

Temporal Racism and the Invisibilization of Work: or Why Some Can Eat Ice Cream with their Kids While Others Cannot



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PAULA MULINARI 

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ABSTRACT

Through the concepts of temporal racism and racial capitalism, this article explores how time is racialized in Swedish unemployment projects, shaping a racialized and gendered division of labor. The article identifies three forms of temporal racism practices: temporal racism through the invisibilization of work, through waiting, and through wasting. I argue that these practices of temporal racism create diverse forms of labor and are therefore important factors in the production and reproduction of racial capitalism. Temporal racism deprives those defined as 'foreign-born unemployed women' of time for joy, pleasure, community, and family; instead, it ensures that their time is used to transform them into racialized workers, moving between precarious employment and surplus populations.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Paula Mulinari

Department of Social Work,
Faculty of Health and
Society, Malmö University,
Malmö, Sweden

paula.mulinari@mau.se

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It is around one in the afternoon, and we are sitting in a room at one of the unemployment centers in the municipality of Malmö, Sweden's third largest city. It is summer and warm both inside and outside. Hana, one of the women participating in a project for 'unemployed foreign-born women,' leans over to me and says, 'Why can I not be in the sun eating ice cream with my son instead of writing a CV?' Hana explained to me some weeks later during an interview that writing a CV seemed to be 'a waste of time.' Most studies (e.g., [Behtoui 2022](#); [Wolgast & Wolgast 2021](#)) agree with Hana. The professionals in charge of supervising the women writing their CVs also agree that sending a CV has seldom initiated a journey toward formal paid employment in Sweden. While the women were sitting in the hot room writing their CVs because they were unemployed and hence obliged to be there or they would lose their social security ([Herz 2021](#)), I was there as a researcher. I spent 2 years (2018–2020) following several unemployment projects in Malmö specifically targeting what the state and the municipality label 'unemployed women with foreign background' (*arbetslösa kvinnor med utländsk bakgrund*).

There is an extensive field of research that explores the nexus between the Swedish unemployment complex¹ and the production and enactment of the category of 'foreign-born unemployed women.' Vesterberg (2015) shows how labor market activities aim to make participants employable by transforming them from 'migrants' into 'Swedes.' According to Dahlstedt and Vesterberg (2016), the 'employable citizen' is created as the opposite of the 'racialized other'; further, migrant women are represented as victims of their own cultures, and their unemployment is blamed on their culture. A similar conclusion is drawn by Larsson (2019), whose research shows that the most common explanation provided within the Swedish Public Employment Service for foreign-born women's unemployment is framed through discourses on 'cultural difference.' Krivosos (2019) argues for the need to analyze how activation projects create 'gendered migrant labor' even for women who have formal citizenship rights. The unemployment complex creates, she argues, a labor force that is oriented toward specific sections of the labor market, which in turn reproduces gendered and racialized labor market inequalities. Parsland and Ulmestig's (2021) analyzes in the Swedish context reaches a similar conclusion: activation projects and especially those targeting 'foreign-born women,' reproduce a gendered unequal labor market. The unemployment complex hence not only controls people's time but also constructs them as a specific labor force and orients them to specific labor sectors—reproducing gendered, classed, and racialized inequalities. In other words, research shows that, in many ways, the unemployment complex reproduces the same gendered inequalities it officially criticizes.

While issues of time and temporality have gained increased attention within critical border studies ([Anderson 2013](#); [Jacobsen, Karlsen, & Khosravi, 2021](#); [Philipson Isaac 2022](#)), analyses of time within the unemployment complex have often been limited to analyses of waste and control of time ([Paulsen 2016](#)). According to Haikkola (2019), it is, however, central to explore the various forms of temporal rationalities within the unemployment complex, as different groups of unemployed are temporally

¹ By 'unemployment complex,' I mean all of the different actors who are in some way or another involved in unemployment politics and in contact with my interviewees. These include the Swedish Employment Agency (AF); the municipality of Malmö's social welfare and employment administration, as well as education administration; the Swedish National Insurance Office; and private and civil society actors.

governed in different ways. Issues of temporality and work have been explored within Swedish labor research, not only in relation to the position of the migrant in the labor market (as mentioned above) but also in relation to the vast difference in employment conditions between workers. The situation of racialized workers in Sweden is characterized by a substantially lower employment rate, a higher degree of both precarious temporary employment and over-education in employment, less access to internal training as employees, and substantially lower wages (Neergaard 2018). While temporal inequalities, such as the unequal distribution of paid work and the higher degree of part-time and temporary employment for women, have been identified as an aspect that both produces and reproduces gender inequalities in the labor market (Bryson 2016; Weeks 2011), unequal racial temporal inequalities are more often seen as the effect of an unequal labor market and not as inequality itself. I argue for the need to study how temporal inequalities are, in fact, not the effect of racism but a fundamental aspect of racism. Inspired by this research, this article explores the racialization of time within unemployment projects specifically targeting ‘unemployed women with foreign background.’ Through the concept of *temporal racism*, the article untangles practices within the unemployment complex that create racialized temporal inequalities and diverse forms of labor, as well as unequal possibilities of time for leisure and joy, for instance, time to eat ice cream with one’s children in the sun.

RACIAL CAPITALISM AND TEMPORAL RACISM

In 2006, the Official Reports of the Swedish Government titled ‘On the Limits of Welfare and Conditional Citizenship’ [*Om välfärdens gränser och det villkorade Medborgarskapet*], edited by Professor Paulina de los Reyes, were published. It was one of the first interventions exploring how racial discrimination was produced and reproduced within Swedish welfare institutions. Since then, a burgeoning field of research from various disciplines has emerged, investigating the racial aspects of the Swedish welfare system (Hamed 2022; Hiitola et al. 2020; Hübinette, Lundström & Wikström 2023; Nordling & Persdotter 2021; Schclarek Mulinari & Keskinen 2022). This body of research reveals that racism and processes of racialization permeate and are intrinsic to virtually all central spheres of the Swedish welfare system. According to Perocco, welfare racism is as old as the welfare state itself. However, the author contends that it has gained new momentum over the last two decades, expanding into new areas and intensifying. Perocco argues that welfare racism encompasses racial discrimination in welfare provisions and a racialized welfare discourse (2022: 1). It is, he argues, a form of racism perpetuated through laws and measures concerning welfare and social benefits, often practiced by key actors within the welfare state. Welfare racism creates diverse access to welfare provisions along racial lines and divides the working class in terms of, for instance, citizen/noncitizen, European/non-European citizens, or in my own material, between the unemployed categorized as Swedish and those defined as foreign-born (despite their legal status as Swedish citizens). For Perocco, welfare racism is highly interconnected with issues of exploitation and labor. Welfare racism, he argues, ‘creates, preserves, and accumulates unequal conditions and rights among workers, fuelling differential exploitation’ (2022: 35). In this article, I explore what can be seen as a temporal dimension of welfare racism. The concept of temporal racism is used as a lens to explore how the municipality—through diverse temporal techniques, such as the invisibilization of time, long periods of waiting, and the waste of time—not only governs and controls time but also produces racialized

temporalities that, in turn, create diverse forms of labor and diverse access to time outside of work, such as, for instance, the time to eat ice cream with your kids in the sun. Welfare racism is therefore not only the unequal distribution of rights and resources but also the unequal distribution of time and, therefore, life. Central to my argument is the need to explore welfare racism as embedded in racial capitalism to be able to study how welfare racism, as Perocco argues, fuels differential exploitation.

The concept of *racial capitalism* is increasingly being used in migration and labor research exploring, among other things, the relationship between global capitalism, migration, race, and capital accumulation (see [Bhattacharyya 2018](#); [Bird & Schmid 2023](#); [Kundnani 2020](#)). The concept was theoretically developed and popularized² by Cedric Robinson in his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983/2021). Robinson argued that capitalism emerged within the feudal order in an already racial regime ('racialism' is the term he uses). There is not and has never been a capitalist system that is not racialized. Racial capitalism harbors and creates multiple differentiations of forms of labor, involving varying degrees of noneconomic coercion, and race is at the core of these differentiations. According to Bhattacharyya (2018), racial capitalism should be seen not as constituting a new general theory of capitalism *per se* but rather as a lens of investigation that centers on the role played by race and racialization in the development of global capitalism and its local variations in dividing the workforce. Inspired by Stuart Hall, Kundnani (2021) stresses that capitalism has the capacity to constantly recreate itself through the differentiation of labor. Race, he argues, provides the means of coding and managing the material boundaries between different forms of labor. A similar argument is made by Mbembe, who stresses that among the diverse things that race is, the

materials from which difference and surplus—a kind of life that can be wasted and spent without limit—are produced'. [...] 'Race is an instrumentality that makes it possible both to name the surplus and to commit it to waste and unlimited spending' (2017: 34–35).

As discussed in this article, by naming the woman 'foreign born unemployed woman' the municipality creates a space, where it becomes normalized to waste and spend the woman's time. It became, as Mbembe writes, a kind of life and time that is seen as spendable.

In *Between the World and Me*, Coates (2016: 91) writes that one of the 'defining features of being drafted into the black race' is the robbery of time: 'The robbery of time is not measured in lifespans but in moments.' Research has shown the importance of time in creating racialized labor markets and divisions. Cwerner (2001: 10) argues that 'time is a central variable and tool used by immigration law, policy, and control before and after obtaining citizenship.' Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) assert that time and borders are key sites for the articulation of capital as it differentiates among various forms of labor. For the authors, the temporal border is not restricted to the territorial edges but embedded into national systems of migration, integration, and employment. Thus, the multiplication of borders relates not only to national territory

² The concept of *racial capitalism* originated in South African academic and activist debates and was first mentioned in the article 'Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa' (1976) by Martin Legassick and David Hemson. The authors criticized the idea that the flow of international capital would undermine the apartheid system and replace it with a multiracial liberal democracy.

but also, as de los Reyes (2017: 17) points out, to the ‘differentiated working regimes, that is, hierarchical constructed models for the organization of work involving different wage conditions, laws, access to rights, work hours, labor environment, and so on.’

In this article, I explore how time itself becomes racialized and how, in turn, this produces and reproduces diverse forms of labor within racial capitalism. According to Mills (2014: 27), there has been more research on the racialization of place than on the racialization of time. He proposes to explore what he names the ‘White temporal imaginary,’ which serves to protect White privileges from racial justice. Racial politics, Mills argues, is done not only by the visible racial politics of space, but also by the less visible, but equally central racialization of time. White time, he argues, is a “‘sociomental’ representation of temporality shaped by the interests and experience of the White ‘mnemonic community’” (2014: 27). Different racial regimes, according to Mills, impose diverse allocations and redistributions of time, differentiated by race. White time shapes all aspects of life, he writes, ‘working times, eating and sleeping times, free times, commuting times, waiting times, and ultimately, of course, living and dying times’ (2014: 28). Hanchard (1999: 252–253) discusses the concept of ‘racial time.’ Temporal inequality resulting from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups produces, he argues, unequal temporal access to service, resources as well as institutions, and power.

Inequality is therefore a temporal inequality that shapes all aspects of life. Mahadeo (2019: 187) argues that temporal inequality illustrates how the relationship between ‘whiteness and time is subtractive for racialized people but additive and profitable for whites.’ Time, he argues, is not race neutral; it is a challenged terrain that privileges some and exploits others. Similarly, Sharma (2022) argues that the temporal logic of whiteness appears in all different spheres of sociality. These authors stress the importance of exploring how time itself becomes racialized and what forms of inequalities this racialization creates.

Through the concept of temporal racism, we can explore how the racialization of time within institutions, workplaces, and policies creates an unequal distribution of life and the differentiation of labor. We can also explore how those temporal inequalities shape the everyday through the dispossession, exploitation, and control of time for some and added time for others.

IT TAKES TIME TO SEE TIME: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

During my stay in the unemployment complex, time was a constantly discussed issue: not having time, stressed time, the children’s time, or the organization’s demand on their time. These were issues discussed every day. Still, it took some time for me to see or feel time. As Mills stresses, the White time of the organization was more difficult to see than the spatial racialization of the organization (for instance, there were very clear restrictions concerning where the unemployed were allowed to be). Partly, time appears as an issue because it became evident that the organization valued my time and the other professionals’ time very differently from the unemployed woman. In the organization, everyone complained about the lack of time, but while the professionals’ complaints were often understood as rational and as a critique of the organization, as well as a critique of the life puzzle, the unemployed women’s complaints were often read as whining and as an effect of them not being able to

plan their time in a structured way. Time surfed, as Milles argues, as a less visible, but as a fundamental aspect of how the institution normalized and legitimized racial and gendered inequality.

According to Bhattacharyya (2018), an analysis of racial capitalism is not only a description of the racializing impact of capitalism but also an analysis of the ways in which racializing processes are incorporated into how capitalism works. She argues that by taking as our point of departure analyses of 'the edge places of capitalism and the people who inhabit these zones that helps us to understand the role of arbitrary divisions in the function of capitalism' (Bhattacharyya 2018: 27). The everyday on those edges, which the unemployment complex in part can be seen as, can therefore be a place to analyze how temporal racism produces and reproduces racial capitalism in Sweden. Smith (2012: 119) writes, 'taking the everyday as problematic aims to explore the social processes and practices organizing people's everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world.' That is, the aim is not to explore issues that are already defined as being a problem (e.g., unemployment), but to explore the social processes and practices that create them as problems and people's experiences of being defined as a problem. Inspired by Bhattacharyya and Smith, I take as my point of departure the everyday and the people that inhabit the edges of capitalism in order to explore the racial temporality of unemployment projects. In my research, it was the everyday talks with the women at the unemployment center that made me aware of the temporal racialized practices of the municipality.

The material presented and analyzed in this article is part of a larger research project conducted between 2018 and 2021 in the city of Malmö, Sweden. The idea behind the research project was to create greater cooperation between research and practice. For 2 years, I was based as a researcher at the administration for employment and social services in the city of Malmö. The material presented in this article was obtained from 30 interviews. All the women interviewed participated in a 3-year labor market program that I followed on a weekly basis over the 2-year period. Several of the women were interviewed on more than one occasion. The interviews were held in Swedish, English, and Spanish. All the women interviewed were recruited through unemployment projects. They were aged between 25 and 54 years, and all had permanent residence or citizenship status in Sweden. Some had lived in Sweden since they were children, while others had been in the country for only a few years. The majority had children. They had diverse ethnic, educational, and religious backgrounds. While the women experienced different forms of gendered racism, such as Islamophobia or anti-black racism, this article focuses not on the differences among them but rather on the similarities because, despite having different backgrounds, they all shared the experience of being constructed as a specific category of workers.

TEMPORAL RACISM THROUGH INVISIBILIZATION

One of the practices of temporal racism within the projects I followed was the invisibilization of women's past and present work, as well as the time they had devoted to it. First, women's prior work experience is rendered invisible by labeling them as individuals without any work experience. Second, the work they undertake while being unemployed is also obscured, as it is never acknowledged as work due to their unemployed status. By rendering both their past and current work experience invisible, temporal racism creates a context where exploitation and the extraction of their value remain unseen.

I began to think about the invisibilization of time during my research because the work the women had done or were doing within the projects was never defined as work. Thus, the time they had invested in their work, as well as the time they spent working while unemployed, was constantly made invisible. Specifically, official discourses represented the women I met as individuals who had never worked and who came from countries where women did not work (Mulinari 2018); needless to say, the women had worked. Hana is around 50 years old. She came to Sweden 5 years ago and entered the municipality's unemployment complex after obtaining her residence permit. Reflecting on the question of work and her experience of work before coming to Sweden, she said

I am 50 years old. I have worked more years than they have lived [she is referring to the women in charge of the programme], and still, they treat me as a child. We have all worked. We are not rich, and if you are not rich, you need to work.

Hana had work experience, but what she did not have were documents that could verify that she had worked. The demand for documentation is a central mechanism in the bordering practices of the state (Baas & Yeoh 2019). When it comes to documentation demands, Bird and Schmid (2023: 1247) use the concept 'secondary exploitation' to refer to indirect forms of labor exploitation, namely, practices that 'range from the exposure to indebtedness and predatory rents to obstacles to accessing public services and the lack of recognition of professional or educational qualifications.' According to the authors, secondary exploitation creates a series of discriminatory practices through which displaced populations are restricted, for instance, from working. Thus, the invisibilization of working time partly occurs through the municipality's invisibilization of former experiences of work and education. Sabrin, had worked since she was 13, but she was still defined as a woman lacking work experience:

We were poor, so we all had to work. I have been working all my life since I was 13, first in a factory and then here and there. And then I studied to become an economist, but that is worth nothing here.

Earlier work and earlier studies are 'worth nothing' in Sweden, Sabrin stressed. Not only are they worth nothing, but they are not even made *visible*. Even when documents are acknowledged by the Swedish unemployment complex, the skills these documents attest to are seldom recognized as 'compatible' with the Swedish labor market. As research has shown, institutional discourse represents migrant women as both temporally and spatially distant from Sweden and Sweden's gender equality (de los Reyes 2022; Mulinari 2018). By describing women as having never worked or being from countries where women do not work, their work (both past and present) becomes invisible. Invisibilization creates a space where women can still be defined as not working while they are actually working. Malee, one of the women I interviewed, had been working for many years but was still categorized as unemployed:

I have done my SFI [Swedish for immigrants], but the Af [the Swedish Public Employment Service] did not think that my Swedish was good enough, so they offered me work as a cleaner. I cleaned houses, and then I cleaned at a pizza restaurant, so four hours of cleaning houses and four hours in the pizza place. And in opposite places in the city. We have to work

eight hours a day, but it took all day. And it was all through the Swedish Public Employment Service. They paid everything, so it was cheap for them [the workplaces]. But they say that this work does not count for my CV, because the Public Employment Service is the one that puts the money.

Malee worked 8 hours a day, but her work was invisibilized because she was officially categorized as unemployed. The work the unemployed do through different forms of internships and projects for private as well as public actors is defined as training and, thus, not 'real work.' The invisibilization of work makes it possible to make time itself invisible, as time is often defined as something linked to paid work. The women in my study never got paid for the work they did in all those projects, and they did not have the labor rights that formal workers have. In other words, the unemployed perform much-needed work, but their work is invisible.

In the unemployment complex, invisibilization occurs on two levels, first, by disregarding their work prior to entering Sweden, and second, by defining the work they do within the unemployment complex as nonwork. Temporal racism, though invisibilization therefore also creates the illusion that Sweden is delinked from the global economy, as it disregards how the extraction of work from the global south in diverse ways has created wealth (and therefore time) in the global north. Central to my argument is the necessity to explore how the unemployment complex extracted labor power, and therefore profit, through the invisibilization of the time invested in work by women, both past and present. As the women in my research are defined as nonworkers, their time is also conceptualized as nontime. Long periods of waiting have therefore become a normal aspect of everyday life in the unemployment complex.

TEMPORAL RACISM THROUGH WAITING

A significant aspect of temporal racism involves prolonged periods of enforced waiting while one is unemployed. The long period of waiting reinforces the woman's precarious position as it orients them toward a specific section of the labor market. Recent studies have explored waiting as an expression of power governing the lives of the unemployed, asylum seekers, and the poor (Auyero 2012; Jacobsson et al. 2021; Mulinari & Sager 2022). For instance, Khosravi (2021: 204) emphasizes waiting as a racialized phenomenon:

Waiting is racialised. Some groups are kept waiting longer than other groups. Some groups are kept waiting longer than other groups because their skin is darker. This secures racialised inequality.

For Khosravi, forced waiting legitimizes and normalizes the racialized exploitation of those who are forced to wait. The constant waiting, enduring circulation, and delays are based on the rationality that migrants' time is not valuable. As it has no value, it also becomes easier to exploit. Following Khosravi, I understand waiting not only as an effect of racial inequality but rather as a central aspect of how the labor force becomes racialized. Thus, racialized waiting becomes a way through which racial capitalism can code and manage the boundaries between different forms of labor.

Among the unemployed women I encountered, waiting was a very common experience. They often had to wait for long periods in the migration complex and then found themselves waiting in the unemployment complex. Sara came to Sweden

9 years ago. As with many others, she came because of the war in Syria. She had worked as an administrator for a company but found it hard to find a job in Sweden. She descried waiting as a fundamental aspect of her day.

I talked to a friend the other day, and she asked me, 'What do you do?' I answered, 'I wait'. I feel like I've been doing this for so long. I'm here, and I can work. I want to contribute. I like Sweden, and I want to give something back. I waited for asylum, and then I thought, 'Let's go!' And here I am, still waiting.

When Sara got her residence permit after 4 years of waiting, she thought that the waiting would end, but on the contrary, she found herself once again waiting, now in the unemployment complex. Another woman, Leah, has been in Sweden for over 10 years. Like Sara, Leah first waited for a residence permit and was now waiting for a paid formal job. When I asked her what she did during these years, she pulled up her shoulders and answered,

I waited. I went back and forth, applied for new jobs, went to new courses, got a new social worker and a new job coach, told them everything all over again, started again, and wrote more CVs. I just waited.

The long periods of waiting forced many of the women in my study toward areas of the labor market that they initially had no interest in but in which Swedish racial capitalism wants to locate them: toward (cheap) care work in unstable working conditions. In Sweden today, as an effect of the healthcare workforce crisis, there has been a massive demand for assistant nurses. This has opened a possible path for the women in my study toward a formal position within the labor market. However, this position, which the municipality actors have defined as 'successful integration,' did not fulfill most of the women's wishes and goals. It was not what many of them wanted or had worked for: Marwa, who had a previous degree in economics that she could not get validated, stresses that the refusal to acknowledge her former education is, in fact, a way to steal her time. As argued in the previous section, it can be seen as an aspect of the invisibility of work that temporal racism creates, in her own words. Marwa explains

I never thought of this [i.e., being an auxiliary nurse], but it is better than sitting at home. But I would have been better off if they could have helped me with something in my profession. I have a diploma, a degree. But this is better than sitting at home. I want to work. I have a degree in economics from my home country, but I cannot use it, they said. I sent all my diplomas and everything, but they said no, it could not be translated, so I could not go to university here, and then I wanted to work, and they said no. They have stolen five years of my life.

After waiting for many years, care work becomes one of the few options left. Marwa agreed to work in care not because she wanted to do it but because it was the only option left for her to get formal employment. Racialized waiting—namely, waiting that acts upon those who are racialized—is also gendered, as it is based on the idea that 'foreign-born women' are specifically suited for care work (Farris 2017; Parsland & Ulmestig 2021). Anya had a university degree in tourism from Eritrea that was deemed invalid in Sweden. When I asked her why she entered a program to become an assistant nurse she answered:

Did I have any experience in this [doing care work]? No. When they asked me, 'Do you want to work in care?' I was like, that's not me. I want to continue my studies in tourism. I've studied tourism, and I know four languages: Arabic, English, French, and Swedish. They said my education was not valid here, so I lost five years of my life. It's not that I didn't like the programme, but it wasn't what I wanted to do. But here I am. At least I'll get a job.

The invisibilization, denial of former education and earlier experiences of work, and long periods of waiting create a space where even precarious work or work the women had never considered before becomes the *only* alternative (Farris 2017). Temporal racism, for instance, by long periods of waiting, is not an effect of a slow organization process but rather an example of how the control of people's time is a key aspect of differentiating forms of labor (e.g., skilled labor, reproduction labor, and precarious labor). Perocco argues that welfare racism isn't merely a consequence of incompetence but should be perceived as a structural phenomenon. In the context of the project I followed, the extended waiting period signifies an illustration of the temporal dimension of welfare racism. It creates a marginalized population of workers facing highly precarious conditions within limited areas of the labor market. While waiting was a common experience among the women, another experience involved having limited control over their time and finding themselves in a situation where their time is wasted, as if it were nothing.

TEMPORAL RACISM THROUGH WASTING

One day, when I was conducting interviews with some of the participants in one of the programs I followed, I saw that the women were all very upset. It turned out that they had been informed by a municipal employee that there was no money left for the program, so in the end, they could not become assistant nurses but only nursing assistants, which is a 10-week education compared to a 2-year long high school education for assistant nurses. Nursing assistants have lower salaries, more precarious employment, and often also more flexible working schedules. By then, the program was ending, and the women only had 3 more months before getting their assistant nursing professional diploma. It seemed that all their efforts, all their studying and work were in vain. Nasira said

They've taken three years of my life. If I had known that, I wouldn't have entered the programme. I would've chosen another path. I chose this because they said it was nearly guaranteed that we'd get permanent employment. I didn't want to become an assistant nurse, but I wanted paid employment and secure employment, and they said that this was it, and now here we are. Again, we do not know what will happen. Again, we have to wait.

Using a Marxist perspective, Khosravi (2018) explores how the detention and deportation system creates a specific form of labor force and, more importantly, steals people's time. According to him, the time capitalists do not pay for the time they steal from laborers should be read as *surplus value*. Nasira had entered the program in the hope of getting employment. She had been unemployed for several years, moving between unemployment projects, precarious employment, and social security. She had a university degree that was not valid in Sweden, and although she

wanted to continue her studies, the waiting she had been forced into and the denial of her former education left her with few options other than entering the care work program. However, once again, she found herself in a situation where her time was not only controlled but also wasted. All the work and education the women in the program had done in those years was stolen, so they could only become nursing assistant, as Nasira explains

It's chaos. First, they say that you'd be an assistant nurse, and then, no, you'll only be a nursing assistant/care assistant. This is chaos. I've been studying for something for 2 years, and now they say that I'll become something that takes 10 weeks to become.

While the municipality tries to represent itself as a rational bureaucracy where things are on time, the women I encountered had a rather opposite experience. According to them, the organization was chaotic, and most importantly, it seemed to waste their time; it seemed not to care so much about their time and hence their lives. As stressed by Hanchard (1999), racial time produces unequal access to among other things institutions, in the unemployment complex racial time produces an unequal understanding of who's time can be wasted and who's not. A central aspect of temporal racism is the power to constantly change the rules while arguing that these rules are stable, consistent, and rational. Another aspect is the power to waste other people's time, that is, to produce surplus. In line with Mbembe, the constant wasting of women's time (both past and present) should be read as a form of temporal racism as it defines their time and, hence, their lives as surplus, partly because they are considered as having no time (life).

The women reacted collectively and forced the municipality to account for its actions. It then became obvious that the municipality was not used to collective resistance and demands for accountability. The municipality's leadership responded by arguing that, on the one hand, this was a decision beyond their control and, on the other hand, the women were ungrateful and unable to understand the economic reality of the municipality (field notes 2020/04/05). In the end, and thanks to the collective forms of resistance of the women in the project, the municipality financed the remaining three months of their education so that they could become assistant nurses.

CONCLUSION

Through the concepts of temporal racism and racial capitalism, the article explores how time is racialized in the Swedish unemployment complex and how this form of racialization shapes a racialized and gendered division of labor. The article identifies three forms of temporal racism practices: invisibilization, waiting, and wasting. I argue that these practices of temporal racism create diverse forms of labor and extractions of value and are therefore important factors in the production and reproduction of racial capitalism.

The article contributes to the research on Swedish gendered racial capitalism through a focus on the racialization of time. It shows that temporal racism is key to the construction of cheap gendered labor working in precarious and poor labor market conditions within a Swedish welfare regime that has been radically transformed by decades of neoliberal interventions. Therefore, it is essential to explore how practices of temporal racism are created in welfare organizations as well as in the labor market.

The article began with a question posed by Hana: Why could the unemployed not be in the sun eating ice cream instead of writing a pointless CV? The right to eat ice cream in the sun with your children may appear trivial. However, an unequal distribution of ice-cream-eating time in the sun is highly relevant. Temporal racism creates a category of people, the ‘foreign-born woman,’ whose time is made invisible, appropriated, stolen, and transferred to privileged categories of people who can use their time to eat ice cream in the sun with their children. The robbery of time is central to racism, namely, to the formation of racial capitalism through the differentiation of labor. However, it is also central because it makes some people’s time—in this case, those women defined as ‘foreign-born unemployed women’—surplus. In other words, the robbery of a moment to eat ice cream in the sun is a quintessential example of how time is racialized and creates temporal inequalities. Temporal racism essentially deprives those defined as ‘foreign-born unemployed women’ of time for joy, pleasure, community, and family; instead, it ensures their time is used to transform them into gendered and racialized workers. Therefore, I would argue, Hana’s question is one that not only demands an answer but also requires a new temporal vision that challenges rather than reproduces racial and gendered inequalities through exploitation.

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AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Paula Mulinari  orcid.org/0000-0002-4225-8590
 Department of Social Work, Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University, Sweden

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