

**TIME REFLEXIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK INTERACTION:
A LITERATURE REVIEW ON MIGRATION, TIME AND
TEMPORALITY FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

***REFLEXIVIDAD TEMPORAL EN LA INTERACCIÓN DE TRABAJO SOCIAL:
UNA REVISIÓN BIBLIOGRÁFICA SOBRE MIGRACIÓN, TIEMPO Y
TEMPORALIDAD PARA LA PRÁCTICA***

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Abstract

Introduction. In this article we explore how findings from existing research on time, temporality and migration can be relevant to social work practice and inform social workers' interaction with migrating individuals. In social work literature, time mainly appear as part of the procedural knowledge as organizationally decided time frames and deadlines for work which is sometimes internalized and taken for granted and sometimes contested. Challenging this tendency to equalize time with the clock, we explore how time and temporality tied to other forms of knowledge may play a different role in social work and be a constructive tool in interaction with individuals who have migratory experiences. **Methods.** Findings are presented from a configurative literature review in which in total 41 articles meeting inclusion criteria were analyzed and thematically synthesized into three main themes. **Results.** Findings in the first theme *Time and power* serve to demonstrate how power operates with time as a resource, and how power relations are visible in the different ways social workers and migrants are governed by, experiencing and relating to time. In the second theme *Recalibrating*, migratory experiences and consequences are put in relation to life plans and prospects in a life course perspective. The literature on the third and most extensive theme *Waiting* identifies this state as being connected to both slowness, uncertainty and frustration, as well as work, agency and hope. Theoretically informed by Barbara Adam's dynamic approach to time—time as social, multifaceted, contextual and positional—we suggest that these findings can be useful for *time reflexivity* in social workers' interactions with individuals with migration experiences. **Discussion and conclusions.** We find time reflexivity to be relevant for social work practice at four levels. Three of these levels have relevance for the direct interaction: the preconditional (reminding social worker of power asymmetry), the relational (time as a meaning making tool) and the operative (filling waiting time with meaning). A fourth level is the organizational, and it concerns the social workers' work environment and working conditions. Beyond social work practice, time reflexivity can inform policy makers in strivings to create a transparent and dignified attendance of migrants within public organizations. We invite academic scholars and social work practitioners to give further empirical content to our proposed practice theory; time reflexivity.

Keywords: Time; Temporality; Migration; Social Work; Reflexivity; Recognition.

Resumen

Introducción. En este artículo, exploramos cómo los resultados de la investigación existente sobre el tiempo, la temporalidad y la migración pueden ser relevantes para la práctica del trabajo social. En la literatura de trabajo social, el tiempo aparece principalmente como parte del conocimiento procedimental, como marcos de tiempo y plazos de trabajo decididos organizacionalmente, que a veces se interioriza y se da por sentado, y a veces se impugna. Desafiando esta tendencia a igualar el tiempo con el reloj, exploramos cómo el tiempo y la temporalidad ligados a otras formas de conocimiento pueden jugar un papel diferente en el trabajo social y ser una herramienta constructiva para los encuentros con individuos que tienen experiencias migratorias.

Métodos. Se presentan los resultados de una revisión exhaustiva de la literatura en la que se analizaron un total de 41 artículos que cumplieran los criterios de inclusión, sintetizándose temáticamente en tres temas principales. **Resultados.** Los hallazgos en el primer tema *tiempo y poder* sirven para demostrar cómo el poder opera con el tiempo como recurso, y cómo las relaciones de poder son visibles en las diferentes formas en que el personal del trabajo social y las personas inmigrantes se rigen por el tiempo, cómo lo experimentan y cómo se relacionan con el mismo. En el segundo tema, *recalibración*, las experiencias y consecuencias migratorias se ponen en relación con los planes y perspectivas desde la perspectiva del curso de la vida. La literatura sobre el tercer tema, el más extenso, *espera*, identifica este estado como relacionado tanto con la lentitud, la incertidumbre y la frustración como con el trabajo, la agencia y la esperanza. Teóricamente informados por el enfoque dinámico del tiempo de Barbara Adam—el tiempo como social, multifacético, contextual y posicional—sugerimos que estos hallazgos pueden ser útiles para la reflexividad del tiempo en las interacciones del trabajo social con personas con experiencias migratorias. **Discusión y conclusiones.** Encontramos que la reflexividad temporal es relevante para la práctica del trabajo social en cuatro niveles. Tres de estos niveles tienen relevancia para la interacción directa: el precondicional (recordando al trabajador social la asimetría de poder), el relacional (el tiempo como herramienta terapéutica) y el operativo (llenando de significado el tiempo de espera). Un cuarto nivel es el organizativo, y se refiere al entorno y las condiciones del trabajo social. Invitamos al personal del ámbito académico y profesional del trabajo social a proporcionar más contenido empírico a nuestra teoría práctica de reflexividad temporal.

Palabras clave: Tiempo; Temporalidad; Migración; Trabajo Social; Reflexividad; Reconocimiento.

1. Introduction

In this article we present findings from a literature review of research on time, temporality and migration, with the aim of making these findings relevant to social work practice. Social workers meet people with different needs in a variety of settings, often as representatives of either a governmental institution or a civil society organization. They may be in more or less powerful positions and have varying discretion in adapting general rules and norms to individual circumstances (Lipsky, 2010). In a context of individually changing circumstances and needs, social workers draw on and combine multiple sources of knowledge such as theoretical, empirical and procedural knowledge, as well as practical experience and personal wisdom (Drury Hudson, 1997). It is intensively debated if there is or should be any hierarchy between the documentable knowledge forms and the more tacit knowledge sources (Hjärpe, 2022; Parton, 2008; Reinders, 2010; Rosen & Zeira, 2000). In social work literature, time is often an absent dimension (Adams et al., 2009; Payne, 2020; Trevithick, 2005) or mainly appears as part of the procedural knowledge, as organizationally decided time frames and deadlines for work which is sometimes internalized and taken for granted and sometimes contested (Hjärpe, 2020, 2022). Challenging this tendency to equalize time with the clock, we explore how time and temporality tied to other forms of knowledge may play a different role in social work and be a constructive tool for encounters with individuals who have migratory experiences.

Such an approach is possible if time is related to, not only as something objective and robust (like clocks, calendars and deadlines), but as something relational, social and subjective, as in Barbara Adam's (1990, 1995) dynamic approach to social time. From this perspective, time is multifaceted and can be lived in many ways at the same time. It is constantly changing depending on the situation, but also on power relations, age, gender, et cetera. For example, time may be experienced differently by the social worker and the client in the same encounter or vary over the same period. This perspective assumes that in the dynamic and complex daily life, we are constantly in and out of tune with different rhythms of time. All experience is an intersection of different times, not one or the other, but several at the same time. Multiple temporal modes coexist within societies, varying between individuals and across contexts and life courses. An examination of time should therefore include all the nuances that time can entail at the same time and how they interact or compete (Adam, 1990, 1995). In order to particularly

emphasize the relationship between power and time, media studies scholar Sarah Sharma (2012) has developed the 'power chronography', arguing that experiences of time, even before clocks and calendars have always been embedded in uneven and subtle power relations that are visible at all levels of society. Starting from these ideas, that the experience of time is social, multifaceted and always powered, we suggest *time reflexivity* as a lens to be used in social work practice in the migration field.

To put time at the forefront in the context of migration can be motivated from several points of departure. To start with, time is – just as space – a basic precondition for social work and is closely intertwined with social workers' own perceptions of possibilities to build relations and trust (Sundbäck, 2024). Secondly, time is a metaphor often used by migrants to make sense of and conceptualize their experiences during migration and it has proved to be a useful meaning making tool to illuminate sources and experiential qualities of migration (Griffiths, 2014). Thus, by paying attention to the temporal dimension of migration we can understand detailed meanings and consequences of migration (Cwerner, 2001). Finally, we argue that on the one hand, time and temporality is a promising but underdeveloped perspective in social work literature. On the other hand, the rather extensive and growing literature on time, temporality and migration, including other literature reviews (Griffiths et al., 2013), tend to be theoretical and addressed to policymakers rather than to social workers.

Against this backdrop the questions guiding this explorative literature review are: What are the key emerging themes from the existing literature on time, temporality and migration of relevance for social workers interacting with migrants in different contexts? How can these insights contribute to time reflexivity?

2. Methods

Baumaister and Leary (1997) explain that literature reviews can have different aims, and followingly, different methodology and structure. The aim of the present study is to identify prominent themes for the development of a research-informed practice theory of time, why it can be described as explorative and configurative. In contrast to systematic aggregative literature reviews aiming at testing and giving evidence to a hypothesis, this review offers an interpretative synthesis of mainly qualitative studies found useful for informing social work practice (Gough et al., 2012; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Following our aim, the search strategy was purposive rather than exhaustive in the sense that it was guided by the intention to find, not all relevant studies, but sufficient cases to explore patterns and themes for the theory foundation (Gough et al., 2012). The strategy consisted of both broader key-word-based searches, and more targeted searches for specific publications. Throughout April 2023 through September 2024, searches were made in google scholar using combinations of the five key words: *time*, *temporality*, *migration*, *social work* and *encounters*. In a first step, articles were selected based on the inclusion criteria; *targeting temporality and migration*, *peer-reviewed literature in English*, and *relevance for social work practice*. After a second reading of the abstracts, a further number of articles could be excluded by the same criteria or if found to be *lacking empirical anchoring*. In parallel with these searches and readings, targeted searches were made for specific articles, either snowballing from selected articles, or found in other literature or conference material. If found to meet the inclusion criteria, these articles were added to the review. Finally, we ended up with 41 articles (35), monographs or book chapters (5) and literature reviews (1) with qualitative empirical work. These 41 publications were then further reviewed and coded.

Themes and sub-themes were developed iteratively as the research process developed. An inspiration has been what Thomas and Harden (2008) calls a “thematic synthesis” (p.4), developed for reviews of qualitative research targeting people’s perspectives and experiences. Synthesizing in this context means “taking concepts from one study and recognizing the same concepts in another study, though they may not be expressed in identical words” (Thomas & Harden, 2008, p. 3). By finding such patterns, a literature review can go beyond the findings of the primary studies and make analytical contributions. We looked for both the articles’ main conclusions, more specific empirical findings and key concepts. The process of coding and analyzing was divided in three yet sometimes overlapping steps. In a first step, the articles were clustered around themes emerging from the literature itself: *Time and democracy*, *Power asymmetry*, *Power and bureaucratic time*, *Migrants’ experiences of time*, and *Clashing time rhythms*. In a second step after a narrower reading, the articles were re-clustered under a fewer line of partly new themes: *Power*, *Recalibrating* and *Waiting*. In the third step, the reading was focused on identifying, synthesizing and structuring the empirical findings resulting in the subthemes now visible in the article: The main theme *Power* has the following sub-themes: *Governing with time* and *Who’s precious time?* Main theme *Recalibrating* got the sub-themes; *Disrupted time*, and *Parallel temporalities*. Finally, the main theme

Waiting was divided into the sub-themes *Slowness, uncertainty and sudden rupture, Work and agency in waiting, and Hope in waiting.*

3. Results

As the following presentation will show, the existing and growing body of research on time, temporality and migration can be related to three main themes. The findings of the first theme demonstrate how power relations are visible in the different ways social workers and migrants are governed by, experiencing and relating to time. In the second theme the migratory experiences and consequences are put in relation to life plans and prospects in a life course perspective. The literature on the third and most extensive theme identifies waiting in migration as connected to both slowness, uncertainty and frustration, as well as work, agency and hope.

3.1. Time and power

That there is an inevitable relationship between power and time beyond the migration context has been recognized in sociology for a long time (Bourdieu, 1997). As Sarah Sharma (2012) points out, the uses and experiences of time are ways in which power relations are manifested at both macro and micro levels. Reviewing the literature selected here, time emerges as a lens for visualizing asymmetrical power relations between migrants and the governing institutions mediated by street-level representatives in the new country. The studies aim at discussing either how time can be a resource to control migration flows or how asymmetric power relations are reflected in the social worker – migrant interaction.

a) Governing with time

To begin with, some articles focus on how political power operates within public institutions through politics and the control of time (Auyero, 2011; Cwerner, 2004; Griffiths et al., 2013). This can be seen in the many administrative time frames and deadlines for everything from how long one can stay on different types of visas to deadlines for asylum applications and appeals and the importance of time markers in asylum interviews (Brux et al., 2019; Lipatova, 2022; Pasian, 2024; Philipson Isaac, 2022). Some scholars pay particular attention to how power is reproduced in the ways that migrating people must wait (Auyero, 2011; Mulinari & Sager, 2022; Rota et al., 2022). Cwerner (2004) notes

that: “the politics of time becomes a function of the articulation of state power through mechanisms of legislation, legitimation and administration of law and public policy” (p.73). In this context, time is a resource that is used to achieve different ends, by limiting it, speeding it up and slowing it down, according to the purposes of the moment. A few studies show that quantified and decontextualized clock time (as opposed to relational or task-oriented time) is useful for controlling people’s time use because it is separated from events and experiences and taken for granted within bureaucratic logics (Adam, 1995; Hjärpe, 2022). Adam (1995) argues that relationships in which time is used as an abstract quantity are surrounded by power relations because someone decides what is considered “on time”, “too long” or “too fast”.

In a document-based study from 2004, Cwerner illustrates how UK governments have prevented cross-border migration through a “policy of speed”, emphasizing that the asylum process should be faster, more rigorous and fairer, through earlier identification of “non-genuine” asylum seekers. Delays and backlogs were constructed as the main problem in the asylum process, pointing to the negative consequences for migrants of being in temporariness. In this case, state power operated through references to (1) the modern discourse in which speed is taken for granted as something good, (2) organizational devices such as tighter deadlines for the submission of evidence, and (3) streamlining the administration through faster decisions on asylum claims and more standardized procedures and work routines. These adjustments left less space for individual consideration, and the burden of proof on migrants was placed under tighter time constraints. An important contribution by Cwerner (2004) is the attention to the temporal tensions in the asylum interview. A clash is described between the lived temporalities of refugees and the institutional mechanisms emphasizing speed. The timing, duration and pace of the interview is set by the institution, and fragmented and sometimes traumatized experiences of migration must be narrated in a chronological order according to an institutional, clock-based and linear logic. Cwerner (2004) concludes that “there is an unavoidable conflict between speed and democracy” (p.83).

b) Who’s precious time?

Trickling down to the encounter of the social worker and the individuals, temporal regulation frames interactions and what is possible for both parties to achieve. Just as the shape and placement of furniture affects how people can (and cannot) interact in a social service reception, temporal frames affect the public encounter and possible

outcomes in many ways. The asymmetrical relationship between social worker and client is visible in the routines (opening hours, meeting times, etc.) that are always pre-determined by the organization (Lipsky, 2010) and in the frames and values about which way of relating to time is considered the right one (Sharma, 2012). As soon as time planning and time demands involve others than oneself, it becomes a question of power (Adam, 1995). The claims one can make on others for time use are influenced by one's social status, which can be symbolically visible in who apologizes for taking up whose time (Zerubavel, 1976). Drawing on interviews and ethnographic data within the Swedish Migration Board, Philipson Isaac (2022) has examined experiences of temporal dispossession from the perspectives of both state officials and migrants. She finds that the structuring of time as a political tool entails temporal regulations for both bureaucrats (completing investigations at a certain time and filling case quotas) and migrants (for example how long one can stay on a temporary visa). Both must adapt and make strategic considerations in relation to time frames and time norms set by the government. However, Philipson Isaac (2022) points out that the impact on asylum seekers is qualitatively different in terms of the consequences for their life chances. The social worker's context is characterized by a lack of waiting and the asylum seeker waits a long time to see the officer who, once there, doesn't always have time to engage at a deeper level. However, social workers sometimes use time strategies such as speeding up their work processes in favor of asylum seekers.

3.2. Recalibrating

The concept recalibration is borrowed from Sarah Sharma (2011, 2012), who illustrate one aspect of the power relations described in the previous section: someone recalibrates their time and life plans according to someone else's needs, and how does this recalibration take place? (Sharma, 2011, 2012). To recalibrate, Sharma argues, is to find ways of dealing with time given the different points of reference that surround us. Sharma (2012) illustrates how the time of taxi drivers and airport workers is linked to that of commuting white-collar workers, but with very different experiences of time. Someone recalibrates their time (working late nights and early mornings) to support the temporal needs of the other (travelling quickly). The cultural fixation on speed in the West, for example, requires a taxi to be available at all times, which is made possible by someone else's loss of time. The literature reviewed captures the content of migration as recalibration in several ways.

a) Disrupted time

In different ways, some of the reviewed articles suggest that migration experiences always involve some degree of disruption to traditional rhythms and flows, sequences and frequencies of the life course. Social life is altered or disrupted in one way or another as plans, strategies and desires, both for life and for the moment, are negotiated within (temporal) limits and conditions often set by institutions (Cwerner, 2004; Karine & Cretton, 2021; Robertson, 2018). Such temporal recalibrations are documented for example in the pausing of life plans such as graduation and marriage while preparing for migration or waiting for a residence permit (Cwerner, 2004).

In an Asian-Australian context, Robertson (2018) has conducted in-depth interviews with people migrating for study and work, interested in the temporalities of what he calls 'staggered' migration. He shows how heterogeneous, circular, multi-staged and ever-changing the migratory experience can be. It involves constant recalibration, reordering and adjustment of trajectories and life plans. As Brux et al. (2018) also note, the migratory experience is far from a linear journey from one destination to another, but rather a process that is constantly interrupted and takes unexpected detours. The journeys of Robertsons' (2018) interviewees were characterized by long periods of immobility, detours and delays and related to three different timescales simultaneously: the institutional (politics and governance), the biographical (life events and imaginings of the past, present and future) and the everyday (work and family life). At the intersection of these timescales, Robertson (2018) identifies two experiences that disrupt the sense of purposefulness and rationality of life transitions and migration outcomes: *Contingent* and *Indentured* temporality.

Contingent temporality (conditioned or uncertain) refers to the experience of constantly juggling future life and career and migration goals on the biographical timescale, within a dynamic institutional timescale that can shift rapidly. For example, parents' approval to marriage can be conditioned to the couple living in one specific place, which can be in tension with changing work visa opportunities. Interviewees describe having to redirect their plans and aspirations along new and unexpected pathways according to changing institutional circumstances, including delays, sudden accelerations and reorientations. These circumstances provoke the experience of temporal disruption in the sense that commitments don't always become investments for the future when one has to start all over again in a different place and slowly fall behind in cultural expectations and norms. The second experience, *Indentured temporality*,

comes from more specific forms of delays in migrants' intended trajectories. In the overall migration experience, interviewees had periods where they had to be in a particular type of employment or area for a certain period of time in order to achieve a migration outcome. For example, they applied for a regionally sponsored visa to gain work experience, with consequences such as temporary separation or leaving children in the care of grandparents. Based on these cases, Robertson (2018) states that the present is mortgaged for future aspirations and future security. However, there is often a sense of time being suspended or stopped and a desire to be somewhere else. To some extent, Robertson (2018) finds these experiences to be gendered. For example, male respondents were more likely than females to talk about contingent temporality as a positive "time out" from family expectations and responsibilities (Cwerner, 2001).

Based on similar observations, Griffiths et al. (2013) encourages for the migration experience to be understood as "a flow" going backwards and forwards rather than a step-by step-process starting with the decision to leave a country and ending with a residence permit in a new country. We can rather ask questions about the timing of the migration experience in a life-course perspective such as: How is the migration positioned in time over the migrants' individual life cycle? How do migrating people themselves view their decision to migrate, as only temporal, or for life, and has it changed over time? How do they look upon the issue of return; is it projected, planned, desired, postponed or impossible? (Griffiths et al., 2013).

b) Parallel temporalities

Another finding from the literature is that migration often entails living and adapting to the time rhythm of a new country and simultaneously live in the temporalities of home countries, and that tensions can arise in this intersection.

Cwerner (2001) has proposed concepts of time based on the experiences of Brazilian migrants in the UK in relation to the constant presence of the home country through different temporalities: heteronomous time (adapting to other people's time expectations), asynchronous time (with the time of the home country), remembered time (memories affected by the passage of time), collage time (one's home country represented through fragments and stereotypes), diasporic time (collective synchronization and memories). Even with permanent residency, the temporality of the home country is still present and have an impact on daily lives in many different ways. He also makes an important distinction between simultaneity (living in two temporalities

at the same time) and meanwhileness (being a guest in one of the temporalities), where the former has a much stronger sense of belonging in the new country.

Transnational caregiving and family expectations continue despite living in different places and are increasingly supported by technology (Acedera & Yeoh, 2019; Gustafsson, 2022). This means that one can be more temporally rooted in the country where one is not physically present, or in a different time rhythm than the rest of society. Kilkey and Merla (2014) show how migrants can continue to provide direct care after migration through technology, at the expense of living in parallel temporalities. For example, one might get up in the middle of the night in the new country to accompany a relative to the doctor via Face-time, or to call a government office during office hours in the other country. As it seems, possibilities coming with technology can have importance for the time in the new country being perceived as “meanwhile” or “simultaneous”, as Cwerner (2001) distinguished. Regardless, work time guided by clocks and calendars can be in tension with diasporic, national and life-course time-scales.

3.3. *Waiting*

Waiting has been the focus of many articles in migration studies, demonstrating it to be a condition with particular expressions and characteristics. As Bendixen and Erikson (2018) put it, waiting is a “particular kind of temporality” (p. 89) and a distinctive way of experiencing time. Being a migrant involves different kinds of waiting, such as queuing and waiting at the welfare office (Auyero, 2011; Reeves, 2020) or waiting at home for important decisions. It is described as qualitatively different from other kinds of waiting (e.g. waiting for the bus or waiting for a holiday) because of the high stakes involved in the reason for waiting (Elliot, 2016; Karine & Cretton, 2021). The literature describes both stagnation, frustration and stasis associated with waiting, but also the work that waiting entails and the ways in which agency can be enacted while waiting.

a) Slowness, uncertainty and sudden rupture

A number of articles explore how waiting is experienced and lived. Prominent themes in these studies concern tempo, slowness, uncertainty and sudden disruption. Regarding the first theme; tempo, waiting is described as an experience of being at a contrasting, different and slower pace than the rest of society that moves forward often at an accelerating tempo (Bendixen & Erikson, 2018). This is expressed by people waiting as they watch people work and invest in their lives and futures, creating a sense

that their own lives are “on hold” compared to the rest of society. At the same time as many workers in the West long for a slower pace and less information overload, others want nothing more than to be part of that pace, to be “normal” and through the participation of this temporality, show themselves worthy of being part of the new context. The findings also illustrate how waiting is often filled with boredom and unwanted slowness, as time is perceived as having to be “waited out” or “killed” (Conlon, 2011; Elliot, 2016). What for some is the content of a holiday - sleeping, playing and exercising - for people waiting in a migrant context, can rather be associated with a sense of time being wasted and of life taking place elsewhere (Karine & Cretton, 2021; Lipatova, 2022). Cwerner (2001) suggests that power inequalities are visible in these different meanings of “time off”, “paused time” or “waiting time”.

One characteristic of waiting often highlighted is temporal uncertainty and unpredictability. Because the outcome of the waiting is uncertain, all aspects of everyday life is marked by temporariness, in-betweenness and liminality, affecting how to relate to, imagine and plan, and what relations to build on (Brun, 2015; Lipatova, 2022; Mountz, 2011). There is a described lack of defined statuses or social positions to relate to and build on (Bendixen & Eriksen, 2018). In Griffiths’ (2014) study, participants with experiences of both migration related waiting and incarceration, found the latter to be worse due to the uncertainty of the outcomes of the waiting. Hage (2009) has described the experience of not being able to move neither backwards, nor forward as “existential immobility”. Brux et al. (2019), leaning on Greek time concepts *chronos* (time as sequentially and chronologically measured) and *kairos* (the qualitative experience of time and moments of significance) explains that the working mechanism here is that as waiting is enforced and the outcome is uncertain, there are limited possibilities to “kairofy” (fill with meaning) the time.

Another distinctive feature of this kind of uncertainty appearing in the studies is the potentiality for a sudden rupture. Such a rupture can be a deportation from one day to another, or a letter with either good or bad news. Thus, slowness and speed alter in ways that migrants have little control over, tainting the experience of uncertainty (Fontanari, 2018; Griffiths, 2014; Guitérrez Garza, 2018).

Griffiths (2014) has interviewed and observed asylum seekers and immigration detainees in the UK and describes the state of waiting as a mixture of four parallel experiences that shift in intensity, creating temporal tensions and time uncertainties: *Sticky time* - the long and slow time shift between a sense of being forgotten and

hopefully waiting for a destination. *Suspended time* - the sense of stagnation and wasted time in an often rigid bureaucratic system, *Frenzied time* - the time of administration and the rapid changes in its processes that are out of their control, and *Ruptured time* - the ruptures in people's imagined time frames and the dislocation of temporal and geographical expectations. Griffiths (2014) notes that temporal uncertainty is compounded by combinations and tensions between these experiences. This tension can be seen, for example, in how slowness and rupture alter, and how migrants simultaneously hope that time will speed up and slow down, and try to anticipate constant change while at the same time fearing stasis.

Some studies focus on the more psychological consequences of prolonged waiting and uncertainty, describing temporal anxiety, depression, apathy and trauma associated with worrying (Bendixen & Eriksen, 2018; Brux et al., 2018; Guitérrez Garza, 2018). Others highlight the unpredictable shifting between different temporalities, and the mechanization and perceived lack of transparency of the migration administrative process (Mulinari & Sager, 2022). Rota et al. (2022) followed 14 minors for two years after their arrival in Greece and documented their gradual psychological exhaustion from waiting and lack of control in a "legal limbo" between EU and national legislation. Although some of the minors were actively involved in social activities at the beginning of the study, the authors note alternating periods of hope and disappointment, and successive signs of lower self-esteem, resignation, loss of hope, leading to permanent sadness, poor sleep, fatigue and stress as well as anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

Finally, Gustafsson (2022) has studied waiting as a collective experience in the context of family reunification in Sweden. She shows that caring practices are affected by prolonged waiting as delegation of care, emotional support and caring practices also play an important role in one person's waiting. Waiting needs to be understood as a shared experience, in the way that friends and family members support and worry about each other while they wait, and in person or at a distance through technology. In this collectivity there are what she calls "spillover effects", meaning that one person's choice of how to spend time waiting, or tolerance of waiting, can create tension and jealousy. In the narratives of couples waiting to be reunited, different ways of dealing with waiting proved to be a challenge to the relationship as such. Cwerner (2004) notes within the UK Brazilian community that he has followed that waiting can disrupt internal dynamics within the migrant group in the new country and create tensions between about identity,

what is OK and what is not OK to feel and think in relation to both the old and the new country in which the residency permit is acquired.

b) Work and agency in waiting

In other studies, focusing on waiting, it is rather the work and engagement it entails to be waiting in itself, or how agency is enacted in different ways during waiting, that is captured. Waiting can also influence action and sometimes be an opportunity for resilience and meaningful experiences (Gasparini, 1995).

In a few studies it is demonstrated how much work the waiting can require, both in terms of concrete actions such as taking opportunities for work, when possible, appointments to keep, showing hours spent on certain tasks, as well as socially understanding and adjusting to norms of good and bad waiting (Elliot, 2015; Mulinari & Sager, 2022). Through ethnography in Moscow, Reeves (2020) shows how even the act of queuing in different settings is a work in itself. Queuing is an activity filled with social norms and expectations on your time, and strategies are developed in the queues leading to interactions that can be filled with emotions and contradictions. She uses observations of people queuing to illustrate the point of “beyond empty waiting” and localize temporal agency in these strategies used by migrants to keep things going. Based on interviews and observations with asylum seekers and unemployed persons in Sweden & UK, Mulinari and Sager (2022) illuminate different layers of waiting and demonstrate that many activities structured the days of the women in many ways, yet these engagements were not valued as real work. As they write: “one could argue that waiting is both emotionally and physically hard work but is always defined as non-work; therefore, it is regarded as something that does not take time while simultaneously regulating people’s everyday lives” (Mulinari & Sager, 2022, p. 1023).

There are many studies whose findings contrast with portraits of migrants waiting as passively spending meaningless time (Bendixsen & Eriksson, 2018; Brun, 2015; Richards & Rotter, 2013). For example, while some see the “forced orientation to the present” (De Genova, 2002, p. 427) as an inevitable consequence of uncertainty, others see the act of focusing on the present as an active strategy to resist waiting or uncertainty (Näre et al., 2024; Rota et al., 2022). Everaert (2020), conducting ethnography in shelters along “la Ruta” in Mexico, finds that many migrants do “kairofy” (Brux et al., 2019) time and, using her own expression; “inhabit the meanwhile” despite uncertainty. She notes how migrants passing through shelters and stops along the route socially engage with

the spaces and communities they encounter, places they simultaneously want to leave as soon as possible. Three ways of inhabiting the meanwhile are identified: (1) actively constructing a place through home-making practices, for example making the temporary bed homely and decorated (2) arranging predictability by establishing agency in the forthcoming, for example through everyday routines such as dressing for work (3) contesting dependency by seizing every opportunity to work. Everaert (2020) sees these expressions as ways of arranging predictability and control in the everyday against an unpredictable future, without letting go of long-term future projects. Migrants are social actors who engage in concrete practices through which they transform a waiting space into a place and resist temporal subordination.

Bendixen and Eriksen's (2018) study in a Nordic context, frames the act of migrants using social networks and informal infrastructures for political mobilization to demand welfare rights (housing and basic assistance) as a way of resisting passive waiting. Using these resources they turn towards an active time of project activities. These engagements are future oriented, not only in the desire to create a better future for themselves, but also in the striving to change structures for others to benefit. In Näre et al.'s (2024) ethnography, also from Norway, informal structures and connections were identified as crucial also for engaging in education and working activities, despite not having formal permission. Participants worked in volunteering or in precarious labour markets, and found on-line courses, through networks where the lack of national ID would not be a problem. Näre et al. (2024) argue that taking an approach to waiting as active and filled with possibilities creates space for action.

Ramachandran and Vathi (2022) find similar, however gendered, activities and webs of everyday tactics developing among migrants waiting in Glasgow. Their findings consist of everyday small mundane acts and tactics such as gaining familiarity with the local surroundings and infrastructures, interacting with other migrants and organizations to learn the language and engaging in work-like activities such as volunteering. These tactics were however applied differently by men than women. Men applied all three strategies more than women who often limited their presence to women-only-activities. The engagements also started later for women due to fear and lack of trust in the authorities and the activities arranged, as well as family obligations.

In some specific contexts, the experience of waiting is described as meaningful in itself and as an opportunity to engage in activities where time is "filled" and "invested" (Tazzioli, 2018, p. 15). Griffiths (2014) and Tuckett (2018) note migrants' expressions of

“making time” under certain circumstances, including the finding that temporariness has the potential to offer freedom and transformative moments and even an administrative delay could give a little more room to maneuver (Tuckett, 2018). For some participants, waiting was time away from social expectations, an opportunity to enjoy youth and explore identities, if only for a short time. In these cases, waiting for decisions and letters became just one aspect of their lives, not something taking over the whole life. Yet, Griffiths (2014) points out that these experiences were conditioned by circumstances such as having strong support and external help while waiting and not being in a position where family members were dependent on the residence permit.

c) Waiting and the mechanisms of hope

A final sub-theme for the theme waiting is that to some extent hope is always present in waiting, but the function of hope seems to be paradoxical. On the one hand, hope is that part of waiting that is directed towards the future and that often makes waiting bearable. Studies show that engaging in hope is a way to be active during waiting and to stimulate constructive engagement (Bendixen & Eriksen, 2018; Griffiths, 2014). Brux et al. (2019), for example, see hope in the way participants sometimes allow themselves to imagine a day when the time and effort they have put in would be validated with a residence permit. If an asylum system is transparent and rules do not change, waiting can be bearable even for a long time because of hope (Guitérrez Garza, 2018). Hage (2009) has distinguished between the experience of waiting for something (patiently waiting for the present to end) and waiting something out (anticipating the future), the latter involving hope as the key - a mechanism that transforms passive waiting into activity. The acceptance of the former (waiting out) relies on hope as a central component of the other (waiting for).

But while hope can be a constructive force, it can also be used as a resource for different purposes. As long as there is hope, people can accept waiting (Turner, 2015), and hope can be used as a form of governance. Drawing on the waiting out- waiting for-division, and through ethnographic work on the Greek borders, Lipatova (2022) shows how both government and mobilizing actors used social hope as a resource. When the Greek government announced that asylum seekers with legal status would no longer be eligible for humanitarian funding and housing, the basis for hope in “waiting out” was taken away, and patience and strategies for coping with waiting were challenged. Instead, hope was called for through a mobilizing commitment to open borders, called

“the Glitter of Hope”. After a while, what calmed the turbulence down was the government’s promise to those facing immediate eviction that they would be housed for more time. This action re-established Greece as a place of a possible future with a small glimmer of hope that made people accept to wait once again. Hope functioned as a carrot on a stick (Biehl, 2015). Lipatova (2022) gives evidence on the importance of hope as a means of keeping people waiting, but also on the tactics of creating hopeful subjects.

4. Discussion

With the concept of time reflexivity, we propose that time does not only have to be a given organizational premise for planning and adjusting work, but an active and constructive tool in everyday social work practice. Without being neglective of structural constraints and the relative powerlessness of the social worker in the institutional context within which they often work, we now turn to discuss how insights from the literature review can inform social work practice. We find relevance for time reflexivity at four levels: for the preconditional, the relational and the operative level of the social worker-migrant interaction, and for the level of the social workers’ work environment and work conditions (organizational level).

Table 1

Time reflexivity at four levels

Level	Use
Preconditional	Visualize power asymmetry
Organizational	Assess work conditions
Relational	Sensemaking tool
Operative	Activities to “inhabit the meanwhile”

At the *preconditional level*, social workers can use time as a lens to remind themselves of the power asymmetry surrounding the contexts in which they interact with individuals with migratory experiences. While the power dimensions of welfare professionals in general are widely recognized in key social work literature (Banks, 2021; Lipsky, 2010) and are well covered in social work education (Svensson, 2025), time reflexivity offers a concretization of this work in everyday practice over time. Time reflexivity allows us to deepen our understanding of how power works. Awareness can be raised through simple questions such as: Who has set the time frames for the social

worker-migrant relationship and how? What ways of relating to time are valued and accepted within this framework? Drawing on Adam's (1995) insights that experiences of time shift individually with each context, and Sharma's (2012) insights that one's experience of time is always linked to another's temporality, social workers can make useful reflections. Their own experience of time is embedded in these power relations and is therefore potentially qualitatively different from that of the people they are attending. The social worker can be productive and achieve work goals (whether they like it or not) because their clients adjust their time to meet them. The same encounter can be temporally experienced as fast or slow depending on what one brings to the encounter, how much time one has waited for the encounter, and what life is like before and after the encounter. For the social worker, a designated hour may be one of several meetings of the same kind to keep up with during days of constant high tempo. For the migrant, the same meeting may be a too short break in days of waiting where time passes slowly. Time reflexivity can therefore be used as a lens through which it is possible to understand the other better and grasp the full experience of powerlessness.

At the level of relationship building and recognition, we find the perspective of time to be useful for meaning making and recognition of migration experiences. Griffiths (2014) pointed out that time is a metaphor often used by migrants themselves to describe their experiences and uncertainties during migration. Therefore, an appreciation of time helps to sort out the experiential qualities lived by people migrating. The articles show that many challenges described by migrants are related to temporal dissonance, uncertainty and anxiety. The experience of being out of pace and in a different, less "deserving" time rhythm than the rest of society, was present in some articles (Bendixen & Erixen, 2018; Brux et al., 2019). In other articles, the state of waiting and the uncertainty associated with it were found to be socially and psychologically challenging both individually and collectively by families and networks (Gustafsson, 2022). We also learned that people can live and have responsibilities in parallel temporalities and be active in societies with time differences and different temporalities at the same time, with implications for experiences and interactions in the new country. Time is linked to social cohesion and shared experiences of time can increase the sense of belonging and conversely explain the opposite. Social workers can understand the perspective of the migrant by asking questions about such dimensions.

At the operational level, social workers can be allies in "inhabiting the meanwhile" even when the outcome of waiting is uncertain. Everaert's (2020) study showed among

other things that even when people are on the move, they attach to places and people and create temporary homes, routines and structures, sometimes as a mechanism for coping with uncertainty. Other studies point to the importance of meaningful activities and social networks in times of temporal uncertainty, where social workers can make important contributions (Pasian, 2024). Time perceived as lost in waiting can be transformed into time gained for engagements needed by the individual anyway: trauma treatment or other types of therapy, networking, education, work experience, taking driving license, just to name but a few activities where social workers can be facilitators. Griffiths (2014) pointed out that although not all migrants are in such a position, they can explore ways of reappropriating time to give it meaning, a sense of empowerment and to tame anxieties about temporal disruption. This might involve creating routines to give structure, or developing plans for the immediate and longer-term future to gain control, even if only for a few days ahead. Based on the findings of Ramachandran and Vathi (2022), which demonstrated gendered opportunities to participate in such activities, social workers can suggest targeted activities for men and women, and programs without social and economic barriers.

Finally, we find time reflexivity useful for questions of work environment and working conditions, which is a more indirect aspect to the experiences and lives of migrants. Even though having delegated power from the organization in relation to their clients, social workers themselves are relatively powerless in relation to the organization. It has been documented that social workers are increasingly governed by time frames and quotas and that time for team and individual reflection are diminishing, and that such dimensions can explain high turnover and work-related stress (Hjärpe, 2022). An assumption is that reasonable time constraints don't guarantee yet increase the social workers' possibility to be thorough in their work. Acknowledging time as social and contextual rather than objective and constant, might make it easier to see that time and especially lack of time is something possible to contest and change.

This literature review has limitations and is far from exhaustive of results on time, temporality and migration. One limitation particularly worth mentioning relates to the inclusion criteria used as being peer reviewed literature in English. This strategy might have excluded relevant insights from research published in non-Anglo-Saxon contexts in other languages, as well as nuanced empirical findings published in reports, anthologies and other grey literature. However, we have been able to identify some prominent themes to lay a foundation for a time theory for social work practice. We invite

other academic scholars and social work practitioners to contribute to this exploration and to fill time reflexivity with further content.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore whether results from scholarship on time, temporality and migration can be useful for social work practice, which we found to be at the four levels preconditional, organizational, relational and operative, all covered by the suggested perspective time reflexivity. Beyond the practical implications for social work practice where time reflexivity can be used as a tool to visualize power asymmetry, assess working conditions, engage in sensemaking with migrants and to fill waiting time with meaning (see discussion), our results can inform policy making at local, regional and global levels. Policy makers at all these levels can use time reflexivity to create transparent and dignified attendance structures of migrants within public organizations.

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