“Harvest Work, Migration, and the Structured Phenomenology of Time”

ABSTRACT

The paper draws on Rosa’s three dimensions of the structured phenomenology of time – daily time, longer time, and historical time - as a conceptual lens to analyse the lived experiences and structural framing of temporary farm work in the UK and to address the question: how is it that short-term precarious work remains the accepted solution for agricultural work even under conditions that challenge the status quo. We draw on qualitative research with farmers and workers conducted prior to and during Brexit and Covid-19. We note that farmers and workers alike have found ways to accept and adjust to seasonal migrant labour as a taken-for-granted solution to the pressures of daily farm life. Further, farmers contend that seasonal migrant work is essential to secure the longer-term viability of their farms, while migrant workers’ longer-term view involves delayed gratification in a ‘dual frame of reference’. Local workers, alternatively, cannot imagine farm work as providing a long-term future. When looking historically at farm life, farmers and workers alike invoke changing epochs, to explain current conditions as the conditions of our times, and thus to deny their own agency. Structural-economic shifts are thus never addressed and other ways of doing things never imagined.

Key Words: Food, Horticulture, Labour, Migration, Precarious, Time.

INTRODUCTION

The paper draws on Rosa's (2015) three dimensions of the structured phenomenology of time – daily time, longer time, and historical time - as a conceptual lens to analyse the lived experiences and structural framing of temporary farm work in the UK and to address the question: how is it that short-term precarious work remains the accepted solution for agricultural work even under conditions that challenge the status quo? We acknowledge that precise, consistent and universally agreed definitions of precarious work are difficult to arrive at (Kiersztyn, 2018; Mai, 2018) but define precarious work (as distinct from the more general notion of precarity) as involving low and unstable income, non-standard employment, in workplaces that are usually non-unionised, and where migrants/ minority workers often dominate. Harvest work is clearly precarious using these criteria and the work offer could certainly be improved were the political and economic structures governing the food system to change.

Many argue that current processes of food production (especially involving labour-intensive horticulture) are not working for local communities, for workers, for farmers, nor for the natural environment (e.g. Lang, 2020). Production is concentrated on fewer and larger farms that function like 'factories in the fields' (Martin, 2021); labour-intensive farm work is often done by precarious (international migrant) hired workers living in farm camps (Brovia and Piro, 2021); intensification leads to environmental degradation and labour exploitation (Rogaly, 2008); local communities are increasingly disconnected from their agricultural producers; and rural communities suffer out-migration of the young and working-classes (McAreavey, 2021; Slettebak, 2022).

The structured phenomenology of time, in the context of acceleration (Rosa, 2015), offers us a route through which to better understand processes behind the production and reproduction of precarious work. Modern farming is subject to many of the time pressures exerted on all industries. Farmers and farm workers are expected: to respond, in time, to market pressures; to produce quickly and efficiently, to satisfy the (imaginary) global consumer who wants to consume produce 'out of season'; and, to compete with producers in other time zones with different geographies.

Rosa's (2015) treatise on time usefully distinguishes three phenomenological meanings of time that inform agency in modern times. First, agents live their lives in daily time, which is cyclical, repetitive, here and now. For our purposes, this relates to how farmers and workers view farm work as necessarily responsive to the natural environment, and to a view of farm work as temporary, short, fast, and flexible. Second, while living in and responding to day-to-day contingences, agents nevertheless have one eye on future time, or take a longer-time view in the context of their biographies. For our purposes, we note that farmers and workers need to (at least attempt to) plan for longer term futures, as well as the job at hand. Third, agents often refer to historical or past times. Here, we see people talking about how things used to be, often as a way of (re)imagining the future. But this perspective is often accompanied by a sense of powerlessness, as when talking nostalgically about things that are lost. It is crucial to note that, while we analyse farmers' and workers' perceptions and actions, we understand these always to be located within, infused by, and shaping wider structural contexts.

In the paper that follows we frame our analysis through a review of Rosa's work on the phenomenology of time and in the context of the emergent literature on harvest labour and the migration-time nexus. We outline the qualitative research that informs the paper before illustrating Rosa's concepts of 'daily time', 'longer time' and 'historical time' by drawing on interview material from horticultural employers and harvest workers in the UK from 2017-2020. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on the interplay of daily, longer and historical time and how the structured phenomenology of time perpetuates the status quo.

THE STRUCTURED PHENOMENOLOGY OF TIME

Hartmut Rosa's distinction between three phenomenological meanings of time frames our argument by drawing attention to how farmers, employers and workers understand and act in relation to the time pressures that shape their lives. First, actors live their lives in 'daily time', which is cyclical, repetitive, here and now: "the recurring routines and rhythms of work and leisure time, waking up and going to sleep etc." (Rosa 2015: 8). Importantly, Heidegger's existentialist concept of *Dasein* is invoked, via Giddens (1984), locating presence within the structural. Second, while living in and responding to day-to-day contingences, actors nevertheless have one eye on future time, or take a 'longer time' view. They "constantly

develop a temporal perspective on life as a whole", especially in the context of personal biographies (Rosa, 2015: 8). Third, "actors experience their everyday time and their lifetime as embedded in the encompassing time of their epoch" (ibid.). Here Rosa invokes the concept of the *longue durée* (see Giddens, 1984; Morawska, 2009), which he refers to as 'historical time'. As he explains, this perspective is especially revealed when older people refer nostalgically to 'our time'. Crucially, "The third plane of time, historical time or the epoch, almost entirely eludes the possibility of being shaped by individuals" (Rosa, 2015: 10).

Rosa's (2015: 13) overarching thesis is that "adequate social-scientific diagnoses of *the times*…should in fact literally be diagnoses of *its time*, i.e. its temporal structures…" and that the constant feeling of acceleration in modern life is intimately linked to structural and cultural aspects of our (neoliberal) institutions and practices. This macro-level interpretation requires that we locate our analyses in the context of the neoliberal food production system, while the phenomenological perspective requires us to note how certain patterns and conditions become taken for granted and continually recreated in line with the perceptions and practices of everyday life (see also Author, 2012a; Authors, 2021). Crudely, 'in capitalism, time becomes money, and acceleration profit' (Rosa, 2015: 309), and so we ask how do social practices and agency enable this, over time?

The phenomenology of time centres on how people perceive time, and how this shapes what they do. But no perspective or action is ever entirely liberated from its conditions. As Bourdieu (e.g. 1984, 1990) reminds us, the way people think and feel is shaped by what has gone before, what is possible in the future, and diverse assumptions and experiences inscribed into the habitus. The phenomenology of time is a window onto "how much inherited time structures and perspectives become, so to speak, second nature to actors" (Rosa, 2015:12) and thereby how practices fail to be fully questioned or challenged. The perceived pressures of everyday time result in adaptations with which actors are already familiar, or yield to the demands of those with most power.

Long-term futures of given individuals may play second fiddle to the daily demands and long-term futures of organisations and institutions, in the face of rules and regulations that seem inflexible. Future scenarios are inadequately envisioned because their imagining is shaped by

what has gone before and by what actors believe can be altered. This approach is thus a *structured phenomenology*, as discussed in Stones et al. (2019: 44), in which the subjective experiences of migrants and employers are understood as always anchored within, and infused by, past and present structural contexts.

HARVEST LABOUR, TIME AND MIGRATION

Studies of harvest labour are established across Europe (Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999; Author, 2018; Authors, 2021), North America (Hennebry and Preibisch, 2012; Martin, 2003; Mitchell, 1996) and Australasia (Hanson and Bell, 2007), with it becoming clear that the horticultural sectors of higher-income economies have become reliant on workers from lower-income countries. Governments have played a key facilitating role. Familiar concerns over 'crops rotting in the fields' due to labour shortages have tended to underpin openness towards regular and irregular horticultural labour migration (despite the fact that some have questioned farmers' conceptualisation of the situation, Campbell, 2019). In addition, labour market intermediaries, working within predominantly supportive policy environments, have played a vital facilitating role (Findlay and McCollum, 2013; McCollum and Findlay, 2018). It has, as a result, become taken for granted by many employers, policy makers and academics that migration is the only viable solution to the temporal (seasonal and daily/ weekly) uncertainty of horticultural production (Farinella and Nori, 2021; McAreavey, 2021) . Other solutions exist but are generally less favoured (i.e. more costly) (Martin, 2021; Ruhs and Anderson, 2010).

The favoured policy solution to farmer's demands is often the guest-worker scheme, portrayed as a 'triple win' for migrant workers, for the country of origin and for the country of destination. There is plenty of evidence, however, that things need to improve for workers who are vulnerable to intensifying workplace regimes (Rogaly, 2008); whilst being largely confined to the farm for the season (Author, 2022); often having to leave family and friends back home (Jakobsen et al, 202*). Farmers occupy a "contradictory position between the interests of labour and capital" (Author, 2021: 142) in this circular migratory system and generally feel that they act "in socially responsible and ethically sound ways" (ibid., p154) whilst having to survive a highly competitive and pressurized neoliberal food production system.

Alongside the vast literature on low-wage horticultural labour an impressive time-migration literature has emerged. Cwerner's (2001) seminal paper (in this journal) marks the beginning of this 'temporal turn', in which the 2017 edited collection on 'Timespace and Migration' by Mavroudi and colleagues (2017) has been significant. The work of Amrith (2021), Baas and Yeoh (2019), Cojocaru, (2021), King and Della Puppa (2021) and Robertson (2021) provide excellent examples of the importance of temporal perspectives in migration studies, and some scholars specifically explore the time-space-migration nexus in farm or horticultural work (Lulle, 2021; Medland, 2021; Reid-Musson, 2018).

Shanthi Roberton's (2021) book 'Temporality in Mobile Lives' – using the case of middle-class migrants from East Asia to Australia – makes the critical point that migration is often no longer about moving across the binaries of past/ home to present/ host country. Instead, it is increasingly complex and often non-linear, multi-dimensional and open-ended: taking us away from conventional notions of settler migration. These observations are clearly relevant beyond Robertson's specific case. Horticulture, for example, is characterised by working-class migrants' labour circulation where a move to the host country is temporary (for the season). Though this move may occur many times, over many seasons/ years, and even eventually result in year-round work, there remains a complex and evolving relationship between home and host country and migrants' associated sense of attachment and belonging.

From the extant literature, we draw five themes of particular relevance for understanding (migrant) farm or horticultural work from a temporal perspective: transnational simultaneity; the dual frame of reference; a liminal state; being permanently temporary; and control over workers' time-space contexts.

First, the concept of "transnational simultaneity" (Hedberg, 2021) captures the sense in which transnational migrants can simultaneously inhabit or dwell in the home and the host country. This is especially evident where temporary labour circulation prevails, as it does in horticulture, and where employment in the host country is accompanied by the "offshoring" of social reproduction (child-rearing and family life) back home (Jakobsen et al, 202*). Labour and life are thus separated in time and space (Cojocaru, 2021).

Second, alongside transnational simultaneity, migrants may employ "dual frame of reference" (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003) to favourably compare the value of their work in the host country with earnings and investments in the home country. The putative good work ethic of migrants in precarious jobs is partly explained by this dual frame of reference which enables workers to approach the same work with different time-space horizons.

Third, migrants (and employers) often portray the liminal nature of precarious work in terms of a stepping stone to future advancement (Author et al., 2022). For Katz (2004) it is clear that for many workers, especially migrants, *resilience* in the face of precarity is underpinned by a sense that livelihoods will someday improve through eventual *reworking* of a liminal position (see, for example, Robertson, 2021).

Fourth, guestworker migration, particularly evident in the horticultural sector, is conceptualised as a state of being "permanently temporary" (Hennebry, 2012). The direction of travel in higher income economies seems to be increased temporariness and long periods of waiting for settlement (Robertson, 2021). Cwerner (2001) illustrates how immigration policies and visa regimes operate as tools of discipline, controlling movement and settlement processes, and Allen and Axelsson (2019) underline how temporary visas work to preclude migrants from longer-term settlement.

Fifth, illustrating the broader reach of our arguments, control over workers' time-space context is central to the operationalization of power, to labour productivity and efficiency (King and Della Puppa, 2021; Medland, 2021; Reid-Musson 2018). Domestic work, for example, has been described as demanding "permanent availability" (Anderson, 2000, p. 4) and the same is true of other precarious 'on-call' employment such as farm work and platform/ gig work. In some cases, such as domestic work and harvest work, employers even confine migrants to the workplace so they are on-hand to work as and when required (Author, 2022; Author, 202*).

These various temporal understandings of harvest work inform our analyses below.

RESEARCHING HARVEST WORK OVER TIME

It is widely acknowledged that the UK food industry is heavily dependent on imports of both people and goods. The home production of vegetables in 2021 stood at 57% and the home production of fruit at just 15% (DEFRA, 2022). Alongside this, up to 99% of the estimated 40,000-70,000 seasonal workers used in UK horticulture each year come from abroad (House of Lords, 2022) most now supplied through Home Office licenced labour providers within the UK's new seasonal guestworker scheme. The supply of harvest labour to the UK has, over recent decades, come largely from Central and Eastern Europe: from Poland following 'A8' EU enlargement in 2004; then from Bulgaria and Romania following 'A2' EU enlargement in 2007; before moving to Ukrainian migrants up to 2022. From 2022, the supply of harvest labour to the UK has diversified and now also comes from source countries beyond Central and Eastern Europe.

The UK horticultural industry has faced three labour supply shocks over the last decade: the Brexit vote on June 23rd 2016; the Covid-19 crisis from March 2020; and the Russian invasion of Ukraine from February 2022. In response to the Covid-19 crisis in particular the horticultural industry launched a 'Feed the Nation' campaign that was then rebranded with government (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) support into a 'Pick for Britain' campaign. These campaigns were designed to attract resident UK labour into the fields to make up for the declining supply of migrant harvest workers, with the emphasis very much on attracting British workers into temporary jobs as a short-term fix. The campaigns were abandoned in 2021 due to poor response from UK based workers and persistent lobbying from industry to find ways to permit more migrant labour (Authors, 202*).

The UK government also introduced a limited seasonal worker visa scheme in response to Brexit and the ending of free movement after 31 December 2020 (Author, 2022). This is designed to allow low-wage foreign workers to enter the UK for up to six months to work in horticulture. The scheme was initially capped at 2,500 migrant workers, then 10,000, then 30,000, before being expanded to 40,000 in 2022 because of lobbying from industry and the failure of the campaigns to attract UK workers.

Against this context, the paper analyses the experiences of farm workers and farmers in the UK through the conceptual lens of the structured phenomenology of time to understand some of the processes through which short-term precarious work remains the accepted solution for agricultural work. It is informed by empirical evidence from two projects we have been engaged in: a UK focused project with farmers[i] and workers called 'Anonymised' (2020 - 2021) as well as the UK part of the international 'Anonymised' project (2017-2022).

The 'Anonymised' project launched in January 2020 to examine experiences of horticultural employers and UK-based harvest workers during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. It consists of 20 in-depth interviews, with horticultural employers from different fruit and vegetable producing farms (N=9) and UK-based harvest workers from the same 9 farms (N=11), thus representing a diversity of farm size and produce, covering two different growing regions in the UK[ii]. Interviews were conducted online during January to August 2020. We also talked with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Association of Labour Providers (ALP) and the Countryside and Communities Research Institute (CCRI) as key gatekeepers.

The 'Anonymised' project addresses how contemporary global flows of low-skilled and manual labour transform rural labour markets and communities in Western society. It has culminated in numerous publications (e.g. Authors, 2021) and has led to rich insights into the precarious nature of harvest work and how this is reproduced, managed, justified, and masked. We draw on the UK part of the 'Anonymised' project, comprising 8 in-depth interviews with migrant horticultural workers (all conducted in English) and 10 in-depth interviews with horticultural employers, all in the west of England. The UK 'Anonymised' research took place in two stages: a strawberry crop case-study, 2017-2018 ('Anonymised' 1) and a local area case-study, 2018-2019 ('Anonymised' 2). The combined research informing this paper is represented in Table 1.

Table 1: In-Depth Interview Sample Frame

'Anonymised' **(data collection 2020)**	'Anonymised' **1 (data collection 2017-2018)** 'Anonymised' **2 (2018-2019)**

UK Based Horticultural Workers	11	Migrant Horticultural Workers	8 (Glarus 2)
Horticultural Employers	9	Horticultural Employers	10 (5 = Glarus 1; 5 = Glarus 2)
Totals	**20**		**18**

The 38 interviews were analysed using interpretive thematic analysis, informed by an iterative-inductive approach[iii]. Specific analytical tools were open/inductive coding, analytical coding, memo writing, theoretical coding, constant comparisons, and abductive reasoning (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Author, 2012b). The concept of the structured phenomenology of time was used for this paper as analytical coding, providing coherence for our explication of key emergent and co-constructed themes in relation to some of the ways in which precarious work conditions are reproduced.

Overall, our research revealed an acceptance of the norm of precarious work and temporary migrant labour. As outlined above, attempts to attract UK based workers into the fields were largely unsuccessful. We met farmers and managers who went out of their way to help local workers gradually build up their physical strength, cope with the demands of a long day, manage other demands on their time and so on. Some even provided longer-term jobs that parcelled together tasks that occur throughout the year or gave supervisory roles to locally-based workers. But overall, they continued to argue for migrant labour. We now turn to analysing some of the processes behind this situation using the concept of time as a lens onto structural and phenomenological processes shaped by acceleration (Rosa, 2015).

DAILY TIME, LONGER TIME, AND HISTORICAL TIME IN HARVEST WORK

Both the 'Anonymised' research and the 'Anonymised' research revealed fascinating insights into how it is that precarious work remains the accepted solution for horticulture even in changing times. In the ensuing three sections we look respectively at the concepts of 'daily time', 'longer time' and 'historical time' as they pertain to the agency of harvest workers and farm employers, within the context of neoliberal horticulture and the omnipresence of precarious work.

Daily Time

In a structured phenomenology of time, as noted above, agents perceive, understand, and live their lives partly in the here and now, in the cyclical, repetitive, routine and immediacy of daily time. But daily time and agents' responses to it are also moulded by wider forces beyond their control. Farm work is marked by the unwieldy rhythms and flows dictated by nature and by the immense time pressures of a global neoliberal industry (Medland, 2021; Rogaly, 2008). Daily time on the farm is thus both perceived as and structurally shaped to be responsive and flexible, hard and fast, or slow and inactive, changing throughout the seasons and the year. We note that precarious work, performed by migrants from lower income economies, is now perceived as the obvious and only solution to such exigencies and that practices and attitudes have emerged to consolidate this status quo.

The vicissitudes of daily life on the farm were beautifully illustrated by one farmer, who told us:

> "In reality you don't pick fruit in the wet because it damages the fruit. You don't pick in the searing heat, you start picking very early in the morning and then you finish early in the day." (Charlie, Employer/Manager, PFB Project)

Farmers respond to these time pressures by arguing for temporary migrant workers, who can be flexible and responsive both in terms of when they come and what they do each day. To explain why the government should allocate sufficient seasonal worker visas for harvest work, one farm manager told us he needs:

> "A clear period where they must go back to their home country, say two months, with a 9-month work visa which gives them a bit of flexibility of start and finish times to cover seasonality. It could be a late season or early season. I would even, as a grower…making sure I organise transport to take people back to airports and just as I used to do in the '90s, one of the labour managers would go with them into the airport terminal, see that bunch of guys go through security. So, it is all about making sure they go back, and it is not immigration via a back door." (Roger, Employer/Manager, PFB project) [iv]

Farmers and employers suggest that migrant workers, furthermore, have a good work ethic, tied to the need to earn well in the short time they are there.

> "As long as they don't have, you know, they don't want to spend money they want to take money home and they're here for a short period and that short period is about making as much money as possible if they can get it." (John, owner medium farm, 'Anonymised' 1)

Responding to the immediacy of daily time is also enabled by various practices noted in previous research. Across Europe and the US, migrant workers are often housed temporary workers in camps so they can be flexible and committed to the daily demands of the job (Brovia and Piro, 2021; Author, 202*; Author, 2022). These arrangements also mean social life is restricted to fellow workers, while family life is "offshored" back in the home country (Jakobsen et al., 202*), in the context of their "transnational simultaneity" (Hedberg, 2021). Thus, during the period of commitment to the farm, external demands on workers' time are effectively limited.

Whether in camps or living locally, migrant workers have often suspended their daily lives back home and paused their usual routines to assign themselves, for the short term, to the farm. In other words, they embrace the liminal state mentioned above (Author et al., 2022). One of our farmers illustrated this with clarity:

> "So, with the guys working here, living here, they are a lot more flexible. They kind of give the hundred percent of their time and their life to the farm once they're here...Cause they haven't got their children, they've not got their family. We don't overwork them by any means. I mean there are rules (but)… you know, they haven't got that all 'I've got to go tomorrow to go watch my daughter's play' or whatever. So, they are a hundred percent committed to the job." (Beth, HR Manager, 'Anonymised' 2)

Migrants then, in their liminal state, are portrayed as able or even keen to respond flexibly to the vicissitudes of harvest work. This is, of course, enabled and shaped through various

practices that limit their own control over their daily lives. We noted in our research, that locally-based workers are constantly and negatively juxtaposed by farmers explaining why they need to employ seasonal migrant workers (Author, 2013; Author, 2021). This was already implied in the quote above, from Beth, who was implicitly contrasting migrant workers, whose social and family lives do not impinge on their work, with some imaginary other worker who is not so responsive.

As noted in previous research, farmers feel the pressure to transfer some of the daily time pressures of their industry onto workers or risk being uncompetitive, and they express frustration that local workers are not able to do the work adequately. Our research revealed the extent to which this is related to the other demands locally-based workers face, such as seeing friends, family commitments, job interviews (for more permanent work), doctor's appointments, and leisure time. Farmers are aware of this and frustrated by it in equal measure. During the Pick for Britain campaign and as a response to difficulties caused by both Covid and Brexit, several made extra effort to employ locals and in the process these difficulties came again to the foreground. One farmer told us:

> "We had quite a few young (locally-based) people coming into the 'Pick for Britain' cohort and we had a lot of people going 'Oh I need to have tomorrow morning off because I've got to go and talk to my friends' or 'I've got to have a job interview' or something like that. That's absolutely fine, and we tried to accommodate that where possible, but then I think their personal life impacted the role that they were performing and being paid to do, and people struggled with the rigidness of a full-time job." (Charlie, Employer/Manager, PFB Project)

Another pointed out how seasonal migrants are much more relevant for the responsive needs of the farm, specifically because of the demands a local worker faces:

> "We're flexible because of course weather conditions change the crops so much, so that's when we need flexibility of our labour, so we tell our employees at two o'clock today what time we'd like them to work tomorrow or whether they're on day off. Now that doesn't necessarily suit someone who's, you know, got rent to pay, got a mortgage,

needs to have that stability of work. It does suit someone who's living cheaply onsite, who has made the decision to come to, to make money really." (Paul, HR Manager, large farm, 'Anonymised' 1)

The locally-based workers we spoke to also illustrated this dilemma very well. These workers are situated in local social milieus away from the farm and have many demands on their time. As indicated above, fruit does not wait for the time pressures of people's family and other life commitments to go away. Those we interviewed who had managed to do some harvest work were able to do so because they could start later in the day than the migrants or lived fairly locally, or didn't have family to care for. Farmers had also made attempts to accommodate their needs.

One worker told us he knew several people with children who wished they could do some harvest work but either could not afford the childcare costs, could not bring children with them, or could not fit the work around school hours. Travel is a further concern; it takes time to travel to or around in rural areas, it can be costly, and can be very difficult to organise during unsocial hours. Clare was trying to understand why farmers found it so difficult to recruit locally, and noted:

"You know I think probably if they were trying to encourage English people to pick fruit, I think it would have to be because it was local because at the end of the day you're not going to earn enough to afford to be able to travel to that kind of job because it's all going to go on your travel expenses." (Claire, Worker, PFB Project)

UK based workers also found the daily demands of the work physically tough, because they were not used to it. Several workers described the physical exhaustion they experienced (and began to enjoy in some cases):

"The heat was definitely a big struggle for a lot of us. I think the first couple of days I came home with real bad headaches and things like that because it was so hot and there's no shade or protection, because obviously in order for them to sort of grow

> the plants need that nice sun exposure, so they're really, really exposed. The first few days did feel really, really long. They felt endless really because it was so early and getting used to getting back into that and you're on your feet for a very, very long time as well… and it's quite rough terrain. The fields aren't flat and the plants can be quite heavy as well, so you definitely felt it in your shoulders and your arms. You have to lift up the plants to get underneath to get all the ripe ones, so it was odd coming home and feeling so tired through something that sounded as simple as strawberry picking". (Diane, Worker, PfB Project).

To summarise, it is clear that the daily time pressures, and the vicissitudes of farm work, produced by industry and nature, are real and visceral for farmers and farm workers. Farmers believe they have found a solution in the hiring of migrants who are continually enabled to suspend their usual routines and commitments and to dedicate their daily lives for the season to being available to work hard and fast, as and when required. Against this, there are locally-based workers for whom the harvest time pressures are insurmountable and famers appear unable to improve their precarious work offer to accommodate locally-based workers' needs.

Longer Time

A structured phenomenology of time recognises that while agents live their lives in daily time, they also have their eye on a longer-term view and try to act in accordance with that (as shown by Robertson, 2021). Again, this is in the context of the opportunities that are available to them and the power they have to shape their futures. Here again conditions have emerged that serve to perpetuate the status quo.

For farmers, while responding to the daily demands of the farm is essential and structures their days in terms of immediate demands, they consider the long-term viability of their farms in the context of neoliberal pressures of concentration, intensification, and just-in-time food production. Migrant labour is again the normative solution and employers, understandably, emphasize the value of 'delayed gratification' for migrants: of working hard for part of the year in the host country to reap the benefits on eventually returning to futures back home. As one emphasised (while also returning to the lack of commitment of locally-based workers):

> “So, they're coming over to earn as much money as they can and then they go home and potentially aren’t working for the rest of the year or they're going to take a three-month break. They’ve left their families, a lot of them, so they’re coming to work intensively and take money back with them and then have a really long break. So, if that's your only objective then, yes, you are slightly more incentivised…they're not coming to do a bit of work and then go to the pub and then have a social life and then go to the cinema and then be a bit hungover for work or something like that.” (Charlie, Employer/Manager, PFB Project)

Farmers we spoke to highlighted a raft of longer-term benefits for migrants, especially in relation to housing and family life. Paul was determined to focus on these positive aspects:

> “And we are employing people, these people are going back home, building houses and feeding families, yeah? You know, for every one person we employ that’s 10 that we are actually feeding in one way or another. Why not look at that as positive?” (Paul, UK Farmer, ‘Anonymised’ 1).

Here precarity and liminality are portrayed as incentives for workers to work hard and to achieve financial security, especially in the context of a longer-term perspective and when comparing countries economically, as in the dual frame of reference, mentioned above.

Roxie and Jenny, for example, suggest of the migrant workers:

> “For them money is everything, everything, because of the situation at home. They’re dependent on it and they know that they can earn so much more here…they know that their family will have a better life. And a lot of them are building their own family homes so this money is going back.” (Roxie, Worker then Manager, PFB Project)

> “And of my lot, lots of them have now bought houses and they’re updating their houses and doing work like that. Yeah, so the winter-time they do that. If they’re half of a partnership they keep sending money back to the other half. Yeah, well, they’ll be

earning every week here more than they earn every month over there. It's all about money – feeling safe and getting money." (Jenny, owner, small farm, 'Anonymised' 1)

It is to be expected that employers would focus on the longer-term benefits of precarious harvest work. However, it is well known, and observed in our own research, that migrant workers also draw on a dual frame of reference in their acceptance of less desirable daily conditions in favour of differently imagined futures (Author et al., 2022). One migrant worker illustrated this beautifully when she said of herself and her co-workers:

"They are coming here to earn money. They don't think about anything else, they just think about their job and that's it…They invest, because if you have the salary in Bulgaria, you can't buy house or car. But when they work in the UK then can buy everything." (Annabel, Bulgarian migrant, 'Anonymised' 2)

Another, Andy, spoke more personally of his longer-term biography, while Anthony (below) compares being able to chase the dream in the UK with studying for 20 years in Bulgaria and getting nowhere:

"I'm spending money and I'm saving a bit and then when I go home, I'm…I have a house so I have to rebuild it a bit." (Andy, Bulgarian migrant, 'Anonymised' 2)

"In Bulgaria, we are smart people, but if you have friends, you can have good job. But here it's not like that. If you can work, if you want to learn something new, you can progress. In Bulgaria it's not like that. If you study 20 years does not get help people…We are coming here for better life, because we cannot get in our countries... You can chase the dream here." (Anthony, Bulgarian migrant, 'Anonymised' 2)

Similarly, the skills migrant workers acquire through the longer-term experience of returning to the work, year on year, enables them to take a view of their work that reconciles both daily time (and even constant monitoring and control) and longer-time in the context of a biography. Furthermore, it is important to note that some previously seasonal migrant

workers are promoted to better and permanent jobs, such as managers and supervisors on farms (Author et al., 2022).

UK based workers, alternatively, could rarely envisage farm work as a stepping-stone to a longer-term future. One told us explicitly that neither he, nor other people he knew, could imagine seeing farm work as a career:

> "Strictly speaking you would really struggle to make a real career out of such a thing as seasonal work. The seasonal pickers that I worked with over the summer knew very well that they were here for X amount of time…I deem myself to be a young professional. I am thinking about career and opportunity and all of these things and I don't know that you can find that in that particular area of work. I'm sure you can, I'm sure you could forge a path, but I don't know if that's easily recognisable from outside looking in for a British person." (Neil, Worker, PFB Project)

Another, who did find longer-term work on the farm, had not expected it to work out this way. He took on farm work because he had run out of options, not because he imagined a better or more secure future as a result, and the job offer he ended up with was far lower paid than he was used to:

> "I applied for umpteen jobs, really had absolutely no response whatsoever, and so we had a mortgage of £2,000 a month and needed the money. So, when it came up for fruit picking, going into summer, I've always been a bit of a farm boy, I do like that. I go hunting and shooting and that kind of thing. So, I thought, 'well, hey, any port in a storm it might just tide me over'" (Graham, Worker, PFB Project)

The transnational time-space contexts, as discussed above, of low-wage migrants are key to understanding their more positive longer-time perspectives on precarious work in the context of their wider biographies. They move across an economic gradient from a lower-income (home) to a higher-income (host) country, and tend to put (home-based) social and family life on hold. UK based workers, however, do not share this economic or social "dual frame of reference" (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). They

cannot imagine (phenomenologically) and there are few systems in place to enable (structurally) seasonal farm work to provide a secure or even viable long-term future. In this respect both daily time (the here and now of precarious work) and longer time (the potential that precarious work holds for advancement) are experienced differently for migrants and locally-based labour because of the different time-space contexts within which they are embedded.

Historical Time

People experience their everyday time and their biographical time in a broader historical context as "embedded in the encompassing time of their epoch, their generation, and their age" (Rosa, 2015: 8). They tend to ask, from time to time, if their plans are in step with the times, and the amount of time (and money) spent on any plans will be brought in accordance with 'the times' as they are perceived and contrasted with other times. It was this insight from Rosa that helped us understand how farmers and workers in our research tended to reflect on past times as a way of thinking about or imagining a future in which (for example during a pandemic or post Brexit) sourcing migrant labour might be a challenge. Importantly, as we observed, there is a sense that "in our time these traditions are obsolete" (Rosa, 2015: 8), that in current times it is impossible to imagine doing things as they were then.

Over and again, our respondents referred, somewhat nostalgically, to a time when local people worked on farms (see Newby, 1977). Their tone was not anti-immigration but very much pro local communities. One locally-based worker sent us a photo of her grandmother (nan) working on the farm near her, noting the lack of development in rural areas then and the fact that women worked at home more:

> "I think after the war, I can remember my nan…doing potatoes and things like that. There was a lot because all around…was fields and so everyone used to go and help with the harvest. Loads of women at home and things. In fact, I've got an absolutely fab photo I will send you that was on Facebook the other day of the women working in the fields, and my nan is one of them." (Jo, Worker, PFB Project)

Others noted the community-centred nature of the work in past times, the inclusion of children, the relaxed and flexible nature of the work:

> "When I was very little my mum used to pick potatoes in the fields and stuff…and she said it was really hard work, but they used to have almost a community doing it. So, they would all bring their young kids along and they would go and play while they were picking the potatoes…It seemed to be easier to do stuff like that, I don't know why it was easier, but it used to be more community focused. My mum said they used to drive round with the tractor and pick them all up." (Mandy, Worker, PFB Project)

Farmers also reminisced about the times when they found it easier to hire locals, because life itself was different then:

> "Sadly, gone are the times where your whole family would get the train down from London and you'd pick strawberries for an afternoon and you'd get some cash in hand. Sadly, I wish it was like that and we all picked into beautiful wicker baskets." (Charlie, Farmer/Manager, PFB Project)

Farmers again referred to the need for flexible workers, noting that what was different in the past was the epoch, or the times, not the work. As one described for us in detail:

> "So, (imagine) we've got a field, it is as basic as you like, we've got a grass field, it's got some cold water, it's got plastic loos in it, cold water showers, cold water taps, no other embellishments beyond that. And we had a cohort of retired British caravaners who from the 1960s through 'til about 2010, 2012 came back to us year on year. They would come for our peak season…The deal was they came, they got a free pitch on site and they would support us through our peak harvest, which was three weeks' worth of work from mid-June through to early July and they could then stay on site for anything up to four months." (Keith, Farmer/Manager, PFB Project).

This level of flexibility cannot be achieved now, farmers argued, often because health and safety rules mean people cannot bring their families along and benefit systems cannot

respond in real time to temporary work. One farmer was quite explicit about the need for flexible daily time for all workers, but simultaneously identified what would need to change in order to be able to provide either more stable work or more flexible conditions:

> "For me the simple thing is about making it easier to earn a little extra money and not be penalised for it. We have a lad who comes every year, he's had drug addiction problems, and we talked to him about taking him on and doing more hours but his problem is, apart from harvest which works different because there is a harvest labour two week period that you can work for, but any other work than that, basically for every £5 we pay him he will lose £5 from his benefits. So, there is no incentive for him to do any more work. And he would like to work, but he has to get to and from work, so it is actually costing him more money because he has to travel than actually staying home. Occasionally we find him a bit of work and throw some money his way, but there needs to be greater flexibility to help people" (Dave, Farmer/Manager, PFB Project)

The shift from the 1990s onwards to seasonal migrant workers was couched, by the farmers we spoke with, within the changing (intensifying) nature of the food production system whereby farmers needed to raise labour productivity and general work ethic:

> "So, prior to that I'd mainly be on British workers coming in, of course, at that time some of the British workers were brilliant because I used to run a shift for people with children at school so they were mainly female, some males – even back then. And they'd come to do a five-hour shift and we'd have one supervisor, a five-hour shift and they were brilliant. Totally trouble-free. Again, what they wanted to do was earn money and we had the arrangement if they needed a day off because the children were ill or something just give me a phone call I needed to know whether they were coming or not. So that's how we operated and it was small enough then that the pack-house could also operate on a five-hour shift. But, then as I intensified I obviously needed more people and that's when the problems happened...I just couldn't get enough English people to do it. So, I started off with HOPS [a migrant labour provider] and worked this way ever since." (Jenny, owner, small farm, 'Anonymised' 1)

Over time, harvest work in the UK has been provided by local labour, then Polish labour, then Romanian and Bulgarian labour, to mainly Ukrainian harvesters up until 2022. Local labour became scarce during the 1990s as the industry intensified and a migrant labour norm was established. The shift in nationalities over the 2000s and 2010s has been instructive and ties in with the longer-term livelihood strategies identified in the preceding section. But instead of seeing it as farmers bumping down to the next country to exploit, it is portrayed as each nationality bumping up through migration. Reflecting on past times also serves to *explain* the present rather than question it, and illustrates how "inherited time structures and perspectives become, so to speak, second nature to actors" (Rosa 2015:12).

CONCLUSIONS

The paper reveals fascinating insights into how it is that short-term precarious work, usually performed by migrants, remains the taken-for-granted solution for horticulture even during labour supply crises. We draw on Rosa's work on time and acceleration as a conceptual lens to elaborate the processes behind this migrant labour norm and its concomitant labour exploitation. The phenomenology of time is a window onto how "inherited time structures and perspectives become, so to speak, second nature to actors" (Rosa, 2015:12) and thereby how practices fail to be fully questioned or challenged. The perceived pressures of everyday time, wrought by the neoliberal imperative towards polarisation, consolidation, intensification, and acceleration, result in adaptations with which actors are already familiar or bend to the demands of those with most power.

Farmers' and workers' time is perceived, enacted and structured in terms of daily time, and all have accepted and found ways to adjust to the fact of seasonal migrant labour as a solution to the many pressures of daily time on the farm. Farmers are under immense pressure to respond to just-in-time food production demands and to nature's seasonal demands. Migrant workers provide a solution by being, temporary, flexible, and responsive on a daily basis. Locally-based workers, alternatively, are rarely in a position to suspend their daily lives to commit to the farm, even for a short period. They are not enabled to be flexible in terms of

their daily time: they have families, social lives, health needs, travel costs, and housing costs to consider.

While coping with the daily exigencies of the task in hand, farmers and workers alike must consider their longer-term futures. Farmers have found seasonal migrant work secures the viability of their farms in the context of global intensification and consolidation. Migrant workers accept a liminal existence and the control and monitoring of their daily lives as delayed gratification with respect to the prospect of more secure futures in their countries of origin. In other words, their 'dual frame of reference' means they hope to benefit longer-term from precarious harvest work. Locally-based workers, alternatively, have no dual frame of reference to compensate for the inadequate recompense or long-term security, and find it difficult to imagine future careers in this sort of work.

In the context of the longue durée, farmers and workers alike refer to historical time to invoke changing epochs, to explain current conditions as the conditions of our times, and thus to deny their own agency. It is widely noted that farmers often uncritically defend their need for the sort of commitment from workers that only migrants can give, perhaps by imputing them with natural (national) hard-working natures, by calling locals lazy, by referring to the benefits that migrants secure for themselves, their home countries and their families in the longer term. The putative evidence of their willingness to provide good jobs, to locals, to migrants, to diverse migrants as times change, is implicit in their stories of times past, and so implies that it is times that have changed rather than their choices.

Certainly, there have been structural-economic shifts that shaped the move away from British-based labour, not least a shift towards higher-intensity workplace regimes (Rogaly, 2008), tighter regulations around informal cash payments and health and safety, the gentrification of rural areas and increased house prices causing the out-migration of the rural working classes. But the perspectives on and actions in relation to time discussed in the paper serve to ensure the present conditions prevail and fail to ask how things might be different or throw any light on the structural inequalities they constitute.

Overall, time is a key element in the continued profitability of horticulture. Farmers, operating within a highly flexible just-in-time neo-liberal food supply system, have sought to use workers' time more intensely and efficiently than in the past. The need amongst low-wage employers for an ever-greater 'temporal fix' (Lulle, 2021) is sated by turning to migrant workers whose temporary/ circulatory status means that they approach precarious work ready or needing to make considerable time sacrifices. Locally-based workers, however, are simply unwilling or unable to make equivalent time sacrifices. It is workers' different relationships with time – especially whether they are living for the 'here and now' or looking towards the future whilst engaged in precarious work – that helps us to understand why migrants appear more 'suited' to precarious work than their locally-based counterparts.

To move away from precarious work, we must reimagine food production systems so that they provide jobs that are suitable and sustainable (sensitive to people's family ties, social networks, financial commitments, etc.) over the longer term. Any reimagining must, we conclude, recognise that the structured phenomenology of time is currently enabling the status quo.

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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[i] Note that we interviewed farmers, employers, managers, and HR managers and often use the term farmers to denote the structural position of farmer/employer as opposed to worker.

[ii] Respecting anonymity requires that we do not mention the regions.

[iii] Pseudonyms were used for all interview respondents.

[iv] Note that Roger is here implicitly also responding to widespread mass media portrayed anti-immigration sentiment.