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On waiting, work-time and imagined futures: theorising temporal precariousness among Chinese chefs in Sweden's restaurant industry

Abstract

This paper explores the precarious working conditions in the Chinese restaurant industry in Sweden – a country considered to have one of Europe's most liberal labour immigration policies. Drawing upon a theoretical framework inspired by scholarship on precarious work and time geography, the paper argues that precarious work performed by migrant labour can be usefully understood through three interrelated temporal processes that, when they work together, produce and maintain precarious work-life situations. They are: (1) work-time arrangements: that is, actual working hours per day and over the annual cycle, the pace and intensity of work and the flexibility demanded of migrant workers in terms of when work is carried out, (2) the spatio-temporal 'waiting zones' indirectly produced by immigration policies that delay full access to labour markets and in which precarious work-time arrangements consequently arise, and (3) migrant workers' imagined futures, which motivate them to accept precarious work-time arrangements during a transitory period. The paper thus also illuminates that the Chinese chefs in Sweden's restaurant industry are not just passive victims of exploitative work-time arrangements. Rather, waiting – for a return to China or settlement in Sweden – may be part of migrants' strategies to achieve certain life course trajectories.

Keywords: Sweden, Chinese migrant workers' strategies, liberal migration policies, migration status; permanent residence, precarious working conditions, temporalities

Introduction

In recent years, labour geography has become increasingly concerned with the intersections between migration and precarious employment (e.g. Coe, 2013; Ellis, Wright and Parks, 2007; Lewis et al., 2014; May et al., 2007; McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer, 2007, 2009; Vosko, 2006; Waite, 2009; Wills et al., 2010). Migrant workers, it is argued, are clustered in particular jobs and segments of the labour market characterised by low pay and insecure employment. In this literature, there is an often implicit discussion about the relationship between precarious work and time. The precarious working conditions of migrant workers are linked to the proliferation of short-term, temporary or casual contracts in advanced capitalist economies (e.g. May et al., 2007; McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer, 2009; Wills et al., 2010; also see e.g. Amin, 1994; Peck and Theodore, 1998; Rogers and Rogers, 1989; Sassen, 1991). It is also implied that precarious working conditions are not only characterised by low status and low pay but also by uncertainty about working hours, which may be both too many or too few (e.g. McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer, 2009), and by a lack of regularity and predictability about length of employment and when work will take place (Anderson, 2007). Thus, precarious work among migrant populations, as noted by Anderson (2007), has much to do with matters of time or, more precisely, with a range of temporal uncertainties – about how long employment will last, the number of hours of work each week, and when to be available for work – which are crucial to the understanding of the situation of precarious migrant workers. However, temporal uncertainty as a particular form of precarious work, the distinct temporalities that produce this condition, and how it is experienced are rarely made explicit.

In this paper, we draw on the case of Chinese chefs who work in the Swedish restaurant industry in order to outline how migrant work precarity can be usefully understood through the prism of time, both in terms of how precarious work-time arrangements are experienced and how they are produced. Specifically, we consider three interrelated temporal

processes, which, we argue, are key to understanding the temporal uncertainty of migrant workers. First, we set out work-time arrangements, by which we mean actual working hours per day and over the annual cycle, the pace and intensity of work, and the flexibility demanded of workers in terms of when work is carried out, as a key component of precarious work experienced by Chinese chefs in Sweden. Second, we examine how certain temporalities associated with Sweden's labour migration policy indirectly create spatio-temporal "waiting zones" (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, 68), which delay full access to the Swedish labour market and in which precarious work-time arrangements consequently may arise. Finally, we explore the role of the Chinese chefs' imagined futures in producing and maintaining precarious work-time arrangements.

While recognising the precarious situation of Chinese chefs in the Swedish labour market and the constraints of Sweden's labour migration policy, at the same time, we want to acknowledge that accepting certain work-time arrangements may be part of the chefs' long-term agential projects. The agency they exercise is not based on collective organising through trade unions (e.g. Herod, 2001) or community unionism (e.g. Tufts, 1998). Rather, it is the individual agency of unorganised migrant workers (Rogaly, 2009) that is the subject of this paper. This agency extends beyond the realm of wages and employment conditions as well as beyond a tactical coping with difficulties in the here and now (e.g. Datta et al., 2007). Indeed, the agency that is the focus here is future-oriented and aimed at improving the chefs' individual life course trajectories. In this sense, it has more in common with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, 984) notion of projective agency; a temporally embedded process in which "social actors negotiate their paths toward the future" by constructing "images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are at present". The decision *not* to act in order to improve salaries or employment conditions, but to wait – in this case, for enough time to pass to apply for permanent status or for a return to

China to build a future at home – may be understood as strategies aimed at improving overall life conditions – not necessarily in the present but in the longer term. In this way, waiting should not only be understood as absence of action; rather, waiting, as argued by for example Gasparini (1995), Gray (2011), Jeffrey (2008), Mountz (2011) and Schuster (2011), may be an active and intentional practice. The agency exercised by migrant workers when they agree to exploitative working conditions for a certain length of time in exchange for promises of assistance with applications for extensions of work permits and, ultimately, permanent residence, we argue, is consequently not constrained only by immigration policies. Legal regulatory frameworks may at the same time present opportunities to achieve other, more long-term goals. These temporal aspects of labour agency (Coe and Jordhus, 2011) need to be more widely acknowledged if the production and maintenance of precarious working conditions are to be more fully appreciated.

The purpose of emphasising the temporal is not, however, to suggest that space and spatialities are irrelevant to the understanding of migrant labourer's precarious work. On the contrary, temporal and spatial aspects of precarious work are intertwined. Employers' control of migrant workers' time, for example, constrains daily, weekly, and annual activity paths. Moreover, immigration policies fashion multiple statuses in the restaurant industry areas and within individual workplaces. We argue instead that an appreciation of both immigration policies and migrant strategies as distinctly temporal phenomena may enable different and perhaps more precise accounts of the power relations involved in producing and maintaining precarious working conditions. Importantly, we want to suggest that in order to understand more fully the situation of precarious migrant workers there is a need to look at how the temporalities associated with work-time arrangements, immigration policies and migrant subjectivities are interlinked, and how, when they work together, they produce precarious work-life situations. Indeed, the paper will show how the chefs' intended life

course trajectories and Sweden's labour migration policy interact to produce precarious work-time arrangements that at the same time restrict the chefs' lives in spatio-temporal terms and, from the Chinese chefs' perspective, hold the promise of their future lives; either as settled in Sweden or back home with enough money to build a better life.

The paper draws on secondary literature, policy analysis and semi-structured interviews. The policy analysis and an interview with a representative for the Swedish Migration Board were conducted in October 2014. Interviews with 12 Chinese chefs and a representative for the Hotel and Restaurant Union were conducted between October 2012 and February 2013 as part of a research project funded by the International Organization for Migration. The relatively small sample is due to the focus of the research on workers who had migrated to Sweden after December 2008, which limited the pool of potential interviewees. Additionally, the working conditions of Chinese chefs in Sweden, which include long working hours, uncertainty about when time off work would be granted, and collective living arrangements in remote locations made participation in research difficult. The sensitivity of the research made approaching potential interviewees at their workplace impossible. Instead, the sampling strategies we adopted included using private networks and contacting chefs via an e-forum for Chinese people in Sweden. The difficulties associated with obtaining access to precarious workers and the sometimes inventive and/or time-consuming strategies required to do so have been noted by other researchers, for example Ahmad (2008) and McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer (2009).

The interviewed chefs were all men between 28 and 46 years old. Eleven of the chefs migrated to Sweden between 2008 and 2010. One migrated in 2007. Four of the interviewees used the services of Chinese recruitment agencies in order to migrate to Sweden. Seven of the interviewees were recruited through social networks, and one contacted the employer directly after seeing an advert in a European Chinese newspaper. All the

interviewees were employed by the owner of the restaurant where they worked. The Chinese population in Sweden is mainly concentrated in large city regions and medium-sized towns (Axelsson, Hedberg, Malmberg and Zhang, 2014). Our sample reflects this pattern. Seven of the interviewees worked in Stockholm and three in Sweden's third largest city region: Malmö. Two of the interviewees worked in medium-sized towns. None of the respondents disclosed at which restaurant they worked. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin and lasted for around one hour. Ten of the interviews were recorded at the time of interview and later transcribed. Two of the interviewees did not want to be recorded. Instead notes were taken. The transcripts and notes were coded and analysed using three pre-determined themes: work-time, labour migration policy and migrant subjectivities. In order to protect the informants, all names used in the article are pseudonyms.

The next section draws upon a review of selected literature on migration and precarious work to illuminate how a temporal perspective may provide a fruitful approach for analysing the precarious working conditions of migrant workers. Thereafter, we outline Sweden's labour migration policies and the Chinese population in Sweden. Following that, the case of Chinese chefs in Sweden is used to show the application of this approach in empirical research. Finally, we present the conclusions of the paper.

The times and temporalities of precarious work

The intersections between migration and precarious employment have attracted increasing interest among labour geographers. Two large research projects on Greater London's low-paid, low status labour market in particular have contributed to shaping this agenda. The first, led by Wills, charted the disproportionate clustering of foreign-born workers in the low-paid, low status segments of the Greater London labour market (e.g. Datta, 2011; Datta et al., 2007; May et al., 2007; Wills, 2009; Wills et al., 2009, 2010). Migrant workers, Wills et al. (2010)

argue, function as a reserve army of labourers that meets employer demand for a highly motivated labour force prepared to accept precarious working conditions. Critiquing the global cities argument, May et al. (2007, 160) suggest that political processes have created a situation where the demand for low-wage, flexible labour in the global north is supported by increasing flows of migrant workers from the global south. Precarious working conditions are thus linked to a more general trend: the increasing demand for a flexible labour force and the associated proliferation of insecure employment in advanced capitalist economies (e.g. Amin, 1994; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005; Peck and Theodore, 1998, 2000, 2001; Rogers and Rogers, 1989; Sassen, 1991). Migrant workers are more vulnerable than other workers to these trends because they are subject to immigration policies. Lacking access to welfare and income support, they have little choice but to accept jobs deemed unattractive by ‘native’ workers (May et al., 2007). The relationship between migration and precarious employment in the Greater London economy has also been explored by McDowell and colleagues who have demonstrated how migrant workers with different social characteristics and legal entitlements are incorporated differently into the low-paid segment of the labour market (Dyer, McDowell and Batnitzky, 2008; McDowell, 2008; McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer, 2007, 2008, 2009). According to McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer (2009), the expansion of the European Union has changed London’s migrant division of labour, making ethnicity, nationality, skin colour and language key to understanding the competition between migrants of different origins at the bottom end of the Greater London economy. Temporary, part-time agency jobs are central to this story too, with links yet again being made to wider trends of casualization of the labour market.

By linking the precarious working conditions of migrant workers in the Greater London economy to wider trends of casualization, the work of both Wills et al. and McDowell et al. suggests that, from the employers’ point of view, part-time employment, temporary

employment and 'stand-by workers' provide the flexibility needed to meet fluctuations in demand for labour. From the worker's point of view, the casualization of the labour market is associated with uncertainty about how long work will last and with unreliable working hours. The latter may be illustrated by two quotes with which McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer (2009) begin their article. First, Peter from Hungary suggests that being on a temporary contract also means being available for work whenever the employer requires him. Furthermore, he explains that work can take place during any part of the day: sometimes he works in the morning, sometimes in the evening. Similarly, Vera from Bulgaria explains that her working times are unpredictable: "I work when they say. It's different each week. The last few days, I work Monday, one day I was off, then I was in three days in a row, but tomorrow I am off" (McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer, 2009, 3). While temporal dimensions of precarious work are not explored further in the article, these quotes suggest that in the Greater London economy, *when* work does and does not take place is very much in the hands of the employer.

Thus, it would appear that time is rather central to the understanding of the often precarious working conditions of migrant labour. This point has previously been made by Anderson (2007), who suggested that exploitation of precarious migrant workers may occur primarily through the medium of time. Focusing mainly on how immigration controls institutionalise temporal uncertainty, Anderson (2010) suggests that immigration policies have disciplinary functions and shape relationships in the labour market. For labour migrants the right of presence is often linked to fixed term contracts that may be terminated at the employer's discretion. Extensions of visas and work permits are equally dependent upon employers' willingness to sponsor applications. In a similar way, Robertson (2014) argues that temporariness inscribed in schemes such as the Working Holiday Makers and Temporary Graduate Workers schemes in Australia position working holiday makers and temporary graduate workers as sojourners rather than settlers. Furthermore, Anderson (2007) notes that

immigration policies may directly or indirectly prescribe how many hours migrants can work. In the UK, students may work 20 hours per week in term time and 40 hours per week throughout the rest of the year. Working holiday makers may work up to 12 months of their two-year stay. Thus, for these two categories of migrant workers, working legally in the UK means to work part-time or for a limited period of time. Others, such as the Chinese chefs in Sweden, are required to work full time to meet salary criteria stipulated by immigration policies.

Shifting the focus to the experiential dimensions of labour migration, Ahmad (2008) highlights how the long and anti-social working hours in London's Pakistani migrant economy impose spatio-temporal restrictions on workers' lives. Somewhat ironically, Ahmad writes, these workers have travelled across continents only to "become prisoners of time, locked in an endless cycle of work that confines them to a physical space of a few square metres" both at work and in the often inadequate dwellings where they reside (Ahmad, 2008, 311). Ahmad also draws attention to the 'temporal paradox' of the Pakistani workers in London who, Ahmad (2008, 313) claims, "lose great chunks of their lives working in order to secure futures that may never arrive" as precarious work-time arrangements become an ongoing condition rather than a transitional phase, placing family life or the purchase of a property out of reach. Also focusing on the experiences of migrants, Villegas (2014) emphasises the importance of temporal contingency for understanding the impact of immigration policies on migrants' ability to plan for the future. In the Canadian context, the permanently temporary status of migrants serves to place them in what Coutin (2000, quoted in Villegas, 2014) has called a 'temporal void' in which all decisions about the future are put on hold. Jeffrey (2010), Griffiths (2014) and Xiang (2006), to mention a few, have made similar observations regarding waiting and disrupted life paths in the migration process.

This is not to suggest that all forms of temporary work or part-time work are experienced as precarious (Fantone, 2007; Raghuram, 2014) or are even low-paid or low status (McDowell, Batntizky and Dyer, 2009). Rather, they may be the outcome of specific life-cycle needs (Waite, 2009). Nor do these definitions suggest that only migrant workers experience precarious working conditions (ibid.). However, because migrants are subject to immigration policies it is particularly precarious *migrant* workers who make up the “hyperflexible” labour force which is “available when required, undemanding when not” (Anderson, 2010, 300), and which the global service economy demands.

While these studies have contributed significantly to increasing the knowledge about temporal aspects of migrant work precarity, we argue that in order to more fully understand the situation of precarious migrant workers there is the need not only to look at specific temporalities associated with either immigration policies or with migrants’ experiences of precarious work, but also to analyse how different temporalities are interlinked and how such linkages are central to the creation of precarious work-life situations of migrant workers. Furthermore, we argue that a focus on intersecting temporalities can also help to clarify the specific spatialities associated with precariousness among migrant workers.

The links between different temporalities are the key focus of studies adopting a time-geographic perspective. In 1981, Allan Pred argued that daily activity paths (movements over the course of a day) and life course trajectories (movements over the course of a life) mutually influence each other. For example, social networks that are established through everyday interactions during adolescence or in young adulthood influence norms and aspirations. These norms, in turn, have an impact on the individual’s future life career (see Andersson and Malmberg, 2014). Through an analysis of homeless people in Los Angeles, Rowe and Wolch (1990), demonstrate that individuals whose daily activity paths are dedicated to securing basic subsistence may have to sacrifice longer-term goals such as

escaping from homelessness. A related argument is made by McQuoid and Dijst (2012) who show how everyday time-geographic constraints play a central role in solidifying precarious life situations for low-income, single mothers in the San Francisco area. These studies suggest that time-geographic constraints in the present impact upon future life course trajectories in various ways or, in the case of Schwanen and Wang (2014), that thoughts about the future have an impact upon decisions made about the present. Below, we consider to what extent such intersecting temporalities also affect migrant worker precarity.

Another time-geographic concept that is useful in linking different temporal aspects of precarious work among migrant populations is authority constraints. Authority constraints, according to Pred (1977, 208), “subsume those general rules, laws, economic barriers, and power relationships which determine who does or does not have access to specific domains at specific times to do specific things”. Based on this definition, authority constraints involve restrictions in both the temporal and the spatial senses. In the case of the precarious working conditions of migrant workers, authority constraints play a pivotal role in regulating length of stay and the time it takes to gain full labour market access. The control of access to national labour markets influences both the daily local activity paths of migrant workers and their trans-national life course trajectories.

While retaining the focus on how different temporalities are interlinked, in this paper, we argue that temporal precariousness affecting migrant labourers can be usefully organised around three, closely interrelated temporal dimensions, which serve to constrain migrant workers’ lives in several ways (see Figure 1). These temporalities draw from the time-geographic concepts of daily activity paths, authority constraints and life course trajectories and on the work of Ahmad, Anderson and others.

[Figure about here]

The rest of the paper draws upon the case of Chinese chefs in Sweden to show the potential application of these ideas in research on precarious working conditions among migrant labourers. It highlights how the daily, weekly and annual activity paths of migrant workers are deeply embedded in their employers' demand for extensive working hours. It also explores the interplay between, on the one hand, the authority constraints associated with Sweden's labour migration policy and, on the other hand, migrants' dreams and desires in explaining how precarious work-time arrangements are produced and maintained. However, before exploring in more detail the temporal aspects of the Chinese restaurant industry in Sweden, we will set out Sweden's labour migration policy and place the case of Chinese chefs in the wider context of labour migration to Sweden.

Sweden's labour migration policy reform and the case of Chinese chefs

Family reunification and humanitarian migration have long been the main channels of immigration to Sweden. For a long time, labour migration was highly restricted. This meant Sweden had one of the lowest levels of discretionary labour migration among the OECD countries relative to its population (Cerna, 2009; Ministry of Justice, 2008; OECD, 2011). Following rising concerns about demographic forecasts and labour shortages in certain sectors, Sweden became one of only three countries not to impose temporary restrictions in order to limit the labour market access of the 'Accession 8' – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – when they joined the European Union in 2004 (Tamas and Palme, 2006). In 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU, Sweden and Finland were the only countries not to impose restrictions. This represented a significant shift in Sweden's approach to labour migration.

Sweden's new approach to labour migration was consolidated in December 2008 when the then right-wing coalition government, with the support of the Green Party,

amended the Alien's Act in an attempt to increase labour migration flows from countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA). The policy has resulted in a strong relative increase in labour migration but the absolute number of labour migrants is still modest. Between December 2008 and December 2012, the stock of labour migrants¹ in Sweden quadrupled – from 7,097 to 28,008. Of the latter, 23,930 arrived after 2008. In this group of recent migrant workers, more than one fifth (5,300) are employed in the restaurant sector. Sixty-five per cent of these restaurant workers come from Asia (Statistics Sweden, 2015). Shifting the focus to the Chinese population in Sweden, there is a notable clustering of Chinese nationals in the restaurant industry, with one third of the Chinese working population working in a restaurant (Axelsson, Hedberg, Malmberg and Zhang, 2014). Thus, in Sweden, restaurant workers of Chinese origin represent one of the main labour migration flows since the policy reform in December 2008.

Under the amended legislation, only a job offer from an employer in Sweden is required in order to apply for a work permit. The current legislation does not impose skill or educational requirements, or numerical limits on labour migration from countries outside the EEA. As long as the European Union's Generalised System of Preferences has been adhered to and the terms of employment, including the salary, are in line with collective agreements or prevailing practice within the profession or sector, employers are free to recruit any number of employees from non-EEA countries (Government Bill, 2007/08:147). The maximum grant period for the first work permit is two years. Labour migrants may apply for extensions of their work permits for up to another two years. During the first two years the work permit is tied to a particular employer and during the first four years to an occupation. Only after having worked for four years in Sweden do labour migrants have full access to all sectors of the labour market. At the same time, labour migrants whose employment is terminated or who decide to quit their job may remain in Sweden for up to three months while searching for new

employment with a similar job description. The Swedish legislation thus offers some flexibility as far as the requirement to work for a particular employer is concerned (Government Bill, 2007/08:147). After having worked in Sweden for four years during a seven-year period, labour migrants are eligible to apply for a permanent residence permit (Government Bill, 2013/14:213). This route to settlement is open to both lower skilled and highly skilled workers. Further rights associated with the work permit are: the same labour market protection as citizens (Fahlbeck and Mulder, 2009); the right to family reunification for all non-EEA workers who are granted a work permit lasting at least six months; and, if the length of their work permit is at least 12 months, full access to healthcare (Swedish Migration Board, personal communication, October 2014).

Despite offering a relatively quick route to permanence and associated rights, Sweden's new policy for labour migration has been followed by debates about precarious or even exploitative working conditions. The underpaid Pakistani workers in McDonald's became the subject of media debate, as did the Cameroonian tree planters who, after being deceived by false contracts in 2011, waited in Sweden for economic compensation they argue they are entitled to. There were also 120 Thai berry pickers who spent two weeks outside the offices of a Swedish trade union's local branch in September 2013 protesting the non-payment of salaries and retroactive changes to employment contracts (for more on the Swedish berry picking industry see e.g. Hedberg, 2013; Woolfson, Olsson and Thörnqvist, 2012). Unannounced visits by the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union at 118 restaurants in the Greater Stockholm region in 2011 and 2012 suggested that precarious working conditions were common in the restaurant industry as well. In an unpublished report, the union claimed that restaurant workers from countries outside the EEA often lacked employment contracts, that their salaries did not follow the collective agreement, and that labour laws and regulations concerning work-time were frequently violated.

The next three sections explore in more detail these working conditions in the context of the Chinese restaurant industry by focusing on the temporal aspects of work-time, immigration policies and migrants' subjective aspirations.

Work-time

According to the Swedish law, one should work for eight hours per day with one hour for meals. But actually we work for more than ten hours a day. *This is exploitation in time.* On top of that, the working intensity is high. Isn't it exploitation? (Wu, November 2012, our emphasis)

Key, but perhaps less frequently discussed aspects of migrant work precarity are the long and anti-social working hours or not enough hours; time-limited contracts, shift work, part-time work; and the lack of control over one's time that follows from constantly working or the need to be permanently available for work (e.g. Anderson, 2007).

In Sweden, work-time legislation, which is intended to protect workers, limits the time that workers may work on a daily, weekly as well as annual basis. Regular working hours in the restaurant industry are 40 hours per week. For every period of 24 hours, the working hours may not exceed ten hours. Employees may not work ten-hour shifts more than three times every two weeks. Overtime may not exceed 200 hours per year and must be distributed over the year so that working hours do not exceed 48 hours per week. The collective agreement limits the working days per week to five. Stand-by hours, during which an employee must remain at the employer's disposal, cannot be included in the weekly rest. Overtime and anti-social hours should be compensated with extra pay or, if an employee has worked more than three ten-hour shifts during a two week period, with leave (Collective Agreement 2012-2013).² Yet, according to our interviewees, the average working hours for newly arrived Chinese chefs were ten to 13 hours per day, six days per week. None of the interviewees received any compensation for the extra hours they worked. Nor did any of them

get paid annual leave, and only some had been able to negotiate unpaid annual leave, making the working hours over the annual cycle very long. The Chinese chefs were also denied sick pay. Some even testified that they had been required to compensate for absence due to illness by working additional hours upon their return to work. Employers are able to ‘exploit workers’ time’ (Wu, November 2012) by retroactively changing work-time schedules. Hu said that:

The Swedish government stipulates that we should work for 40 hours per week but are there any of us not working for 55 to 60 hours? How would it be possible for the government to find out that we are not? It is easy for the employers to change the records in the work-time book. When you come to work, he writes 11 o’clock. If no officer comes to check, in the afternoon, he changes it to 14. Then three hours are removed. Every day he changes the records in the book. In the book he tries to keep the working hours within six to seven hours. Then it looks legal. But actually all the workers have to work for 60 hours. That is a long time. (January 2013)

Following unannounced visits at over 100 restaurants in 2011 and 2012, the Hotel and Restaurant Union drew similar conclusions. Looking only at restaurants that had entered collective agreements, the union claimed that at almost 50 per cent of the workplaces they visited work schedules were not available, which in itself represents a breach of the collective agreement. In restaurants where work schedules were available these showed that daily working hours were too long and that workers were not given enough rest between working days. In some cases, restaurant workers had worked 12 hours per day, seven days a week. According to the Hotel and Restaurant Union, Chinese restaurant workers are rarely trade union members. Since trade unions are membership-based organisations with a mandate to act on behalf of their members it is very difficult for the union to take action based on grievances raised by this group of migrant workers (personal communication, November 2012).

As noted earlier, the exceptional amount of time spent at work has spatio-temporal restrictions on workers’ lives (e.g. Ahmad, 2008). The long working hours and the lack of extended periods of time off work limit the Chinese chefs’ activity paths in several

ways. First, the lack of annual leave confines the Chinese chefs to Sweden. One interviewee explained that he had not been able to go back to China at all since he first came to Sweden in 2009 (Zhu, December 2012). Second, shared accommodation with other Chinese restaurant workers, arranged by the employer and often in remote locations, further contributes to the experience of isolation. In Stockholm, for instance, many of the chefs spent around two hours per day travelling to and from work in addition to their long working days. Third, the Chinese chefs have no time to participate in Swedish language classes and therefore struggle to understand their rights as workers in Sweden. Lacking language skills further confine them to the Chinese-owned restaurant segment of the restaurant industry. Long working hours, then, not only have consequences in the present but may serve to extend precarious working conditions for migrant workers into the future (Sporton, 2013).

Work-time precariousness is not only related to the number of hours spent working. The pace and intensity of work is another dimension of precarious work-time arrangements. One of the interviewees described his experiences of working in Sweden in the following way:

The working pressure is very high. The workers are like robots who work for a whole day without any break. If it is a nice employer, one can have a break after lunch. If it is a bad one, there is nothing at all. I am quite like the highest level of person in the industry. Therefore, I can have a few hours rest after lunch. All my colleagues have to work from nine o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock in the evening. (Wu, November 2012)

Like Wu, all interviewees stated that the intensity of work was higher in Sweden than in China. Not only were the newly arrived chefs asked to work longer hours; just like the workers in Ahmad's study they were refused breaks throughout the working day. Life in Sweden thus turned out to be much harder than most of the chefs had anticipated. In fact, working in Sweden was seen as much harder than doing a similar type of job in China. Li said:

When my work permit was going to expire, frankly speaking, I worked very hard; I said I would not like to continue. The first work permit was for one and a half years. Because I found life here is quite difficult from what I thought, life was much happier in China. The employer [in Sweden] wanted me to stay. He asked others to persuade me to stay. So I stayed. (November 2012)

Uncertainty about when work will take place and the requirement to constantly be available for work is the third dimension of precarious work we link to precarious work-time arrangements. As suggested earlier, excessive or unreliable working hours and flexible work-time arrangements are often associated with the proliferation of casual and temporary work. From the employer's point of view, part-time employment, temporary employment and 'stand-by workers' provide the flexibility needed to meet fluctuations in demand for labour. The cost of the flexible demand for labour associated with the global service economy is generally paid by workers who, as noted by Anderson (2010), are expected to be available when there is work, and to demand nothing when there is none.

In the case of Chinese chefs in Sweden, employers' attempts to meet the flexible demand for labour in the restaurant world were primarily manifested in employees having to negotiate their one-day weekly rest with their employer and co-workers. It was not uncommon that a chef's weekly rest was withdrawn when restaurants were busy. Additionally, chefs working in one restaurant would sometimes have to work in other restaurants owned by the same employer on their day off if the need arose. These types of arrangements add to already excessive working hours and make workers' lives increasingly organised around insecurities about when and how much work will take place, and around workplace and home.

By unpicking work-time as a form of precarious work, this section has sought to illustrate that precarious work-time arrangements not only have to do with the number of hours worked on a daily and annual basis but also with the pace and intensity of work and uncertainty about when work will take place. In the case of the Chinese chefs, these work-

time arrangements have spatial and temporal consequences. They not only restrict the chefs' activity paths to home and workplace and the journey in between; daily work-time arrangements also limit their possibilities of keeping close contact with China, and place restrictions on their life course trajectories when excessive working hours result in lack of time to learn the skills needed to improve their present and future status in the labour market. These work-time arrangements, we argue, are partly linked to the distinct temporalities of Sweden's labour migration policy.

The ordered waiting under labour migration policies

Immigration and settlement policies not only order labour migrant mobility in a spatial sense (e.g. who can go and/or settle where) but also in a temporal sense. They may, for instance, be used to manipulate the speed of labour migrants' movements across borders. In some instances, migratory movements are accelerated, for example, by speeding up bureaucratic or legal processes (Cwerner, 2004). An example is skilled migration schemes, which are designed to fast-track the entry of qualified, desired workers into labour markets (e.g. Shachar, 2006). In other instances, rapid movement is cut through by periods of waiting and being stuck. Using the example of Indian IT-professionals, Xiang (2006), for example, has demonstrated how the temporal strategy of 'benching' – that is, the placing of workers 'on hold' once they have reached the destination where their temporary work visa applies – temporally suspends IT professionals' entry into a particular labour market while putting their lives on hold. Immigration policies do not cease to manage labour migration once migrants have entered the host country. Rather, migrants remain subject to a number of temporal constraints, manifested, for example, in length of stay, times for renewing permits and applying for changes to migration status, and temporary or indeed permanent restrictions on full access to the labour market (e.g. Anderson, 2007, 2010; Castles, 2006; Cwerner, 2001,

Rajkumar et al., 2012). The focus of this section is the authority constraints placed on migrant workers by the continued regulation of these migrants after they have entered the host country.

As noted earlier, Sweden has opted for a work permit system, which allows labour migrants to enter only if they have a job offer from an employer based in Sweden, and which limits full access to the labour market by linking work permits to a particular employer during the first two years and to a particular job description during the first four years. While Sweden offers a route to settlement, all work permits are in fact temporary and, during the first four years of working in Sweden, the continued right of presence is therefore conditional on a valid work permit. It could be argued that this way of governing access to the labour market produces a group of temporary migrant workers. These workers inhabit spatio-temporal “waiting zones” (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, 68) in which full access to the Swedish labour market – that is, the right to choose whom to work for and what job to undertake – is suspended. The “time technology” (Cwerner, 2004, 7) of suspended time provides a very powerful means of disciplining migrant workers into accepting precarious work-time arrangements since if their employment is terminated they may lose their right to stay in Sweden (for a related discussion on the power of deportability in disciplining migrant workers, see e.g. Basok, Bélanger and Rivas, 2014; Hahamovitch, 2011).

Temporary migration statuses and delayed access to full labour market rights not only open up the possibility for precarious work-time arrangements to arise; they also incorporate workers differently into the labour market, depending on their status as temporary or permanent, and create spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1995; also McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer, 2009; Wills et al., 2010) *within* the same workplace. In the case of the Chinese chefs, these divisions of labour are organised around working hours, intensity of work and uncertainty about when and where work will take place. Indeed not all Chinese chefs in Sweden work as many hours or with the same intensity and uncertainty, as was discussed in

the previous section. Several of the Chinese chefs we interviewed noted that there was a distinct difference between the working conditions of chefs with permanent status and chefs on temporary work permits. These two categories of Chinese chefs work side by side in the same workplaces but on very different terms. According to Liu:

There are two types of workers in Chinese restaurants now. One type has permanent residence and the other type has a work permit [workers without permanent residence permit]. Now Sweden's labour migration policy is open. Employers prefer to hire new immigrant labourers rather than us who have been exploited here [and who are now permanent residents]. [Because] comparatively we know more about policies and we also have higher salaries. They prefer to hire labourers [without permanent residence]. Therefore, there are such labourers in nearly every restaurant. The employers can earn more because they spend less on salaries. (October 2012)

Zhan noted that: "with permanent residence, one can have two days off a week but with a work permit, one can only have one day off" (October 2012). Other interviewees noted that employers treated permanent resident permit holders with more respect than chefs on temporary work permits (e.g. Miao, February 2013; Zhan, October 2012).

In this context, obtaining a permanent residence permit would appear to represent the ultimate form of freedom for the Chinese chefs in our study. One of the interviewees explained it in the following way:

I have a friend with permanent residence. One day his employer was criticising him about his work, and he said: "Sister, if you think I am not good enough, please look for someone else." Then he quit. With permanent residence, you can quit if you want. With a work permit, you cannot unless you have an extensive social network so that you can find a new job in three months and thus a new employer to apply for a new work permit for you. (Zhan, October 2012)

At the same time, the relationship between permanence and a secure position in the labour market is not entirely straightforward. Somewhat ironically, and contrary to the view that the lack of permanent status and/or citizenship renders migrant workers more vulnerable to exploitation (Vosko, 2010; also e.g. Anderson, 2010; Goldring, Hennebry and

Preibisch, 2009; Lenard and Straehle, 2012; Preibisch and Otero, 2014), it appears that permanent status, in some instances, results in a more insecure position in the restaurant industry and even functions as a barrier to employment. Liu explained how his employment was terminated once his migration status changed: “I was fired. The employer said directly: ‘your wages are too high. I have found labour in China’” (October 2012). Since being fired Liu has struggled to find long-term employment. According to Liu, other Chinese chefs too had been made redundant once they had been granted permanent status since employers prefer to replace these workers with new migrant workers who, due to their temporary status, are more likely to accept precarious work-time arrangements. Others stated that they had struggled to negotiate better working conditions with their employers after being granted permanent status and that while their working hours were somewhat reduced they still greatly exceeded the working hours in the collective agreement (e.g. Deng, January 2013). This shows that the transition to permanent status does not automatically translate to a secure position in the labour market (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Goldring and Landolt, 2011). Additionally, it illustrates that competition between workers in the Chinese restaurant industry in Sweden is not primarily about the origin of workers. Within this ‘ethnic economy’ (e.g. Ahmad, 2008; Light and Gold, 2000), the temporary migration status represents a contradictory form of currency that can be used to ‘buy’ a job in the Chinese restaurant industry. At the same time, once the Chinese chefs have obtained permanent status, they have been in Sweden long enough to understand their rights if they indeed lose their jobs. At the time of interview, Liu, for example, received income support and participated in Swedish language classes, something which long working hours had previously prevented him from doing.

The spatio-temporal waiting zones produced by Sweden’s labour migration policy are thus central to explaining how precarious migrant work precarity arises. For as long as the Chinese chefs inhabit these spaces their right of presence in Sweden remains linked to

continued employment. This makes them as a vulnerable workforce that is highly dependent on maintaining a good relationship with their employers. The delayed access to full labour market rights also fashions multiple statuses within the same workplaces and in the Chinese restaurant industry in general. The constant risk of being outcompeted by new workers from afar limits the bargaining power of those chefs already present in Sweden. This highlights that temporal dimensions of precarious work among migrant labour are embedded simultaneously in spatial relationships within and beyond individual restaurants. However, in order to fully understand why the Chinese chefs accept these working conditions, the linkages between particularities of Sweden's labour migration policy and the chefs' dreams, hopes and aspirations must be considered.

Imagined futures

In this section, we shift the focus to how imagined futures appropriate the present and how future plans, consequently, impact upon current work-related strategies. Migrant workers with only temporary residence rights may, for example, decide that they cannot refuse to do certain jobs because that might jeopardise their opportunities to work in the future (Anderson, 2007; Preibisch and Otero, 2014). Furthermore, long working hours, fast-paced work and uncertainty of work may be tolerated if they are seen as important to realizing other long-term goals. Although these goals may vary greatly – one migrant may aspire to spend a number of years in the host country in order to save money before returning to the country of origin, while another migrant may seek to create a future in the host country – importantly, these future aspirations impact on migrant strategies in the present.

The relationship between present and future, then, is central to the individual migrant agency we explore here. Indeed, we argue that the future aspirations of the Chinese chefs in this study play a role in explaining their current precarious position in the Swedish

labour market. Despite precarious work-time arrangements, the Chinese chefs rarely complain about the long hours, the high intensity and uncertainty of work. What is more, they choose to stay with their employers. This is partly a result of the work permit system, which, as argued earlier, limits labour mobility (Anderson, 2007, 2010). However, we suggest that the authority constraints of the work permit system are not the only reason why the Chinese chefs in our study agree to precarious work-time arrangements. In addition, for the Chinese chefs, maintaining a good relationship with an employer is part of a strategy to realize more long-term goals that require that they keep their employment in Sweden. While some Chinese chefs look upon their time in Sweden primarily as an opportunity to earn money before returning to China, others plan to settle. The possibility of applying for a permanent resident permit after four years of working in Sweden motivates these chefs to accept precarious work-time arrangements during a transitory period. According to Miao:

As regards the persons I know, the lowest get only 5,000 [Swedish] kronor per month. This is because they are dependent on the employers to get permanent residence. They accept it. They say, it is OK, I'll work a bit harder and get a bit less as long as the employers can help them to get the permanent residence at the end. (February 2013)

The prospect of bringing up their families in Sweden also motivated several Chinese chefs to work hard in order to become eligible for permanent status.

It is for the children. Among the countries I have worked, Sweden is comparatively safe. From an adult's perspective, I definitely do not want to move to here. I would rather just earn some money and return to China to develop my career. (Wu, November 2012)

For others, the permanent resident permit represented compensation for the years of hard work in Sweden. Even if a future in China appeared more attractive than staying in Sweden, Li, for instance, said that he would not feel “reconciled” (*bu gan xin*) if he left Sweden without having applied for permanent status (November 2012). Chinese chefs who came to Sweden before December 2008 and who, consequently, were not placed on a pathway to permanent status upon arrival, were primarily motivated by the prospect of earning more

money than they had done in China. However, once the policy changed and settlement consequently became an option, they decided to stay in Sweden. Wu, for example, moved to Sweden from Germany because the German labour migration policy only allowed him to work in Germany for three years. Sweden, Wu said, “is different. As long as I have a job and there is no problem with my tax payments, I can continue [to work]”, (November 2012). From the chefs’ point of view, Sweden’s labour migration policy thus represents an opportunity rather than a constraint.

Rather than staging acts of defiance, strikes and protests in an attempt to improve wages and working conditions in the present, the strategy adopted by the Chinese chefs in order to take advantage of the opportunities presented by Sweden’s labour migration policy, is to wait for enough time to pass to apply for a permanent residence permit. During this period of waiting they negotiate and collude with their employers in order to circumvent some of the requirements of Sweden’s labour migration policy. One area of negotiation and collaboration between Chinese chefs and restaurant owners is taxation. The chefs are very aware that in order to be granted an extension of their work permit their tax record must show that they have earned the salary specified in their initial offer of employment. Since none of the chefs were actually paid this amount, they were promised extra payments to the tax authority in order to ensure that they ‘kept a good tax record’. According to Yang, for example,

People would try to avoid changing jobs [during the first four years of working in Sweden] because no employer would pay the tax for the gaps between the change of jobs, often half a month. It is better to continue working in the same restaurant. (November 2012)

Another deal was struck between Liu and one of his employers. While in practice remaining an employee, on paper Liu became a co-owner of the restaurant. The alleged co-ownership enabled Liu to change his migration status to self-employed and apply for permanent

residence after two and half rather than four years (see Government Bill, 2007/08:147).

According to Liu, the restaurant owner

proposed it to create a win-win situation. He knows you have such a need [of getting permanent residence] and you also know that it is a good thing for him. So I was glad to accept it. (October 2012)

Through the case of Chinese chefs in Sweden, we seek to highlight the need to recognise that migrant workers do not simply passively submit to exploitative working conditions (Sporton, 2013). While we do not deny that the work-time arrangements in the Chinese restaurant industry violate Sweden's immigration and work-time legislation or that the chefs struggle to cope with the long and intensive working days on a day-to-day basis, we want to acknowledge their agency when they agree to precarious work-time arrangements in exchange for promises of assistance with tax payments and applications for extensions of work permits and, ultimately, permanent residence. From the Chinese chefs' perspective, working long hours in the restaurant industry is not only a way to earn a wage that is higher than what they could have earned in China but, for some, it is a way of earning the right to settle permanently in Sweden. The currency they trade in is their time on a daily, weekly and annual basis. Migrant work precarity, then, is not only linked to the disciplinary power of immigration policies or employer strategies of flexibility. Rather, accepting precarious work-time arrangements and spatially restricted lives in the present is seen as a necessary cost of realizing long-term agential projects that extend beyond the realm of wages and employment conditions.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that time and temporalities are central to the understanding of precarious work among migrant labour. Specifically, the paper proposes that the position of Chinese chefs in Sweden can be understood through three, closely interrelated temporal

dimensions, which, when combined, produce and maintain precarious working conditions. These include employers' control of migrant workers' time and daily activity paths through work-time arrangements that place the Chinese chefs outside the normal flow of time and restrict their lives in a spatial sense. Certain authority constraints are also involved, which suspend full access to the labour market for a certain length of time. The spatio-temporal waiting zone produced by Sweden's labour migration policy is occupied by temporary workers who are requested to be hyperflexible regarding when and where work takes place and who work longer hours and with higher intensity than their colleagues who have obtained permanent status.

At the same time, the paper also illustrates that immigration policies alone do not explain why migrant workers accept precarious work-time arrangements. Indeed, we demonstrate the necessity of recognising the individual agency of migrant workers in explaining how precarious working conditions are produced and maintained. It would be difficult to make sense of the Chinese chefs' willingness to accept precarious work-time arrangements if we did not understand how it is motivated by the possibility of applying for permanent status under Swedish labour migration policy. The case of the Chinese chefs thus urges a rethink of the relationship between insecure migration status and precarious work. Rather than something that primarily arises from and is exacerbated by the lack of a permanent status, accepting precarious work-time arrangements while waiting for enough time to pass to apply for permanent status, may be part of migrant strategies to achieve certain life course trajectories. In this sense, waiting is both a condition imposed upon migrant workers *and* a strategy used in order to realize certain agential projects. Similarly, immigration policies may simultaneously represent an authority constraint and an opportunity that may be negotiated and/or circumvented in various ways to serve the interests of both migrant workers and employers. At the same time, migration status may work in paradoxical

ways. The embeddedness of the Chinese restaurant industry in spatial relationships beyond individual restaurants in Sweden – illustrated by the constant threat of being outcompeted by new workers who lack permanent status – creates multiple statuses in the restaurant industry. It is particularly by engaging with time geography and the relationship between different temporal arrangements that this paper attempts to improve the understanding of precarious work among migrant labourers. The case of Chinese chefs clearly shows that precarious work-time arrangements, labour migration management and imagined futures are temporal phenomena that are intimately connected, and that one therefore cannot be understood without the other. Placing these intersecting temporalities at the centre of the analysis enables more precise accounts of the power relations involved in producing migrant work precarity while, at the same time, acknowledging migrant workers as agents whose long-term, strategic decisions, in a sense, contribute not only to restricting their own daily activity paths but also to maintaining the hyperflexible labour force demanded by the global service economy.

From a policy point of view, this paper has one clear message; that the rules for how work permits are granted and extended can be conducive to the creation of precarious work conditions. In the Swedish case, it seems that such implications of the new regulations on labour migration were not fully considered when this legislation was introduced. Thus, the framework we have proposed for analysing the interlinked temporalities of international labour migration is not only a research tool but can also help inform the design of the policies that govern migrant workers' movements between countries.

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Figure captions

Figure 1 Interlinked temporalities of Chinese migrant workers in Sweden

¹ Migrants registered as residents in Sweden who have entered on a work permit after 1989.

² In Sweden, work-time is regulated in the Working Hours Act (*Arbetsstidslagen* 1982:673), the Annual Leave Act (*Semesterledighetslagen* 1977:480), the Sick Pay Act (*Lag 1991:1047 om sjuklön*) and the Parental Leave Act (*Föräldraledighetslagen* 1995:584). Work-time in the restaurant industry is further regulated in the Collective Agreement (*Avtal om allmänna anställningsvillkor*) (2012-2013) between the Hotel and Restaurant Union and the employer organisation for Sweden's hospitality industry: Visita. The analysis was conducted in November 2012.