central to my analysis because both the government's chronotope and the immobility mechanisms employed by *Comuneros* operate through moral discourses around time and space to inform how people think and feel about emigration (Hastings 2014). Practices, experiences, and emotions cannot be considered independently from discourse because the latter has the power to habituate behaviour to such an extent that individuals conform to social constructions, like collective time and immobility, without questioning it (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015: 84). Responding to this premise, the qualitative data collected is constituted by the political and social discourses adopted by *Comuneros*. I identify sedentary subjectification by tracing how they narrate staying put as a way of safeguarding the commune and the socialist future, and how these narratives are enforced through stigma, guilt, and social sanctions directed at those who emigrate. Methodologically, I treat these

discursive practices and the affects they mobilize as the means through which sedentary subjects are produced (Foucault 1982; Bissenbakker and Myong 2019). I recorded the interviews and transcribed them using data transcription software. Through discursive clustering, I identified recurring affective references to emigration and examined how Comuneros linked these to time (e.g., the Communal State), space (e.g., the commune), morality (loyalty to the Revolution), and immobility. I then conducted a critical analysis of how these discourses recur across commune members, as well as in official government documents and declarations referenced in our conversations (e.g., [Official Gazette 2009](#); [MPPP 2020](#); [Vargas-Arenas 2021](#); [Pacheco Torres 2022](#); [Union Comunera 2022](#)). After analysing the material, I identified the discursive lines that constitute the chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification presented in the next section.

## 5. Chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification

### 5.1 Spatio-temporal acceleration

When I asked Tomás what his commune was doing to prevent its members from leaving the country, he told me the following story. He and other commune members decided to take over garbage collection in the municipality. Garbage collection was done by a private company that did not do the job well and charged high prices. There was garbage everywhere on the streets. The government provided the Comuneros with a garbage truck, and they began to collect the garbage (including that from households that were not part of the commune). Each family contributed 1 USD per month to cover the truck's cost and the operators' salaries. However, a single truck could not collect all the municipality's garbage. To solve the issue, the commune started recycling. Comuneros launched a campaign to teach people to separate their garbage and take the plastic to a collection centre in the commune. Three years later, they were receiving between three and four tonnes of plastic a week. Since they could not process it, they took it to 'los capitalistas' (a private company). 'To liberate ourselves from this relationship of capitalist exploitation', Tomás told me, 'we decided to do the work ourselves'. They presented the project to the Ministry of Communes and Social Movements and it provided them with the necessary machinery to recycle plastic. They had a problem, though. They needed a warehouse to put the machines in and neither the state nor the commune could afford one. They found an idle warehouse that belonged to a businessman who had left the country. They occupied it without permission and put it into production to generate employment in the commune. To prevent Comuneros from being forced to migrate because of the severe economic crisis, Tomás emphasized the importance of providing employment opportunities. Considering the US economic blockade supported by la Burguesía, Comuneros justify the implementation of extraordinary measures, such as the illegal occupation of the means of production, to foster the growth of the communal economic space.

The sustainability of the communes is threatened by emigration because it hinders its capacity to operate due to a lack of people and stalls progress toward the Communal State. The threat of emigration, triggered by what the government calls 'economic war' against the nation, intensifies el Pueblo's temporal anxiety—their fear of returning to a past they associate with a lack of historical and political agency. Consequently, emigration is viewed by Comuneros as a state of exception that moralizes the illegal occupation of private spaces as an act of social justice. By integrating individuals into the communal economy, a form of

spatio-temporal acceleration occurs, allowing el Pueblo to 'take away' time and space from la Burguesía, propelling them towards the socialist future. This approach is seen by Comuneros as a strategic response within a class struggle which is characterized by competing collective spatio-temporal trajectories for the country.

While la Burguesía is thought to be seeking a return to the neoliberal past, Comuneros strive to progress toward a socialist future. Within this context, spatio-temporal acceleration serves as a mechanism with multiple objectives: it aims to quickly generate employment opportunities, thereby preventing Comuneros from seeking work abroad; it transforms spaces of capitalist production into spaces of socialist production; and it seeks to create new social spaces where social relations foster sedentary subjectivities and synchronization with the collective time, accelerating the arrival of the Communal State.

Occupied spaces, forcibly claimed by el Pueblo, are intricately connected to a class struggle encompassing time, space, and political subjectivity. The transformation of these conquered spaces results in the creation of synchronicity, fundamental to the government's chronotope of containment because it makes staying put the moral duty of the 'new historical subject.'

Martín could be considered a new historical subject whose socio-political subjectivity is shaped by the social and economic relations of the commune. He joined it at the age of seventeen because it allowed him to help 'design' his community and solve the problems of his people. He is now twenty-nine and 'in sync' with el Pueblo. He works in the commune 'not for the financial remuneration but for love,' and feels a profound responsibility to remain present resisting the 'damned current' (*corriente maldita*) of capitalism so that the next generations can have a post-capitalist future. For Martín, el Pueblo has the right to appropriate space and to participate in all decisions affecting the production of space (Harvey 2008). 'Chavez brought the poor to the [Caracas] city centre through *Misión Vivienda* [social housing program]', he told me as he explained why people emigrate in Venezuela. 'The Ho Chi Minh Housing Complex in the city centre allowed the poor to live in a space they were excluded from. Many did not like sharing space with the poor and left the country'. This statement highlights the dynamics of class struggle in Venezuela, where the key battlegrounds are space, time, and political subjectivity. The city's historical centre holds significant symbolic value, and the presence of el Pueblo within it represents a contestation over the nation's historical space-time. By appropriating and redefining space and time previously dominated by la Burguesía, el Pueblo experiences a sense of empowerment. This is reflected in Martín's outlook.

When I asked Martín what the commune does to keep its members from leaving, he proudly told me a story like those told by other interviewees like Tomás. Martín used to work in an agricultural factory. Its owners closed it and left the country. 'They joined the economic sabotage', says Martín, 'to destabilize the government'. The closure of the company left 180 workers unemployed. They organized themselves and, with the help of Martín's commune, took over the facilities by force. They converted it into a 'socially owned enterprise' and registered it with the Ministry of Communes and Social Movements. It was transformed into a communal space and it operates now according to socialist values. They reactivated the operations and 'rescued' fourteen hectares of agricultural land. Martín emphasizes that this newly conquered space 'was born in the heat of the class struggle'. Thanks to this conquered space, employment and food sovereignty have been generated to prevent Comuneros from having to look abroad for them—that is what la Burguesía wants in his view. The significance of this conquered space goes beyond economic aspects. It serves as a breeding ground for the new historical subject, driven by a moral obligation to stay in the country and actively participate in its development—as Martín thinks it should be.

Comuneros view emigration as a part of the class struggle. Temporal anxiety exacerbated by it among el Pueblo justifies, and even moralizes, radical measures against la Burguesía (Moore 1993). In an announcement of the factory, whose name I will not disclose to protect Martín, the workers say: ‘We warn el Pueblo that difficult times are coming where the class struggle will intensify and the only way out is to occupy, resist, recuperate and produce.’ Tomás and Martín believe that the most effective strategy to prevent emigration among Comuneros is to occupy, resist, recuperate, and produce in an intensified way. This strategy creates jobs quickly, expands the commune’s space, and increases the production of new historical subjectivity. It instils a sense of responsibility for social transformation in the youth and moralizes sedentarism in the commune. To defeat la Burguesía, el Pueblo must remain in the country and transform private spaces into socialist spaces to accelerate the arrival of the Communal State.

Doris, a teacher in her commune, reflects the new historical subjectivity produced in those spaces when she told me that, although she respects the personal decision of some to emigrate, she must stay in the country because ‘the struggle is from here, from the land [(tierra)].’ The moral duty expressed by Doris is intrinsic to the new historical subjectivity. Producing it is a way of stopping people from emigrating. Class struggle in Venezuela consists of a fight over space because space makes the kind of subject each social group—el Pueblo and la Burguesía—needs to move to a socialist future or go back to a neoliberal past, respectively. While conquering time and space in the class struggle is an objective of spatio-temporal acceleration, the reproduction of a new historical subjectivity is a chronotopic mechanism of sedentary subjectification because it reproduces that sense of sedentary responsibility expressed by Doris. Integrating people into the ideological economy of the commune instils in them the notion of being agents of social transformation. Comuneros understand that if they emigrate, such transformation is not possible. In this sense, spatio-temporal acceleration fosters synchronicity and immobility through a shared vision of reality and a moral responsibility with el Pueblo ‘from here, from the land [(tierra)].’

## 5.2 (De)territorializing the commune: Territorializing the comunero

‘So many people have reached out to us from the North [(USA)], Asia, Europe, and many parts of the world because they see in the commune an alternative for the world’, Tomás told me as he reflected on the importance of the commune as a political project. ‘Is it so great what we are building?’ he wonders at times, amazed. ‘When people are demoralized, any beacon of light, as small as it might be, offers hope.’<sup>5</sup> Communes are not an alternative to capitalism yet, but in fifteen or twenty years they could be. By that time, Europe will be plunged into a terrible crisis as a result of capitalism and the crisis of the left. That’s why Comuneros are in the global vanguard [of politics].’ Tomás’ sense of place in the world transcends his town in Venezuela. As a Comunero, he feels part of a cosmopolitan political project. Tomás and his fellow Comuneros imagine the commune as the vanguard of the left in the world, which makes them feel a part of a global political community. The global exchange of ideas and images has expanded the concept of mobility beyond the simple notion of physical movement (Salazar 2011). In this sense, Tomás embodies immobility and connectivity simultaneously (Smets 2019). This is more than a connection between the local and the global. It is a way of participating in the globalized world. To imagine the commune as a cosmopolitan project is a way of producing local meaning and subjectivity, embedded in transnational dynamics and global imaginaries (Gaibazzi 2015).

In the commune, Tomás and the other Comuneros destabilize imaginations and experiences of 'locality' to generate the cosmopolitan sense of place in the world that they expressed in our conversations (Pollock et al. 2002). However, in the process of de-territorializing the commune, they territorialize the Comunero. The cosmopolitan discourse of Comuneros requires one to remain in the commune to be an actor in a modernizing and globalizing world. Only the commune grants global membership because of its international transcendence. On the other hand, those Comuneros who emigrate lose their political and historical agency by being absorbed into the international labour market as cheap labour. President Maduro famously warned on television that whoever leaves Venezuela ends up washing toilets abroad (Euronews 2018).

In this section, I discuss how the de-territorialization of the commune is a chronotopic mechanism of sedentary subjectification. Mobility is considered a key aspect of modern subjectivity (Chu 2006). To deal with the apparent contradiction of carrying out a territorialized project in a mobile world of global and transnational forces, Comuneros establish symbolic connections with subjects, ideas, images and collectives beyond the space-time inhabited by them. This is what Munn (1986) calls a 'spatial-temporal extension.' Such an extension provides a sense of inhabiting the world in a dynamic and cosmopolitan way without the need to move from the spatial location. This means that whoever leaves the commune leaves the spatial-temporal extension that the commune's cosmopolitan project offers its members.

According to Bauman (2011), global membership is inextricably linked to mobility in the modern world and is an intrinsic part of being a full human. Arendt (1968) argued similarly that freedom of mobility is a fundamental political right. Therefore, immobility, whether voluntary, involuntary, or acquiescent (Schewel 2020), causes feelings of exclusion from 'what is required to be fully human' (Landau 2019: 181) in a globalized world. To reconcile this dehumanizing sensation in a territorialized project such as the commune, Comuneros continuously de-territorialize it by speaking of the commune in a broader geopolitical context. They perceive themselves as international political actors who play a fundamental historical role for the international left and set a political example for the world. For instance, my interviewees narrate the commune in ways that reflect the imaginations of cosmopolitan ideologies such as feminism, de-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and environmentalism. Such a narrative crystallizes a spatial-temporal extension of the Comunero beyond the commune's boundaries and of a stagnant Venezuela in crisis. This is a response to Comuneros' desire to be a part of the spirit of modern times and being connected to other spatial locations (Chu 2006).

Practices and ways of inhabiting the world make use of symbolic elements to produce social spaces and subjectivities (Munn 1986). The symbolic connection with people, ideas, and images from other space-times, such as the Soviet Union, the 1871 Paris Commune, and the Zapatistas in southern Mexico, constitutes the social and phenomenological reality of Comuneros and, consequently, the 'new historical subjectivity'. For them, physical mobility is not a requirement to engender a sense of cosmopolitanism while emplaced in the Global South, as in other cases (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). The government's chronotope claims that Chávez's socialist revolution is a historical event of geopolitical significance (Unión Comunera 2022). According to it, Chávez is equated with emblematic figures of the international left—from different times and spaces—such as Che Guevara, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong (ibid.). Figures of international relevance such as Noam Chomsky,<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Corbyn,<sup>7</sup> Doreen Massey,<sup>8</sup> and Pablo Iglesias<sup>9</sup> (among many others) have helped to solidify the cosmopolitan *Weltanschauung* of the Comunero by praising the Bolivarian Revolution. The constant connections to the globalized world made by Comuneros in the interviews confirm this. Reference was made to thinkers such as István Mészáros, Marx, Engels, Trotsky, Ho

Chi Minh, Oscar López Rivera, Camilo Cienfuegos, and Doreen Massey. Tomás assures that Venezuela is in a process of globalization close to the BRICS.<sup>10</sup> Gladys told me about a course she took in Brazil on Latin American politics at the Florestan Fernandes National School, founded by the Landless Workers' Movement. Alicia told me that now comrades from her commune are accompanying and guiding community projects in Brazil and Argentina. Martín thinks that the commune challenges colonial borders imposed by the Spanish to develop a Latin American identity that dialogues with the cultures of Abya Yala.<sup>11</sup> In explaining the economic crisis, Doris reminded me that 'all leftist countries have gone through situations of blockade and economic war like Venezuela now.'

The spatial-temporal extension that Comuneros practice has resulted in regimes of values and meaning closely tied to global dynamics. Their connections with the globalized world, although largely symbolic, produce a cosmopolitan sense of place in the world. This is not the case in some parts of the Global South, where ideas of cosmopolitanism are used to delink oneself from local obligations (Landau and Freemantle 2010). The transnational subjectivity of the Comunero is deeply entangled with the idea that people have a natural attachment to their land (Malkki 1992). While the political and historical agency of the Comunero transcends the local, it is intimately linked to and conditioned by the commune. For Tomás, his actions in the commune are relevant to the international left because they help pave the way for an alternative to global capitalism: the communal state. The Comunero who emigrates leaves not only the commune, but also his cosmopolitan place in the world. The commune imbues with international relevance the political and historical agency that Comuneros have conquered in Venezuela. As they step out of the commune, that agency vanishes, exacerbating el Pueblo's temporal anxiety. Their agency vanishes when the Comunero emigrates because they lose the power to act upon the country's politics. For example, they cannot participate in elections because Venezuela is one of 23 countries worldwide that do not allow its citizens residing abroad to vote (Ospina-Valencia 2018). Those who leave the country cannot support the government electorally. Their agency vanishes too when their labour force is not invested in the growth of the commune as an alternative to capitalism, but in the neoliberal labour market. President Maduro has called those who have emigrated 'economic slaves' of capitalism (Euronews 2018). Emigration poses an issue to Comuneros because it does not foster spatial-temporal extension; it does not produce symbolic connections between the commune and the international community. On the contrary, it delinks Comuneros from the cosmopolitan project of the commune.

There are cases, however, in which Comuneros celebrate physical mobility because it produces symbolic connections with the international community. These cases show the complicated entanglement between ideas of natural attachment to the land and Comuneros' cosmopolitan sense of place in the world. Alicia's views on migration illustrate this entanglement. She has never left Venezuela. She told me that, although the idea scares her, she would like to travel to 'exchange experiences' with other self-governance organizations. However, she emphasized that she would travel only briefly and return to the commune. For her, 'there is no place where we will be better off than in our territory, in our commune, with our families and neighbours.' Her hypothetical trip is acceptable because it is seen as a form of spatial-temporal extension; it builds transnational social connectedness between the commune and other experiences of self-government. For her, only in Venezuela can she exercise her political and historical agency. Only in her country does she have 'the possibility of developing collective projects that generate sustenance. Not abroad.' She also explained that 'we must not see things from a personal, individual perspective, but from the collective perspective. Everyone contributes their 'grain of sand' to help the collective. Whoever leaves not only doesn't help, but their labour potential is lost, and instead of benefiting the

community, they harm it [by depriving it of their labour potential].’ Travelling temporarily to establish symbolic linkages to other spatial locations is seen in the commune as an act conforming with ‘the perspective of the collective’; it is a form of spatial–temporal extension of the commune. On the other hand, emigrating is understood as an individualistic and short-sighted act. As Gladys explained, those who leave are selfish because ‘they emigrate to solve their individual problems ... They are not solving their children’s future.’

In conclusion, Comunerros broaden the concept of mobility beyond physical movement through a flow of symbolic connections with people, ideas and images from other space-times (Salazar 2011). Munn (1986) refers to this as ‘spatial–temporal extension.’ Comunerros unsettle and expand the notion of locality by harnessing such symbolic links to a global community, thus generating a cosmopolitan sense of place in the world. The government’s chronotope assures that Chávez’s revolution is a historical event of international transcendence; and the Comunerro is its protagonist. For Comunerros, remaining physically rooted in their territory paradoxically creates a global connection, transforming immobility into a form of transnational engagement. Comunerros’ cosmopolitanism is intricately entwined with the notion that people have a natural attachment to their land (Malkki 1992). Those who emigrate give up their place in the global community, and their political and historical agency fades as they ‘wash toilets’ abroad. The discourse that deterritorializes the commune and emplaces Comunerros into a larger global and transnational social sphere also serves to territorialize them in the commune. Even though Comunerros do not explicitly say it, the underlying assumption of their de-territorializing discourse is that the commune confers ‘what is required to be fully human’ (Landau 2019: 181) in a globalized world. The one who leaves the commune relinquishes that privilege.

### 5.3 Geographies of terror

Harold sees emigration as a survival strategy used by Venezuelans. He told me, however, that there is a prevalent discourse among his fellow Comunerros: ‘Instead of suffering hardships abroad, alone, it is better to do it in your country, with your family, and in your house.’ The labour exploitation and xenophobia suffered by Venezuelans abroad are well documented. The ‘RMRP 2022 End-Year Report’ (R4V 2022) shows the challenges for Venezuelans’ socio-economic integration abroad. Most of them lack legal and social protection. They lack documentation and cannot access health services, education, and livelihood opportunities. This makes them highly vulnerable to evictions, deportations, and other expedited removal procedures. Furthermore, xenophobia—defined as fear of groups or people who are different (Berezin 2006)—and related violence suffered by children in school hinder access to education. Many of them migrate in a situation of family separation. Considering this dire landscape, alerting about the dangers of emigration is an act of care among Comunerros, and a form of protecting the commune’s future.

In this section, I discuss how Comunerros construct ‘geographies of terror’, a collective imaginary composed of the real hardships suffered by Venezuelan migrants that seeks to discourage mobility through fear. Geographies of terror are imagined danger zones surrounding Venezuela where threats lurk at every corner, a cartography of fear mobilized as a mechanism of sedentary subjectification to establish ‘an inner, self-regulating border’ (Vammen 2022: 3) that prevents the emigration of Comunerros, particularly the youth, before they leave the commune. I use ‘terror’ here not simply as a synonym for fear but as an analytic condensation of negative affects such as fear, danger, and unease, expressed by my interlocutors (Gregory and Pred 2006). Terror operates as ‘affective borderwork’ that regulates mobility (Vammen 2022). Following Vammen, I combine ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ because the distinction

can under-describe the work of emotions, which involve forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about 'subjective content' or qualification of intensity. Emotions are not 'after-thoughts' but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit (Ahmed 2010: 230 as cited by Vammen).

Comuneros implement these geographies in response to what they describe as la Burguesía's media campaign to scare young people into emigrating. Based on Comuneros' impressions, I discuss how the nation's class struggle operates here at the level of affects and emotions. Geographies of terror are the measure taken by el Pueblo in the dispute with la Burguesía over which bodies may inhabit the national space-time, a measure justified and informed by the temporal anxiety that the government's chronotope instils in el Pueblo. Comuneros respond to this narrative with a counter-narrative that functions on the level of affects and emotions as well. They engender imagined danger zones surrounding Venezuela to move the site of mobility governance from a territorial space to Comuneros' consciousness (Vammen 2022).

'Emigration is a social threat right now,' assures Noemí, an art teacher in her commune, activist, and feminist. 'Young people are innocent and believe in the false idea promoted by the media that there is no future in Venezuela.' For Noemí, 'the media of the [U.S.] empire and the Burguesía' have orchestrated a campaign to scare young people into emigrating. This resonates with Martín's observation: 'Emigration is the consequence of plans to destroy Venezuela's economy. The goal is to overthrow Maduro ... The hegemonic media has a narrative that antagonizes Maduro's government and blames it for the crisis.' Doris agrees with them when she says that 'those ideas for people to leave are part of the economic war that the country is suffering. The [U.S.] empire wants to convince people that socialism cannot be achieved.' Gladys also believes that 'young people are manipulated by the media, where they find false promises of a better quality of life: brand-name shoes, the latest smartphone, etc'

The media campaign that Comuneros describe operates through words and images that convey the idea that leaving the country is the most sensible thing to do. According to my interviewees, the media seeks to influence the desires and imaginations of Venezuelans. They say that the media does so by using discourses of disorder and alarm (Mountz and Hiemstra 2014). Among the alarming narratives about the country whose veracity my interlocutors challenge are the idea that there is a humanitarian crisis in the country caused by government mismanagement and that there is a dictatorship that commits systematic human rights violations. For Comuneros, the Burguesía's media uses fear to codify Venezuela in the collective imagination as an apocalyptic collapse where 'there is no future,' in Noemí's words.

At the end of our interview, I asked Tomás if there was anything he would like to add. He told me that I should conduct research on the xenophobia suffered by 'our people' abroad. 'It's an invisible issue. People suffer in silence abroad. Those pains are ours too,' his voice broke. 'Because our family, our brothers and sisters, are suffering.' The idea of xenophobia is present in the commune to such an extent that simply talking about it arouses emotions. 'Outside, the xenophobia that Venezuelans experience is horrible,' Gladys told me while explaining why she thinks it is better to stay in the country. Her sister went to Colombia with her daughter, but returned because it was too hard for them. 'The offer outside of Venezuela that they [the media] make to us is not as good as it seems. There is a lot of trafficking of women, xenophobia, labour exploitation.' Gladys describes a geography of terror in which her sister and niece suffer discrimination in Colombia. She echoes her sister's negative experience to prevent others from leaving. Although she does so to protect her fellow

Comuneros, Gladys feeds a collective narrative of fear. She uses xenophobia, trafficking of women, and exploitation as repel factors. Through this narrative of fear, Gladys moves the physical border 'deeply into the everyday space' (Vammen 2022: 3) of the commune before Comuneros attempt to cross it. She assured me that, unlike in geographies of terror, her sister always finds a helping hand in the commune. For that reason, 'I don't leave the country,' she said with conviction. 'Because here I always have a helping hand.' The commune functions as a social safety net for its members, and in the face of the imagined fear landscapes surrounding Venezuela, a 'helping hand' is a powerful reason to stay.

Labour exploitation is the other important repel factor in the narrative that elicits fear among Comuneros. As explained in the previous section, labour exploitation in the international market is associated by Comuneros with the mobilisation of cheap labour to capitalist countries and corporations. This mobilisation of workers seeks to deprive a socialist country like Venezuela of its labour force to prevent its development and consolidation. Doris shows that this repel factor of the geographies of terror has drawn 'an inner, self-regulating border' (Vammen 2022: 3) in her. She told me that:

They sell us the American dream ... to exploit us and turn us into cheap labour. In other countries, you are worthless. Rights don't count for you. For you, there are neither human rights nor worker protection laws. You are exploited. You don't get to settle in other countries. You can't build a home. You will go to work for other people. That's why it's better to stay here to develop the country.

Doris' fear of being exploited abroad functions as an internal discouraging mechanism towards emigration. Before she thinks of emigrating, fears associated with the geographies of terror dissuade her. The border is no longer where the nation-state ends, but in her. She also expresses a fear—intimately related to el Pueblo's temporal anxiety—of losing her ability to 'develop the country' if she emigrates. The consequence most feared by Comuneros is the loss of el Pueblo's historical and political agency. The 'helping hand' that Gladys refers to is a symbol of el Pueblo's agency. Only as long as the existence of the commune is possible, el Pueblo will have the power to offer (economic, medical, emotional) help to people like Gladys' sister. If they lose it, la Burguesía would turn the national clock back to a neoliberal past where el Pueblo has no capacity to help itself or influence politics, history, and the national space-time.

The loss of agency occurs not only because abroad el Pueblo's options are limited by structural constraints like social stratification, market access, power disparities, and cultural norms (De Haas, Miller, and Castles 2022), but also because the agency of Comuneros relies on their capacity for cooperation and synchronicity. In other words, the political and historical agency of el Pueblo relies on the commune's existence. This is the space of el Pueblo's synchronicity. Without an organized and synchronized collective, there is no possibility of influencing the political, historical and spatial landscape of the country (Buciek, Bærenholdt, and Juul 2006). Those who stay in the commune retain their political and historical role, which is fundamental for the spatio-temporal advancement of the commune. However, reality shows that emigration—thought to be caused by la Burguesía's fear narrative—is eroding the space that produces and reproduces el Pueblo's synchronicity. Comuneros feel that their capacity to influence the social reality of the national space-time is in danger.

In conclusion, emigration exacerbates el Pueblo's temporal anxiety and, for Comuneros, threatens their ability to influence the country's politics and history. Because el Pueblo's agency lies in acting together, the social dispersion of emigration decimates their synchronicity. For my interviewees, la Burguesía's media is responsible for emigration. According to

Comuneros, its objective is to frighten young people into leaving and to channel their labour into exploitative capitalist economies. Comuneros answer to this narrative of fear with a counter-narrative anchored in fear as well. Here I use fear to name the emotion my interlocutors report, and terror to refer to the systematic use of discourses that mobilize negative emotions among Comuneros in relation to mobility, a form of affective borderwork (Vammen 2022). This affective work engenders geographies of terror, imagined danger zones surrounding the country where xenophobia and labour exploitation await Venezuelans. Comuneros seek to move the physical border deeply into the commune's everyday space (Vammen 2022). Establishing 'an inner, self-regulating border' (ibid: 3) prevents emigration before Comuneros leave the commune. Geographies of terror are el Pueblo's response to la Burguesía's fear campaign and operate as a mechanism of sedentary subjectification, producing immobility in the dispute over which bodies may inhabit the national space-time.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has examined how, in the context of Venezuela's unprecedented emigration crisis, the government and government-aligned Comuneros mobilize a chronotope of containment that makes staying put a moral imperative. For Comuneros, immobility is not a passive state but an active decision as socio-politically complex as emigration itself. The government's chronotope charges with moral weight the choice to move, heightening its political implications for would-be migrants. Drawing on qualitative data and government official documents, I traced how immobility is produced and re-signified within a class struggle and future-oriented pastoral project. I identified three chronotopic mechanisms that work to produce sedentary subjectification in the commune, which operationalize the chronotope of containment in practice.

The government's chronotope is constituted by a discursive configuration that links a selective past, a moralized present, and a promised socialist future around el Pueblo's agency and temporal anxiety. It becomes a chronotope of containment when political actors use the national crisis to recalibrate that configuration for mobility management by reframing emigration as a form of betrayal. The chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification are the discursive operations through which this recalibration works at the commune level. Identifying these three mechanisms reveals how morality shapes the social world of Comuneros, and how their relationship to (im)mobility is governed through affects and moral ideas surrounding time and space, rather than through physical coercion.

By demonstrating how such moralisation of space and time function as a political technology of pastoral governance that produces sedentary subjectivities, the article contributes to the temporal turn in Migration Studies. While it also makes a contribution to recent literature on Venezuelan migration, which largely focuses on those who leave, the drivers of departure, and the consequences for receiving societies, the article wants to further scholarly efforts to challenge the 'receiving country bias' in the study of migration by focusing on how sedentarism is socio-politically naturalized in the country of origin.

Chronotopic mechanisms of sedentary subjectification may operate differently across the country's diverse political geography, as the interviews in this study capture a particular moment in the crisis, a specific set of places, and the voices of committed government supporters in a political environment that has steadily become more violent and authoritarian since my fieldwork. Although the degree to which these mechanisms prevent Comuneros' departures is unclear, Venezuela's socialist communes reveal how an (illiberal) pastoral project transforms the decision to stay or emigrate into the terrain on which the national future is

contested, thereby transforming subjectivities and emotions into sites of migration management and political dispute.

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## Institutional ethical approval for the study

This research complies with the ethical guidelines of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). Research Ethics Approval Ref No: SSH/ODID DREC: C1B\_22\_001.

## Notes

1. <https://www.r4v.info/en>.
2. A commune member participates in the communes' decision-making assembly, participates in the economic and social initiatives of the organization, and, as a member of the governing party, enacts socialist practices in the everyday life of the commune. Typically identifying as historically marginalized and poor, commune members see themselves as empowered by the socialist government and as agents of a new spatial order in the country that responds to popular needs rather than the interests of economic elites. They regard the commune as a territory of popular power and self-government that challenges Venezuela's hierarchical spatial distribution of land (Ciccariello-Maher 2016).
3. In the case of Venezuelan migration, humanitarian migration management, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, was used to contain Venezuelans within South America, producing distinct forms of (im)mobility (Bonilla Mena 2024; Palma-Gutiérrez 2024).
4. The Chavista government has consolidated power by constraining opposition efforts at democratic change by ruling by decree, skewing elections, censoring media, and targeting dissidents and rivals (Polga-Hecimovich and Sanchez Urribarri 2025).
5. Tomás considers the international left to be disoriented and demoralized due to the capitalist hegemony in the world and the recent rise of the right in USA and Europe.
6. American public intellectual.
7. Ex-leader of the British Labour Party (2015–20).
8. British public intellectual.
9. Ex-leader of the Spanish party Podemos (2014–21) and public intellectual.
10. BRICS is an acronym for the five non-Western leading economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
11. Latin America's indigenous name. It is used today as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance.

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