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'Work tomorrow?' The lived experiences of temporary agency workers in a UK fresh food factory

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Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in a UK fresh food factory. The UK food supply chain, like other lower paid and lower skilled sectors, is heavily reliant on this precarious form of employment and the voice of these workers has not been adequately heard.

Whilst temporary agency work has been subject to extensive research, few accounts take into consideration the view from below to consider the overall lived experiences of these workers. This is surprising and, given the significance of this form of employment, warrants further examination.

In this study I give an ethnographic account of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in a salad processing factory, focusing on three aspects. The first aspect considers precarious work and employment insecurity and explores the experiences of temporary agency workers as they seek work and then aim to maintain work, whilst the second aspect examines these agency workers as they undertake work. These temporary agency workers experience multi-faceted relationships whilst at work - which is the third aspect of their lived experiences that this study examines.

The ethnographic approach that I adopted for this study combined participant observations and semi structured interviews to provide valuable insights into the work experiences of temporary agency workers. As the motivation for this study was to further understand the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in the food supply chain, an ethnographic approach was necessary as we cannot really learn a great deal about what actually happens or about how things work in organizations without undertaking the intensive and close-up participative research that is central to an ethnographic approach.

By examining the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in this way, this thesis makes an important contribution to the literature in the following areas. First, I add to our knowledge of temporary agency work by highlighting and explaining how temporary agency workers exhibit individual agency to lessen the effects of precarious work and employment insecurity. Second,

many temporary agency workers carry out intense work and this thesis contributes to the literature on temporary agency work by examining how the combined effect of temporality and hard work intensifies their workplace experiences. Third, the relationships experienced by temporary agency workers from within a blended workforce have not been adequately examined from their perspective and this thesis contributes to the literature in this area. Whilst blending suggests a workplace which is smooth and homogenous, I introduce the concept of the mixed-up organisation to appropriately reflect that life on the diverse factory shop floor is far more complicated.

Finally, this study reveals how discreet acts of resistance are enacted by temporary agency workers, and in doing so further highlights that these workers possess a surprising degree of individual agency.

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1.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Temporary work is a prominent feature of the UK labour market and temporary workers represent an important element of the UK workforce. Data from a 2021 Office of National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey (LFS) suggests that the total number of temporary workers in the UK stands at over 1.56 million, equating to 5.6% of the UK workforce. The LFS shows that since 2010, the total number of temporary workers in the UK has averaged 1.58 million, with a range that has fluctuated between 1.39 million to 1.71 million (www.ons.gov.uk, 5th March 2021).

The temporary workforce within the UK consists of a wide range of employment types including fixed period contracts, casual work, seasonal work, and temporary agency work. Temporary agency workers are those workers who are hired out to client firms on a temporary basis for an hourly fee (Forde and Slater 2016) and the proportion of workers classed as temporary agency workers has, historically, proven difficult to ascertain with estimates that range from 235,000 temporary agency workers (www.ons.gov.uk, August 2020) up to 865,000 temporary agency workers (Judge and Tomlinson 2016; www.acas.org, October 2015). LFS data in 2012 indicated over 321,000 temporary agency workers in the UK (Forde and Slater 2014), whilst in the same year the UK Government as well as the employers' organisation Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC 2014) jointly estimated the number of agency workers at around 1.1 million (Maroukis and Carmel 2015).

There are several reasons why it is difficult to determine the true number of temporary agency workers in the UK. First, some temporary agency workers identify themselves as permanent agency workers and Judge and Tomlinson (2016) estimate that this proportion of the temporary workforce, which may have been in the workforce for many years, could be as high as 440,000 workers. Second, some workers – possibly up to 66,000 - identify as self-

employed, even though they are paid by an agency, which also administers their tax and national insurance (NI) contributions. Third, up to a further 20,000 workers are thought to be employed as temporary agency workers in second jobs (Judge and Tomlinson 2016).

Whilst the number of temporary agency workers in the UK may be disputed, temporary agency work in the UK is heavily skewed towards certain industry sectors with many organizations in these sectors now reliant on such workers (van Wanrooy et al 2013; Forde and Slater 2016). The jobs undertaken by temporary agency workers in sectors such as the food supply chain, warehousing, hospitality, and care work are characterized as low skilled, low paid and precarious (Balch and Scott 2011; Geddes and Scott 2012; Anderson and Ruhs 2012; Potter and Hamilton 2014; Forde et al 2015; Forde and Slater 2016).

As for all employment types, macroeconomic factors directly impact temporary agency work. For instance, the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS 2011) reported that a reduction in the use of temporary agency workers of 30% was evidenced in the public sector at the time of the 2008 UK recession, whilst the private sector saw a reduction of 13% (van Wanrooy et al 2013). Additionally, changes to UK migration policy have a direct bearing on temporary agency work as migrant workers are prevalent in many sectors that engage temporary agency workers. The impact of the most recent changes to UK migration policy, which came into effect when the freedom of movement of labour with the European Union (EU) ended on 1st January 2021, will be discussed later in this thesis (section 2.4.1.1) along with other relevant changes to UK migration policy. Other prominent regulatory and legislative interventions affecting the UK labour market and temporary agency work are attached as appendix A.

1.1 The relevance of this study into temporary agency work in the UK

Temporary agency work has been studied from a variety of perspectives such as human resource management (Feldman et al 1994; Davidov 2004; Koene

and van Riemsdijk 2005; Forde and Slater 2006, 2016; Hopkins et al 2016), social identity (De Gilder 2014), the psychological contract (McClean Parks et al 1998; Claes 2005; Toms and Biggs 2014; Chambel 2014), job satisfaction (Forde and Slater 2006; Wilkin 2013), the organizational cost effectiveness of using temporary agency workers (Ward et al 2001), temporary agency worker interactions with permanent co-workers (Pedulla 2013; Toms and Biggs 2014) and the globalization of the temporary worker industry (Coe et al 2007). However, this body of research offers a limited understanding of life as a temporary agency worker: the view from below. To find such a limitation is unexpected given that temporary agency workers are established as an increasingly important source of flexible labour in many sectors of the UK labour market.

This study will address this limitation, and contribute to the literature on temporary agency work, by examining the lived experiences of temporary agency workers as they seek work, maintain work, and carry out work in a UK fresh food factory.

The UK food and drink industry is a highly significant contributor to the UK economy, adding over £120 billion (6.7% of the UK's total £1.8 trillion) to overall Gross Value Added (GVA), making up 11.9% of UK turnover, investing over £20 billion in 2017, and representing 14% of UK employment (www.fdf.org.uk, October 2019). This industry is also fertile ground for further research into temporary agency work as over 40% of companies use temporary agency workers to provide short-term sickness or holiday cover for permanent employees and to bolster their workforce during seasonal production peaks (www.fdf.org.uk, Sept 2013), and of the two million EU nationals working in the UK economy, many via temporary work agencies, approximately 20% of these are working in the food sector (UKFDSCWG 2017).

I suggest that the findings from this study will gain further relevance as global labour migration continues, as the consequences of the end of free

movement of labour with the EU are realised, and as a result of structural changes within the UK food supply chain (see chapter two).

1.2 <u>Methodology and the aims of this study</u>

In this study I have taken an ethnographic approach to increase our understanding of temporary agency work, from the perspective of temporary agency workers themselves. The temporary agency workers whom I travelled with, worked alongside, and observed were supplied to a UK fresh food factory, referred to in this thesis as FoodCo, by a temporary work agency, referred to as AgencyCo.

Three aspects of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers have been studied: finding and maintaining work, carrying out work and relationships whilst at work. At the onset of this study I identified three primary research questions, centred on each of these three aspects, which are outlined in the following section. I worked as a temporary agency worker at FoodCo over a seven-month period, and as my time in the field progressed, these three research questions were refined.

After my time immersed in the field came to an end, I returned to the field site and conducted twenty semi structured interviews with temporary agency workers, permanent workers, supervisors, and managers.

This thesis has three interrelated aims. First, to understand how temporary agency workers' experience and deal with security, insecurity and precarity related to work. Second, to examine the nature of the work which is undertaken by temporary agency workers. Of specific interest is understanding how the temporal aspect of temporary agency work differentiates temporary workers from their permanent co-workers. Third, to understand how temporary agency workers make sense of their workplace relationships, particularly their tripartite employment relationship and relationships they experience as part of a blended workplace. I express these as research questions in the following section.

1.2.1 <u>Primary research questions and intended contributions</u>

In this this study I address three primary research questions to explore the lived experiences of temporary agency workers.

1. *<u>What are temporary agency workers lived experiences of workplace security and workplace insecurity?</u>*

To address this first research question, in the context of temporary agency workers seeking work and then aiming to maintain work, I uncover why agency workers are attracted to the precarious work provided by AgencyCo. I explain how employment insecurity is experienced by temporary agency workers, and how some of these workers are subsequently able to reduce the effects of their employment insecurity. As a result, this thesis seeks to contribute to the literatures on temporary agency work, precarious work, and employment insecurity.

2. *<u>What are temporary agency workers experiences of the temporal aspect of their work, and of the intensity of their work?</u>*

The second research question examines the experiences of temporary agency workers who are carrying out work at the FoodCo factory and considers two issues. First, how the combined effect of job type and job time impacts the workplace experiences of temporary agency workers and, second, the intense nature of temporary agency work at FoodCo. I argue that job time has been overlooked when considering the role that temporary agency workers play in secondary job markets and this study offers a contribution to the literature in this area.

3. *<u>What are temporary agency workers' experiences of the blended workplace?</u>*

The third research question explores the relationships that temporary agency workers experience whilst at work. First, the lived experiences of what the literature refers to as a blended workforce has not been adequately explored

from the view from below. By addressing this, I will seek to fill this lacuna in the temporary work literature and provide an inside view that reveals a far more mixed-up workforce. Second, I examine resistance tactics which are enacted by temporary agency workers, which is an area of the temporary work and workplace resistance literature which appears to have been overlooked.

By addressing these three primary research questions this study will contribute new thinking, and empirical evidence, to the ongoing academic and political discussions of temporary agency work in the UK.

1.3 <u>How this thesis is organised</u>

Chapter two examines the key political and macroeconomic factors which have helped to shape the transformation of flexible employment practices within the UK. I explain the concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism and I outline how segmented labour markets and an increase in workplace flexibility, are linked to a post-Fordist rise in precarious work and employment insecurity. I discuss the role of migrants in UK labour markets and summarise how regulatory changes to migration and labour polices, have impacted UK labour markets. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the industry structures of the UK grocery retailing and UK food manufacturing sectors.

Chapter three is the main review chapter of this thesis and provides a comprehensive overview of the temporary agency work literature in six sections. I examine the literature both in general and, more specifically, in relation to the UK food industry, which is the focus area of this study. In the first section I outline the rise of temporary agency work in the UK and, in the second section, I examine the increased use of migrants as temporary agency workers. In section three I explore the relationship between temporary agency work and employment insecurity. I focus on the nature of temporary agency work in the UK in section four, whilst section five examines the concepts of tripartite employment relationships and blended workplaces. In section six I examine temporary agency work and workplace resistance.

I conclude the chapter with an explanation as to how my research questions are positioned in relation to the current literature.

Chapter four provides a detailed overview of the methodology used to conduct this study. Initially, I discuss the ontological and epistemological positions which I have taken throughout this study. Next, I introduce the field site, the key actors, and the work which is carried out by temporary agency workers at the field site. I then provide the rationale for the research design, the challenges which were faced to secure access to the field site, and the necessary ethical considerations. In this chapter I explain the processes employed to capture and analyse data. Finally, I discuss how I encountered, and dealt with, various reflexive challenges throughout this study.

Chapter five is the first of three data chapters that provides an analysis of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in a fresh food factory. In this chapter I examine temporary agency workers experiences of precarious work and employment insecurity as they seek work and then aim to maintain work. In doing so, I uncover why agency workers are attracted to the precarious work provided by the temporary work agency and explain how some agency workers are subsequently able to reduce the effects of employment insecurity.

Chapter six develops the emerging picture from seeking and maintaining work and focusses on the work itself. In the context of temporary agency workers carrying out work, in this second empirical chapter I examine how the lived experiences of temporary agency workers are impacted by the combined effect of hard, repetitive work and long hours. In this chapter I highlight how the concept of job time provides a nuanced understanding to further explain the role of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market.

Chapter seven is the final data chapter. Whilst the first two chapters focus on seeking and maintaining work and then the work itself, in this chapter I focus on a third aspect of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers - their workplace relationships. In this chapter I explore complex and interconnected

factory relationships in three areas. First, I examine how a tripartite employment relationship is experienced by temporary agency workers, particularly in respect of the expectations placed upon these workers by the management of both the host site and the temporary work agency. Second, I explore the workplace experiences of temporary agency workers who work alongside permanent co-workers. Third, I determine how patterns of control, by leaders, and resistance, from workers, exist as a fundamental dynamic of life at the field site. As a result, I reveal how tactics of resistance are enacted by temporary agency workers and explain how these workers use such tactics. This reveals a surprising degree of individual agency.

Chapter eight discusses the contributions that this thesis makes to the current literature in five areas. First, I provide new insights into precarious work and workplace insecurity. Second, I explain how the combined effect of job time and job type significantly impacts temporary agency workers. Third, I provide insights into the intense work experiences of temporary agency workers. Fourth, I provide further explanations as to how temporary agency workers experience a blended workplace and finally, I reveal how temporary agency workers respond to their workplace experiences of intense work and perceived unfairness.

Chapter nine concludes this thesis. In this chapter I provide an overview of the issues that motivated this research and highlight the key findings and limitations of the study. This chapter also provides suggestions for future research opportunities.

To position this study, I will now outline the key macroeconomic and political factors which have helped to shape the transformation of flexible employment practices within the UK.

2.0 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EMPLOYMENT AND FOOD INDUSTRY STRUCTURES IN THE UK

This chapter comprises five sections and considers how macroeconomic and political factors have combined to contribute to increasingly flexible employment structures within the UK. In this chapter I also examine the structural context of the UK food industry which is the setting for this study of temporary agency work.

First, I examine the concept of Fordism and explain how Fordist practices have progressed into an age of post-Fordism, typified by globalization, neoliberalism, and increasingly flexible types of employment. Second, I explore the links between workplace flexibility and segmented labour markets. Third, I examine the relationship between an increasingly flexible labour process and a rise in precarious work and employment insecurity. Fourth, I discuss UK labour markets and migration, detailing how the expansion of the European Union (EU) has impacted UK labour markets to provide an influx of flexible labour. In this section I also examine notable changes to UK migration policy, and the effects of regulatory changes on UK labour markets. Finally in this chapter, and of relevance to this study, I provide an outline of the industry structures relating to food retailing and food manufacturing in the UK.

2.1 Fordism and post-Fordism

According to Jessop (1991), Fordism can be analysed on four levels. First, Fordism is viewed as a mode of macroeconomic growth. In this regard, Fordism involves growth based on mass production, rising productivity based on economies of scale, rising incomes linked to productivity, increased mass demand due to rising wages, increased profits based on full utilisation of capacity, and increased investment in improved mass production equipment and techniques. Second, Fordism can be analysed as a mode of social and economic regulation. This involves the 'separation of ownership and control in large corporations with a distinctive multi-divisional, decentralised organisation subject to central controls, and a Taylorist division of labour'

(Jessop 1991: 9). Further regulatory elements include monopoly pricing, union recognition and collective bargaining. Third, Fordism can be viewed as a general pattern of social organisation, or socialization. Such socialization involves the provision and consumption of standardised, mass commodities, goods, and services. Finally, and of particular relevance to this study, Fordism is an organisation of work which extends the dynamics of Taylorism. The use of an assembly line is a central feature of a Fordist labour process, which standardises work, enables mass production, increases productivity, and determines the type, and pace of work. As a result, from a worker's perspective, such organization of work can be regarded negatively as boring and repetitive.

The development of Fordism can be traced during the twentieth century, peaking in the post-World War II decades of American dominance and mass consumerism, but collapsing due to political and cultural changes in the 1970s (Antonio and Bonanno 2000) as advances in technology, and the end of the Cold War, ushered in a neoliberal phase of globalization known as post-Fordism. Whereas Fordism is associated with the mass production - and consumption - of standardised goods, post-Fordism is associated with providing greater emphasis on choice and differentiation, and by the 'targeting of consumers by lifestyle, taste, and culture rather than by categories of social class' (Hall 1988: 24).

Sabel (1982) suggests that the epochal redefinition of markets, technologies, and industrial hierarchies into a post-Fordist era has been caused by the rise of global competition, in addition to changing patterns of consumer tastes, and the demands of new information technologies, whilst Hirst and Zeitlin (1991) believe that such transformational change resulted in the 'displacement of mass production as the dominant technological paradigm of the late twentieth century' (p36). Whilst the primary use of labour in the post-Fordist era may have changed, and has moved away from mass production, several authors argue that the economic fortunes of even technologically advanced firms are still primarily dependent on their workforce, and their

ability to develop and engage the skills of all employees (Hirschhorn 1984; Zuboff 1988; Adler 1992a, 1992b; Vallas 1999). In the post-Fordist, neoliberal world, some scholars also suggest that employment conditions have been degraded in terms of reduced job security, increased work intensity, increased worker expendability, increased worker subordination and increased employment intermediation (Slavnic 2010; Likic-Brboric et al 2013; Scott 2017).

The movement from Fordism to post-Fordism is widely debated in the literature, with some authors rejecting the idea of transformative change and dismissing narratives of:

> turning points, rules of transition and clear breaks between distinct stages or phases of development [Fordism vis-à-vis post-Fordism], preferring instead a more evolutionary interpretation of change which stresses a mixture of continuity and change from one period to another (Amin 1996: 3).

For instance, Piore and Sabel (1984) note how, even in the heyday of mass production assembly lines, small scale batch production was still widespread in the economy (Gertler 1988), whilst Schoenberger (1987) and Peck and Townsend (1987) show how mass production continues to coexist alongside more flexible systems of organization. Within UK manufacturing I argue that such an evolutionary approach appears logical as many manufacturing processes, in a post-Fordist era, retain Fordist approaches such as the use of assembly lines for the large-scale manufacture of standard items. Furthermore, I suggest that the UK food industry serves as a good example for the coexistence of both Fordist and post-Fordist approaches, as the mass production of standardised food products (e.g., using assembly lines) is combined with post-Fordist approaches, such as the widespread use of temporary agency labour to provide numerical flexibility (see section 2.2.1). In this study I will examine the impact that such a coexistence has on temporary agency workers in a UK fresh food factory.

The evolution of Fordism through to post-Fordism in the UK is also accompanied by a significant shift in the influence of Trades Unions. At their 1979 peak Trades Unions in the UK had 13 million members, density of over 50 per cent and there were 30 million lost work-days due to industrial disputes (Wright 2013), and the Trades Unions were able to use their position of strength to maintain rates of pay through collective agreements with employers.

During the 1980s union membership dropped significantly along with the incidence of strikes. This reflected the government's anti-union position (Waddington 2000; Howell 2005) and the weakness of Britain's manufacturing sector, which failed to produce the kind of industry structure that, for instance, in Germany formed the basis of a highly unionised private-sector industrial core. In the UK, Trades Union membership dropped to around seven million members and density only around 25 per cent, with only four years since 1990 with more than 1 million workdays lost to strikes (DBIS 2015). In the 1980s, not only did the Thatcher government's anti-union offensive take hold, but the post-Fordist evolution accelerated, with business restructuring processes intensifying along with radical changes in the organization of work and an increased desire for labour flexibility (Martin et al 1993; Williams 1997). Wright (2013) points to an increase in precarious work as driven by the individualisation of employment relations, owing to the decline of Trades Unions and collective bargaining, and the high rate of outsourcing and sub-contracting (or externalisation). For instance, strategies which unions once used were outlawed, in the case of secondary boycotts, or resisted with 'increased vigour from employers struggling to compete in a more competitive and trade-exposed economy' (Wright 2013: 280).

Trades Unions membership was traditionally centred on permanent, full-time workers and non-standard workers, e.g., temporary agency workers, were absent from many membership structures as they were regarded as a threat to the permanency enjoyed by Trades Union members (Fantasia et al 1998; Gumbrell-McCormick 2011). However, from the 1980's onwards as post-

Fordist forms of employment increased and Trades Union membership fell, many Trades Unions entered a period of reassessment (Carter 2000; Hyman 2002). In line with this re-evaluation, one approach taken by some Trade Unions was an attempt to be more relevant to, and inclusive of, workers outside their historical core membership including women, minorities, young people, and workers with precarious terms of employment, such as temporary agency workers. With this in mind, and of relevance to this thesis, the UK Trades Union Congress (TUC) subsequently called for increased legal protection for precarious workers, including temporary workers and migrants, identifying the need for unions to organize these groups of workers (Holgate 2005; Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010). Such an about turn by Trades Unions, from shunning temporary workers in the 1980s to embracing them three decades later, highlights the significant role that temporary agency workers now play in the make-up of the UK labour market.

Although this overview of Fordism and post-Fordism is intentionally succinct, we can begin to appreciate that to cope with rapid technological advancements, changing product markets and to satisfy new consumer demands, manufacturers required increasingly flexible equipment, methods, processes, and labour. The following section will now explore the development of a flexible post-Fordist labour process in the UK.

2.2 Workplace flexibility and segmented labour markets

This section consists of two parts. First, I review how workplace flexibility is categorised and critiqued in the literature, and in doing so I examine the links between workplace flexibility and post-Fordist labour markets. Second, I examine theories of segmented labour markets and their role in facilitating specific types of post-Fordist employment.

2.2.1 Workplace flexibility

Research into flexible forms of labour organization generally follows two different perspectives, namely a non-managerial and a managerial perspective. Researchers from the non-managerial perspective focus primarily

on the societal or political consequences of flexible labour practices and are typically interested in consequences such as the impacts on employees (e.g., stress, job insecurity, psychological well-being). Researchers from a managerial perspective, particularly human resource management (HRM), are generally interested in the effects of flexible labour practices on the competitiveness of organizations (Kozica and Kaiser 2012), and the contribution of flexible labour to organizations' ability to cope with complex and dynamic environments is a pivotal theme and an important goal of HRM (Guest 1987). This study of temporary agency work in the UK takes a non-managerial perspective to consider the views of temporary agency workers, who are a prominent feature of the UK food supply chain.

Flexibility remains a widely used yet ill-defined term (Furaker et al 2007) and workplace flexibility is often regarded as a set of relations between employers and employees which has various outcomes for businesses, workers, and customers (McCollum and Findlay 2015). In the employment literature, flexibility generally takes the form of two broad categories. First, functional flexibility, also often referred to as internal flexibility, is when workers can be redeployed between activities and tasks. Such flexibility is considered desirable as when products and production methods change, the same labour force changes with them (Atkinson 1984; Smith 1997; Gouliquer 2000). The second type of flexibility referred to alongside functional flexibility is, numerical, or external flexibility. This type of flexibility enables headcount to be quickly and easily increased, or decreased, in line with changes in the level of demand for labour (Atkinson 1984; Smith 1997; Gouliquer 2000). Numerical flexibility is often characterized by looser contractual relationships between organizations and workers, as organizations seek to match the number of workers with the work required (Atkinson 1984). Temporary agency work represents a prominent facilitator of numerical flexibility and Taylor et al (2017) observe that such flexibility may well be one-sided and present issues to temporary workers as 'flexibility may not be reciprocated, with a

requirement [for workers] to be available for work at very short notice, without any guarantee that work will actually be available' (p43).

From a managerialist perspective, Atkinson's (1984) notion of the flexible firm provides a prominent account and is particularly significant, as from the 1980's onwards post-Fordist Britain grappled with the increased demands of industrial complexity, organizational change and technological advancements. It is against this backdrop that Atkinson (1984) suggested some employers were increasingly placing a premium on achieving a flexible workforce which could respond quickly, easily, and cheaply to unforeseen changes, contracting and expanding to match worked time with the requirements of the job.

A key aspect of Atkinson's classification was using peripheral workers to provide the numerical (or external) flexibility, in which peripheral jobs enjoyed a lower level of job security and were not firm-specific. As a result, such roles could be sourced from the external labour market and were characterized by temporary, or casual, work.

Critics of flexible workplace labour systems, primarily from a non-managerialist perspective, believe that many aspects of traditional hierarchical modes of control remain, and that flexibility provides little movement from established patterns of work which disadvantage workers, but offer employers significant benefits (Pollert 1988; Gordon 1996). In particular, the dichotomous nature of core and periphery workers has been fiercely contested. Pollert (1988) effectively condemned the normative model of the flexible firm (Atkinson 1984; Atkinson and Meager 1986) as 'old wine in new bottles' (p310), a metaphor for the model as merely presenting the continuation of an existing 'wide repertoire of management strategies, including lowering labour costs, rationalisation, and productivity bargaining' (Pollert 1988: 310). Pollert argued that the generalisations which formed the basis of the flexible firm, were based on highly selective cases and that 'conceptually, the notion of core and periphery is confused, circular and value

laden' (p281). Pollert argued that the restructuring of workforces follows more complex lines than a dichotomy of core versus periphery.

The simplistic nature of the flexible firm approach to workforce flexibility was also criticized by Smith (1997) who examined the impact of flexible work practices on different groups of workers. Building particularly on Atkinson's (1984) and Wood's (1989) views of functional and numerical flexibility, Smith (1997), like Pollert (1988), believed that flexibility was uneven, characterized by:

> the opening of opportunities that are differently distributed across different groups of workers, emerging under conditions in which effort is intensified, control is decentred, and employment is destabilized (p316).

Smith (1997) suggested that core workers benefitted because peripheral workers were bought in to absorb fluctuations in demand and that typically such peripheral workers were temporary workers who would be 'excluded from participating in organizational innovations' (p332). Davidov (2004) also questioned whether such a drive for flexibility could be justified 'on the back of the weakest workers' (p727).

In section 2.1 of this chapter, I intimated that many parts of the UK food industry are characterized by the coexistence of both Fordist (e.g., mass production via assembly lines) and post-Fordist (e.g., widespread use of temporary agency workers) labour process. Furthermore, I suggest that there are two key reasons why post-Fordism in the UK food industry is primarily characterized by numerical labour flexibility. First, the widespread use of temporary agency workers points to a reliance on numerical flexibility, as over 40% of companies in this industry use temporary agency workers (www.fdf.org.uk, Sept 2013) and second, it is logical that labour-based (quantitative) flexibility strategies are most important in economic sectors that are labour intensive, such as food manufacturing. This ethnographic study will examine the impact of numerical flexibility on temporary agency

workers in a UK food factory which appears to be an area of the literature which is underexplored.

In addition to criticisms that core versus peripheral was just too simplistic when assessing labour flexibility, Atkinson's (1984) model of the flexible firm has been challenged because it was 'too dependent on questionable ideas about the contribution of core labour to output' (Ackroyd and Procter 1998: 171). Ackroyd and Procter (1998) believe that Atkinson's (1984) model of the flexible firm places too much emphasis on the upskilling of core employees and instead they argue for the lesser-skilled periphery, claiming that organizational output is significantly influenced by a heavy dependency on the flexible use of relatively unskilled labour, such as temporary agency workers to provide numerical flexibility. Ackroyd and Procter's (1998) assertions are based on the belief that the basic arrangement for manufacturing is the use of standard technology by teams of unskilled workers, and that management activity is concerned with assessing the costs of labour and the organization of production.

Ackroyd and Procter's (1998) analysis of numerical flexibility is relevant to the UK food manufacturing industry for several reasons. First, the demand for food can be unpredictable and unskilled labour (e.g., numerical flexibility) can be deployed more rapidly than the training of existing employees. Second, existing employees may also be reluctant to train for additional duties, some of which may be less desirable than their accustomed roles. Third, some food companies may be reluctant to upskill employees as skilled workers may have greater control of the workflow and more discretion in production decisions on the shop floor. Fourth, skilled labour is likely to be less expendable and less readily replaceable than unskilled labour.

Notions that some organizations may be reliant on a combination of both core (or skilled) workers and peripheral (or unskilled) workers suggests that there is a requirement for distinct types of labour, and in the following section I review literature that relates to theories of labour market segmentation.

2.2.2 <u>Segmented labour markets</u>

In this section I will examine the relationship between workplace flexibility, segmented labour markets and migrant labour. Piore's (1979) assessment of segmented labour market theory emphasizes the role played by migrant workers, arguing that the existence of a segmented labour market involves a primary sector dominated by non-migrant labour and a secondary sector dominated by migrant labour.

Flexibility is often associated with the segmentation of labour markets (Piore 1979; Karlsson 2007) and research into workplace flexibility has explored the relationship between segmented labour markets and migrant labour, particularly regarding the characteristics and consequences of flexible labour market structures and the role of migrant labour in facilitating them (Piore 1979; Ruhs 2006; Castles and Kosack 2010; McCollum and Findlay 2015). The literature regularly interchanges the terms dual labour market theory and segmented labour market theory to describe the existence of distinct types of labour from the labour market. For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term segmented, and not dual, to allow for conceptualization of a market that consists of multiple, as opposed to two, options of supply.

Economists date the existence of segmented labour market theory to Harris and Todaros' (1970) research into the labour market in Africa, in which they qualitatively analysed rural agriculture and urban manufacturing (Doogan 2009), and labour market segmentation is defined by Reich et al (1973) as the:

> historical process whereby political-economic forces encourage the division of the labour market into separate submarkets, or segments, distinguished by different labour market characteristics and behavioural rules (p359).

According to Reich et al (1973) primary and secondary segments of the labour market are differentiated mainly by stability characteristics. For instance, primary jobs require and develop stable working habits; skills are required; wages are relatively high and prospects for progression exist. On the other

hand, secondary jobs do not require, and often discourage, stable working habits; wages are low; turnover is high; few prospects for promotion exist. Reich et al (1973) also posit that 'secondary jobs are mainly (though not exclusively) filled by minority workers' (p360). Reich et al's (1973) characterization of secondary jobs can be applied to temporary agency work, and this study will examine a view from below to determine the reasons why migrant temporary agency workers undertake such unstable work.

Theories relating to segmented labour markets have been criticized for being economically deterministic and problematic in terms of identifying in which sectors certain groups of workers may be located, and in dealing with movement between sectors (Grimshaw and Rubery 1998), whilst further disaggregation of the secondary labour market in terms of specific employment patterns, for instance to separate temporary work from part-time work, is also argued for (Doogan 2009).

Consistent with Reich et al (1973), Piore (1979) characterizes a primary segment typified by reasonable salaries and reasonable levels of job security, and a secondary segment characterized by poor pay and conditions, insecurity, and tedious work carried out mainly by migrant labour. In the post-Fordist era Piore (1986) also points to the changing share in manufacturing and services total employment, changing labour market regulation and the changing motivations of migrant workers, as 'important factors determining employer demand for migrants to work in secondary sector jobs' (MacKenzie and Forde 2009: 145). The use of migrants to fill secondary labour market vacancies has also been highlighted by Scott (2013, 2017) and Waldinger and Lichter (2003).

Piore (1979) maintains that migrants enter labour markets in industrialised countries where cost pressures have driven down pay and conditions, thereby creating secondary forms of employment. Consequently, migrants fill a 'distinct set of jobs that native labour refuses to accept' (Piore 1979: 3) which

is evidenced in the UK food supply chain where 'local applications have virtually dried up' (Dench et al 2006: 29).

Segmented labour market theory shows how it is possible to offset the costs of an uncertain market, typified by fluctuations in demand, by 'passing the uncertainty onto certain groups of workers' (Geddes and Scott 2012: 197). By having a proportion of labour that is employed on an as-and-when-needed-basis, a temporary segment of the workforce is created that forms part of the secondary labour market. It is here that 'the least desirable and most insecure forms of employment are concentrated, and where labour shortages and migrant penetration are most intense' (Geddes and Scott 2012: 197). Piore (1979) asserts a similarly negative view of the secondary labour and characterizes secondary labour as 'a means of evasion: a sector of the labour market that is not subject to restrictions on lay-off and discharge to which the unstable portion of demand can be transferred' (p39).

Whilst the literature points to the existence of a segmented labour market, characterized by primary and secondary roles, I concur with Geddes and Scott (2012) who argue that the 'situation on the ground is more complex' (p198) and my experience of working in food factories since the 1980s, albeit from a managerial perspective, points to factory shop floors which do not merely consist of dichotomous primary and secondary roles. For instance, many food factories consist of migrant workers occupying both primary (core) roles and secondary (peripheral) roles, whilst it is also common practice for permanent employees (classified in much of the literature as core workers) to occupy roles which are characterized as secondary roles, and thereby, according to the literature, primarily occupied by temporary workers. The field site for this research is an example of such a workplace, and this study will examine the significance of multi-faceted employment relationships for temporary agency workers, which is an area that the current literature has not fully considered.

In this section I have examined the relationship between workplace flexibility and segmented labour markets, highlighting how the literature characterizes

both primary and secondary jobs. I have outlined how migrant workers represent a significant element of the secondary labour market, contributing significantly towards the numerical flexibility found in many post-Fordist workplaces.

The following sections will examine links between a post-Fordist increase in numerical flexibility, precarious work, and employment insecurity.

2.3 Precarious work and employment insecurity

This section consists of two parts. First, I explain what is meant by precarious work and explain how the concept is used in this thesis. The evidence which points to an apparent increase in precarious work is then explored. Second, I provide definitions and examine concepts of employment insecurity, and explore the relationships between post-Fordist labour markets, numerical flexibility, and employment insecurity.

2.3.1 Precarious work

In section 2.1 I explained that the nature of post-Fordism in the UK is characterized by an increasingly flexible labour process, whilst in section 2.2 I discussed concepts of workplace flexibility, theories of segmented labour markets, and the specific role of numerical flexibility in post-Fordist labour markets. Such theories suggest that core workers are provided with a level of protection and job stability, whilst workers in secondary, or peripheral, jobs experience less protection and reduced job stability. Consequently, workers in secondary roles, such as temporary agency workers who often provide numerical flexibility, occupy a weakened position in the labour market as they have 'no bargaining power, no power to protect themselves, and cannot properly navigate the conditions of their employment' (Appay 2010: 28). Such a position is aligned to Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) whose work I draw on in this thesis. In their view, precarious work involves:

> instability, lack of protection and insecurity and that it is some
> combination of these factors which identifies precarious jobs, and the

boundaries around the concept are inevitably, to some extent, arbitrary (Rodgers and Rodgers 1989: 5).

Historically, Bourdieu (1963) is credited with the term précarité, using it in his research in Algeria to differentiate between workers with permanent jobs and those with casual ones (Alberti et al 2018), whilst Standing is often associated with the concept of precarity, and his book The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class (2011), popularised the term precariat[1]. Standing (2011) built upon the theorization of précarité (Potter and Hamilton 2014) in francophone literature (Wresinski 1987; Freschet 1993; Bourdieu 1998) and developed the notion of the precariat, postulating that the precariat was not a class-in-itself - observing that precarious workers experienced significant difficulties in mobilizing and bargaining - but was a class-in-becoming. According to Standing (2014), the precariat is an ever-growing number of people across the world, who lack one of the seven forms of labour-related security: labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security and representation security (p17).

Concerns about an apparent growth in various forms of precarious work have been an increasingly prominent feature of academic and public debates regarding flexible labour markets (Benach and Muntaner 2007; Kalleberg 2009; Anderson 2010; Standing 2012; Potter and Hamilton 2014; Swider 2015; Alberti et al 2018; Moore and Newsome 2018; Rubery et al 2018; Choonara 2019) and a swathe of empirical studies points to a rising tide of precarious employment situations in terms of being unpredictable, low waged, lacking protection, and with little employment stability (Swider 2015). Studies cover a broad range of sectors, such as the mushroom picking industry in Northern

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The neologism precariat is an amalgam of precarity and proletariat which can be traced back to Bourdieu who used the term to describe the 'colonial working class and later a new mode of dominance resulting from a (neoliberal) restructuring of global economy' (Jorgensen 2015: 3). The salariat, another neologism suggested by Standing (2011), appears to be diametrically opposed to the precariat – that is to say, non-precarious - and is classified by Standing as benefitting from, for example, secure employment, sick pay, paid holidays, and pension schemes.[1]

Ireland (Potter and Hamilton 2014), workers in the hospitality industry (Alberti 2014), jazz musicians (Umney and Kretsos 2015), the UK striptease industry (Hardy and Sanders 2015), migrant workers in the Chinese construction industry (Swider 2015), parcel delivery workers in the UK (Moore and Newsome 2018), taxi drivers in South China (Choi 2018) and part-time workers in Spain (Munoz-Comet and Steinmetz 2020). Holgate (2005) provides a notable view from below with her case study of a London sandwich factory, highlighting the precarious nature of a workforce dominated by temporary and migrant workers with workers reporting that management would tell them 'If you don't like this job, go and get another one. We don't care about you. You can easily be replaced' (p469).

Precarious employment appears, therefore, to be a defining feature of many national economies, promoted by labour market flexibility and typified by moving social risks away from employers and governments onto individuals and families - 'those who can least bear them' (Evans and Gibb 2009: 2) - with migrant workers amongst those impacted the most. Consequently, many authors believe that precarious work creates 'greater economic inequality, insecurity and instability' (Kalleberg 2009: 8) and that precarious workers, particularly migrant workers, are less likely to be aware of their employment rights with little access to social benefits including health, state and pension benefits, and workplace training (Lewchuk et al 2006; Standing 2008).

Although the literature suggests that precarious work is a real and increasing phenomenon, primarily, it would seem, because of capitalist desires to control labour costs via numerically flexible working arrangements, Spencer (2012) argues that for many, 'neoliberalism may have intensified labour, but it did not invent it'. Spencer (2012) points to the fact that employment under capitalism has always featured some element of precariousness, as the 'capitalist employment relationship is built on an unequal power relationship between workers and employers' (p688).

The perils of precarity are regular topics for social research and examples of precarious employment are also discussed via many media sources. For instance, Chakrabortty (2015), referring to a Liverpool biscuit factory, discusses the concept of ghost jobs and reveals how casual workers and their families are 'burdened with all the insecurity and powerlessness, while their employers enjoy the flexibility of labour on tap' (www.theguardian.com, January 2015). The ghost jobs which Chakrabortty (2015) refers to are temporary agency jobs typified by low pay, no guaranteed hours and reduced employment benefits.

Temporary agency work remains relevant when discussing precarious work, as agency work is insecure, unpredictable, and low-waged (Ward et al 2000; Ruhs 2006; Evans and Gibb 2009; Kelleberg 2009; Fudge 2011; Anderson and Ruhs 2012; Geddes and Scott 2012; Swider 2015; Lever and Milbourne 2017; Rubery et al 2018; Choonara 2019), and the specific nature of post-Fordism in the UK food industry, with large numbers of temporary workers providing numerical flexibility, leads to the increased risk of precarious work for many agency workers in the UK food supply chain.

As post-Fordist UK labour markets are characterized by numerical flexibility, and precarious work, there is an appreciation in the literature that the corollary of a flexible labour market may be an insecure workforce (Heery and Salmon 2000). Consequently, it is plausible that numerical flexibility may impact heavily upon some workers and this position is examined in the next section.

2.3.2 Employment insecurity

In this section I examine concepts of employment insecurity, and I concur with Choonara (2019) who suggests that the analytical separation of precarious work and employment insecurity is justifiable as a worker 'may feel insecure without being precarious or may be precarious yet feel secure' (p8).

In the literature, employment insecurity means many things and is often associated with financial implications for the workers who are involved. Job insecurity, or job tenure insecurity (Choonara 2019), is a prominent concept in the literature and is broadly associated with a workers' fear of becoming unemployed (Burchell et al 1999; Vulkan 2012). Job insecurity is defined further in the literature as objective job security and subjective job security, with objective job insecurity regarded as 'the actual risk - as assessed by some outside observer – of a job loss for a given category of workers' (Berglund et al 2014: 167). Subjective job insecurity, on the other hand, is 'a matter of individuals' own perceptions of the continuance of their employment' (Berglund et al 2014: 167). Notably, in the context of my study, two temporary agency workers may be equally insecure in an objective sense but may interpret their situation differently. I will examine this position, which has not been thoroughly examined in the literature, in this ethnographic study.

A further form of employment insecurity is work insecurity, which Vulkan (2012) describes as a workers' concern of finding a new position following a job loss. While assuming that lifetime employment is eroding, many politicians and policy makers are increasingly claiming that work security should not depend (entirely) on their current employment – their current job – but on their ability to find new employment in the labour market. In other words, workers should derive their work security from their employability, which Auer (2010) refers to as employability security or labour market security. This is an important notion as it appears to place greater responsibility on individuals to enhance, or improve, their chances of obtaining work, for instance through enhanced skills, improved English language ability (especially in the case of migrants) or a positive attitude towards flexible working hours. The shifting of responsibility, from employers to workers, is characterized in the literature as a feature of the post-Fordist labour process (Sennett 1998; Davidov 2004; Kalleberg 2009; Slavnic 2010; Likic-Brboric et al 2013; Wright 2013; Scott 2017), typified by 'passing uncertainty onto other certain groups

of workers' (Geddes and Scott 2012: 197) or otherwise moving risks away from employers onto workers (Evans and Gibb 2009).

For many workers, the effects of employment insecurity extend beyond financial concerns and the literature highlights concerns for workers' health and wellbeing (Burchell et al 1999; Nolan 2001) and family relationships beyond the workplace (Burchell et al 1999; Nolan et al 2000; Vulkan 2012). Losing valued job features such as status within an organization and opportunities for promotion are also proposed as indicators of employment insecurity (Burchell et al 1999; Choonara 2019) along with 'concerns over a lack of control over what goes on in the workplace' (Robinson 2000: 25).

Furthermore, the literature highlights other forms of insecurity, such as income insecurity (Wilhagen and Tros 2004; Vulkan 2012; Zekic 2016) and combination insecurity, which is attributable to Wilhagen and Tros (2004) and is defined as 'the security of a worker of being able to combine his or her job with other – notably private – responsibilities and commitments' (p171).

The relationship between an increase in labour flexibility, and a subsequent increase in employment insecurity has been linked by prominent social theorists such as Beck (1992), Giddens (1998) and Sennett (1998) although the significance of this link has been robustly challenged by others. Robinson (2000), for instance, suggests that 'in understanding the phenomenon of work insecurity it might be a mistake to concentrate on those in flexible forms of employment' (p37), whilst Doogan (2001) argues that a 'rising sense of insecurity' is not a result of the transformation of jobs and labour market restructuring but is in effect 'social insecurity' or a type of 'manufactured uncertainty' (p439). Fevre (2007) too disagrees that 'employment risk was being transported away from employers towards employees' (Mythen 2005: 143) and argues that such a statement is 'incorrect as no reliable evidence is provided in support of it' (p519).

Further alternative flexible working arrangements have continued to emerge over the last decade, such as the so-called gig economy. The gig economy, workers hired for gigs under flexible arrangements as independent contractors or consultants, working only to complete a particular task or for a defined time, is now widely established (Friedman 2014) and the rise of the gig economy raises new issues regarding employment insecurity.

Rethinking the nexus between workplace flexibility and employment insecurity has once again become necessary from a policy perspective, and the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices in the UK (2017) was established with the overriding aim of understanding what it would take to provide 'good work for all' (Taylor 2017: 7). The report also states that one-sided flexibility makes it very difficult for a person to achieve financial security and highlights that:

> whilst in theory individuals in these working arrangements have the right to turn down work, workers, needing work but lacking unfair dismissal rights, often felt that to express legitimate views about conditions or make even reasonable requests risked having future work denied to them (Taylor et al 2017: 43).

Achieving security for workers, and flexibility for organisations, is the basis for the flexicurity approach (Wilthagen and Tros 2004; Berglund et al 2014). Advocates of flexicurity believe that job insecurity is necessary, to some extent, to allow companies numerical flexibility, but that this is compensated for by work security. Specific policies and generous benefits for those who cannot find work immediately are a key feature of this approach, and Denmark and the Netherlands are often referred to as flexicurity 'model countries' (Berglund et al 2014: 166).

As a result, flexicurity policies can be assumed to establish labour markets with 'relatively higher levels of job insecurity for employees' (Berglund et all 2014: 166). Although flexicurity may appear to provide a solution to the flexibility versus security debate, not all authors agree (Burchell 2009;

Berglund and Furaker 2011), as work and income security may not necessarily compensate for a lack of job security (Berglund et al 2014).

In the UK, the EU flexicurity initiative initially sparked a political debate about labour market regulation, and also encouraged Trades Unions to explore the link between collective bargaining and labour market policy. However, the debate was confined to a narrow political forum and framed in terms 'both of a traditional suspicion of European regulation, and of a strong normative bias towards flexibility rather than security' (Milner 2012: 225). The weakness of the flexicurity debate in the UK (Wild and Voss 2011) was perhaps unsurprising, given the employer view at the time that the UK labour market was already adequately regulated, and the reluctance of successive UK governments to embrace European employment and social policy (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2004). As the UK is no longer part of the EU, it must be considered unlikely that the flexicurity debate will be rekindled.

This section has examined concepts of precarious work and employment insecurity, and two key propositions point towards an increase in employment insecurity since the 1980s. First, the transfer of economic risk from employers to employees through reduced job tenure (Gregg et al 2000) and, second, a growth in the use of contingent workers such as temporary agency workers (Appelbaum 1989; Cappelli 1995; Allen and Henry 1997; Purcell 2000). A further dominant theme in the literature is, understandably, that temporary agency work is precarious, and that such workers experience employment insecurity. The literature has not fully acknowledged whether, or not, some temporary agency workers experience a subjective sense of employment security, which is a position that my view from below will seek to establish.

The following section will examine the role that UK migration policy, and labour market regulation, has played to facilitate the post-Fordist, migrant-dominated increase in numerical flexibility.

2.4 <u>Migration and the regulation of UK labour markets</u>

In section 2.2.2 I outlined the role played by migrant workers in segmented labour markets. I now expand the discussion of migration in two areas. First, I examine the impact of increased migration, primarily as a result of the expansion of the EU, on UK labour markets. In doing so I highlight some notable changes to UK migration policy, including the policy change which came into effect when the freedom of movement of labour with the EU ended on 1st January 2021.

Second, I analyse how regulatory changes to both migration and labour policies have impacted UK labour markets.

<u>2.4.1 The impact of migration on UK labour markets</u>

A migrant may be broadly defined as foreign born (meaning all persons born outside the host country regardless of citizenship) or as foreign national (persons without citizenship of the host country) (Ruhs and Anderson 2012: 13). The latter comprises two broad groups, those who are settled (i.e., with permanent residence status) and those who do not have long term residence rights – and who therefore are not necessarily free to move within the labour market. These distinctions are important not only in terms of describing the size and characteristics of the migrant population, but also in terms of their rights in the host country, and in the extent to which their labour market behaviour can be controlled by labour market policy (Ruhs and Anderson 2012). The ending of the free movement of labour between the UK and the EU on 1st January 2021 further highlights the importance of these distinctions (see section 2.4.1.1 for details of this change to UK migration policy).

International migrant workers have been a feature of the UK agricultural workforce for many years with employers regarding such workers as 'indispensable' (Collins 1976: 55) and seasonal migration by Irish workers was particularly common (Johnson 1967). However, since the mid-1990s the number of migrants coming to the UK, from outside and within the EU, has increased significantly. Total migration to the UK increased from 314,000 in

1994 to 582,000 in 2004. Out migration (people leaving the UK) also increased but at a lower rate – from 238,000 in 1994 to 360,000 in 2004 – thus resulting in a significant rise in net migration (Salt 2005, IPPR 2005, ESRC 2006, Ruhs 2006). According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2003-04, ten percent of the working age population in the UK at that time was foreign-born, and such figures would preclude those migrants who entered the UK illegally.

The general increase in the employment of foreign nationals is evidenced across many economic sectors in the UK (Anderson et al 2006; Forde and Slater 2006, 2016; MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Scott 2013, 2017; McCollum and Findlay 2015), including the food industry, with the expansion of the EU the catalyst for large scale immigration. Notably, the accession of the A8 states (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) to the EU in 2004 provided a major influx of potential labour, of all skill levels, into the UK. This influx of EU migrants, according to McCollum and Findlay (2015), served a particular function in the UK labour market, that of 'flexible workers for flexible jobs' (p428), although the rapid increase in migration may well have served to create flexible labour markets, rather than merely providing labour to satisfy existing labour markets.

2.4.1.1 UK migration policy

Immigration to the UK is one of the seven aims of the Home Office, controlling the 'regulation of entry to, and settlement in, the United Kingdom in the interests of social stability and economic growth' (Glover et al 2001: i). As immigration has both economic and social impacts, policies which affect migration are one of the most contentious and divisive issues of public policy making in the UK.

Migration policy in the UK is complicated and comprehensive, covering entry controls, settlement, and integration into society. As such, the UK immigration system interacts with many other state policies and objectives. Further complexity is added as the definition of what is a migrant differs across frequently used data sets. For instance, the international passenger survey

(IPS) includes all those who intend to stay for one year, whilst the Labour Force Survey (LFS) specifies country of birth, as using nationality would exclude migrants who have settled in the UK. Migrants are also not the same as ethnic minorities. Many migrants are white, and many ethnic minorities are not migrants as they were born in the UK (Glover et al 2001). Whichever data is used, it is likely that inaccuracies will exist as illegal migrants will, by definition, be somewhat unknown.

From the 1990's migration polices were based on the premise that, if managed correctly, immigration would generate significant economic benefits to the UK (Spencer 2003). For instance, policies were developed to enable different routes of entry for skilled, or highly skilled, EEA and non-EEA nationals to the UK.

The most recent changes to UK migration policy came into effect from 1st January 2021, the date that freedom of movement with the EU ended. The UK's new points-based system treats EU and non-EU citizens equally and is designed to attract people who can contribute to the UK's economy (www.gov.uk., 12th October 2020). The system includes a route for skilled workers who have a job offer from an approved employer sponsor, but there will not be a general route for employers to recruit at or near the national minimum wage[2].

In most cases, as some exemptions do apply (e.g., the global talent scheme for highly skilled scientists and researchers), non-UK citizens who wish to come to the UK to live, and work, after 30th June 2021[3] must satisfy the criteria of the UK points-based immigration system. The new system will award points for

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[2] See appendix A1.3 for an outline of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and A1.4 for an outline of the National Living Wage (NLW)

[3] Current EU (non-UK) citizens who wish to continue living in the UK after 30th June 2021, must have been resident in the UK before 31st December 2020 and can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme for either settled status (five years continuous residence in the UK) or pre-settled status (less than five years continuous residence in the UK). In both settled and pre-settled status, residency in the UK must have started by 31st December 2020.

English-speaking ability, post graduate qualifications and the level of salary offered by a prospective employer. Critics of the system believe that it will almost 'entirely close the door on the recruitment of low-skilled, low-wage migrants from the EU' (www.ft.com, 19th February 2020), such as those migrant workers who occupy many of the jobs in UK food manufacturing factories, with the impact being felt by 'every factory in the country' (www.thegrocer.co.uk, 19th February 2020).

2.4.2 <u>The effects of regulatory changes, to migration and labour policies, on UK labour markets</u>

In section 2.1, I suggested that the UK food manufacturing industry serves as a good example for the coexistence of both Fordist and post-Fordist approaches, as the mass production of standardised food products (e.g., using assembly lines) is combined with post-Fordist approaches, such as the widespread use of temporary agency workers to provide numerical flexibility. In the following section I provide an analysis of the regulatory links between migration policy and labour policy, showing how these links affect the numerically flexible nature of post-Fordist UK labour markets.

Since the 1980s successive UK governments have contributed to the transformation of employment relationships (Hall 1988; Evans and Gibb 2009) primarily through policies aimed at increasing the deregulation of labour markets and, according to Grady (2017), the state has 'been a key agent in providing employment regulation that has allowed low paid and insecure employment to increase' (p274). Grady (2017) argues that state regulatory approaches have shaped the UKs low-wage economy influenced by a 'political preference for financialization' (p274), with financialization defined as 'a pattern of accumulation in which profit-making occurs increasingly through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production' (Krippner 2005: 181). Consequently, during this period, there have been significant developments in the capitalist mode of production in the UK, characterized by a move away from industrial and commercial capitalism in favour of financialization.

Specifically, since the 1980s, UK governments have followed a dual approach to labour market regulation as financialization has, first, prompted regulation that favours 'big business' (Grady 2017: 274) and second, deregulation has 'permitted active labour market policies (ALMPs) which create an environment in which low-wage jobs flourish' (Grady 2017: 274). By adopting economic policies that are based on financialization, the UK state has elevated the 'significance of the financial sector relative to the real sector, transferred income from the real sector to the financial sector and contributed to increased income inequality and wage stagnation' (Palley 2013: 3). The disconnection of wages from productivity growth is a key characteristic of financialization which Palley (2013) argues is:

> connected to a drive for labour market flexibility which includes the weakening of Trades Unions, and the eroding of labour market supports such as employee rights, unemployment benefits and employment protections (p23).

The role of the state in labour market regulation has been subject to much debate with some authors arguing that the role of the state is diminishing (Reich 1991), whilst others suggest that the state is more of a transformative actor imposing 'market-orientated agendas' (Forde and Slater 2016: 591). Such transformations are evidenced as the state pursues 'increased marketization in order to make economic activities located within the national territory.....more competitive in international and transnational terms' (Cerny 1997: 259), and the emergence of the UK government as an example of a 'competition state' (Forde and Slater 2016: 591) has been suggested.

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) have been a feature of the approach taken by the UK state to increase participation in labour markets, by reducing unemployment and spending less on jobless benefits, with 'conditionality of benefits progressively tightened' (Grady 2017: 281) over the last thirty years. Whilst ALMPs may not be specifically intended to eradicate welfare payments, ALMPs do enact institutional changes that intensify control over job seekers

and makes them more compliant towards lower-paid jobs (Greer 2016). In this regard the intention of ALMPs 'is to increase the number of available job seekers, encourage wage moderation and increase labour flexibility' (Greer 2016: 166).

The effectiveness of ALMPs in the UK have been criticized in the literature for allowing low-waged work to become 'naturalized and viewed as inevitable' (Grady 2017: 282) as preferable to welfare benefits. Some employers too, remain sceptical about the attitudes of workers who are available, as potential workers may be unwilling to accept low-paid and mundane work and may 'not necessarily behave flexibly' (Greer 2016: 169). This notion, of a lack of worker flexibility, particularly amongst indigenous workers, will be empirically examined in this study, alongside the 'perception of the migrant work ethic' (Dawson et al 2017: 811).

As migrant workers dominate many low-paid industries, such as the UK food industry, the accession of the A8 states into the EU in 2004, and the A2 states (Bulgaria and Romania) in 2007, are inextricably linked to changes in the composition of UK labour markets. The links between migration policy and labour market regulation help to explain how large numbers of migrant workers now provide the numerical flexibility which characterizes many post-Fordist UK labour markets. As many migrants enter the labour market via temporary work agencies, in chapter three I will provide a substantive literature review of temporary agency work in the UK. In addition to academic attention, temporary agency work has also attracted regulatory focus, particularly as state regulation has 'facilitated the corporate view that employees are an easily disposable cost' (Grady 2017: 280).

 The most prominent regulatory change that has affected the role of temporary agency workers in UK labour markets is the Agency Workers Regulations (AWR), and the basic aim of the AWR is to give effect to the EU Temporary and Agency Work Directive in UK law. The AWR is intended to improve pay and conditions for temporary agency workers and to contribute

to the development of the temporary work sector as a flexible option for employers and workers (www.ec.europa.eu, May 2015). However, the success of the AWR in the UK is subject to debate and Forde and Slater (2016) argue that:

> the state has developed a regulatory instrument which provides uneven protection for workers, favours the actions of employers, promotes further flexibility in the use of temporary labour contracts and, by taking advantage of compromises at the European level, creates further market-making opportunities for well-established large agencies in the sector (p590).

Forde and Slater (2016) highlight how the UK Government enacted its role as a competition state by shaping the Directive, with 'profound implications for labour markets'(p590). It is argued that the UK state shaped the Directive at European level and transposed the AWR into UK law in such a way as to 'offer new market-making opportunities for capital [e.g., larger temporary work agencies] and to protect the competitiveness of UK industry [e.g., for the benefit of employers over workers]' (p591). Forde and Slater (2016) argue that the 'actions of the state in the UK have privileged the aims of flexibility and economic growth……over that of equal treatment for temporary agency workers' (p591-592).

One such example, and a feature of the AWR from their enactment into UK law in October 2011, was the option for an agency worker to waive their rights to equal pay in preference for the so-called Swedish Derogation or pay between assignments (PBA) model. My practical experience of the PBA model in several food manufacturing sites that engage large numbers of temporary agency workers is that the PBA could be as little as only a couple of hours of minimum wage pay per week. Such a notional weekly payment is clearly counter to the rationale for the AWR, which is to improve pay and conditions of temporary agency workers.

The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017) recommended the removal of the PBA contract from the AWR. The government followed this recommendation, and the Agency Worker (Amendment) Regulations 2019 removed the PBA provisions from the 2018 Regulations on 6th April 2020. Therefore, with effect from this date, all agency workers have been entitled to pay parity.

However, temporary agency workers are still required to work for twelve weeks until they achieve pay parity, which highlights the 'veneer of fairness' referred to by Forde and Slater (2016: 590). Once again based on my industry experience, and from a managerial perspective, even after temporary agency workers have completed twelve weeks of service, businesses are still able to avoid pay parity by making marginal adjustments to job descriptions to claim points of difference. For example, packing duties may be identical for permanent and temporary agency workers, except for some notional additional responsibilities such as mentoring or overseeing temporary agency workers in the workplace.

In section 2.2.1 I argued that post-Fordism in the UK food industry is primarily characterized by numerical labour flexibility for two main reasons: the widespread use of temporary agency workers and the labour-intensive nature of many food manufacturing operations. The choices and actions of the state in shaping the AWR have not only provided further market making opportunities for larger agencies with large, recurrent labour supply contracts, such as those found in the UK food industry, but the AWR are also limited in their protection of migrant temporary agency workers. The full impact of these limitations on the lived experiences of temporary agency workers has not been fully established, and this study will further establish this view from below. A comprehensive overview of the AWR is attached as appendix A1.2.

In addition to the AWR, the establishment of the Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) has also had a significant impact on the UK food industry. The GLAA was initially established as the Gangmasters Licensing Authority

(GLA) on 1st April 2005 by the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 and the GLAA is a regulatory, law enforcement and compliance body charged with preventing, detecting, and tackling labour exploitation across the UK. The GLAA has a scope which licenses temporary work agencies supplying temporary workers to the agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering and any associated processing and packaging industries, which includes the UK food manufacturing industry, and temporary work agencies operating in these sectors in the UK have had to be licenced by the GLAA since October 2006. The deaths of 23 Chinese immigrants in the 2004 Morecambe Bay cockling disaster, led to the establishment of the GLA, as the UK at the time had one of the least regulated temporary labour markets in the developed world, and a lack of regulation - together with large-scale immigration - created segments of the UK labour market which were at risk of exploitation (Gaus et al 2010).

Although since April 2017 a broader scope has since been provided to the GLAA, allowing it to prevent, detect, and investigate worker exploitation across the entire economy, the licencing requirements still only extend to businesses operating as temporary labour providers to the original industries of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, shellfish gathering and food and drink processing and packaging. Consequently, other low paid sectors, such as care work, construction, and hospitality, which attract temporary agency workers, remain outside of the remit of the GLAA. A comprehensive overview of the GLAA is attached as appendix A1.1.

This section comprised two parts. First, I explained how the general increase in the employment of foreign nationals is evidenced across many economic sectors in the UK, including the food industry, with the expansion of the EU the catalyst for large scale immigration. I also highlighted how some notable changes to UK migration policy facilitated these migrant flows including the policy change which came into effect when the freedom of movement of labour with the EU ended on 1st January 2021. Earlier in this chapter (section 2.1) I highlighted how post-Fordist UK labour markets are characterized by numerical flexibility, and in this section I have explained how this has been

facilitated by the expansion of the EU, and subsequent large-scale immigration.

In the second part of this section, I analysed the regulatory links between migration policy and labour policy, showing how these links affect the nature of post-Fordist UK labour markets which are dominated by a requirement for numerical flexibility. I have highlighted how successive UK Governments have contributed to the transformation of employment relationships primarily through policies aimed at increasing the deregulation of labour markets, as the capitalist mode of production in the UK has been characterized by a move away from industrial and commercial capitalism in favour of financialization. The emergence of the UK Government as a competition state has been analysed, particularly in relation to two pivotal regulatory changes that impact temporary agency work; the Agency Worker Regulations (AWR) and the creation of the Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA).

In the final part of this chapter, I now examine the structural context of the UK food industry which is the setting for this study of temporary agency work.

2.5 <u>UK food industry structures</u>

As this study of temporary agency work concentrates on a UK fresh food factory, in this section I examine some key structural aspects of both the UK grocery retailing industry and the UK food manufacturing industry.

2.5.1 <u>The UK grocery retailing industry.</u>

In section 2.1, I examined the concept of Fordism and explained how Fordist practices have progressed into an age of post-Fordism, typified by globalization, neoliberalism, and an increasingly flexible labour process. Post-Fordism is also characterized by a shift of power within the structures of capitalism from manufacturing enterprises that once 'stood at the centre of the world economy's production/distribution nexus' (Lichtenstein 2010: 10) to large retail chains that now 'occupy the strategic heights once so well garrisoned by the great manufacturing firms of the Fordist era' (Lichtenstein

2010: 10). Several UK grocery retailers are regarded amongst these global retail powerhouses, and the UK now has one of the most concentrated grocery retail sectors in Europe, ensuring that the balance of power is firmly set in favour of the largest retailers.

The big four supermarkets - Tesco, Asda, Sainsburys and Morrisons – account for 72% of all grocery sales in the UK (www.uk.kantar.com, September 2015) and the UK grocery market accounts for over 51p in every £1 of UK retail sales (www.igd.com, June 2015). According to the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD), the UK grocery market will be worth £218bn in 2023, a 14.8% increase on 2018 (www.igd.com, June 2018). For a list of the top ten UK grocery retailers by sales please refer to appendix B.1 (www.mintel.com, November 2020).

During the 1970s food retailing companies could be largely characterized as acting as the vicarious agents of food manufacturers. However, since this time the major food retailers in the UK, and most other industrialised countries, are now widely accepted as the most powerful actors within the whole food supply chain (Hanf 2008). One of the reasons why the grocery retail industry moved into this powerful position was because of the expansion of some retail chains, which significantly concentrated the sector. This increase in market power transformed the retailers from 'vicarious agents to actors who were able to affect the terms of trade' (Hanf 2008: 1).

In the face of such retail concentration, grocery suppliers vie for precious shelf space resulting in a highly competitive environment. A key distinction of the UK food industry, which has a direct bearing on the profitability of suppliers, is whether suppliers manufacture their own brands or retailer own label brands. For the largest 150 food manufacturers, the average profit margins for branded producers are 13%, compared to 5.4% for own-label producers (Davis 2006). The tight profit margins for producers of supermarket own label products explains the propensity for these suppliers to actively deploy numerical labour flexibility, and their use of temporary agency workers to

control labour costs is widespread in this sector of the industry. The field site for this study, a UK chilled food factory, is one such supplier.

Another significant feature of the change in business behaviour by the UK grocery retailers has been the increase in their consumer orientation (Hanf 2008), evidenced by schemes which reward loyalty and are tailored to align, and sometimes monitor, consumers' buying habits, history, and preferences.

The intense competition between the big four supermarkets, especially in the face of emerging competition from discount retailers Aldi and Lidl, is characterized by a significant emphasis on low price but high quality, particularly for basic products. In addition, consumer demand has also seen a rapid expansion in the convenience foods sector, predominantly in pre-prepared chilled foods, including salads and ready meals, as well as in the higher-priced specialist and luxury food markets.

Although premium ranges and brands may attract higher margins for suppliers, retailers have increasingly moved to compete in these sectors too with their own sub-labels, for example the Tesco Finest range, Sainsbury's Taste the Difference range and Asda's Extra Special range, which threaten to further challenge the position of suppliers who manufacture premium branded goods (James and Lloyd 2008).

Since the early 1980's there has been increasing concern about retailer practices and the general concentration of the sector led to the referral of the grocery sector to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC)[4]. In 2001, following a recommendation from the Competition Commission a statutory Code of Practice was introduced detailing how the main supermarkets should deal with their suppliers amidst complaints that supermarkets were imposing charges on suppliers, making changes to contractual arrangements without adequate notice and 'unreasonably transferring risks from the main party to

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[4] The MMC was closed and replaced by the Competition Commission (CC) on 1st April 1999. Subsequently the CC, along with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), were closed on 1st April 2014, and replaced by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

the supplier' (Competition Commission 2000: 6). One of the consequences of transferring risks to suppliers, it is argued, is that:

> low-skilled, low-paid repetitive work is subjected to increasing price pressures and unpredictable orders in order to satisfy the requirements placed upon suppliers [by retailers] (Thompson et al 2013: 133)

In the face of such retailer demands, and to control labour costs, many suppliers turn to temporary agency workers to provide numerical flexibility. This highlights the link between the structure of the UK food retailing industry, and the rise of precarious work and employment insecurity in many sectors of the UK food supply chain.

There is an expanding body of research that highlights the increasing demands that grocery retailers place on their suppliers and distributors, and how they further impact upon work and employment within the supply chain. For instance, Bowman et al (2013) have researched the opportunistic and adversarial nature of supermarket buyers for pork meat products. Additionally, Free (2007, 2008) has researched coercive retailer practices, whilst Nicholson and Young (2012) have posited that supermarket buyers use their power to place sanctions on suppliers who challenge prices, additional payments, or unrealistic orders.

The evidence indicates that low skilled, low paid and repetitive work within food manufacturing factories is subjected to intense and tightly monitored regimes (Harvey et al 2002; Lloyd and James 2008; Rogaly 2008; James and Lloyd 2008; Newsome et al 2009, 2013; Newsome 2010; Thompson et al 2013), with grocery suppliers under constant pressure from grocery retailers to supply least cost, best quality products. The impact of such power relations, as a direct consequence of retailer pressures, frames the potential choices and behaviours that many suppliers exhibit towards their own workers, with employers seeking to reduce direct costs to maintain viable profit margins. The basis for these claims will be examined in detail in the literature review

which follows (chapter three) and the experiences of the workers themselves provides the empirical focus of this study.

Between May 2006 and April 2008, the sector was once again investigated by the competition authorities, although the unwillingness of suppliers to provide specific evidence against supermarkets was problematic. As a result, the Competition Commission (CC) called for the establishment of a retail ombudsman after the CC failed to agree a voluntary arrangement with major retailers. The intended purpose of the ombudsman is to rule on disputes between supermarkets and their suppliers, although the big four retailers opposed the idea, arguing it would create an unnecessary and costly layer of bureaucracy and could lead to higher prices. The Food and Drink Federation (FDF), which represents many suppliers, urged the government to implement the ombudsman (Fletcher 2009).

In 2010, The Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP) was established to regulate the relationship between the ten largest supermarkets (with an annual turnover of £1 billion) and their direct suppliers, and the ombudsman - the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) - was established to enforce GSCOP.

This section has outlined the competitive and concentrated nature of the UK grocery retailing industry, and the effects that such concentration has on retailer suppliers. I will now focus attention on the UK food manufacturing industry.

2.5.2 The UK food manufacturing industry

Since the 1970s there has been a significant reduction in farm-based labour, with Geddes and Scott (2012) citing new crop varieties, more sophisticated farm machine technology and larger farms contributing towards this shift. As primary food production has reduced, secondary food processors have emerged with a significant number of jobs moving from the field to the factory (Geddes and Scott 2012). Consequently, modern factories and packhouses have been designed, built, and equipped to develop and supply a more sophisticated consumer market with higher value-added, good quality

and convenient food products. This case study of temporary agency workers is located within this emerging sector of value-added food production.

Food production is one of the UK's largest manufacturing industries, and food manufacturers are major employers. However, despite its size and importance, the industry is in slow decline as consumer expenditure on food stagnates, prices are squeezed, and imports grow (James and Lloyd 2008).

Vorley (2003) characterized contemporary food production as involving two different worlds with power and control draining into the large and transnational retail end of the food supply chain and away from food producers over the past 30 years (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Hingley 2005; Geddes and Scott 2012). Considering that retailer profits are heavily influenced by retail prices, product availability, the quality of the products supplied to them, and the manufacturers selling prices (MSPs), the retailers, primarily as a result of driving sales of their own label products, have increasingly controlled the supply chain and production processes of food manufacturers.

In the UK, as power has become concentrated into the hands of the big four supermarkets, the competitive pressures between the sub-contracted growers, producers and processers in the supply chain have intensified (Lever and Milbourne 2017) as the retailers are regarded as the main gateway to consumers, and the gate keepers between producers and consumers (Lang 2003).

The weak position of many food producers in the UK food supply chain is exacerbated for two further reasons. First, one of the least profitable and most labour-intensive parts of the food industry is manufacturing predominantly supermarket own label chilled products, and the perishable nature of the product also means that flexible delivery demands cannot be managed through the holding of higher levels of stocks (Lloyd and James 2008). Second, some food manufacturers have established their entire

business model as retailer dedicated[5]. Whilst retailer dedicated businesses have clear focus on the needs of their customers, the consequences of a breakdown in the trading relationship can often be catastrophic for the supplier and their workers.

Continuous downward pressure from the major retailers has impacted UK food suppliers in three key areas (Geddes and Scott 2012). First, the consolidation of farmers and food processors has seen the amalgamation of some producers – via acquisitions, mergers, and co-operatives – into larger and more specialized operations. Second, there has been a rise in the incidence of low paid, non-regular and non-unionised work in many areas of the food manufacturing industry (Rogaly 2008). Third, the influx of EU migrant workers to provide numerical flexibility, many employed via temporary work agencies, has been a very visible change to the UK food manufacturing industry. Such workers are now a key feature of food production in the UK as employment in the industry has become less attractive to the indigenous UK workforce, leading to labour shortages, and a reliance on migrant temporary agency workers (Forde and Slater 2006, 2016, Geddes and Scott 2010, Thompson et al 2013).

The dependency of UK food manufacturing on EU migrant labour is of increasing relevance since the 2016 BREXIT referendum, and the subsequent introduction of the UK's new immigration policy is of concern to many food manufacturers. The new UK immigration policy does not include a route for potential food industry workers who score insufficient points on the Government's immigration scoring system (and therefore might be classed as low-skilled) or for temporary workers (with the notable exception of seasonal agricultural workers). In explaining this approach, the Government's policy states: 'we need to shift the focus of our economy away from a reliance on cheap labour from Europe' (www.publications.parliament.uk, EFRA,

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[5] A retailer dedicated food manufacturing site is one whereby all the production output is destined for only one retailer and is normally 100% retailer own label. Such sites normally produce a variety of products, known to retailers as stock keeping units (SKUs).

December 2020). Furthermore, food supply chain businesses, according to the UK government, 'should seek to attract the unemployed who may previously have worked in other sectors of the UK economy through better pay and conditions and offering training opportunities' (www.publications.parliament.uk, EFRA, December 2020).

One way of meeting the challenges of the new immigration policy is for food manufacturers to become more capital intensive and both drive forward and exploit technological opportunities. However, there are several reasons why this approach may be difficult to attain. First, it is likely that many roles throughout the food supply chain will be difficult to affordably mechanise, especially for smaller businesses. Second, the benefit of any capital investment is likely to take time to be realised. Third, retailers will expect supplier productivity gains to flow towards themselves in the form of lower MSPs, thereby diluting the justification for the initial capital investment.

The difficulties that food manufacturers are likely to face with changes to the availability of labour, as a result of the Government's new immigration policy, requires a clearer understanding of the experiences of workers who currently occupy low-skilled roles in the UK food industry, which is a position that this study seeks to understand.

Comprising five sections, this chapter has considered the political economy of employment and food industry structures in the UK.

First, I explained the concept of Fordism and highlighted how Fordist practices progressed into an age of post-Fordism and an increasingly flexible labour process. I have argued that the UK food industry serves as a good example for the coexistence of both Fordist and Post-Fordist approaches, as the mass production of standardised food products (e.g., using assembly lines) is combined with post-Fordist approaches, such as the widespread use of flexible temporary agency labour.

Second, I have examined workplace flexibility and segmented labour markets and suggested that there are two key reasons why post-Fordism in the UK

food industry is primarily characterized by numerical labour flexibility: the widespread use of temporary agency workers and the labour-intensive nature of many food manufacturing operations.

Third, I have explained how increasing workplace flexibility is linked to increasing levels of precarious work and employment insecurity, highlighting that precarious work has become a defining feature of many national economies. Although not all authors agree that a rise in insecurity is the result of post-Fordist labour market restructuring, I suggest that the shifting of responsibility, from employers to workers, is a further key feature of post-Fordist labour process.

Fourth, I have discussed UK labour markets and migration, detailing how the expansion of the European Union (EU) impacted UK labour markets to provide an influx of flexible labour and a subsequent increase in precarious jobs. I also examined notable changes to UK migration policy, the role of the UK state and the effects of regulatory changes on UK labour markets.

Finally in this chapter, I have provided an outline of the industry structures relating to food retailing and food manufacturing in the UK and explained how these structures are reliant upon precarious migrant labour and numerical flexibility.

In the chapter that follows I will provide a comprehensive review of the literature on temporary agency work.

3.0 TEMPORARY AGENCY WORK: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is a substantive literature review of temporary agency work in the UK and consists of seven sections. First, I consider reasons why temporary agency work has become a significant feature of many UK workplaces and, second, I examine why migrants represent a significant proportion of the temporary agency workforce. In the third section I examine the relationship between temporary agency work and employment insecurity, whilst in section four I explore the nature of the work which is undertaken by temporary agency workers in the UK. In section five I consider the workplace relations that temporary agency workers experience as a key element of the blended workforce, and in section six I examine the links between these workplace relationships and worker resistance. Finally, in section seven, I position my research questions within the literature which has been reviewed.

Throughout this chapter I examine the literature relating to temporary agency work both in general and, more specifically, in relation to the UK food industry, which is the focus area of this study.

3.1 The rise of temporary agency work in the UK

In chapter two I highlighted that the evolution of Fordism through to post-Fordism, accompanied by a significant reduction in the influence of Trades Unions, is characterized by an increase in flexible forms of labour, with numerical flexibility prevalent in many lower-skilled, low-paid sectors in the UK, such as the food manufacturing industry. During this period, the provision of temporary staff by agencies has 'metamorphosed from simply meeting the ad hoc needs of employers for small numbers of often season employees' (Coe et al 2010: 1055) to a form of working, across a range of sectors, that has become 'integral to business strategy' (Nollen 1996: 567).

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), in 1999, confirmed the significance of the temporary agency sector by stating that:

the private recruitment industry is both a product of the flexible labour market and a key attribute of its success. For employers, the ability to access the widest range of skills, quickly and reliably, is essential for competitive performance (DTI 1999; cited in McCann 2007: 156).

Temporary work is a form of contingent work, and Polivka and Nardone (1989) define contingent work as 'any job in which an individual does not have an explicit or implicit contract for long-term employment or one in which the minimum hours can vary in a non-systematic manner' (p11). The ongoing requirement for a temporary work sector indicates that temporary work continues to represent a considerable shift away from the notion of regular employment (Koene et al 2014) and the temporary agency sector is 'strategically significant given its role in promulgating wider labour market flexibility' (Coe et al 2007: 503), characterized in the UK by numerical flexibility.

Historically, temporary labour in the UK has traditionally been supplied via agents known as gangmasters (Strauss 2013) although the 14th Report of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee acknowledges that:

> there is no surviving legal definition of a gangmaster and the distinction between a gangmaster and what would generally now be described as an employment agency is not entirely clear (EFRA 2002: 5).

Through the establishment of the Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) in 2005 (see section 2.4.2 and appendix A1.1), the term gangmaster has been formalised and gangmasters are essentially defined in relation to the sector in which they operate, rather than their organizational structure (Strauss 2013). Consequently, in the UK, gang labour is still characterized as a form of temporary casual labour in which a gangmaster provides workers for employment in the labour market, traditionally in the horticultural and agricultural sectors (Strauss 2013). Since the establishment of the GLAA all gangmasters, labour providers and employment agencies who provide workers to the agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering, and associated

processing and packaging sectors (including the food manufacturing industry) are required to be licensed by the GLAA.

For many temporary workers in the UK, the route into temporary work is primarily via temporary work agencies. For instance, approximately 70% of all temporary workers are provided into the UK food supply chain via 350 of such agencies (www.labourproviders.org.uk, 15th October 2020) and the presence of an additional party, mediating between the place of work and the worker, makes temporary agency work a qualitatively distinct arrangement when compared to other forms of temporary work, such as fixed term, casual or seasonal work (Biggs et al 2006; Forde and Slater 2006).

As the post-Fordist demand for a numerically flexible workforce has risen over the last three decades, it is unsurprising that the number of temporary workers, and temporary work agencies, has also increased significantly. The number of workers employed on a temporary basis through agencies increased in the UK from 50,000 to 250,000 in the fifteen years between 1984 and 1999 (Forde 2001) and reached 330,000 (1.5% of the employed workforce) by 2015 (Forde and Slater 2016). Globally, the temporary staffing industry doubled in size over the period 1994-1999 and again in the years 1999-2006, 'reaching a level of US$341 billion in 2007' (Coe at al 2010: 1055), and in 2007, the industry was dominated by six national markets, which accounted for approximately 80% of the revenues: the US (28%), the UK (16%), Japan (14%), France (9%), Germany (6%), and the Netherlands (5%) (CIETT 2009).

There are several key operational activities undertaken by temporary work agencies. First, the recruitment and management of temporary workers is the core activity, which includes advertising, interviewing, inducting, and co-ordinating agency workers. Second, a significant amount of administration is required including confirmation of the hours worked by agency workers, timesheet approval, invoice sign-off (by the client), payroll to agency workers, and interaction with regulatory bodies, including the GLAA. Third, developing

the relationship with the client is an increasingly important aspect for many temporary work agencies, and many agencies have devised strategies to 'reinforce, regulate and facilitate an employer's use of agency labour' (Forde 2001: 635). An example of such a strategy is what Forde (2001) calls an individualised service and may involve a manager from the temporary work agency working on-site in the client firm. According to Peck and Theodore (1998) the presence of an agency resource working on a client site brings an increased expectation from the client, in terms of how temporary agency workers should be managed. This in-house approach may also carry additional benefits to the agency as the client organization may well provide office and other administrative facilities to the agency, thereby reducing overhead costs for the agency.

Other ways that agencies have actively sought to deepen employer dependence on their services is through the provision of screening and selection, further management support, and labour force planning services (Peck and Theodore 2006). Such services are commonplace for contracts that place large numbers of temporary agency workers. Purcell et al (2004) concur that in order 'to cope with the tension between finding labour, meeting client specifications, and sustaining their profits' (p706), agencies have broadened their range of services to client companies. However, as individualised services are provided by the agency to strengthen the relationship with the client, it is not clear in the literature how such individualisation impacts the relationships and experiences of temporary agency workers, an area that this study will explore.

Temporary work agencies pursue a number of simultaneous strategies to generate profits and such strategies include providing more temporary workers to current contracts, increasing the number of contracts secured, and managing the total costs incurred in running the agency business. As a result, scale of operation and efficient administration are likely to be important factors in the profitable running of a temporary work agency, and some temporary work agencies have now established themselves as significant

organizations in this sector. For example, Staffline plc is a large-scale temporary work agency, supplying up to 40,000 temporary workers every day to more than 450 sites in the UK, with annual revenues in excess of £1 billion. Over 70% of Staffline's business is with businesses which operate in the UK food and manufacturing industries (www.staffline.co.uk, June 2020).

Temporary agency workers are required by organizations, either on an ad hoc or longer-term basis, for several reasons. First, some employers use temporary labour as it is cheaper than hiring permanent employees. However, since the introduction of the Agency Worker Regulations (AWR) in 2011 (see section 2.4.2), agency workers should be paid in line with permanent co-workers performing comparable jobs, known as pay parity. That said, in chapter two I highlighted that temporary agency workers are still required to work for twelve weeks until they achieve pay parity, and that based on my food industry experience, even after twelve weeks, some businesses are still able to avoid pay parity by making minor adjustments to job descriptions to claim marginal points of difference between permanent workers and temporary agency workers (see appendix A1.2 for an overview of the Agency Worker Regulations 2010).

Second, many organizations use temporary agency workers to match the labour required to the demand for their products or services, which is prevalent in seasonal businesses such as many food manufacturers. In this scenario temporary agency workers are an example of a just-in-time strategy to deliver numerical flexibility (Kalleberg 2000), as temporary agency workers are drawn from the external labour market and primarily undertake lower-skilled jobs (see section 2.2 - workplace flexibility and segmented labour markets).

Third, some organizations which hire temporary agency workers use this approach to screen suitable workers for permanent employment. Effectively, employers evaluate the performance of potential staff while under no obligation to offer them permanent contracts (Parker 1994, Henson 1996,

Ward et al 2000, Forde and MacKenzie 2009, Forde and Slater 2016). Organizations who effectively outsource their own internal requirements for permanent labour to temporary work agencies in this way normally pay recruitment, or signing on, fees or commit to take the workers for an initial period as a temporary worker prior to becoming a permanent hire, often known as a temp-to-perm arrangement. This type of arrangement appears to be a win-win-win situation as temporary workers can secure permanent roles, employers can bolster their workforce with proven new recruits, and temporary work agencies benefit from signing on fees.

A fourth reason why some organizations use temporary agency labour is because uncertainty and risks are carried by the temporary workers, not the client (Forde 2001), nor the permanent employees. As discussed in chapter two (section 2.3.2), post-Fordist labour markets are characterized by moving risk and uncertainty away from employers onto workers (Sennett 1998; Davidov 2004; Kalleberg 2009; Slavnic 2010; Likic-Brboric et al 2013; Evans and Gibb 2009; Geddes and Scott 2012), for example, if demand falls - and the requirement for labour decreases - then the client simply engages fewer temporary agency workers. Such an approach may be beneficial to permanent workers, but is detrimental to temporary agency workers, whose services are considered disposable (Hyman 1988). In other words, the value of temporary staff is that they 'act as a buffer against changes in demand and the recruitment of temporary employees helps to secure permanent employees jobs' (Geary 1992: 258).

Finally, some businesses use agency labour to cover for the holidays and absences of permanent, mainly lower-skilled, employees.

The literature is dominated with demand-side-orientated reasons for the increase in temporary agency work, such as focussing on employer 'cost aspects, numerical flexibility and risk sharing' (Mitlacher 2007: 583), although some authors argue that supply-side explanatory factors such as 'changing demographics and shifting social values' (CIETT 2000: 11) lead some workers

to demand more time flexibility and job diversity. Such supply-side demands include specific types of flexible employment for carers (part-time or temporary) and older workers who may want 'post-career jobs which are less demanding' (CIETT 2000: 12).

Despite some evidence for an increase in temporary agency work due to supply-side factors, I argue that the sustained increase in temporary agency work is driven by demand-side reasons. Significantly, as product-driven approaches (typified by the Fordist mass production of standardised items) have given way to post-Fordist consumer-driven approaches (characterized by rapidly changing product markets) temporary agency workers remain a major source of the numerical flexibility required by employers.

In this section I have explored the rise in temporary agency work in the UK and outlined reasons why organizations use temporary agency workers to provide numerical flexibility. I will now examine why migrants represent a significant proportion of the temporary agency workforce.

3.2 <u>Migrants as temporary agency workers</u>

In chapter two I highlighted how macroeconomic and political factors combined to determine increasingly flexible employment structures within the UK, and how changes to migration policy, and the effects of regulatory changes on labour markets, enabled the UK to take advantage of the influx of migrant labour from the EU accession countries.

The decision of the UK government not to limit the rights of EU workers to access the labour market at the time of the A8 accession in 2004, during a period of sustained economic growth, was pivotal and provided the numerical flexibility to maintain growth and drive competitiveness by controlling labour costs. Not only was there a demand for an influx of labour into the UK at this time, economic incentives also orientated migrants towards the UK, as wages even at the bottom of the UK labour market were significantly higher than in the migrants' home countries.

Although some migrant workers are found in higher skilled jobs in the UK, most recent migrants are in lower skilled employment (Salt and Millar 2006) and many migrants access the secondary labour market via temporary work agencies, often occupying mundane, hazardous, or precarious jobs, such as those located in the food supply chain (Geddes et al 2007, Scott et al 2007). The relationship between secondary labour markets and migrant labour has been extensively examined (Piore 1979; Forde 2001; Ruhs 2006; Forde and Slater 2006, 2016; Coe et al 2007; Geddes et al 2007; Scott et al 2007; Castles and Kosack 2010; Balch and Scott 2011; McCollum and Findlay 2015; Forde et al 2015), and in section 2.2.2 I explained how secondary labour markets are characterized by poor pay and conditions, insecurity, and tedious work. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) also point to segmented labour markets which are not uniform and 'where jobs of a particular type are linked with categorically distinctive workers' (p8), with migrant workers often categorised as suitable for lower-skilled temporary roles, which are easy to learn and often only require a low-level understanding of the English language.

In the literature, there are two dominant themes regarding employers increased use of EU migrant workers. The first theme in the literature refers to the 'added value' (Scott 2013: 459) that some EU migrants bring to the low-wage workplace and since EU enlargement from 2004 onwards, there has 'emerged a preference amongst low-wage employers in the UK for newly arrived immigrants' (Scott 2013: 459), many of whom find temporary work via agencies.

Dawson et al (2017) describe some EU migrant workers as having 'higher levels of human capital, as evidenced, for example, with their higher levels of qualifications' (p812), (see also Wadsworth 2015; Hopkins and Dawson 2016). In other words, some EU migrants work at a level below that to which they are qualified and are skilled workers in low status jobs (Anderson et al 2006; Forde and Slater 2006, 2016; Salaheen and Shadforth 2006; Drinkwater et al 2009; MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Ruhs and Anderson 2012; Thompson et al

2013). I understand that research into the tendency for migrants to work at levels below their home-country qualification levels is informed by a range of factors, including de facto de-credentialising by the host country and poor English language skills, with language skills, according to Dawson et al (2017), regarded as complementary to job-related skills. Furthermore, both language skills and job-related skills are needed to match workers with jobs that reflect their skill set (Eckstein and Weiss 2004; Dustmann et al 2013).

One particular disadvantage for migrants who possess neither job skills language skills is their inability to signal ex ante (i.e., when applying for a job) their underlying value to employers through the traditional channels, such as education (Spence 1973) and labour market experience. As such, Dawson et al (2017) argue that:

> migrants have an incentive to find new ex post (i.e., after being employed) methods of signalling their actual value to employers in order to progress from low-skilled, low-paying roles and into employment positions that better reflects their skill sets. In this view, migrant workers signal productivity through a stronger work ethic (p812).

A perceived superior attitude and work ethic, especially when compared to indigenous workers, is the second dominant theme in the literature that considers the use of migrant workers in the UK (Anderson et al 2006; Dench et al 2006; Forde and Mackenzie 2009; Dawson et al 2017) and many employers who engage migrant temporary agency workers to cover low skilled roles 'expect that migrant workers will bring high commitment, a positive work ethic and a willingness to work to the organization' (Forde and MacKenzie 2009: 441).

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) believe that the willingness of migrant workers to accept repetitive work is one of the key skills that is 'not found in the home population' (CIPD 2005: 16), whilst many employers also seek 'soft skills, which includes constructs such as the

willingness to be flexible and a good work ethic. The term skill now seems to extend to include personal characteristics and attitudes' (Mayhew 2012: 54). Although the meaning of skill has widened significantly over recent years (Anderson and Ruhs 2012, Mayhew 2012), to consider a broad range of personal attributes, such as demeanour, physical appearance, and whether a worker looks and sounds right (Nickson et al 2001; Warhurst and Nickson 2007), Moriarty (2012) warns that such constructs can 'blur into stereotypes associated with certain types of workers' (p138). This is evidenced by Mackenzie and Forde's (2009) research which highlights migrant workers who were 'feted as valuable resources for a perceived 'work ethic' and reliability that elevated them, as 'good workers', above the local labour alternative' (p155).

In their mixed-methods study of the UK meat processing industry, Lever and Milbourne (2017) also highlight migrant workers who are necessary because the type of work is unattractive to UK workers:

> from the slaughter of livestock to the production of fresh, chilled, and frozen meat products, the work involved in the meat-processing sector – boning, freezing, preserving, and packing meat – is widely recognised to be dirty, dangerous, demanding, and unattractive to UK workers (p307).

Ruhs and Anderson (2012) suggest that there is a variety of reasons why certain groups of migrants are perceived to possess a better work ethic than other workers, with many explanations stemming from migrants' frame of reference and their preparedness to do the job on the employers' terms compared to domestic workers. The absence, or smaller size, of family and social networks is a further reason why employers might favour migrant temporary workers who are willing to work anti-social, or longer, working hours (Preibisch and Binford 2007).

The preparedness of migrant workers to undertake work rejected by local workers may be because newly arrived migrants are 'not yet aware that the

task and conditions of a job are stigmatizing and therefore something against which one should chafe' (Waldinger and Lichter 2003:41). Waldinger and Lichter (2003) also argue that migrants operate with a dual from of reference by judging conditions in the UK by the standards back home and that 'as long as the comparison remains relevant, low-status work in an advanced capitalist society does not rate too badly' (p9).

Consequently, in many cases, migrant workers work in precarious temporary jobs in the UK because wages in their home countries are so poor and the attraction of what is a considerable wage, not for the living standards in the UK, but what can be sent (or taken home), means that migrant workers want to work even though the job may be repetitive, arduous, and boring (James and Lloyd 2008). For many UK employers, it is this motivation to work, a perceived work ethic, that remains attractive, if not universal amongst migrant temporary agency workers.

It could also be the case that limited, alternative employment options result in some migrant workers accepting any paid work assignment. In this respect an employer's view of a positive work ethic might simply be a case of a worker's preparedness to undertake any number of undesirable work tasks, as requested by the employer, in order to earn a wage. In the UK, some employers have acknowledged that the wages and employment conditions that they offer for low-skilled work are considered unacceptable to many indigenous workers (Moriarty et al 2008; Forde and MacKenzie 2009; Geddes and Scott 2012), whilst Thompson et al (2013) argue that the utilisation of migrant workers is driven more by a need for temporal flexibility rather than any 'essential features of migrant labour power' (p129), once again pointing to the requirement of many employers for numerical flexibility.

The type of lower skilled work carried out by many migrant agency workers is concentrated towards the bottom of an increasingly polarised UK labour market (Sassen 1991; Goos and Manning 2003; Kaplanis 2007) and the UK food industry provides many jobs that require little training or English

language acumen, such as manual assembly line work, packing duties and basic cleaning tasks. However, such jobs are often carried out by both migrant permanent workers and migrant temporary agency workers, and it is not clear from the literature whether their lived experiences differ because of their employment status. Given the prevalence of temporary workers in the UK labour market it is important to understand if, and how, employment status affects the attitudes and lived experiences of migrant workers, and this study will investigate this aspect.

In this section I have highlighted literature that points to employer preferences for migrant workers. Such preferences are based on perceptions of added value and a superior work ethic, especially in relation to indigenous labour. Employers are also aware of the economic and other trade-offs that migrant temporary agency workers are prepared to make by accepting wages and employment conditions that are poor by the general standards of the UK, but higher than those prevailing in the migrants' own countries.

Previous research into temporary agency work has significantly advanced our knowledge of this important aspect of flexible labour markets, and in the following sections I will now focus on four specific aspects that impact agency workers directly, and which are of relevance to my view from below: employment insecurity, the nature of temporary agency work in the UK, relations with a blended workplace and the links between workplace relationships and temporary worker resistance.

3.3 Temporary agency work and insecurity

In chapter two (section 2.3) I examined concepts of precarious work and employment insecurity, explaining that since the 1980s an increase in numerical flexibility is associated with an increase in precarious work and employment insecurity. This section will build on this discussion and provide a review of the literature which examines links between temporary agency work and employment insecurity.

Theodore and Peck (2016) highlight that temporary agency workers have become, paradoxically, a permanent presence in 'an endlessly restructuring economy in which a premium is placed on no-strings-attached, flexible employment relationships' (p27). They argue that temporary agency workers are in an inherently insecure position as they are 'very often the first fired as they bear the brunt of economic fluctuations' (p27). Although periods of economic downturn do often impact the requirement for labour, for instance in times of a recession, unpredictable demand for products and services in some industries occurs even in times of economic growth. For instance, in section 2.5, and from my own experiences, I explained that the demands placed on food manufacturers can be unpredictable and are exacerbated by retailer practices.

As many sectors use temporary agency workers, often in large numbers, Forde (2001) argues that job insecurity for these workers can stem from the 'strategies adopted by agencies to generate a surplus of workers' (p639) with 'unpredictability and threat of job loss/insecurity' (p639) cited by agency workers as the biggest disadvantage of agency work. Forde (2001) highlights two key strategies used by agencies which increases job insecurity for temporary agency workers. First, to satisfy the possibility of a short notice request from a client for more workers, agencies create large – and often excessive - pools of temporary workers. From a temporary worker's point of view this can result in limited opportunities for work, and an increased sense of job insecurity, as the size of the labour pool often exceeds the demand for workers.

Second, clients often prefer repeat workers, that is workers who have previous experience of the workplace. This is the case in many food factories, for instance assembly line work where prior knowledge of products and line equipment reduces the time required to train new workers and helps to maintain line efficiencies. From the perspective of a Food Production Manager, my experience of operating a production line with several new

agency workers is that the line speed is often reduced (to enable new starters to keep up) and product quality standards are normally more difficult to achieve.

Temporary agency workers who are not repeat workers are prone to increased job insecurity as 'the reward of regular, steady, or continuous employment is reserved for a small number of temps' (Forde 2001: 641). For some agency workers, this sense of insecurity is significant and self-fulfilling as whilst they wait their turn in large labour pools, they are not gaining the necessary knowledge to become a repeat worker.

The degree of insecurity felt by some agency workers can also be linked back to the discussion in section 3.2, in which I highlighted that the literature frequently points to migrant workers perceived superior attitude and work ethic, when compared to indigenous workers. For agencies:

> the identification of reliable and flexible workers removes much of the
> uncertainty of sending workers on assignment, with flexibility often
> interpreted to mean workers who never turn down or refuse work, even if
> offers of assignment are made at short notice, or involve working in low
> paid, low skilled jobs (Forde 2001: 641).

For migrant temporary agency workers whose position in the secondary labour market is weakened by limited English skills, a fear of being overlooked for work often results in acceptance of any work, which affirms the good worker narrative found in the literature. However, a sense of job insecurity persists for those temporary agency workers who are unable to demonstrate such flexibility, possibly due to family commitments, such as caring or childcare duties, or due to a lack of transport.

The literature highlights that many temporary agency workers carry out the type of lower skilled work which is located in secondary labour markets (Sassen 1991; Goos and Manning 2003; Purcell et al 2004; Forde and Slater 2006, 2016; Kaplanis 2007), including in the UK food industry (Geddes and

Scott 2012). Moreover, as many temporary agency workers who work in the secondary sector are migrants, many with few formal qualifications (or qualifications not recognised in the UK) and little spoken English, it may be somewhat inevitable that temporary agency work is associated with job insecurity. However, some contradictions exist in the literature, such as the suggestion that job insecurity affects temporary workers less than permanent workers (De Witte and Naswall 2003), whilst Green (2008) argues that temporary agency workers may compensate for their sense of insecurity by 'reducing discretionary effort' (p152). Furthermore, previous research has not fully established whether, or not, temporary agency workers may experience a subjective sense of employment security, which is a position that my view from below will seek to establish.

3.4 <u>The nature of temporary agency work in the UK</u>

In this section I examine characteristics of work which is undertaken by temporary agency workers in the UK. In doing so I also focus on the intense, and potentially hazardous, nature of temporary agency work in the UK food industry.

Intensification, in labour process terms, is the term used to highlight how the work effort required of labour, by capital, has increased over time (Rogaly 2008). Scott (2018) links intensification to post-Fordism by suggesting that:

> the dominance of the neoliberal orthodoxy and the associated shift to post-Fordist labour markets have, according to some, resulted in a worsening of worker experiences (p6).

The literature highlights that some workers in lower-skilled roles, such as temporary agency workers, are at particular risk of high intensity work practices. Two examples in the literature are, first, the use of piece rates – pay based on the quantity and quality of items produced or packed - to increase the productive output of workers (Rogaly 2008; Thompson et al 2013; Scott 2017) and, second, the speeding up of production lines (Scott 2018), as 'the unceasing pressure of the assembly line allows no relaxation from the

demands of the job' (Hodson 2001: 120). Furthermore, the literature also characterizes intense work by unpredictable, unsocial, and long working hours as temporary agency workers undertake a variety of repetitive and arduous tasks (Rogaly 2008; Hopkins 2009; Thompson et al 2013; Potter and Hamilton 2014; Scott 2017).

In chapter two I highlighted that one of the characteristics of the post-Fordist era is the changing share in manufacturing and services, and two service sectors which engage significant numbers of temporary agency workers are hospitality (e.g., hotels and restaurants) and social care (e.g., care homes). In these sectors, agency workers with little English and few formal qualifications often undertake basic domestic (e.g., cleaning/janitorial) duties, although those agency workers who have an elevated level of English language may also occupy customer facing jobs such as receptionist or waiting-on duties. In both hospitality and social care settings, as for the food industry, working hours for temporary agency workers are frequently long, unpredictable, and unsocial.

In section 3.2 I suggested that similar jobs are often carried out by both migrant permanent workers and migrant temporary agency workers, and that it was not clear in the literature whether their lived experiences differed because of their employment status. Furthermore, it is not clear in the literature how working hours differ, vis-à-vis temporary and permanent workers, nor how such a temporal aspect may affect the attitudes and workplace experiences of temporary agency workers. This is a further area that this view from below will consider.

Intense working practices also extend beyond an increase in work effort, as highlighted by Scott (2017) who suggests that some workers are increasingly subject to excessive monitoring and surveillance in the workplace:

to a large degree, managers and supervisors are transferring the pressures of the market onto their workers wherever possible and are rendering jobs more intense and demanding as a result (p11).

Research on temporary agency workers employed in call centres has identified similar workplace intensification, with Taylor and Bain (1999) highlighting 'captured subjectivity and labour trapped in totalising institutions combined with new, oppressive forms of regulation and surveillance' (p103) suggesting also that the nature of call centre work is akin to 'an assembly line in the head' (p101). A high intensity of work, therefore, not only makes work harder but it can also put pressure on workers and 'erode the morale and confidence of workers if they fail to meet the targets set' (Scott 2018: 78).

The literature provides evidence of a high intensity of work in a variety of contexts, many of which are to be found in the UK food supply chain. For instance, Hopkins (2009) in his semi-ethnographic account of life in a UK chocolate factory describes work as 'monotonous and unpleasant' (p130) whilst Potter and Hamilton (2014), in their research of the Northern Ireland mushroom industry, describe mushroom picking carried out by migrant workers as 'labour intensive hand-picking in confined and often unhealthy environments' (p394).

Rogaly (2008) links high work intensity to numerical flexibility, the structural context of UK retailers, UK migration policy, and the increased use of migrant workers, as intense work in horticultural production is:

> driven by an ongoing process of concentration in retailer power, and in the greater availability of migrant workers, shaped in part by state initiatives to manage immigration (p496).

The cost pressures exerted by dominant UK food retailers on their suppliers (see section 2.5), contributes to intense work throughout the food supply chain, as suppliers cut costs, 'with labour one of the easiest and quickest to cut' (Geddes and Scott 2012: 199), and temporary agency workers are normally the first to lose their jobs. For those who remain, and who maybe be grateful for continued work, intense work is unlikely to lessen as in many cases the same work output may be required, but with fewer workers. Therefore, from a worker perspective, intense work is highly likely to be

detrimental as 'many workplaces have seen the work effort norm ratcheted up' (Scott 2018: 77). As we have limited knowledge of temporary agency workers personal experiences of a high intensity of work, the view from below provided by this study will help to fill this lacuna in the literature.

Reflecting the position of many food manufacturers as bottom end employers, migrant workers – many of whom are engaged as temporary agency workers - have been an important source of labour in food factories for many years (Lloyd and James 2008) and, due to the nature of the work in many UK food factories, Holgate (2005) suggests that food manufacturers are looking for people who are prepared to work for low pay and tolerate intensified working conditions, and that this profile 'fits many new migrant workers and people seeking asylum, for whom labour market choices are limited' (p467).

However, the food industry also typifies the 'dynamic of skills polarization' (Waldinger and Lichter (2003:10), as technological innovations drive the proliferation of both high-skilled and low-skilled roles, characterized in chapter two as core and peripheral roles. For instance, some automated production lines in food factories require both highly skilled, software engineers and lower skilled assembly line workers. Despite the increasing use of technologically advanced equipment in many UK food factories, a high proportion of companies still produce relatively simple, standard, but labour-intensive products for the mass market (Mason et al 1996; Wilson and Hogarth 2003). Consequently, for many workers in the UK food industry, work remains predominantly repetitive, mundane, intense, sometimes physically unpleasant, and hazardous.

Several authors concur that intensified work in the UK food industry can be hazardous, highlighting that food industry workers are prone to high levels of accidents (Dench et al. 2006; James and Lloyd 2008; Lloyd and James 2008) whilst Hopkins (2017) found that:

agency workers are found to experience inadequate safety training, provision of poor quality personal protective equipment and a lack of clarity of responsibility for their supervision (p609).

I suggest that the post-Fordist labour process of many UK food factories helps to explain such concerns and in section 2.2.1 I argued that the UK food industry serves as a good example for the coexistence of both Fordist and Post-Fordist approaches, as the mass production of standardised food products (e.g., using assembly lines) is combined with post-Fordist approaches, such as the widespread use of temporary agency labour to provide numerical flexibility. I argue that the combination of intensified work practices - exacerbated by downward pressure from powerful retailers – and inexperienced agency workers contribute to an increase in workplace health and safety risks for temporary agency workers as they try to keep pace with fast assembly lines in order to keep their jobs.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also found further evidence that migrant agency workers 'may be experiencing higher levels of accidents at work and higher levels of physical and mental ill-health that is work-related' (McKay et al. 2006: 128). Within intensive, post-Fordist organizational structures, the risks are also associated with the types of jobs that are undertaken, long working hours, limited understanding of health and safety due to poor English skills, or lack of experience in the sector and inadequate training (Lloyd and James 2008).

The main causes of injury in UK food factories include repetitive strain injuries (Scott 2018), being struck by equipment, cuts from knives and other hand tools, manual handling and lifting injuries, and slips, trips, and falls, frequently associated with wet or greasy floors (HSE 2007).

Labour use in the UK food industry is also highly variable due to seasonal rhythms, on one hand, and daily, weekly, and seasonal patterns of consumer demand on the other. Demand for food products varies from highly seasonal (e.g., Christmas items), seasonal (e.g., foods associated with summer outdoor

eating) and year-round (e.g., staple items such as dairy products and loaves of bread). Geddes and Scott (2012) provide a historical context to the specific nuances of food production in the UK by suggesting that, 'for centuries, such variability has meant reliance upon itinerant workers; and for centuries, these workers have been anchored at the very bottom of the labour market' (p193).

Given the nature of work in the UK food industry, which is unattractive and sometimes dangerous, employers face inevitable challenges to obtain numerically flexible labour to satisfy variable demand. However, Geddes and Scott (2012) suggest that even against a backdrop of acute labour shortages, employers in the UK food industry have manipulated the supply of labour even whilst offering relatively low wages and relatively poor working conditions' (p206). Two examples of such manipulation are to follow age-based and gender-based patterns of recruitment. First, age-based recruitment can be characterized by preferring young migrant workers, as typified by the agriculture industry desire for an extension of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) which is targeted at students.

Second, a gender-based approach is evidenced as women are often over-represented in lower-skilled and repetitive work, such as packing jobs (Flecker et al. 1998; Strauss and Fudge 2016), whilst male temporary agency workers are often allocated duties which are strength-related, such as jobs that require lifting and carrying. Further support of a gendered division of labour in the UK food industry is provided by Geddes and Scott (2012) who suggest that 'men tend to be in charge of machinery and dangerous tools, whilst women are preferred for the nimble tasks' (p206).

Markova and McKay (2008) suggest that the gender of a temporary workforce is related to industry-specific characteristics of the required temporary agency work. I suggest that my examination of a chilled foods factory is a worthwhile undertaking as many jobs in food factories can be carried out by male or female temporary agency workers. However, as alluded to by Geddes and Scott (2012), and in my experience, male workers tend to operate machinery

and female workers are primarily employed as packers, and the view from below from my study will increase our understanding of how gender is considered when job roles are allocated to temporary agency workers.

Irrespective of the roles on offer for both male and female temporary agency workers, the pay rates for many food industry workers – including temporary agency workers - are low, and many roles are primarily based on the national minimum wage (NMW) or the national living wage (NLW), (see appendices A1.3 and A1.4). Estimates indicate that around one third of all workers, and over half of women, are paid below two-thirds of the median hourly wage (James and Lloyd 2008).

In this section I have examined the nature of temporary agency work in the UK and provided specific focus on intense and hazardous practices in the food industry. I will now examine employment relations within a blended workplace.

3.5 <u>Relations within a blended workplace</u>

This section examines two defining characteristics of temporary agency work: the blended workplace, featuring both permanent and temporary workers, and the tripartite employment relationship between temporary agency workers, temporary work agencies, and the client organization.

In the literature, a blended workplace is characterized by combining both standard (or permanent) workers and non-standard (or temporary) workers, especially when workers are engaged in similar activities (Geary 1992; Ward et al 2001; Davis-Blake et al 2003; Broschak et al 2008). The concept of a blended workforce implies a relative smoothness and homogeneity, whilst in most organizational settings this is not the case. For instance, many temporary agency workers are migrants (see section 3.2) of differing circumstances and employment needs. Eade et al (2007) consider four differing groups of migrants: Searchers are those migrants who keep their options open regarding employment mobility, which Eade et al (2007) refer to as intentional unpredictability. By comparison, Stayers are those migrants

who have been in the UK for a long period of time and, having developed connections, intend on settling. Hamsters are those migrants who have long uninterrupted stays in the UK, but intend on eventually moving back, whilst Storks, typically spend short amounts of time in the UK and frequently travel between the UK and their home country. The lived experiences of differing types of migrant workers within a blended workplace is an empirical focus of my ethnographic study.

In most cases, the non-standard element of a blended workforce are temporary agency workers who are hired to provide numerical flexibility, and it is not unusual for temporary agency workers to constitute the majority of workers within a blended organization. This situation is commonly found in lower-skilled, labour-intensive businesses which experience fluctuations in demand for their products or services, such as the UK food industry.

The practice of dual supply – securing temporary workers from more than one temporary work agency – adds further complexity and is used by clients to both safeguard their supply of labour and to maintain bargaining power over each labour provider. The dual - or sometimes even multiple - supply of temporary agency workers can further complicate the relationships temporary agency workers have with permanent workers, workplace managers and temporary work agencies.

Legge (2005) suggests that in many cases a blended workforce is created 'opportunistically rather than as part of a coherent strategy' (p190) and describes the blended workplace as an example of management's on-going efforts to 'optimise labour utilization in pursuit of competitive advantage' (p191). As such opportunism often leads to temporary agency workers being present in greater numbers than permanent employees, changes to the culture and dynamics of the workplace can occur (Ward et al 2001). According to Davis-Blake et al (2003) the widespread use of temporary workers also impacts the workflow and job attitudes of the full-time employees who may also have poorer working relationships with their managers, when compared

to permanent workers who do not have temporary agency co-workers. Additionally, within a blended workforce, permanent team members may feel a reduced sense of loyalty, are more likely to voluntarily leave the workplace and feel that they have a reduced employee voice.

Furthermore, within blended workplaces, conflicts have been known to occur between temporary workers and permanent workers. For example, Geary (1992) noted in his account of three American electronics plants that permanent workers were 'unnecessarily ordering temporary workers about' (p259) and the possibility of conflict at one of the plants required the supervisors to spend most of their time on the shop floor, which increased problems 'as this close form of supervision provoked feelings of mistrust and resentment amongst employees' (Geary 1992: 260).

Although the literature frequently associates blended workplaces with negative outcomes for organizations and permanent workers, there is less research which highlights the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in a blended workforce, which is a further area that my ethnographic study will explore.

In section 3.1, I explained that at the lower end of the labour market many organisations have abandoned previous methods of recruitment and use temporary work agencies to recruit permanent employees (Geary 1992; Parker 1994; Henson 1996; Ward et al 2000; Forde and MacKenzie 2009; Forde and Slater 2016). Consequently, some workplaces purposefully engage temporary agency workers in anticipation that they may move from peripheral workers to permanent core workers, although for some temporary agency workers the lure of permanent work is illusory. For instance, in my professional experience, food factories may engage temporary agency workers with low levels of English language skills but require their permanent hires to have higher levels of English skills. In other words, unless a temporary agency worker improves their English, they have little chance of securing a permanent role, irrespective of their performance in the job. In such cases,

temporary work agencies may retain temporary workers on the basis that temporary work could potentially lead to a permanent role with the client, even though the chances may be slim. Feldman et al (1994) explain that such duplicity is likely to result in negative reactions by temporary agency workers (e.g., resentment and lower commitment) and low trust dynamics towards client firms, even though the client was not necessarily involved in the initial misleading promises.

Many post Fordist workplaces in the UK experience unpredictable demand for their products and services and rely on temporary agency workers to provide numerical flexibility (see chapter two, section 2.1), with many temporary work agencies maintaining large pools of labour. In the UK food industry, for instance, unpredictable demand can be heightened due to retailer practices and expectations (see chapter two, section 2.5) and a short-term reduction in requirements may result in some temporary agency workers without work. Consequently, some temporary agency workers switch agencies to obtain work, resulting in a constant stream of new recruits into blended workplaces which, in effect, constitutes a constant re-blending of the workforce.

Conversely, a significant surge in demand may necessitate an influx of labour which may not be readily available in an agency labour pool. The risks associated with a recruitment process which may require some urgency is that unsuitable workers may be hired (Geary 1992), adding to resentment from permanent workers along with employment insecurity, and poor work experiences, for temporary workers.

Managing a blended workforce is a significant human resource management (HRM) challenge for line managers (Thompson et al 2013) due to the increasing size and diversity of the temporary element of the workforce, and within a blended workplace managers 'act as interpreters of corporate policy and have day-to-day responsibility for managing an occupationally and contractually divided workforce' (Ward et al 2001: 11).

The literature suggests that managers use HRM approaches that are either hard or soft, with hard approaches characterized as calculative, quantitative approaches which address challenges such as strategic fit, between HRM strategy and business strategy, (Legge 2005) or internal fit (between HRM practices themselves). The hard approach is also intertwined with direct and tight managerial control over human resources, which 'is widely acknowledged to place little emphasis on workers' concerns' (Guest 1999: 5). In contrast, the soft HRM model is a broader approach to HRM which incorporates not only organizational effectiveness, but also individual and societal effects and 'treating employees as valued assets' (Legge 2005: 105). In other words, whilst hard HRM focuses on strategic perspectives, soft HRM is more engaged with the human aspect of HRM (Kozica and Kaiser 2012).

Within a blended workforce it has been suggested that softer models of HRM, aimed at securing commitment, may be used for permanent workers, whereas hard HRM approaches could be used towards temporary agency workers (Hopkins et al 2016). An example of this would be monitoring and punishing absence from the temporary workforce, whilst rewarding attendance for permanent workers. I suggest that such an approach is problematic in practice as the temporary agency workforce is not homogenous, as typified by Eade et al's (2007) typology (Searchers, Stayers, Hamsters and Storks). Hopkins et al (2016) also highlight that the use of hard HRM practices, such as disciplinary action, towards many agency workers is likely to have limited impact given the perceived transitoriness of temporary agency work (Anderson 2010), and the little attachment that some temporary agency workers may feel towards either their agency or the client (Eade et al 2007, Hopkins et al 2016). However, some repeat temporary agency workers (see section 3.3), with a stronger connection to the organization, longer tenure, and more frequent work (referred to as Stayers by Eade et al 2007) may well regard hard HRM practices as 'a credible threat' (Hopkins et al 2016: 1098) to their continued employment.

Whilst hard HRM approaches may have limited effect in controlling many of the temporary workers in a blended workforce, I suggest that soft HRM approaches may also be limited in their effectiveness. Many soft HRM practices are centred on workers who are 'capable of development, worthy of trust and collaboration' (Legge 2005: 106) which are unlikely to elicit a positive response from temporary workers who may engender little commitment or effort beyond the call of duty (Forde and Slater 2006; Chambel 2014).

The literature acknowledges a range of contradictions in the hard/soft dichotomy (Legge 2005), which is the case for a blended workplace as neither a hard, nor soft, approach to HRM seems appropriate when managing the temporary element of such a workforce. This study will contribute to this ongoing discussion, regarding the rhetoric and reality of HRM approaches (Legge 2005), by examining the lived experiences of temporary agency workers.

A second defining feature of temporary agency work is the tripartite employment relationship. This relationship, which has also been subject to much academic research, is created when a temporary agency worker is engaged by a temporary work agency and then hired out to be utilized by the client organization (McLean Parks et al 1998; Peck and Theodore 1998; Kalleberg 2000; Forde 2001; Gallagher & McLean Parks 2001; Storrie 2002; Davidov 2004; Claes 2005; Forde and Slater 2006, 2016; MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Coe et al 2010; Chambel 2014; Goudswaard and de Leede 2014).

By creating a tripartite relationship – worker, agency, and client – agency work creates a challenge for both employment regulation and relationships, not least because it disassociates economic from social responsibilities (Havard et al 2009) which thus reinforces the risk of job insecurity and precarity for workers (see section 2.3). In this regard temporary agency workers function in the tripartite employment relationship in such a way that 'the worker simultaneously fulfils obligations to more than one employer

through the same act or behaviour' (Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001: 185), and for temporary agency workers, their employment relationship (i.e., administration and getting paid) is with the temporary work agency, while their work relationship (i.e., their supervision and direction) is with the client organization (Gonos 1997). The client may also use temporary agency workers precisely because the relationship involves no commitment or obligation (Druker and Stanworth 2004), a situation which Fox (1974) describes as likely to result in a low-trust relationship.

The fact that both the agency and the client have some of the characteristics of an employer (Davidov 2004) can cause problems for temporary workers who may be faced with dilemmas and conflicting direction from the agency and the client. As noted by Krasas Rogers (2000), 'both the agency's rules and procedures as well as the clients are enforced over the temporary worker … being a temporary worker is like having two bosses to satisfy.' (p156-157). This study will examine how such dilemmas are manifest and establish how temporary agency workers make sense of their relationships with both agency and client.

For temporary work agencies and clients, a tripartite employment relationship carries potential complications in terms of which party has responsibility for workers under the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996 (see appendix A1.6). From the perspective of UK employment law, the question of a contractual obligation between the client and the temporary agency worker could depend on what actually occurs between the temporary agency worker and the client on the client's premises, irrespective of whether the temporary agency worker is supplied to the client via a temporary work agency. The importance of such an implied contract between the client and the temporary agency worker may represent a 'pattern of regular mutual contact of a transactional nature', which will not necessarily be found in contractual documents, but which may be found by examining what took place in practice between the parties (www.personneltoday.com, May 2005). With this in mind, there could be a significant risk under the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996, if clients are

seen to have implied contracts with temporary agency workers and this risk may well encourage clients to keep temporary agency workers at arm's length. This may especially be the case when compared to the relationships which clients may wish to foster with their own permanent employees. As a result, it is conceivable that such an arm's length approach may lead to unfavourable temporary agency worker relationships within organizations.

Tripartite relationships have further potential to be problematic for temporary agency workers because the co-operation between agencies and clients can be limited and focused primarily on short term transactions (Goudswaard and de Leede 2014), with the greatest possible numerical flexibility delivered at the lowest possible price. Such a transactional approach can affect the integration of temporary agency workers into client organizations, impacting on individual agency workers' attitudes towards the agency or the client. For example, Forde and Slater (2006) and Chambel (2014) suggest that temporary agency workers may show less commitment to the client and fewer organizational citizenship behaviours.

Temporary agency workers often start from a place of disadvantage in the tripartite employment relationship for several reasons. First, if temporary agency workers are subject to poor behaviour in the workplace it is the temporary work agency - the gatekeeper of their work - to whom they must complain. Second, any issues that temporary agency workers raise about the agency's own performance could lead to assignments drying up. Third, and as discussed in chapter two (section 2.1), their weakened position is compounded by low levels of unionisation, 'leaving temporary agency workers largely on their own when it comes to demanding their rights' (Judge 2018: 6).

In addition, the psychological contract between the organization and the worker is inevitably more complicated for temporary agency workers within a tripartite employment relationship. According to psychological contract theory, employees hold a set of implicit expectations (the psychological

contract) about what they feel committed, or obligated, to provide to the employer (e.g., productivity), and what their employer is obligated to provide them (e.g., salary or career opportunities). In other words, employees perceive the employee-employer relationship as a reciprocal exchange (Rousseau 1995). In contrast to traditional employee-employer relationships, the employer role in temporary agency work is divided between the host and the agency. Consequently, temporary agency workers can form dyadic psychological contracts with the host and the agency (McLean Parks et al., 1998; Marks 2001; Cullinane and Dundon 2006) which may in some cases be competing or contradictory.

In this section I have outlined the literature relating to temporary agency workers who are part of a blended workplace and who are the key actors in a tripartite employment relationship. I have highlighted that such workplaces are often characterized in the literature as homogenous. However, as many blended workplaces use large numbers of temporary agency workers to provide numerical flexibility, I argue that the term blended workplace does not reflect the heterogeneity, nor constant re-blending that is an ongoing requirement for many temporary agency workers in such organizations. The dynamic nature of such workplaces has the potential to lead to strained working relationships which in turn could affect the attitudes of workers, and in the following section I examine literature which explores worker resistance.

3.6 <u>Worker resistance</u>

In this section I will build on the concepts of blended and tripartite employment relationships and examine the links between workplace relationships and worker resistance from the perspective of temporary agency workers.

Where tasks between permanent and temporary workers are similar, inequalities in terms, conditions and the experience of work can arise (Forde and Slater 2016). These can lead to:

tensions with attendant negative impacts on motivation and performance, not just for agency workers but for permanent client-firm staff who may feel their security threatened or who may see their job tasks change where agency temps become a regular feature of an organisation's employment model (Forde and Slater 2016: 315-316).

Within a blended workplace, I suggest that forms of workplace resistance are one of the likely consequences of heightened workplace tension and poor motivation, particularly if temporary agency workers perceive that management treat permanent workers differently, i.e., more favourably, than themselves.

Although workplace resistance has been researched amongst a vast array of workplaces, less research has focussed on temporary agency workers. One reason for this could be due to a general conception that if permanent employees have problems resisting workplace controls, then resistance by more precarious workers, such as temporary agency workers, would be virtually impossible (Kalleberg 2009). At the same time there is also a common belief that precarious workers must lack individual agency (Scott 2018).

However, some exceptions do exist in the literature. For instance, in her ethnographic study of precarious migrant workers in hospitality jobs Alberti (2014) explains how workers are able to use their 'transnational exit power to quit bad jobs and defy employers' assumptions about their availability to work under poor conditions' (p865). Similarly, Strauss (2012) argues that although precarious workers' choices may be constrained and limited, 'some agency will almost always be discernible' (p144).

Much of the early literature relating to worker resistance is inextricably linked to various forms of labour process, and the dominant view of research into workplace resistance is centred on a class-based approach. Such research is primarily an examination of:

> the expression of overt and largely collective forms of resistance, such as
> sabotage, work-to-rule actions, and union-organized strikes in primarily

manufacturing settings which challenged the capitalist relations of production both on and off the shop floor (Devinatz 2007: 2).

A key aspect of these early studies (Hyman 1972; Beynon 1973; Friedman 1977; Edwards 1979) is that workers are carrying out their 'historic role as alienated subjects in a struggle to emancipate themselves from the confines of capitalist exploitation' (Devinatz 2007: 2), although research into forms of worker resistance also includes comprehensive studies of covert, or 'less visible and more indirect workplace resistance' (Prasad and Prasad 2000: 388; see also Scott 1985; Martin 1988; Knights and Vrudubakis 1994).

Two popular concepts associated with worker resistance are soldiering and time-wasting. Soldiering, which is akin to the notion of appropriation of work provided by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), is the term used to describe the restriction of output by workers, which Taylor (1919) believed was 'the greatest evil with which the working people of both England and America are now afflicted' (p14). The fascination with soldiering was such that several significant studies in early industrial sociology explored this form of resistance (Mayo 1938; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939; Roy 1952, 1954).

Timewasting also features heavily in the workplace resistance literature and is referred to as the appropriation of time by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), whilst Paulsen (2015) prefers the term empty labour, which he proposes is 'everything you do at work that is not your work' (p352). Roy (1952) illuminated the notion of timewasting in his ethnographic account on Making Time. Roy observed how workers could 'bank a surplus' to be used later to 'fund empty labour' and practiced this form of timewasting himself – which enabled him to 'loaf around talking with his colleagues' (p433).

Debates surrounding the notion of timewasting are also present in the literature. For instance, Paulsen (2015), argues that the workplace is not a 'rational machine' and that 'efficiency losses are not necessarily due to individual employees lacking in work commitment and communication' (p352). Furthermore, in some cases, Paulsen (2015) suggests that empty

labour may be 'forced upon the employee as an effect of organised waste' (p354).

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) developed their concepts of resistance further in terms of the appropriation of product (e.g., theft) and appropriation of identity (e.g., joking rituals) and highlight that worker misbehaviour may be subtle and covert. This view is congruent with Scott (1990) who used the term infrapolitics to explain the 'circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups beyond the visible end of the spectrum' (p183). Furthermore Scott (1990) explains that the requirement for invisibility is a 'tactical choice, born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power' (p183).

The literature shows that the possession of knowledge, by workers, is important in terms of worker resistance. For instance, many workers can resist and 'exercise some control over the shop floor' (Devinatz 2007: 2) by retaining pertinent knowledge of some important aspects of factory processes, in preference to freely providing knowledge to management. One example of this form of resistance could be a worker who fails to report when a machine has developed a minor fault. Furthermore, management may provoke resistance by refusing to involve workers, or otherwise integrate workers' knowledge, a situation which Juravich (1985) regards as irrational.

Although the workplace resistance literature frequently positions workers and management as adversarial, some authors acknowledge that worker resistance can exist, within limits, with the knowledge, and tacit approval, of management. This is exemplified by Burawoy (1992) who considers the labour process as a game and contends that 'workers went to great lengths to compensate for, or to minimize the deprivations they experience' (p78). Burawoy (1992) reasons that the 'games that workers play are not autonomously created but are played within limits, with management actively participating not only in the organization of the game but also in the enforcement of its rules' (p80). This view is also taken by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) who suggest that not only is there a 'toleration of forms of

misbehaviour, but there are also degrees of dependency on it' (p11), whilst Paulsen (2015) suggests that the games are 'psychological safety valves for worker aggression, at a relatively low cost to the employer' (p354).

McCabe et al (2020) concur that resistance is not always a management versus workers struggle, because 'managers also pragmatically resist' (p972), introducing the term pragmatic resistance to refer to 'multiple, informal, unorganized, non-confrontational, unauthorized, pervasive, ongoing, and sporadic subversions of official guidelines' (p971). McCabe et al (2020) also highlight the subtle nature of certain acts of resistance by observing that:

> pragmatic resistance is inseparable from everyday life and, in some ways, it helps to make it happen but not entirely in line with how those in positions of authority might believe or would like it to be (p971)

From the perspective of a blended workplace, we have limited knowledge of how temporary agency workers exhibit acts of resistance, a situation which warrants further investigation, given that these workers are often the largest constituent of such a workplace. Consequently, my ethnographic study of temporary agency work will provide further empirical insight to understand the acts of resistance, often presented by the literature as covert and subtle, which temporary agency workers may deploy to resist controls on the shopfloor.

In the final section of this chapter, I will now revisit my research questions.

3.7 Positioning of the research questions within the current literature

In this section I explain how this study will contribute to the current literature.

Research question one: *What are temporary agency workers lived experiences of workplace security and workplace insecurity?*

The literature explains how, in a post-Fordist world, many organizations have adopted increasingly flexible forms of labour process, and that migrant workers in secondary labour markets have been central to this increase in

workplace flexibility. Some authors suggest that the corollary to this increase in flexibility is a subsequent decrease in employment security and an increase in precarious work. By examining lived experiences, this study will offer new insights to explain how worker insecurity is increased by the practices of temporary work agencies, and subsequently lessened by the agency workers themselves. In doing so I seek to contribute to the literature on temporary agency work, precarious work, and employment insecurity.

Research question two: *What are temporary agency workers' experiences of the temporal aspect of their work, and of the intensity of their work?*

The combined effect of temporality and intense work has so far been overlooked from the discussions surrounding temporary agency work, and this study will explore how the combined effect of job time and job type impact temporary agency workers differently from their permanent co-workers. The ethnographic nature of this study will also extend our current knowledge of the intensified nature of the work experienced by temporary agency workers in a UK food factory.

Research question three: *What are temporary agency workers' experiences of the blended workplace?*

This question examines the workplace relationships that temporary agency workers experience, and by addressing this research question I will contribute to the literature in a further two areas. First, the literature highlights the weakened position of temporary agency workers in the tripartite employment relationship (between temporary agency workers, temporary work agencies, and the client organization) and as part of the blended workplace (comprising of temporary workers and permanent employees). The literature tends to consider the blended workforce as homogenous and dichotomous, which is an area that this view from below will reveal to be more mixed-up. Consequently, this study will seek to fill lacunae in the temporary work literature that relates to tripartite employment relationships and blended workplaces.

Secondly, workplace resistance has been examined ranging from organised and overt acts to more covert and subtle resistance. This ethnographic study of temporary agency work will seek to add to the current literature to establish the extent to which temporary agency workers demonstrate individual agency, and exhibit resistance, given their weakened position in the tripartite employment relationship.

By addressing the three primary research questions in this study, I seek to contribute new thinking, and empirical evidence, to the ongoing academic and policy discussions regarding the workplace experiences of temporary agency workers in the UK food manufacturing sector.

This chapter has examined the literature relating to temporary agency work both in general and, more specifically, in relation to the UK food industry. First, I considered reasons why temporary agency work has become a significant feature of many UK workplaces and, second, I examined why migrants represent a significant proportion of the temporary agency workforce. In the third section I examined the relationship between temporary agency work and employment insecurity, whilst in section four I explored the intense nature of the work which is undertaken by temporary agency workers in the UK. In section five I considered the workplace relations that temporary agency workers experience as a key element of the blended workforce, and in section six I examined the links between these workplace relationships and worker resistance. Finally, in section seven, I positioned my research questions within the literature which has been reviewed.

The following chapter will explain the philosophical and methodological considerations underpinning this study.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter comprises six sections. First, I explain the aims of this research along with the ontological and epistemological approaches for this study. Second, I provide an overview of the research location, the key actors in this study and the work carried out by temporary agency workers. Third, I outline the rationale for the research design including a detailed explanation for the choice of an ethnographic approach. In this section I also explain how the field site was selected and accessed. The ethical considerations for this study are then explained, both in terms of the ethical approaches which informed my actions, and the procedures which were required to adhere to the required ethical standards during the fieldwork.

In the fourth section of this chapter, I describe the processes which I used to collect the copious amount of field notes and interview responses, and I explain the subsequent approaches taken to organise and manage this abundance of data. In the fifth section, I highlight how themes were identified within the data, organised, and developed using an analytical framework. This section explains the processes of analysis and reporting, together with an explanation of how NVivo12 software was used.

In section six, I conclude this chapter with a comprehensive discussion regarding the reflexive challenges I have experienced throughout this research project.

4.1 <u>Research aims and approach</u>

In this study, I am seeking to contribute to existing literature by exploring the working lives of temporary agency workers in a salad processing factory. In addressing the three research questions (see section 3.7), the intended contributions of this study sit within the following areas of literature:

- precarious work and employment insecurity
- the intense nature of temporary agency work
- experiences of workplace relationships within a blended workforce
- workplace resistance

To achieve this aim, the experiences of temporary agency workers are examined across three key aspects. The first aspect considers precarious work and employment insecurity and explores the experiences of temporary agency workers as they seek work and then aim to maintain work, whilst the second aspect examines these agency workers as they carry out work. These temporary agency workers experience multi-faceted relationships whilst at work - which is the third aspect of their lived experiences that this study examines.

To find out 'how things work' (Watson 2011: 204) I adopted an ethnographic approach and employed two primary techniques to gather data. First, I travelled with, worked alongside, observed, and spoke with temporary agency staff who were my co-workers. Throughout a period of embedded participation on the FoodCo factory shop floor, which took place over seven months and amounted to 280 hours in the field, I was able to collect many observations, thoughts, views, opinions, and anecdotes. Second, after my time immersed in the field ended, I returned to FoodCo to undertake twenty semi structured interviews with temporary agency workers, permanent workers, supervisors, and managers. A detailed discussion of the design of this research study is outlined in section 4.3. of this thesis.

4.1.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, whilst epistemology is concerned with what constitutes valid knowledge. The boundaries of what is (reality) and what we know (knowledge) are blurred, which is reflected in the fact that different authors use terms and labels differently (Crotty 1998; Symon and Cassell 1998; Bryman 2001; Denscombe 2002).

The key requirement for my qualitative study of temporary agency workers is to understand the meanings of their experiences of seeking and maintaining work; their experiences of carrying out work; and their experiences of relationships whilst at work. As this study required me to interpret meanings

from *their* perspective, interpretivism underpins the epistemological approach of this thesis. In seeking to understand the lived experiences of temporary agency workers, I therefore take an emic perspective to understand the 'subjective meanings that people [temporary agency workers] attach to their experiences' (Hennink et al 2011: 14).

Interpretivist approaches have been critiqued for indulging in pure observation of culture without a critical stance, and for their general lack of impact on policymaking and practice. Crotty (1998), for instance, argues:

> we should never lose sight of the fact that the particular set of meanings imposed has come into being to serve particular interests and will harbour its own forms of oppression, manipulation and other forms of injustice (p81).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) counter such an argument by asserting that criticisms of interpretivist epistemological approaches, including ethnography, stem from an 'over estimation of the actual and potential contribution of research to policy and practice' and that directing research towards particular political or practical goals can itself be problematic as findings could be distorted 'by ideas about how the world ought to be, or by what would be politic for others to believe' (p17).

In this thesis, within the realm of interpretivism, I follow a social constructivist research paradigm. Constructivism, in general, is based on the belief that reality is subjective and internal, rather that objective and externally imposed. This view describes knowledge as interpretative, constructed and in a constant state of revision (Bryman 2001). Morgan and Smircich (1980) question whether, or not, human beings can 'achieve any form of knowledge that is independent of their own social construction, since they are the agents through which knowledge is perceived or experienced' (p493).

In the social constructivist research paradigm, there is an explicit implication for epistemology and how the social world is researched, and social

constructivism is applied in various ways. To clarify my approach for this study, I will draw upon the work of Burr (2015) who highlights that social constructionism insists that we take 'a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and ourselves' (p2).

As my career has been spent working in the food industry, primarily in managerial roles, engaging temporary agency workers in times of demand, and similarly shedding temporary labour when not required, by taking a social constructivist approach, I have actively re-considered my normative position throughout this study to be 'ever suspicious of my assumptions about how the world appears to be' (Burr 2015: 2). In other words, my experience of working with temporary agency workers, over several decades, is overtly managerialist and top-down, in so much that I have previously only considered these workers as there to serve a purpose (i.e., flexible labour) and that this managerial perspective was an uncomplicated, and acceptable, situation for businesses to take.

The view from below approach to this study required me to re-consider my normative position and in doing so, I actively engaged with the concept of reflexivity. In section 4.6 of this chapter, I provide a detailed account of a wide range of reflexive challenges which I encountered throughout the course of this study.

4.2 FoodCo: the research location

This section consists of three parts. First, I introduce the research location for this study, FoodCo, and provide context regarding the activities of this business. Second, I highlight the key relationships and actors within FoodCo, which are relevant to this study. Third, I provide a comprehensive overview of the work carried out by temporary agency workers at FoodCo.

I use pseudonyms throughout this thesis to preserve the anonymity of all organisations and individuals who have been involved in the study.

4.2.1 FoodCo: An introduction

FoodCo was established in its current location in the 1990s, has a permanent workforce of approximately 300 workers, and is part of a larger Food Group, which employs approximately 1000 people across several manufacturing sites in the UK. The business is non-unionized and although a Work Council is in existence, meetings with management are infrequent.

The business buys significant amounts and types of lettuce and other salad items, and once procured, these items are sorted, trimmed, prepared, washed, bagged, packed, stacked on pallets, and despatched to depots across the UK. FoodCo supply prepared salad products to customers within the retail, convenience, food service (i.e., the hospitality sector) and business-to-business sectors of the UK and European market. Although FoodCo is based in the UK, raw materials are sourced both within the UK and internationally, mainly from Europe.

FoodCo, in line with all large food manufacturers in the UK, is now legally required to comply with section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act which requires organisations that have an annual turnover of at least £36 million to prepare a slavery and human trafficking statement for each financial year, if they carry on any part of their business in the UK. As a result of this legislation FoodCo has stated three aims in order to achieve their commitments to ethical practices, standards and labour practices.

First, FoodCo require all of their suppliers to be registered with Sedex. Sedex is the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (Sedex), an organisation for businesses committed to the continuous improvement of ethical performance within their supply chains. All businesses registered with Sedex are subject to audits which consist of on-site observations, and interviews with workers and management. The results of Sedex audits are made available on the Sedex portal for all Sedex members to view. FoodCo also work with suppliers accredited by the Global GAP, an internationally recognized set of farm standards dedicated to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

Second, as temporary and seasonal work is common practice within the FoodCo supply chain, temporary labour is an area that FoodCo as identified as a potential risk for slavery and human trafficking. FoodCo work in partnership with the GLAA (Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority), ALP (Association of Labour Providers) and the ETI (Ethical Trading Initiative) to help support growers and employees throughout their supply chain to minimise the risk of exploitation. Third, FoodCo have an Ethical Sourcing Policy, based on the ETI Base Code, to reflect their commitment to ensuring all labour is employed ethically and with integrity in all their business relationships.

In section 4.3.2 I will explain the detailed process for the selection of FoodCo as the field site for this study.

The following section will provide further context to FoodCo as the field setting, and to understand the role of labour at FoodCo, I will now outline the key actors.

4.2.2 The key actors

A tripartite employment relationship exists at FoodCo between temporary agency workers, FoodCo (the client) and the temporary work agency, referred to in this study as AgencyCo, and in this section I explain how this relationship operates at the FoodCo site.

The first element of the tripartite relationship are the temporary agency workers registered with AgencyCo and supplied to FoodCo. Up to eighty temporary agency workers are required daily. The temporary agency workers represent a wide variety of nationalities including from eleven of the twenty-seven EU countries, as follows: Poland, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, Latvia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Portugal. Some temporary agency workers at FoodCo are migrants from the following non-EU countries: India, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Afghanistan.

The agency workers consist of both female and male workers, ranging in age from 18 to over 60 years old. Some of the temporary agency workers have

been engaged as temporary agency workers at FoodCo for over five years, whilst others have only completed a couple of days at the site. In the first empirical chapter of this thesis (chapter five) I will provide details of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers as they are recruited by AgencyCo and start working at the FoodCo site.

The second element of the tripartite employment relationship is the client, FoodCo. The FoodCo factory consists of four main departments: Incoming Raw Materials, Raw Material Preparation, Production, and Despatch. Each department is headed by a Shift Manager (known as white hats due to the colour of the hard hats they wear). As most of the temporary agency labour at FoodCo is engaged in the Production Department, the fieldwork for this study is primarily focused on this area of the factory.

Shift Production Managers are key FoodCo actors in the tripartite relationship for four main reasons. First, they have the greatest requirement for flexible, temporary labour at FoodCo as they are responsible for the output from the production department, ensuring that customers' orders are made in full, and delivered for despatch on time. In doing so, Shift Production Managers order the necessary temporary labour from AgencyCo. Second, they allocate the work on the FoodCo shop floor, to both permanent and temporary workers, and determine which skills are required to deliver the production plans. In the context of my own experience as a temporary agency worker at FoodCo, it was primarily Shift Production Managers who determined the type of work which would be allocated to me throughout each shift that I worked at FoodCo. Third, Shift Production Managers combine the agency labour provided by AgencyCo with their own permanent team members who are employed directly by FoodCo and manage the blended workforce. Finally, these managers are responsible for confirming, and agreeing, the hours worked by each temporary agency worker.

Other key actors within FoodCo are Production Supervisors (known as blue hats) and FoodCo permanent employees. The Production Supervisors (blue

hats) are direct reports of the Shift Production Managers (white hats). White hats often delegate tasks to blue hats, which sometimes includes the allocation of tasks to, and the supervision of, permanent employees (known as perms) and temporary agency workers (known as temps).

The final group of key actors within FoodCo are permanent employees, as these work alongside the temporary agency workers as part of the blended workforce. The permanent employees, as experienced workers, are sometimes given informal responsibility by either blue hats or white hats, for the training of newly arrived temps, in a process called buddying up.

The third element of the tripartite employment relationship is AgencyCo. In the literature several terms are used to refer to such providers, including Intermediate Labour Providers, Labour Market Intermediaries, Alternative Staffing Organizations and Third-Party Labour Providers. For this thesis, I will use the terms labour provider and temporary work agency interchangeably, as both are well recognised within the UK food industry.

AgencyCo is licenced by the The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA). Since October 2006 this has been a requirement for all temporary work agencies supplying workers to the UK food manufacturing industry (see appendix A1.1 for further details regarding the background to the establishment of the GLAA). AgencyCo have been engaged as the sole provider of temporary agency labour to FoodCo since 2014.

AgencyCo are based in three offices at the FoodCo site from which they conduct the selection process for hiring new temporary workers (detailed in chapter five, section 5.2) and these offices are also the base for the two key actors representing AgencyCo in the tripartite relationship: Agata and Andrea.

Agata, who is Polish, is the Contract Manager and deals primarily with FoodCo Human Resource Management, the Site Finance Manager, and the Factory Operations Manager.

Andrea, who is Bulgarian, reports directly into Agata and is the Agency Co-ordinator. Both Agata and Andrea are full time employees of AgencyCo and are solely focussed on managing the FoodCo account. As Andrea is mainly responsible for the hiring of temporary workers for deployment at FoodCo, she is the key link between temporary agency workers, the white hats, and the blue hats.

Each morning on the factory floor at FoodCo, Andrea liaises with the white hats and blue hats to establish that FoodCo have the required amount of temporary labour to cope with the day ahead. In some cases, the temporary labour requirement is altered, for instance if FoodCo customers' orders have increased or if some of the permanent workers are absent. In such cases, Andrea will then contact temporary agency workers in the AgencyCo labour pool and arrange for them to come to work at short notice.

Throughout each working day at FoodCo, Andrea remains in close contact with the white hats and the blue hats. Any conflicts or issues with agency staff are relayed by FoodCo supervision to Andrea, who is expected to deal with whatever the situation may be.

4.2.3 The work carried out by temporary agency workers at FoodCo

This is a detailed section which is necessary for me to set the scene as a 'reflexive awareness of ethnographic writing should take account of the potential audience for the finished textual products' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 201). With this in mind I feel that it is important to make no assumptions regarding the readers knowledge of the field setting.

Within the four FoodCo factory departments - Incoming Raw Materials, Raw Material Preparation, Production, and Despatch, a variety of jobs is allocated to temporary agency workers, and in this detailed section I outline the location and nature of these jobs.

First, in the Incoming Raw Materials department there are some, albeit limited opportunities for temporary work. This is mainly because roles in this

department require specific skills and training to operate specialist equipment such as forklift trucks. Some temporary agency workers do possess these skills, although this type of work, for temporary agency workers, is not commonplace at FoodCo.

Second, in the Raw Material Preparation department, there is a high requirement for temporary agency workers and the jobs are low skilled and easily trained. In this department, workers (known as trimmers) are positioned in demarcated and numbered workstations (trimming stations), standing alongside a conveyor belt (trimming belt). In total there are three trimming belts in this department. Produce, for instance whole iceberg lettuce heads, is loaded onto the trimming belt at one end and conveyed along to each trimming station. The trimmers at each position are expected to pick a lettuce off the belt, quickly inspect it and trim off any signs of damage, for instance discoloured or rotten leaves, with a knife. The discarded leaves (trim) are placed into a chute to the side of the trimmer and the trimmed lettuce (trimmed head) is placed in a water flume under the belt. The flume transports the trimmed heads away for onward processing.

Training for this job takes approximately five minutes and is carried out by the side the trimming belt. The trimmer is shown, by a blue hat, how to use the knife correctly to trim the lettuce and where to put both the trimmed head and the trim. The trimmer is told of the need for caution when using the knife, the need for speed to keep up with the belt and the need for vigilance to ensure that all of the poor-quality leaves are removed. Emphasis is put on making sure that good material is not unnecessarily trimmed, as this affects the yield (known as over trimming).

The amount of lettuce required in the factory is very variable, with summer production volumes up to 400% higher than Winter volumes. In broad terms, very few temporary agency workers are required in Winter, whilst in the summer, this department would often be manned with 20 agency workers per shift, which is approximately 50% of the total shift headcount. Also, to achieve

the production volumes in summer, the hours worked are up to twelve hours per day, seven days a week, whilst in winter the lengths of the shift are often six hours or less.

Even during the busy summer months, agency numbers are subject to high fluctuations. For instance, several days of hot weather can result in an increase in demand for salad products, and therefore the requirement for temporary agency labour increases too.

Working as a trimmer involves standing at the trimming belt for up to ten hours a day, with a break for 30 minutes every four and a half hours. The flow of lettuce heads along the belt is unrelenting, and blue hats and a white hat oversee the operation. The environment is refrigerated (less than 5 degrees centigrade) to maintain the freshness of the product, and many workers wear balaclavas or snoods to protect against the cold. Some workers also wear their own gloves underneath company-issued latex protective gloves.

The department has targets (known as key performance indicators, or KPIs) and the main KPI is tonnes per shift. As a result, blue hats and white hats constantly push the trimmers to work faster to achieve this KPI.

As a trimmer, whether a temporary or permanent worker, there is pressure to keep up with the constant flow of lettuce heads coming down the line. In doing so it is common for a trimmer to feel aches, pains, and soreness from the constant standing, holding the knife and grabbing the lettuce heads. Cuts from the knives are also a constant risk.

Trimmers are prone to mistakes, especially whilst getting used to the nature of the work and the speed of the line. Confusion as to where to put the trimmed head and the trim waste occasionally results in poor quality leaves going into the flume, whilst good lettuce is mistakenly placed into the waste chute. Trimmers, in their haste, are also likely to mis-trim and remove leaves which are good. If spotted by a supervisor or shift manager, trimmers are openly castigated for failing to keep up with the line, or for mis-trimming.

The third department which requires temporary agency workers is the Production department; this large department requires the most temporary agency workers at FoodCo. As for the Raw Material Preparation department, the Production department is refrigerated, and many workers take similar precautions against the cold conditions by wearing balaclavas and snoods.

The Production department consists of two main areas. The first area is known as mixing and comprises machinery which is used to mix types of lettuce and other salad items (e.g., grated carrots) prior to transfer to the second area, which is known as packing.

In mixing there is one role, known as feeding, which is allocated to temporary agency workers. This role requires the worker to mix lettuce together in specified proportions to create a leaf mix. The leaf mix is weighed into large, open topped, wheeled skips and, when full, the skips can weigh up to 250kg.

To feed the automatic weighing and bagging machines in the packing department, the skips of leaf mix are manually pushed, positioned into lifts, and tipped into hoppers. The material is then transferred to the weighing machines via conveyor belts.

The role of feeding is mainly allocated to temporary agency workers who can understand and follow a recipe and so those agency workers with a poor comprehension of English are normally discounted. However, if production volumes are high, sometimes temporary agency workers with poor English are asked to feed. Feeding is physically demanding and hard work. Long hours, in a cold environment, pushing heavy skips is intense, and keeping up with the weighing machines and bagging lines is challenging.

Starving the bagging lines of leaf mix is regarded as a cardinal sin in the mixing area. This results in bagging lines being idle, dead time, causing a loss of production efficiency, which is a KPI in the packing area. Blue hats and a white hat manage the mixing area and they are particularly chastening towards workers if dead time is spotted.

Within packing there are fifteen production lines, and each line consists of a weighing machine which is fixed above a bagging machine. Together they are known as a bagger, and each bagger produces a variety of bagged salads. Operating a bagger requires significant training and is a core role within FoodCo, carried out by permanent FoodCo employees. In this area there are also two lines which produce bowls of salads (known as the bowl lines).

There are three secondary roles in packing which are allocated to temporary agency workers: packer, stacker, and jockey. During peak production periods, up to 40 temporary agency workers are engaged in these roles in the packing area, which can be up to 75% of the total headcount on any one shift.

Most temporary agency workers at FoodCo are packers. Their job is to manually pack bags of salad into cardboard boxes or plastic crates. Each line has one packer, except for line six and line 12 which are high speed and require two packers per line. The bags are produced (by the automatic bagger) at speeds of up to 60 bags per minute and the packer is required to keep up with the line speed. Failure to do so becomes noticeable very quickly as bags rapidly spill over and onto the floor, a situation which often catches the eye of blue hats or the white hat.

A packer is required to manually pack bags of salad, into the correct crate or box, and to carry out, and document, quality checks on the bags of product. Quality checks include checking the use by date codes, the integrity of the bag seals, and the overall appearance of the finished pack. Once a packer has packed the correct number of packs into a box, carried out the necessary quality checks, and completed the paperwork, the boxes are then pushed by the packers, along a short conveyor, to the end of the packing line.

Keeping up with the line speed, using the correct boxes, counting the correct number of packs, whilst carrying out quality checks and completing paperwork, within a cold and relatively restricted position, for up to thirteen hours, is demanding work, both physically and mentally, for the packers.

The second role which is allocated to temporary agency workers in packing is the job of stacker. A stacker lifts the cardboard boxes and plastic crates, filled with bags of product, from the end of the packing conveyor and onto a pallet. The weight of each box (or crate) varies depending on the weight in each bag, although full crates can weigh up to 9kgs. Stackers place the filled boxes onto pallets in a particular configuration, which is called a stacking pattern, and each crate (or box) size has a specific stacking pattern. The pallets are then stacked up to 2m high.

In total up to 30 crates per minute are required to be stacked, and each stacker is required to move across, and stack, on three separate packing lines. The work of a stacker is unrelenting and intense.

The third role in packing that is allocated to temporary agency workers is that of a jockey. Packing lines, and packers, need to be constantly supplied with boxes, crates, and replacement empty pallets, and it is the job of the jockey to ensure this process of line service occurs uninterrupted. The jockey role involves significant walking around the site to fetch the various boxes, crates, and pallets to deliver to each of the fifteen production lines. In some cases, total accumulated distances of up to 25km are walked, in a twelve-hour shift, by some jockeys.

The fourth and final department at FoodCo which requires temporary agency workers is the Despatch department. The workers in this department either collect full pallets from the production lines (known as a logistic) or pick customer orders (known as a picker). Temporary agency workers in the Despatch department are only allocated the job of a logistic, as the role of a picker is regarded as a skilled, core job to be undertaken by FoodCo employees only.

Although the logistic job involves the regular removal of full pallets, using a hand operated pallet truck, the frequency of pallet movements is contingent upon the pallets being built by the stackers, which is dependent on the skills of the packer and the performance of the bagging line. As a result, the logistic

job is regarded as the least intense of any of the temporary agency jobs at FoodCo.

The second empirical chapter of this thesis (chapter six) will provide a detailed view from below to examine how the allocation of work at FoodCo is gendered, and this empirical chapter will also examine the effects on temporary agency workers of intense work and long working hours.

In this chapter I have outlined how the structures within the UK food supply chain frame the choices which grocery suppliers make when deciding how to staff their food factories. As the result of an imbalance of power, retailers dominate asymmetric relationships with their suppliers, who in turn search for ways to make acceptable margins of their own. This chapter has also positioned FoodCo in the context of the UK food manufacturing industry and has outlined the key actors in this study. Finally, in this chapter I have provided a detailed outline of the work which is carried out by temporary agency workers at FoodCo.

4.3 Research design

This section consists of three parts. First, I expand on my rationale for using ethnography as the approach for this study. Second, I explain the process I undertook to initially identify, and then access, FoodCo as a suitable field site for this study. Third, I outline the ethical considerations which informed the conduct of this research.

4.3.1 Rationale for choosing an ethnographic approach

As outlined in section 4.1, I adopted an ethnographic approach to study temporary agency workers who were working at the FoodCo fresh foods factory, and like all interpretivist techniques, ethnography is a contested terrain.

Ethnography offers an understanding of a way of life from the perspective of the participants studied (Fetterman 1989; Neuman 1994) whilst also examining the culture from within (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983).

However, others suggest that seeing the world from the perspective of those studied is implausible given that a researcher's own experiences, values and underlying assumptions imprint upon the perceptions and the data (Richardson 1994, Usher et al 1997).

I position myself in the former camp and my view is aligned to Watson (2011) in that I 'would not have got anywhere near understanding the issues being investigated if I had not worked in the factory alongside the individuals whose identities and practices I was examining' (p205).

I chose an ethnographic approach for this study in the belief that we cannot really learn a great deal about what actually happens or about how things work in organizations without, as Watson (2011) posits, doing 'the intensive type of close-observational or participative research that is central to ethnographic endeavour' (p204). Watson (2011) referred to ethnography as an outcome of research, rather than a research method:

> a style of social science writing which draws upon the writer's close observation of and involvement with people in a particular social setting and relates the words spoken and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred (p205-206).

Watson's (2011) definition supports my approach to this fieldwork by considering ethnography as 'the product and not the method of production' of my research investigations, requiring 'close observation and intensive involvement in the field' (p206) alongside approaches such as interviews.

'Intensive involvement in the field' (Watson 2011: 206) in my view, meant that I needed to resemble temporary agency workers in as many ways as possible which included the clothes I wore, waiting for – and travelling on - the bus to AgencyCo and carrying out any of the tasks allocated to me for up to 13 hours, with limited break times. Not only did this approach help me access the view from below, but this was also extremely helpful to build rapport, trust, and credibility with my co-workers. Initially this approach

enabled me to obtain rich data from participants to support my field observations, whilst also later this immersive approach helped to provide a positive and trusting environment for the interview phase of my fieldwork.

My approach to fieldwork in this respect is aligned to Sampson (2013) who:

> kept the same kinds of hours as the seafarers [in her ethnography]. I'm tired when they're tired, less tired when they are less tired…..which helped in terms of getting people to feel I was not separate. I was someone willing to muck in, and they were more willing to talk to me (p4).

By combining interviews alongside participant observations, I felt that the rigour of my study would be improved. The questions I posed during the interviews were therefore used to further enquire, evaluate, and build upon my observations in the field.

4.3.2 <u>Selecting and accessing the field site</u>

I knew that gaining access to a field site for an ethnography would not be an easy undertaking, a point that Watson (2011) acknowledges due to 'enormous difficulties of gaining the very high grade of research access that is needed to prepare an ethnography' (p204).

Aside from the practical difficulties of gaining research access to a field site, I was also aware that to carry out credible research on the lived experiences of temporary agency workers, I would need to carefully consider the selection of my individual case.

Individual cases can pose particular problems, as highlighted by Flyvbjerg (2006) and Small (2009). Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that a lack of generalizability regarding individual case studies can be reduced by the strategic selection of a suitable case. I considered Flyvbjerg's (2006) 'strategies for the selection of samples and cases' (p230) and decided that the most suitable case for my study would resemble Flyvbjerg's (2006: 230) 'critical case'. This required me to obtain information from a site that 'permits logical deductions of the type, 'if this is valid for this case, then it applies to all cases' (Flyvbjerg 2006: 230).

To identify a suitable critical case for my study, I drew upon my experience, and a broad network of contacts, from working in the UK food industry. I have worked in many factories which engage significant numbers of temporary agency workers and felt that a suitable site for a critical case would have three important characteristics. First, a site that required large numbers of temporary agency workers (low skilled, minimum wage, repetitive work, low automation, labour intensive, most likely assembly line labour, potentially in an unpleasant environment). Second, I sought a site that attracted temporary agency workers from a wide catchment area, to increase the diversity of the labour pool and to reduce the possibility of cohabiting, or socially connected, temporary agency workers. Third, the preferred site was likely to be subject to significant fluctuations in production demand and was possibly an operation with seasonal demands, thereby increasing the precarious work arrangements for temporary agency workers.

Central to Flyvebjerg's (2006) critical case selection is the requirement to 'achieve information that permits logical deductions' (p230). My belief was that this would be achievable by securing access to a site that satisfied the three criteria I have outlined above, as a site with significant numbers of agency workers, from different communities, experiencing precarious working arrangements is typical of many operations within the UK food supply chain.

Mitchell (1983) also explains the role of logic in distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate assumptions based on single-case studies. Mitchell (1983) argues that 'extrapolability from any one case study to like situations in general' is acceptable when 'based on logical inference' (p200). Mitchell (1983: 199-200) clarifies that the 'logical inference' by which conclusions are drawn from cases concern the 'essential linkage between two or more characteristics in terms of some explanatory schema', which is the essence of my data analysis, which I will discuss in section 4.5.

Consequently, I argue that FoodCo represents a critical case that permits me to make – in Flyvebjerg's (2006) and Mitchell's (1983) terms - the type of

logical deductions and inferences that if my findings are valid for FoodCo, then my findings apply to all chilled food manufacturers that use temporary agency workers, and who supply UK grocery retailers.

I anticipated four main challenges to securing access to my critical case. First, as I have outlined in chapter four, the food industry is highly competitive both in terms of food manufacturing and food retailing. Such fierce competition results in little openness and collaboration amongst suppliers, a point also made by Bowman et al (2013) who witnessed 'adversarial relationships all along the supply chain in the UK.........exacerbated by a general absence of co-operation between producers' (p301). Given the secretive and protective nature of many manufacturers in the food industry, many processors are extremely wary of opening their doors to any unnecessary external parties.

Second, the production of food is subject to rigorous conditions, quality control and supply agreements. Such conditions can be legislative, for example, The Food Safety Act 1990, or determined by a customer code of practice (COP), or an industry standard, for example the British Retail Consortium accreditation scheme (BRC). In addition, many individual organisations have their own supplementary processes and standards of operation. As a result of the various rules, regulations and risks most food manufacturers would naturally restrict the access granted to their facilities to anybody other than employers, customers, and other key stakeholders.

Third, as discussed in chapter three, work in food factories has intensified (Rogaly 2008) and conditions have become worst because of efficiency savings and associated monitoring and surveillance (Geddes and Scott 2012). Due to the likely impact that such negative changes may have on workers – who may subsequently be keen to be share their views - then once again it was unsurprising that food factory managers were reluctant to open their doors to me and risk airing their dirty linen in public.

Finally, the nature of my research required permission from, and access to, both the host site and the third-party labour provider. As a result, locating a

suitable field site and obtaining such a dual agreement would, I suspected, be doubly difficult.

In total I approached sixteen food manufacturing businesses within 50 miles of where I lived in the East Midlands, all of which satisfied my earlier three-point criteria for a critical case. Of these businesses, ten decided that my project was of no interest to them. Upon closer examination, I decided that a further three businesses were unsuitable due to their requirement for low numbers of agency workers. A further two host sites did declare an interest in my research, however, the third-party labour providers at each site were unwilling to commit to a start date.

One site, FoodCo, satisfied the necessary three-point criteria and, fortunately for me, I shared a mutual acquaintance with the General Manager (GM), who was able to vouch for my endeavours as honest and genuine. At two positive meetings, one with the GM of FoodCo and one with the Regional Manager of FoodCo's temporary labour provider, AgencyCo, I explained both the objectives of my research and the access that I required. The research ethics confirmation of approval from the University of Nottingham and the information for participants, were presented and discussed at both meetings, and both managers were happy to proceed (see appendix C for copies of this documentation).

As a result of these two meetings, approval for my period of work as a temporary agency worker at the FoodCo site was granted by both FoodCo and AgencyCo. Before starting work, I was required to liaise with the site based AgencyCo management team, located at the FoodCo site, to arrange for my registration with AgencyCo, which would enable me to join the temporary labour pool (see section 5.2.1).

4.3.3 Ethics

In this section I will discuss the ethical approaches which informed my actions as a researcher, the procedures which were required to obtain ethical

approval for this study, and the ethical standards which were maintained during the fieldwork.

Ethical theory, at its most basic, is 'concerned with the identification of what is 'good' and it's just and fair distribution' (Legge 2006: 301) and as a researcher it was necessary for me to consider the ethical approaches that were appropriate for my study. In this section I will highlight how a variety of approaches to ethics was applied both before, and throughout, this study.

Social research ethics are characterized in terms of the stances they take, and various stances can be distinguished (Bryman 2016). For instance, a universalist stance takes the view that ethical precepts should never be broken. In this respect, the bureaucratic approach required by the University towards required ethical procedures is one of universalism, that is, applied to all cases regardless of the context.

The process of gaining ethical approval was completed through the University of Nottingham Business School and, in accordance with guidance from the University of Nottingham, all identifiable data was stored securely.

As part of the ethics application process, the relevant documentation was completed and can be viewed in the appendices (see appendix C1.1: research ethics confirmation of approval; appendix C1.2: research ethics review checklist; appendix C1.3: information for research participants – ethnography; appendix C1.4: information for research participants – interviews).

During my earlier meetings with FoodCo and Agency Co, where approval for the fieldwork was granted, I explained the ethical procedures required by the University of Nottingham and provided copies of the relevant documentation, including the research ethics confirmation of approval (see appendix C).

During these meetings we also agreed that my introduction to both FoodCo and AgencyCo would be low key and in this regard, there was no announcement of my arrival. This was to limit any disruption to either FoodCo or AgencyCo, whilst also supporting my desire to discreetly assimilate onto

the FoodCo shop floor as a temporary agency worker. However, from an ethical point of view, my meaning of low key requires some clarification.

To clarify what was intended as low key I refer to Hammersley and Atkinson's explanation of 'field roles' (2007: 79). The typology of these roles suggests a range from complete participant (ethnographers' activities are wholly concealed) to complete observer (participants' perspectives are inferred) and it was clearly necessary to ensure that my approach was both 'ethically defensible and ethnographically productive' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 86).

The primary field role I assumed as a temporary agency worker at FoodCo can best be regarded as participant-as-observer. By adopting this primarily inside role I mucked in, undertook the same intensive jobs, and worked the same long hours as all the other temporary agency workers. I was also happy to discuss what I did outside of work which included talking about my studies.

This approach was helpful for three reasons. First, the role of participant-as-observer satisfied my requirement to become immersed in the field to really understand the lived experiences of temporary agency workers at the site. Second, by being seen to be fully participating in the work, I was assimilated into the daily consciousness of the workers as just part of the furniture, which gave me confidence that the people around me were going about their normal daily business. Third, I was not being deceptive towards my co-workers as I was happy to discuss that I was a student at the University of Nottingham researching temporary work in food factories. In this sense I was not holding back information or manipulating my co-workers which I would have regarded as using them as a means to an end. As such, during this aspect of my fieldwork I argue that I took a deontological ethical approach, aligned to Kant's Categorical Imperative, to respect rational beings as ends in themselves.

Subsequently, some workers at FoodCo did ask me about my studies, but only fleetingly, as either the unrelenting factory work prevented time for lengthier discussions, or the nature of my studies was of no particular interest to them.

The semi structured interviews presented a conflict of ethical approaches. Firstly, as each interviewee was provided with a copy of the information for research participants (see appendix C1.4), then from a deontological point of view, by providing information to interviewees prior to each interview, and obtaining consent, this approach was ethically right. However, none of the interviewees seemed particularly interested in this information, and no one expressed any concerns in answering any of my questions.

Whilst I felt that deontological considerations were necessary during my time in the field, I also felt that a consequentialist ethical approach was necessary afterwards, whilst conducting the interviews. As the purpose of the interviews was to build upon my observations in the field, and for me to understand the interviewees experiences from their perspective, it was important that the interviews provided additional meaningful data.

As I focussed my interview questions to produce rich, meaningful, insightful, and potentially controversial responses, I felt that 'the rightness of my actions was determined by their consequences' (Boatright 1995: 37) which I regard as a consequentialist ethical approach.

Additionally, by using pseudonyms for all the interviewees throughout this thesis I determined that this approach was ethically justifiable as the interviewees were safeguarded from any personal consequences as a result of their candour.

As I engaged a variety of ethical approaches, before and at different stages of my fieldwork, my overall ethical approach was situationally dependant, and is aligned with Fletcher (1966) who argued for a situation ethics approach or more specifically 'principled relativism' (p31), which can be contrasted with universalist ethics (Bryman 2016). In this respect, I adhered to a situation ethics approach throughout my fieldwork and was 'willing to make full use of

principles, to be treated as maxims but not as laws or precepts' (Fletcher 1966: 31).

In the following section I will explain how the significant amount of data, collected from the field, was handled, and analysed.

4.4 Data collection

In this section I will outline the two main approaches taken for the collection and recording of data; participant observations collected via field notes, and transcripts from recorded semi structured interviews. For both approaches I will also explain how I brought the data collection phase to a conclusion.

4.4.1 Participant Observation, field notes and leaving the field

Once registered as a temporary agency worker with AgencyCo, I was able to take my position as part of the temporary agency labour pool and was ready to begin my fieldwork at the FoodCo site (see section 5.2.1 for a detailed account of the full process required for a temporary agency worker to apply, register, and start working for AgencyCo).

Participant observation took place over a seven-month period, and I spent a total of 280 hours travelling with, taking breaks with, working alongside, and observing the interactions of temporary agency workers at FoodCo, and during this time I took copious field notes.

Interactions, in this sense, included any manner of responses, attitudes and behaviours, whether intentional, non-intentional, implied, or suggested. In this regard, my observations of the participants in the field covered many varied interactions between, and amongst, temporary agency workers and the other actors at FoodCo.

I frequently recorded field notes on my iphone, as temporary agency workers typically used mobile phones whilst travelling to and from the field site and during break times. As such, I did not appear to be behaving out of the ordinary and this act of note taking was inconspicuous.

When I was not able to use my iphone, I took jotted field notes using any other means possible. For instance, the use of mobile phones on the factory floor was forbidden, however writing down information in the factory was necessary for many jobs on the shop floor. For example, when packing bags of salad, recording product information such as date codes, or temperatures was necessary. Fortunately, this meant that paper and pens were available and writing down information (or in my case field notes) was a perfectly normal feature of shop floor life at FoodCo. This enabled me to continuously record my observations as jotted field notes 'inconspicuously written while in the field site in order to 'jog the memory' later' (Neuman 2006: 400).

After each shift, once I had returned home, I wrote up my field notes in detail, as I felt it was vitally important to detail my findings as soon as possible. I organised the notes chronologically, in an electronic file, which included observations as to how I felt during each shift. I did this to develop my reflexive awareness, further details of which are covered in section 4.6 of this chapter.

Deciding when I had obtained sufficient field data required some consideration. Not merely in terms of the quantity of data, but primarily in terms of the quality of the data, as the validity, reliability, generalisability, and replicability of data is evidently complex when conducting ethnographic research (Creswell and Miller 2000) and as an ethnographic researcher I need to demonstrate the credibility of my data (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Maxwell 1996; Merriam 1998).

Credible, in this context, refers to how accurately the account represents participants' realities of social phenomena and whether these accounts would be credible to them (Schwandt 1997). This refers not to the data collected, but to the inferences drawn from the data (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). Thick descriptions, dense, detailed accounts of contextualised people and sites also make subjective forms of research more credible to the reader

(Denzin 1989), and immersion in the field is generally regarded as a pre-requisite for a meaningful and credible ethnographic account.

A significant period of immersion in the field, seven months in the case of this study, is a way through which qualitative, subjective methods are made credible (Creswell and Miller 2000) as working alongside people day in, day out for long periods of time is considered to give ethnographic research its 'validity and vitality' (Fetterman 1989: 46).

On the contrary, it is easy to see that an insignificant period of immersion in a field site would lack credibility, an approach which Bate (1997: 1150) referred to as 'jet plane ethnography' in which fieldwork is conducted as a series of flying visits to the research site, rather than 'prolonged immersion'.

In the case of this study, my decision to leave the field was made once 'little new was being learned' (Neuman 2006: 411), which became evident as successive days in the field produced less new information from the daily interactions. In line with Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) I then left the field with 'mixed feelings, some sadness and [due to the intense work] with not a little relief' (p96).

4.4.2 Interviews, conversations and deciding when enough is enough

After my period of immersion at the FoodCo site ended I returned to the field site, two months later, and over the following five weeks I carried out a total of twenty semi structured interviews. The reason for carrying out interviews was to build upon my observations in the field, and to 'understand the actor's understandings of their life world, interpretations, meanings, and narrations' (Skinner 2014: 9).

Spradley (1979) referred to ethnographic interviews as a 'series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to

assist informants to respond as informants' (p58)[8]. Carrying out interviews *after* participant observation in the field was necessary for three primary reasons. First, as I had worked in the field, I was aware of the environment and the expectations that were placed upon the workers. Second, as I was known to most of the interviewees as a familiar face, some rapport had been established and, as a result, engaging in a type of friendly conversation was naturally more straightforward. Third, by working in the field, I became increasingly aware of those co-workers who had the potential to become interviewees.

The rationale for the selection of interviewees was based on four primary considerations. First, their ability to speak to me natively, that is in their way, using terms, phrases, meanings, descriptions, and anecdotes that made sense to them.

Second, interviewees needed to have sufficient command of English to enable me to make sense of their meanings. Based on my time in the field I knew that the levels of proficiency in English varied significantly amongst the workers and identifying those workers who would be able to express their thoughts, views, meanings, and opinions was helpful.

I did consider the use of interpreters for some of my interviews as using interpreters for three-way interviews (Temple and Young 2004) does allow researchers to access 'hidden voices' (Murray and Wynne 2001: 160), which could have been helpful for those who spoke little or no English. Murray and Wynne (2001) also suggest that it is possible that participants discussing sensitive topics in a non-native language, which in the context of my interviews was English, could diminish the quality of the account due to the extra effort that is required for thinking and speaking.

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[8] The term informant is widely used in the literature, e.g Spradley (1979), Neuman (2006), Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), Bryman (2016) to identify, and speak with, 'native speakers' who will provide 'information'. In the context of this study, the term 'informant' is interchangeable with the term 'interviewee', and 'interviewee' is the term that I use throughout this thesis.

However, I concurred with the view of Davies (2019) that the presence of interpreters alone did not guarantee more accurate data, and that there was no single correct way for interpreters to translate sentences, since they too would face a range of possible translations, which could affect the data. I therefore accepted, prior to starting the interview phase of my fieldwork, that some interviews would yield little meaningful information and that some data would inevitably be 'lost in translation' (Davies 2019: 300).

The third rationale for the selection of interviewees was the requirement for them to have been encultured, which Spradley (1979) defined as 'the natural process of learning a particular culture' (p47). In this sense, interviewees needed to have been working at the FoodCo site for a sufficient amount of time. As temporary agency work is definitively transient, and based on my own experiences, I considered the completion of a minimum of five shifts as sufficient time to become acquainted with both the processes within AgencyCo, and the work at FoodCo.

Fourth, my sample of interviewees needed to provide a representative sample of the various actors at FoodCo, based on their gender, age, ethnicity, and their position in the labour process.

The sample types of interviewees are AgencyCo temporary agency workers, FoodCo permanent employees and FoodCo Managers, as follows:

- Eleven interviewees were current temporary agency workers at FoodCo, and all eleven were migrant workers. Four of these workers were female and seven were male. Four workers were Romanian, four were Hungarian, two were Bulgarian and one was from Lithuania. Their ages ranged from 25 to 60 years old and their time in the UK ranged from less than one year to five years.
- Three interviewees were former temporary agency workers at FoodCo, who had become permanent employees of FoodCo. One of these workers was also a Supervisor (a blue hat) at FoodCo. Two of these workers were female and one was male. The females were from Pakistan and Hungary whilst the male was Lithuanian. Their ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old and their time in the UK was between three years and seven years.

- Three interviewees were permanent employees of FoodCo who had never worked as temporary agency workes. Two of these were British women aged between 45 and 55 years old, one had worked at FoodCo for five years and one had worked at FoodCo for sixteen years. The male worker was Pakistani, aged between 30 to 35 and had been employed by FoodCo for thirteen years.
- Two interviews were Shift Production Managers (white hats) at FoodCo. One manager was a white British male, aged between 40 and 45, who had worked at the site for sixteen years. The other manager was a white British female, aged between 50 and 55, who had been employed at the site for six years.
- One interview was the Operations Manager at FoodCo, who was ultimately responsible for the efficient running of the factory operations. This manager was a white British male, aged between 50 to 55 years old who had been employed at the site for nine years.

My selection of these interviewees was primarily based on two criteria. First, I sought to select interviewees who broadly represented the constituents of the FoodCo workforce. The exceptions to this were the managers, and due to their availability and willingness to participate, I was able to interview all three of the main management actors. In this regard the management actors are overrepresented.

The temporary workers and permanent employees who I interviewed were representative of my field-based observations in terms of their nationalities, gender, age range, tenure at the site and time in the UK. For instance, during my participant observation, the temporary workers I encountered at FoodCo were all migrants and primarily from Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Lithuania.

All the female workers at FoodCo – temporary and permanent – were primarily employed as packers. No females occupied stacker or jockey roles. None of the male temporary workers at FoodCo were employed primarily as packers and the majority occupied stacker or jockey roles, or after a period of approximately 12 months, both.

Additionally, those workers who had been in the UK for less than one year, and who's English speaking ability was low, were only engaged in either packing roles (females) or stacking roles (male).

The second important consideration was that each interviewee had at least an adequate grasp of English to enable us to engage in a 'friendly conversation' of the type suggested by Spradley (1979: 58). The implications of this consideration will be discussed further in my reflexive account in section 5.5. Profiles for each of the interviewees are shown below, as table 1.

Inter-view No.	Pseudonym/ type of worker/prim-ary role(s) in the labour process	Nationality	Inter-view Date	Gender/ approximate age	Years in the UK	Transcribed words/A4 pages/ minutes	Date coding on NVivo 12 completed	Reason for coming to the UK	Comments
1	Monica/ **agency 1**/ packer	Romanian	161124	Female, 35-40 years old	2 years	4.3k/18/ 24.5mins	181112	Came with husband to secure a better future for themselves and their young son	Husband has a permanent job with FoodCo
2	Tomas/ **agency 2**/ jockey & stacker	Hungarian	161124	Male, 50-55 years old	6 years	5.6k/19/ 41mins	181115	To earn money for daughter to go to university in Hungary	Worked in several factories in the UK, and for several agencies
3	Anna/ **agency 3**/ packer	Hungarian	161201	Female, 30-35 years old	<1 year	3k/12/ 27.75mins	181113	To settle here	Fabian (interview 11) is Anna's boyfriend. Low level English speaker
4	Viktor/ **agency 4**/ stacker & bowl line packer	Romanian	161208	Male, 25-30 years old	3 years	4.3k/17/ 28mins	181114	Couldn't find a job in Romania	No ties to Romania
5	Rondon/ **agency 5**/ stacker	Hungarian	161208	Male, 30-35 years old	<1 year	2.3k/15/ 20.5mins	181113	Couldn't find a job in Hungary	Parents are also in the UK, low level English speaker
6	Ferdi/ **agency 6/** stacker and jockey	Bulgarian	161208	Male, 35-40 years old	1.5 years	5.4k/42/ 36mins	190107	Couldn't find a job in Bulgaria	No ties to Bulgaria
7	Boz/ **agency 7/** stacker	Bulgarian	170110	Male, 50-55 years old	<1 year	1k/9/8mins	190103	Couldn't find a job in Bulgaria	Low level English speaker
8	Zelda/ **agency 8/** packer bowl line	Lithuanian	170110	Female, 55-60 years old	5 years	3.9k/29/ 28mins	190107	Worked at this site for 5 years	Low level English speaker
9	Max/ **agency 9/** jockey & logistic	Romanian	170111	Male, 25-30 years	1.5 years	6.1k/12/ 40mins	190107	Couldn't find a job in Romania	A Graduate Engineer, here with his wife Katya (interview 10)

10	Katya/ **agency 10/** packer	Romanian	170111	Female, 25-30 years old	1.5 years	3.8k/26/24mins	190107	Here with her husband	Max's wife (interview 9)
11	Fabian/ **agency 11/** stacker	Hungarian	170111	Male, 25-30 years old	<1 year	1.7k/14/14mins	190107	To settle here	Anna's (interview 3) boyfriend. Low level English speaker
12	Zoe/ **permanent 1/**packer	British	161124	Female, 50-55 years old	16 years at site	8.5k/24/50mins	181126	Lives locally to the site	Worked at FoodCo for 16 years
13	Micha/ **permanent 2/** packer	Pakistani	161124	Female, 20-25 years old	6 years	4.9k/14/31mins	181115	Came with her husband who is a Dr in the NHS	Ex Agency worker **(1)**
14	Vera/ **permanent 3/** packer	British	161201	Female, 45-50 years old	5 years at site	11.2/34/54.5mins	181128	Lives locally to the site	Worked at FoodCo for 5 yrs – her son used to work for FoodCo too
15	Malik/ **permanent 4/** jockey	Pakistani	170110	Male, 30-35 years old	13 years	7k/21/39.5mins	190108	Cannot drive so the company transport gets him to work from 15 miles away (picks him up from home)	His wife works for FoodCo too
16	Lucian/ **permanent 5/** jockey & team leader	Lithuanian	170111	Male, 25-30 years	7 years	5.2k/29/32mins	190109	Came to find work 7 years ago	Ex Agency worker **(2)** – now a team leader
17	Kara/ **permanent 6/** packer & QC	Hungarian	170111	Female, 25-30 years old	3 years	4k/23/25mins	190109	Couldn't find a job in Hungary	Ex Agency worker **(3)** – now works in QC
18	Camilla/ **Shift Production Manager 1**	British	161122	Female, 50-55 years old	6 years at site	5.2k/12/29.5mins	190114	Came to work at FoodCo for more money	Shift Manager
19	Noel/ **Shift Production Manager 2**	British	161124	Male, 40-45 years old	16 years at site	9.3k/21/46mins	190114	Started as a Production Operative and has worked his way up to Shift Manager	Shift Manager
20	Owen/ **Operations Manager**	British	170119	Male, 50-55 years old	9 years at site	6.1k/28/35mins	191914	Has worked as a manager in several other factories before joining FoodCo	Used to run the Logistics Department at FoodCo

Table 1: Profiles for each of the interviewees

A copy of the interview guide for the semi structured interviews is attached as appendix D.1.1.

Each interview was recorded using my iphone, which I felt was less obtrusive

than using a dictaphone, and the required ethical considerations, discussed in

section 4.3.3 were observed prior to, and during, each interview (please also refer to appendix C1.4, information for research participants – interviews).

I concluded that the best approach to take would be to carry out as many interviews, of my representative sample types, that were necessary to achieve saturation, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as when 'he [the researcher] sees similar instances over and over again….. the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated' (p61). However, deciding when saturation had been reached did require due consideration, as outlined by Saunders et al (2018) who highlight 'the uncertain logic underlying saturation— as essentially a predictive statement about the unobserved based on the observed' (p1893).

In this regard, two key reasons became evident as to why the interview stage of my fieldwork was drawing to an end. First, as the number of interviews progressed 'no additional data were being found where I could develop properties of the category' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 61) and secondly, it was at this point that the availability of potential interviewees with a sufficient command of English also started to dry up.

An electronic copy of each recorded interview was sent to a third-party transcription service, and upon return, I checked each transcript for obvious errors. In the section that follows I will explain how I organised my data, and how I developed an analytic framework to help structure, interpret and analyse the data contained within the field notes and the transcripts.

4.5 Data analysis

Whilst in the field, and as I started to accumulate data, I was faced with the task of reducing and structuring the data to answer my three research questions. Inevitably, the questions shifted as my fieldwork progressed. For example, the concept of workplace insecurity, from the perspective of temporary agency workers, was considered at the beginning of my fieldwork as inherent insecurity, whilst this focus shifted as temporary agency workers

demonstrated an ability to lessen the impact of their material workplace insecurity in the field setting (see chapter five).

This flexibility in approach is one of the virtues of qualitative research. Researchers can focus on the most salient features embedded in the field rather than being restricted to a set of questions (Bryman 1988). The task of refining my data and streamlining the things I would talk about was both iterative and reflexive (see section 4.6).

Although Silverman (1993) suggests that analysis is the act of getting rid of data, I wanted to ensure that the coherence of my account remained intact and that the themes which I developed in my analysis would ultimately help the reader to gain a true understanding of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers. As described in the previous section, the data I had collected was in two forms: written up notes from 280 hours of field work and transcriptions from 20 semi structured interviews. The written-up field data was electronically stored in chronological order and the completed interview transcripts were ordered and stored, again electronically, in categories (e.g., the interviews with current temporary agency workers were stored together).

As an inductive analytic approach starts with a set of empirical observations, seeking patterns in those observations, and then theorizing about those patterns, knowing where to start was a daunting prospect, as qualitative approaches to data analysis are diverse, complex, and nuanced (Holloway and Todres 2003). Holloway and Todres (2003) suggest that 'thematizing meanings is a generic skill that is shared across all qualitative analysis' (p347) whilst Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest that thematic analysis should be regarded as a foundational method for qualitative analysis as 'a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' (p78).

I considered thematic analysis as a good starting point for my process of analysis, however, as thematic analysis is an underdeveloped procedure

because 'there are few specifications of its steps or ingredients' (Bryman 2016: 584), it is important that I precisely explain the approach which I took.

In this study, a theme is a category which I have identified within my data, which I can clearly relate to the focus of my research, and the data which I accumulated throughout my fieldwork was systematically coded into themes. The themes were organised to create an order, or hierarchy, of themes.

I identified themes by actively reorganizing my data, by 'breaking the texts up into discrete chunks or segments and identifying them in accordance with an indexing or coding system' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 152). Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to codes as 'tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive information compiled during a study' (p56). In this respect coding consisted of two simultaneous activities: mechanical data reduction and analytic categorization (Neuman 2006).

To code data into themes, it was necessary for me to see patterns in the data and to progressively think in terms of concepts and systems. Pitfalls which I occasionally fell in to, previously outlined by Schwandt (1997), included 'staying at a descriptive level only [not being analytic], treating coding as purely a mechanical process and keeping codes fixed and inflexible' (p17).

To assist with the process of coding data into themes, an analytic framework was necessary to help me to organize, categorize and structure the copious amounts of field notes and interview transcripts. The analytic framework also helped me to logically think about my data, to systematically assess my data and, most importantly, to help me to understand meanings within my data.

The hierarchy of themes was developed within the analytic framework and served a practical purpose. The hierarchy of themes began with broad concepts, as primary themes which were progressively focussed into secondary themes and further lower order themes.

For my analytic framework, I incorporated the thematic coding framework function within NVivo12 software which helped me to organise and categorise

data. I opted to use NVivo software as I was already familiar with many aspects of NVivo's functionality, having used NVivo10 to assist in the organisation of the data for my MBA thesis.

My previous experience of using NVivo software to code and organise data enabled me to make the data more manageable, speeded up the process of retrieval and helped me to experiment with comparisons and analytical approaches. Retrieving data itself was a process of discovery as some of the coded data was recombined into 'new and experimental groupings' (Webb and Webb 1932: 83).

My previous experience with NVivo software also made me aware that 'no coding system could remove the necessity for me to remain sensitive to the social context of speech and action' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 153). In order words, whilst I regarded NVivo software as a valuable aid for the organization of my data, I did not lose sight of the fact that it would be me, and not the software, that did the analysis.

The initial approach to coding was as a sequential examination of the data, as gathered in the field, as a first pass. Inevitably, the first pass provided a proliferation of codes which I then condensed into 'preliminary analytic categories' (Neuman 2006: 461). I conceptualized these categories as primary themes, and these themes were at the top of the hierarchy of themes.

One example of a primary theme, shown in my analytical framework is *attitudes* (see figure 1). The first pass approach to coding, as a form of 'open coding' (Neuman 2006: 461), was applied to all of my accumulated data.

Figure 1: <u>An extract of the analytical framework – first pass to identify primary themes</u>

Using this first pass approach, I was not too concerned about making connections amongst themes or elaborating the concepts that the themes represented, as this pass was focussed on the actual data. Furthermore, I considered this process of coding and analysis as an active role as I identified and selected patterns and themes which were of interest, rather than a passive role with themes emerging from the data (Taylor and Ussher 2001).

A second pass through the data took place which focussed on the primary themes (e.g., attitudes). In this pass I was concerned with reviewing, and examining, primary themes to identify analytical connections and to establish key concepts. During this pass, which was a form of 'axial coding' (Neuman 2006: 462), I started to establish how codes related to each other as 'part of a governing structure' (Miles and Huberman 1994: 62).

Coding during this second pass was iterative, and flexible, as primary themes and codes were critiqued, re-evaluated, combined, created, or repositioned to become lower-order themes. For instance, *misbehaviour* was originally coded as a primary theme but was repositioned during the second pass to a secondary theme, with *resistance* as the replacement primary theme (see figure 2).

Figure 2: <u>An extract of the analytical framework – second pass to re-assign themes</u>

Similarly, the primary theme of *attitudes* was re-coded in the second pass. In this pass, *attitudes* was refined and re-coded as a selection of secondary themes, as follows (see figure 3):

- *neg agy* (an abbreviation for negative temporary agency worker attitudes)
- *neg perm* (an abbreviation for negative permanent worker attitudes)
- *neg superv* (an abbreviation for negative supervisor attitudes)
- *pos agy* (an abbreviation for positive temporary agency worker attitudes)
- *pos perm* (an abbreviation for positive permanent worker attitudes)
- *pos superv* (an abbreviation for positive supervisor attitudes)

Figure 3: <u>An extract of the analytical framework – identification of secondary themes</u>

Furthermore, secondary themes, e.g., *neg agy* (negative temporary agency worker attitudes) were refined further to produce tertiary themes (see figure 4) such as *negative temporary agency worker attitudes towards excessive working hours* (abbreviated on the framework as *tow excess hrs*), *negative temporary agency worker attitudes towards working at FoodCo* (abbreviated on the framework as *tow factory*), and *negative temporary agency worker attitudes towards their home country* (abbreviated on the framework as *tow their home coun*).

Figure 4: <u>An extract of the analytical framework – identification of tertiary themes</u>

During the second pass, causes, consequences, conditions, and interactions were sought, along with clusters of categories and concepts. For example, the connection between *negative attitudes* and *misbehaviour* was established in the second pass. The second pass also enabled me to search for themes as repetitions, indigenous typologies (unfamiliar local expressions), metaphors or analogies, similarities, and differences, as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003). Importantly, I was not only looking for consistencies within my data, but I was also looking for where my data differed, and why.

Consistent with ethnographic coding, some data was assigned to more than one, or multiple, themes. For instance, data related to a temporary worker who was constantly allocated the hardest jobs was assigned to themes of both *intensity* and *fairness*.

Coding during the second pass was varied and included individual words, or sentences, or paragraphs. Some codes are verbatim quotes, some codes are based on feelings and some codes are purely observational and contextual. The important aspect was that the 'codes were related to one another in coherent, study-important ways' (Miles and Huberman 1994: 62).

As a result of this iterative coding process, the analytic framework was continually developed, enabling me to examine how the themes related to each other, what the implications were, and how the themes related to the literature. At this stage of the analytic process, the data became increasingly insightful, as connections between the themes were established and conceptualized.

The final pass through the data was selective coding and involved scanning all of the data and previous codes, to 'look selectively for cases that illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts' (Neuman 2006: 464).

At this stage in the coding process, I was iterating between my research questions, the refined data, and the literature (chapter three), in order to inform the potential contributions from my study. As a result, this final pass was, in effect, a series of final passes.

In the data chapters which follow (five, six and seven) I will present these contributions.

Before I present the first of these chapters, I now provide a detailed review of the approaches which I have considered throughout the research process, to deal with a variety of reflexive challenges.

4.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is concerned with a conscious process of review, but reflexivity is not the same as reflection. Whilst reflection suggests a mirror image which affords the opportunity to engage in an observation or examination of our ways of doing, or observing our own practice, reflexivity is more complex, involving thinking about our experiences and questioning our ways of doing (Hibbert et al 2010).

Although the term reflexivity is widely used in organizational research, the significance of reflexivity has increased as qualitative research methods in social science have become more prominent (Haynes 2012). For example, although Gold (1958) believed that 'every field role is at once a social

interaction device for securing information for scientific purposes and a set of behaviours in which an observer's self is involved' (p218), Gold stopped short of presenting this as a matter for undue concern. According to Weick (1999), it was not until the 1970's that management researchers started to think about their thinking, and reflexivity is often considered as a process by which research turns back and takes account of itself (Weick 2002; Alvesson et al 2008; Haynes 2012).

As I was situated in the research (Denzin and Lincoln 1994), it was important that I considered how my presence influenced my findings. My interpretive approach acknowledged that my background, position, and emotions were an integral part of the process of producing data, and that during the 'coming together of the researcher and the study participant each will have reacted to the other, and each will therefore have contributed to the co-construction of reality' (Hennink 2011: 19). As a result of this coming together it was necessary for me to be reflexive and to understand the implications for this study.

I have held management posts in many of the food factories that I have worked in, and distancing myself from a managerialist, top-down background was a recurring challenge for me, particularly as this ethnographic study is focussed on understanding the view from below. Specifically, I considered four areas in which my involvement in the research process had the potential to 'affect the research approach or outcomes' (Haynes 2012: 72).

My first reflexive consideration was my age and ethnicity. As a 46-year-old white, English male I did not look like a fellow FoodCo temporary agency worker, despite my best efforts in terms of attire. The majority of the temporary agency workers at FoodCo were migrants from Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Lithuania. Most of the male agency workers were also under 35 years of age.

Being regarded as an 'outsider' is an issue which is often associated with ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 86). As I may have looked different, and to counter the potential impact this difference could have on my research findings, I decided that the best approach was to behave as much like my co-workers as possible.

Even though I approached the role of a temporary agency worker with an honest endeavour to fit in, there were inevitably occasions when my presence might have impacted my research findings. The following extract of an interview between me (P) and Vera (V) illustrates this point.

I had worked alongside Vera, a packer, who was a permanent employee at FoodCo, during my time as a temporary agency worker. This interview was conducted two months after I had ended my period of temporary agency work at the site and illustrates how my personal characteristics could have potentially affected the research situation:

> V=you were very unusual, especially for here
> P=in what way did you think I was unusual?
> V=more like an office worker.
> P=Really?
> V=Yes, straight away I was like, somethin's odd here
> P=Is that before I'd even spoken to you?
> V=Even before you opened your mouth.
> P=Just by looking at me?
> V=Yeah
> P=And what was it that made me stand out as being 'unlike' an agency worker?
> V=Because you don't look like a manual worker.
> P=And what is that based on?
> V=Just your looks, it must be just based on your looks, cause that's all we was doin', basin' it on your looks. You just don't look like an agency worker, but at least you got stuck in, so it didn't matter to us
>
> Interview number 14, Vera, FoodCo permanent worker

My willingness to *get stuck in,* as Vera suggested, worked in my favour to dispel any major concerns regarding my outsider status, as easing their load seemed to help Vera move beyond how I looked.

My second reflexive consideration was my familiarity with food factories. As I have worked in over fifteen factories the UK food industry since 1984, my study of temporary agency workers in a UK food factory was in familiar surroundings. This had the potential to be problematic as my subjects may 'believe my background has already taught me the answers to my own questions' (Spradley 1979: 50). Additionally, there was a risk that my subjects might feel that I was 'asking dumb questions to test them in some way' (p51).

I countered this issue of cultural familiarity with food factories in two ways. First, for me to understand the lived experiences of temporary agency workers, I took on a role that was new to me, that of a temporary agency worker. As previously explained, I embraced this role and applied myself to do this role to the best of my ability, or more specifically, to the best of the abilities that I observed in the field. In other words, I wanted to work as hard, or as little, as evidenced by my temporary agency co-workers. In essence, I wanted to avoid standing out, and I wanted to be seen as a temporary agency worker. Secondly, by embracing the role of a temporary agency worker I increased my chances of being regarded as authentic, which I felt would enable my co-workers to be as honest and open towards me, as possible.

In essence, as my intention in this study is to write about my understandings as I learnt the ropes of being a temporary agency worker at FoodCo, then the ethnography I have written 'is more or less true to the extent to which its reader would, in principle, be informed to cope in settings like the one described and analysed' (Watson 2011: 209).

As an experienced manager in the UK food industry, my third reflexive consideration, before and during my fieldwork, was potential biases because of my previous professional experiences. I have held senior roles in several of

the food factories I have worked in, including roles of Site Director, Operations Manager, Operations Director and General Manager, and for the last eight years I have been engaged on either a Consultancy or Interim Management basis. All the food factories to which I have been assigned have had clear challenges. For instance, most sites fail to achieve their cost budgets, due to high levels of production waste and excessive labour costs. Some sites have also experienced problems with product quality and deteriorating customer relationships. The expected approach from an experienced Interim Manager in this type of situation is to look for common root causes, and to propose – and implement – speedy improvement plans.

As an Interim Manager, making quick, generic assessments to common factory issues is a natural approach and is favourable to generate factory awareness, focus attention and to build momentum. However, as a researcher seeking meanings from the perspectives of others, when looking for connections, nuances, and patterns of behaviour, such a broad-brush approach would likely yield little meaningful data. My approach and focus as a researcher were therefore necessarily different to my approach as a practicing, fast-acting manager.

Many of the sites I have worked at have had more than 50% of their factory workforce as temporary agency workers. The agency jobs have typically been repetitive and mundane, and most of the agency workers have been migrants with low levels of English. As this situation has been the norm in many of my previous workplaces, at FoodCo I did initially make some assumptions that many migrant agency workers would not be able to understand me, nor me understand them. In reality, English speaking competency did vary considerably amongst the workers, but by me speaking slowly, and improving my gestures and my body language, many workers could understand me, and by listening more intently, I could better understand them. However, some rich potential sources of data remained untapped, as many of the temporary agency workers could not speak any English whatsoever.

In my career I have also worked with many different providers of temporary agency labour. In previous roles as a Shift Manager and Production Manager, I have placed orders for temporary agency workers to work on my shifts and in production departments that I was responsible for. When ordering temporary agency workers at no time did I pay any regard to anything other than my need for a worker to be capable to do the job which I needed them to do.

On some occasions I ordered agency workers, and after only a couple of hours, due to equipment breakdowns, I asked them to go home. I understood that the workers would only get paid for the hours they were required, but my job was to run the shift (or department) as cost effectively as possible. Reducing labour costs has been a constant theme throughout my time working in, and running, food factories, and shedding agency labour was the first cost saving measure.

In some food factories I have worked at, temporary agency workers, even when they have formed most of the factory workforce, have been regarded as secondary to the permanent employees. On one occasion, at a sandwich factory, temporary agency workers were assigned a number, for ease, and not called by their first names. In many factories team briefings were carried out, but agency workers were excluded.

In the food industry, typical jobs for agency workers are those which require the least training, carry the least responsibility, and can be shed (or increased) at short notice should production levels decrease (or increase). In the sandwich factory, a typical job for a temporary agency worker, on a 12-hour shift, would be placing cucumber neatly, in the upper left corner, onto a slice of bread.

As a Shift Manager, if a temporary agency worker presented me with a problem, for instance if a worker was not able to keep up on a production line, then I would inform a site-based agency co-ordinator, who would then come and deal with the problem worker. In my experience, temporary agency workers are not regarded as team members, but are engaged merely as a

source of lowest cost, flexible labour, and to make up the numbers. I have encountered temporary agency workers in all the factories that I have worked at, and no value has been placed on their experiences, even though they represented a significant part of the overall factory workforce. From a reflexive point of point, in this study, I needed to understand their perspectives, and move beyond regarding agency workers as just there to make up the numbers.

Overall, to cope with my cultural familiarity with food factories, and my managerialist background, I once again refer to Burr (2015) as I endeavoured to take 'a critical stance toward [my] taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world [and myself]' (p2).

My fourth reflexive consideration was my ethnographic research approach. In ethnography, a common theme is the notion of sharing, involvement, and a participative approach (Kluckhohn 1940; Whyte 1979; Watson 2011) and from a reflexive point of view, ethnographic work tends to be problematic (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Hodson (1998) asserts that 'ethnographers pick sites that match their substantive and theoretical interests, as well as on the basis of access and convenience' (p1185), whilst Nandhakumar and Jones (1997) believe that 'whatever is chosen will inevitably reflect the researchers own biases' (p126). Watson (2000) also believes that 'human observers inevitably talk or write about a reality which is their own construction' (p501).

From a practical point of view, Haynes (2014) suggests several strategies for reflexive awareness, which I felt was useful as a novice researcher embarking on significant field-based research. Such strategies include writing down theoretical assumptions and presuppositions about the subject of the research and revisiting these throughout the research process, noting how they may have shifted, and considering if or how the research questions required revision. Other practical approaches include keeping the research diary up to date and noting down thoughts and feelings about the research

process; keeping fieldwork notes of observations, interactions, incidents, conversations, emotions, and responses; listening to the recorded interviews and noting how my presence, or interaction as the researcher, affected the process.

In assessing how to deal with several reflexive challenges throughout my fieldwork, I also referred to a study carried out by Synnes (2015) which revealed how preconceived notions regarding fieldwork can overshadow the potential offered by so-called 'lighter narratives'(p172).

Synnes, in her gerontological work which examined the narratives of seriously ill patients, candidly explains challenges which she faced with reflexivity. Of relevance to my own examination of reflexivity whilst carrying out qualitative fieldwork, Synnes (2015) explains how she came to understand during her own analysis that she was initially prejudiced towards narratives which concerned the patient's illnesses, so-called 'real' narratives' (p172). Real narratives in my case were my initial assumptions, based on my managerialist background, that temporary agency workers were all insecure and simply accepted a bad situation, and that all migrant temporary agency workers carrying out poorly paid and mundane work would have poor English skills.

For Synnes (2015), the severity of the patient's health was clearly a major consideration overall, however the patients themselves were more inclined to steer towards narratives of a lighter nature. Such lighter narratives provided by the patients were more concerned with nostalgia and reminiscence, as opposed to stories of their present health. An example of a lighter narrative from my study was the willingness of temporary agency workers to talk to me about how they mischievously use subtle techniques to secure respite from the intense work at FoodCo (see chapter seven). This view from below contrasted starkly with my top-down assumptions.

In my study, seeking lighter narratives also helped to explain the whole of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers as they seek work, experience work, and experience complex relationships whilst at work.

My experience of remaining reflexive during this study is congruent with Alvesson's (2003) view of reflexivity, which 'stands for conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single favoured angle and vocabulary' (p25).

Having considered a number of reflexive concerns that my involvement, as a researcher, may potentially impact the credibility of my findings, then I am drawn once again towards the purpose of my study, which is not to offer an absolute version of events. In line with Watson (2011) the ethnography I write will be intended to be 'more or less true to the extent to which its reader would in principle, be informed to cope in settings like the one described and analysed' (p209).

As a qualitative researcher interested in processes of social construction to understand 'how things work', I have endeavoured to present my own interpretation without denying that there are realities which existed in the field site 'independently of the way they are observed or interpreted' (Watson 2011: 208). My aim, therefore, is to present an organizational ethnography which is concerned with creating systematic generalizations about 'how the world works', in relation to temporary agency workers view from below.

The data chapters of this thesis - chapters five, six and seven - now follow and to construct a coherent account, I have arranged the three data chapters sequentially.

Chapter five is the start of the journey for temporary agency workers as they initially seek work, and then aim to maintain work, Chapter six charts the progress of temporary agency workers as they set about doing the work which they have found, and Chapter seven moves the story on to explain temporary agency workers experiences whilst at work.

Reflexive awareness also extends to ethnographic writing, and the writing of this thesis has therefore endeavoured to 'take account of the audience for the finished textual product' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 201). In writing the three data chapters I have drawn on experiential, contextual information

drawn from the field as well as the narrative accounts of the participants, interviewees, and my own reflexive diary.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stressed the importance of narratives and suggested that the 'transformation of materials from 'field' to 'text' is partly explained by means of the narrative construction of everyday life' believing that 'the ethnographer needs to recognise the crafts of storytelling and learn to develop them critically' (p199), whilst Richardson (1990) also believed that the narrative was an invaluable tool for ethnographers.

Data extracts, used in the three data chapters which follow, are wide-ranging but relevant, and to ensure that the context of the individual extracts is not missed, some are lengthy.

I make use of field notes throughout the three chapters in two general ways, either to describe physical settings or to describe interaction. Such use is intended to allow the reader to get a clearer picture of the scene and to allow them to judge for themselves whether the interpretation placed on such findings seems reasonable. In this way, field notes are used as suggested by Becker et al (1961). Furthermore, my field notes were written up on the same day as they had been observed, in order to achieve an immediacy that could otherwise be lost if written up later, as 'an author's post hoc interpretation and analysis adds to the layers through which any observational data is filtered' (Sampson 2013: 9).

The exact source of the data is highlighted following each data extract and this is done, as outlined previously, with the use of pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity.

Chapter five, which examines precarious work and the types, and degrees, of employment insecurity for temporary agency workers at FoodCo, now follows.

5.0 'Work Tomorrow?'

5.1 <u>Introduction</u>

This is the first of three data chapters which provide an analysis of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers at a fresh food factory in the UK.

This chapter consists of three sections and examines temporary agency workers' experiences of employment insecurity, as they seek work and then aim to maintain work. First, I outline the experiences of temporary agency workers as they undergo the AgencyCo recruitment process. Second, I provide insights as to how temporary agency workers deal with their employment insecurity. In this section I will also explain how permanent employees are indirectly impacted by temporary agency worker experiences of employment insecurity. Third, the temporary agency workers in this study are all situated within the same workplace, carrying out similar jobs, but their sense of insecurity varies. In this final section I examine how some temporary agency workers view their work as a more secure experience, primarily by exerting individual agency to help mitigate the impact of job insecurity and, to a lesser extent, by reframing their lack of work as a secure situation.

5.2 <u>Getting on board</u>

This section highlights why temporary workers are attracted to AgencyCo, and how the AgencyCo recruitment process is geared towards those agency workers who may find work harder to secure elsewhere.

AgencyCo has been the sole provider of agency labour to FoodCo for over two years and has the use of several offices at the FoodCo factory site. The work provided by AgencyCo is paid in line with the National Minimum Wage (NMW), and a detailed description of the types of jobs which are carried out by temporary agency workers at FoodCo was provided in chapter four (section 4.2.3).

FoodCo is located close to several motorways and is surrounded by large distribution centres, many of which offer low-skilled temporary agency work

which compete for the same pool of labour. As the FoodCo factory is in an industrial area, which is not served by public transport, FoodCo provide permanent employees with free transport to and from work, with collections from their homes. To comply with the Agency Workers Regulations (AWR) 2010 (see appendix A1.2), FoodCo are required to offer the same basic working conditions to agency workers, which also includes free transport. However, there is a key distinction. Whilst permanent workers are picked up from their homes, agency workers must find their way to one of two collection points to catch the bus to FoodCo, and for some this may mean walking up to thirty minutes to the designated bus stop. Despite this, the offer of free transport remains a particular benefit to these temporary workers:

> And don't drive either, getting licence is errrrm difficult, is hard. And I go to any bus collection, anywhere, give me job, just I don't have a car yeah, here have a bus… transport means work
>
> Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think it's good … everything is fine, I have transport to here, so I have work
>
> Ferdi, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

The offer of free transport is attractive to many temporary workers and is a key reason why temporary workers seek work with AgencyCo.

5.2.1 Joining the club and catching the bus

AgencyCo uses a variety of platforms to advertise vacancies at FoodCo including popular jobsites and facebook. Word-of-mouth is effective and attracts workers who have no personal means of transport. All applicants are

invited to the FoodCo site for an interview and to undertake the selection process.

The selection process includes checks on an individual's right to work in the UK and confirmation of identification, usually a passport. Two reference checks from previous employment are also required. In addition to identification and verification checks, testing for acceptable levels of English comprehension is a requirement of FoodCo as during a working day most workers are required to complete production records and various other pieces of factory paperwork. FoodCo also require all workers to be able to follow site rules to comply with legal, customer, business, and other requirements and such rules include adhering to health and safety requirements, food safety and quality standards.

The tests for prospective new recruits include spoken English, during the interview, and English comprehension in the form of answering a basic English multiple choice-type test. FoodCo also require applicants to be able to read and write basic English. AgencyCo complete this selection process, as required by FoodCo, and compromises are made:

> Yeah, [the English comprehension tests at AgencyCo] it is very easy. It has just six or seven questions. And that's all. But A2 AgyCo [a local competing agency] have too much, many questions. When you go to induction as well. Maybe 20 or 25 questions
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

> I errr have, have my friend do test for me
>
> Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> I know for a fact they [AgencyCo] don't have proper English tests.
> Cause when my son joined the agency a couple of years ago to work
> here there was a couple that was doin' it with him and they
> [AgencyCo] was helpin' em
>
> Vera, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

The ease with which applicants pass tests to become temporary workers at FoodCo is further illustrated by Zelda, who took her daughter along to her interview:

> I go with my daughter, my daughter speak good English and she do my
> test and the AgencyCo first call to my daughter, 'your mamma start
> work' and my daughter call me, 'mamma you go work!'
>
> Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

As these accounts illustrate, temporary agency workers with very low levels of English pass the tests. The benefits of free transport and a minimal requirement for English skills provides a steady stream of potential workers for AgencyCo.

Once candidates have been interviewed and tested by AgencyCo, a short induction session follows during which the important site rules are explained to the new recruits. All new recruits are required to complete this induction session before starting work. As I had successfully passed the interview and testing process, I also completed an induction session. The induction session was attended by six new recruits, including me, and we each completed various documents confirming our acceptance of the various rules of the site. We were also asked to sign an opt out form, without any explanation, signalling our preparedness to work beyond the 48 hour per week limit of the

working time directive. Finally, we watched a video showing the inside of the factory confirming some of the factory rules, which included what to do in the event of a fire.

Throughout the induction session, it was clear that my five new co-workers were working together to complete their paperwork, and that their general understanding of what was expected of them was low.

The induction session is intended to ensure that all new workers understand the factory rules, however this is not always the case:

> Well when I came to FoodCo I just had an induction, yeah. I didn't understand the induction because I didn't speak English very well that time, I'm just look at the pictures you know and the lady … I remember she was speaking about the things what's happening here but I didn't understand anything
>
> Kara, ex temporary agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker, Hungary

Not understanding factory rules, as in the case of Kara, leads to problems in the factory. For example, not only do temporary agency workers fail to complete key aspects of their own jobs, such as factory paperwork, but there is also the potential for others to be impacted too. For instance, if temporary agency workers do not understand or recognise specific safety or quality issues, these situations go undetected to the detriment of co-workers and FoodCo customers.

Temporary workers who have been recruited, registered, and inducted by AgencyCo, are available for work and are added to the pool of available. Once the recruitment process is complete the priority for all temporary agency workers is to start work at FoodCo.

Each afternoon, once the following day's labour requirements have been determined by FoodCo, and communicated to AgencyCo, the AgencyCo co-ordinator Andrea starts to contact temporary agency workers. Who is contacted is at the discretion of Andrea.

Text messaging, as illustrated in figure 5, is the main method for confirming to temporary agency workers that they are required to *work tomorrow* and the message includes details of the bus pick-up time, the time required to be on the shop floor and the shift start time.
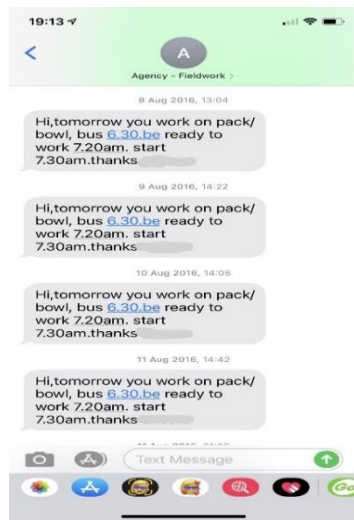
Figure 5: <u>Text message confirmation of work tomorrow?</u>

All temporary agency workers are driven to FoodCo on one of the AgencyCo minibuses, which AgencyCo contract locally. The buses pick up at two well-known town centre shops, within proximity to low-cost housing, popular with migrant workers.

Andrea travels on the front seat of one of the buses that takes temporary agency workers to the FoodCo site and registers their arrival at site. Once the bus arrives at FoodCo, the temporary agency workers disembark and as they file past Andrea, she asks some temporary agency workers if they want to *'work tomorrow?'*. Being asked to *work tomorrow* brought a sense of relief to the temporary agency workers, as they literally only worked day-to-day.

This section has examined why temporary agency workers are attracted to work for AgencyCo and has outlined the experiences of temporary agency workers as they undergo the recruitment process. The following section will now examine how temporary agency workers experience, and deal with, their precarious and insecure employment situation.

5.3 <u>Employment insecurity for temporary agency workers</u>

In chapter two, section 2.3.2, I highlighted that the literature distinguishes various forms of work-related insecurity. I conceptualize the term employment insecurity to reflect those concepts of insecurity that are directly related to employment, with work insecurity and job insecurity the dominant forms in the literature. This section will now draw on these concepts and present insights as to how temporary agency workers deal with their employment insecurity.

Although the main focus of this thesis is an examination of how employment insecurity impacts temporary agency workers, I will also explain how permanent employees of FoodCo are affected too.

5.3.1 <u>'Work tomorrow?'</u>

FoodCo regularly experiences significant fluctuations in demand for their salad products. For instance, if the weather is good, orders and production volumes increase. Grocery retailers also amend their orders based on other factors, such as promotions. In some cases, products must be made before orders are received from retailers, and so production requirements are based on forecasted volumes, which may require further adjustment once orders are received. Any fluctuation in production demand at FoodCo immediately impacts AgencyCo, who must adjust their labour supply to FoodCo accordingly.

On some days, demand for agency labour at FoodCo can increase by up to 60 workers, sometimes with only several hours' notice. If AgencyCo fail to supply the required agency labour, this leads to insufficient production, leaving

orders unfulfilled and the possibility of empty supermarket shelves. Under such circumstances it is established practice for retailers to seek compensation from suppliers for loss of profit, and subsequently for agency providers, like AgencyCo, to be reprimanded by their clients (such as FoodCo). AgencyCo avoid this scenario by recruiting an abundance of temporary workers to maintain a supply of labour that exceeds demand.

Along with the provision of free transport to FoodCo, I have explained how workers with lower levels of English are attracted to AgencyCo because the recruitment process is less stringent compared to other agency providers. Such workers are aware that their lack of English limits their opportunities for employment elsewhere and these workers are at greater risk of work insecurity, as their options of alternative employment beyond AgencyCo are low.

Many temporary agency workers accept the offer of 'work tomorrow?' straightaway, whenever they are requested to work by AgencyCo, even at extremely short notice:

> If you today work, it's good, otherwise err if you not work today, no favour me next day. They [AgencyCo] will not give you hours. They like give up on you. So I work whatever they ask
>
> Dora, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> I know if I say no to work, they will not ask me again, unless they badly need me. So I have to try and say yes everytime
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Permanent workers are also aware of the work insecurity that is experienced by temporary workers, as this quote from Malik confirms:

You can, you get the feeling, you see the body language, there's a lot that are worried, those that speak less English. That's why they're the ones that are worried, they won't take a day off because, they don't want to miss out on a day, they will just constantly work, work, work, work

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Being asked to 'work tomorrow' is central in the minds of many workers. Those workers who are already on-site, and working a shift, are generally asked first, adding to the sense that being on site creates an immediate advantage. The question is asked as temporary workers disembark the bus upon arrival at FoodCo, and is anticipated by many temporary agency workers:

Andrea asks 'work tomorrow?' Everybody says yes straightaway....no thinking about it, no ifs or buts. I would even say that we are all relieved that tomorrow is already in the bag. We want these hours and this work.

Field notes, shift 9

Sometimes notification of an available shift is provided to an agency worker with less than one hour's notice, and in many cases temporary workers are desperately waiting to be asked to work:

Lot of tension, everytime we waiting for a text or a call

Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

On occasions when temporary workers are unable to *work tomorrow*, the implied threat is that future opportunities may be limited, and provides further evidence of one-sided flexibility:

> They expect you to say yes, if they give you work, if sometime you have a problem you said no, they, next time not call you yeah.
>
> Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

> See this is another thing that I feel sorry about the agency people, when it's a busy period they don't let them have a day off, the agency group or whoever does it. And I speak to em and they say we work six days a week, we have to because if we take a day off, they say ok don't bother coming the next day then
>
> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

In periods of sustained high demand many workers are asked to work every day, which ultimately does result in some workers needing to decline the offer of work:

> But sometimes the pressure is on for me to work the sixth day and I say that I can't but I'm forced to. And when I say that I can't then I won't get called again for any other hours. The pressure can be unbearable. I have to say yes. What can I do in this cold land, I can't speak, I can't understand nothing
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

We are told 'work tomorrow?', we are told 'work tomorrow?'. But if I say no…I get asked 'why?', because I need one day to relax!

Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

Errrr onetime, I said sorry, going to, dentist, and one time I'm, errr need to register new home, yeah? And, and one time I need the fucking bank, so need day off. Yeah! Yeah! But they [AgencyCo] don't like that

Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

If I'm sick I may not get called again. I think that we are treated like slaves, we're expected to work 12 hours, we are expected to work all of the time

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

These accounts illustrate how temporary agency workers are regularly subjected to considerable pressure from AgencyCo, who are themselves under pressure to ensure sufficient labour is provided to FoodCo.

Up to this point we can see how AgencyCo establish a large pool of temporary agency workers by attracting and recruiting workers who speak little English and who have limited transport options. AgencyCo exert one-sided flexibility and pressurise agency workers to accept work at FoodCo whenever it is offered, with an assumed threat to workers that failure to accept work may result in fewer opportunities for work in the future. As many temporary agency workers at FoodCo have limited opportunities to work elsewhere, these workers have an increased risk of work insecurity, which Vulkan (2012) referred to as the relative ability to secure a replacement job. The following

accounts will now consider job insecurity which is widely regarded as a workers' ability to keep a job.

In times of reduced production demand, for instance in the Winter months, there is an inevitable reduction in the amount of temporary labour required, and fewer working hours leads to an increased sense of job insecurity for temporary agency workers:

> With the agency you don't know in winter if you are going to work. My wife last winter only worked one shift some weeks, which is no good at all
>
> Sylvester, ex temporary agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker, husband of current temporary agency worker, Romania

> Og [AgencyCo deputy coordinator] replied, 'with winter coming it will get harder for you....the work will dry up'
>
> Field notes shift 12

> No work is no good. When I have work for 4 days a week it is good. I have money for rent, for eating. When I not have work, don't like it here because I can't pay the rent
>
> Fabian, temporary agency worker, Romania

> They give me just a few hours, a few days per week, so that is not good for me because I need to pay the rent
>
> Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

Sometimes I only got 2 days per week...very hard to survive

Field notes shift 2 (Magdalena, ex temporary agency worker, Poland)

These accounts illustrate that at times of low demand for FoodCo products, job insecurity becomes an increasing worry for temporary workers as available working hours are reduced. The consequences of reduced hours clearly results in a greater sense of concern in terms of agency workers being able to pay for basic needs such as food and rent.

This section has examined how employment insecurity, in the forms of work insecurity and job insecurity, is experienced by temporary workers. In the next section I will highlight how employment insecurity for temporary agency workers impacts upon the work experiences of permanent workers too.

5.3.2 <u>Uncertainty for permanent employees</u>

The employment insecurity experienced by temporary agency workers also causes concerns for FoodCo permanent employees:

So glad I am permanent and not agency. So I don't get sent home after only 4hrs.

Field notes shift 18 (Julie, permanent FoodCo worker, UK)

I think this is why they [FoodCo] won't take on permanents because you can't, can't do that with permanents can you really? You know, you can't ship them off and say 'oh you become permanent one day, next day you aint got a job' when you've done nothing wrong. Whereas with the agency they [FoodCo] can get rid of them and get new ones in as quick as anything

Zoe, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

This comment by Zoe highlights a sense of job insecurity on the part of permanent workers, as the perception is that additional permanent staff are not being hired as it may be easier to control labour costs by hiring, then *getting rid of*, temporary workers.

The high turnover of temporary labour also impacts the workplace experience for some permanent workers:

> Every year we're gettin' new ones [agency workers] because the other ones have sort of like been fobbed off, it's winter now, clear off, they've got to fend for themselves. And then come the summer we do get some back every year, but a lot of them, some of the good ones as well, well they don't come back, so we struggle
>
> Vera, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

The constant loss of temporary workers, both in terms of numbers, and trained individuals, ultimately seems to have a debilitating effect on the permanent staff, to the point where some suspect that the constant change is a management tactic to reduce the overall number of permanent employees in favour of an ever increasing temporary and more flexible workforce:

> It makes you wonder errrm you know because it's like are they whittling us [permanent workers] down in a way, too, so that in the end we've had enough of all these agency workers that we will personally leave ourselves. Or are they just gonna make it so bad that you just go?
>
> Zoe, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

In this section I have examined temporary agency workers experiences of employment insecurity. I have demonstrated that AgencyCo increase the workers' sense of insecurity by ensuring that the number of registered agency workers, with few alternative employment options elsewhere, exceeds the amount of work which is available. I have explained how one-sided flexibility results in compliance from temporary agency workers, who experience an insecure employment situation because of their low levels of English, competition from agency co-workers, and the ongoing risk of a drop in the requirement for temporary labour. Lower production demand is also shown to increase the sense of job insecurity for temporary workers.

Finally, I have highlighted how job insecurity not only impacts temporary agency workers, but also affects the work experiences of FoodCo permanent employees too.

The final section of this chapter will now examine responses of temporary agency workers who view their employment situation as somewhat more secure.

5.4 Temporary agency work as a secure work experience

In the following sections I will examine a variety of responses provided by temporary agency workers who view their work experiences as less insecure. Their rationale is grouped into two analytical categories. The first category is concerned with approaches that lessen the impact, or costs, of employment insecurity whilst the second category creates a different frame of meaning to a lack of work.

5.4.1 Lessening the impact of job insecurity

Temporary agency workers at AgencyCo adopt a variety of approaches to lessen the potential effects of job insecurity.

5.4.1.1 The creation of an individual reputation

For some temporary agency workers, a willingness to undertake any type of job increases opportunities for work which may be unpalatable, or unavailable, for others. Within a harsh, cold factory environment such jobs include heavy lifting, cleaning dirty equipment, and unsociable hours, for instance night shifts.

In the case of Rondon, a temporary agency worker, his preparedness to carry out almost any task helps to create a positive individual reputation with AgencyCo which reduces his sense of job insecurity. Rondon believes that his willingness increases his chances of being offered work that other temporary workers may not be prepared to undertake:

> Any jobs, no, no problem, no good or good, I don't mind if not interesting. I work here any hours
>
> Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

As AgencyCo endeavour to establish a situation whereby temporary labour supply exceeds demand, some agency workers believe that their individual reputation, gives them an advantage in terms of being asked to *work tomorrow*:

> Now, no I do not feel insecure. Yeah, he [AgencyCo] know I work very hard. He [AgencyCo] need me now!
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

> So like that. I never miss … like oversleep or something like that, every time I'm coming to work. So agency always give me work

Lucian, ex temporary agency worker, now permanent FoodCo Supervisor, Lithuania

They will bring me always on the A shift, doesn't matter if the order is small or big or I don't know. Same like permanent people. I go on the shift, I am coming always

Katya, temporary agency worker, Romania

These workers believe that by creating and enhancing their individual reputation with AgencyCo, their chances of being looked upon favourably, and given more work, is enhanced. Some temporary workers, especially those that do possess stronger English language skills, believe that their positive attitude towards work will be welcomed by other agencies should the options for work reduce at FoodCo:

AgencyCo have a lot of work. But if they no have space for me here, I am going to another agency and they … if you can speak English ok, are good worker, if you not go missing, if you not do injure yourself you know, if you not do have accident, you are finding new job. So for example if I'm going back to A2 Agy [a temporary work agency] they give me job again because I was good worker, I was hard worker, no missing, no injuries, no nothing, just I leave the job because it was very quiet and that is not good for me.

Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

5.4.1.2 <u>Making the most of busy periods</u>

Although some temporary agency workers believe that their personal attitude towards work provides them with improved opportunities for work, other workers recognise that the seasonal nature of FoodCo's product range, with a subsequent increase in temporary labour requirements during the summer months, provides a brighter outlook for continued work, which effectively increases their sense of employment security:

> Summer period, it's very, very, very easy to get agency work here. When I say easy, I mean very, very, very easy for people to get jobs here, through agency
>
> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

> Busy, busy in England, England busy jobs [in summer].
>
> Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> We had four days work, four days off in summer but from about September it gets really silent here. But we knew at that time we will get busy again. So we didn't worry about that things
>
> Kara, ex temporary agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker, Hungary

Although an increase in job security is relatively short-term, during peak demand in the summer months, this time does provide an opportunity for more work, beyond just *work tomorrow*.

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5.4.1.3 <u>The creation of networks and contacts</u>

Whilst all temporary workers who apply for a position with AgencyCo successfully pass the English competency tests to obtain work at FoodCo, even though their English skills are below those required by FoodCo, not all temporary agency workers at AgencyCo have low English skills. For example, some temporary agency workers with good English skills are attracted to FoodCo because free transport is provided.

Those temporary agency workers who can pass English tests at multiple agencies are accepted into multiple pools of available temporary labour. These temporary workers are accustomed to this transient aspect of agency work, of moving between agencies and work sites, to obtain a continuous steam of temporary work. These workers ultimately build up networks across various agencies, work types, mixes of nationalities and locations. Although overall this employment situation remains precarious, many agency workers regard this as a relatively secure situation, as the options for paid work of some kind are seemingly continuous, albeit not in one specific location or organisation. From this point of view, although job insecurity may be high, this seems to be adequately compensated for by work security:

> So, this is the kind of thing (laughing), this is proof that nobody's really bothered. Come March time you know, everywhere is busy, everywhere is looking for employees. And all the agency people know about this, because they working with different agencies or the same agencies in different warehouses or factory. They goin' around the places and they not just staying at FoodCo, maybe they come back after six months but in that six months they probably gone to two, three different places to work, maybe they liked it more there or what I don't know.

> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

This is the view from Malik, a permanent worker at FoodCo, who is employed as a line service operative at FoodCo which enables him to interact with many co-workers, both temporary and permanent. Malik's insights are substantiated by temporary workers themselves, who revealed their own lived experiences:

> AgencyCo no have a new job for me - then I call new agency, pass the tests and work there
>
> Anna, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> If they [AgencyCo] not give me work, they not give me hours here, I am looking for another job, that is the solution. My English is better now and I can pass the tests.
>
> Katya, temporary agency worker, Romania

> No problem, I go back to A2 Agy. A2 Agy very like me, I work there before, I go to A2 Agy because A2 Agy yeah call 'Zelda, please can you work today?', 'Yeah, no problem'
>
> Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

> Maybe I go where I working before
>
> Keziah, temporary agency worker, Romania

> Everywhere is available with the agency that's the thing, it's all agency work now. And as well the agency will maybe only keep 'em for three months, and they [agency workers] are not bothered that they'll only

stay there three months, 'cos then they'll come to the next place for three months, then they will go to somewhere else for three months. Agency workers don't care where they work, so long as they work somewhere

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Nadhim is a permanent FoodCo worker whose sister has benefitted from the surplus of temporary agency work, which is available to agency workers who succeed in passing the English tests at multiple agencies:

Yeah, it's just, unbelievably easy for people to get jobs through agency. My sister she, I told you, university, she goes to work couple of weeks with an agency when she feels like it because she needs to save a bit extra cash. She will always get an agency job when she wants it

Nadhim, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

There are additional benefits of multi-agency work options for some temporary agency workers. For instance, in addition to increased access to available jobs, some workers see opportunities to increase their English skills by experiencing alternative workplaces:

When FoodCo not need I work here, so what happens? I check for another job. Because for me it's no problem, I may work here ten years but tomorrow maybe FoodCo say to me not need to work here and what happens? Every new job I learning more and more and more English because I am here [in the UK] so far for only one year

Ferdi, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

The creation of broad networks and contacts also helps some agency workers find alternative work which lessens their sense of work insecurity:

> if no work tomorrow, I might help my landlord in his shop and he pay me a little money
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

> I have err, you know, I have a hobby, tattoo. Sometimes, do it, yeah. As little bit of….just so you know is black work. But I'm, I'm, I'm just do it just for my friends. And is no, big money, £50, £30.
>
> Tomas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> Sometimes, somedays, I go help my friend's car wash
>
> Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

These responses highlight opportunities which are open to some temporary workers to obtain further paid work. Although temporary agency workers remain in a precarious employment situation due to non-continuous and insecure work, a range of options do exist to mitigate this situation. In the accounts cited, the common thread that links the temporary workers is that of further insecure work. A paradox therefore exists, as some insecure temporary agency workers can find increased employment security in alternative, insecure paid jobs.

5.4.1.4 <u>Exerting individual agency</u>

In chapter three, section 3.5, I explained the dynamics of the tripartite employment relationship, between the temporary work agency, the client, and the temporary workers themselves. Temporary agency workers are in the weakest position in this relationship. However, at FoodCo, a position of strength in this relationship for AgencyCo shifts towards those temporary workers who can register at multiple agencies.

In some cases, the position of strength in the employment relationship seems to shift significantly towards the temporary workers as the transience and abundance of work, and sometimes extreme short-term nature of their assignments, effectively enables a worker to exert their individual agency to leave their assignment without any notice or meaningful consequence:

> And this is what I was trying to say, there's some people that absolutely not bothered about work here, because they know just like that they'll get work. One more agency guy came into work, he used to work here for quite a long time, he still does come in, yeah he still does come in. One day after about half an hour he disappeared, nobody know where, they were looking for him, he was on line ten. The line was stopped and he walked out. And errr I heard when he did, because his girlfriend works, she don't speak too much good English, she told me he gone to ABC Foods, he's working there. So I don't know how he got home from here, when, that same day he walked out of here he was working in ABC Foods.
>
> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Although the behaviour of this worker may have potential personal consequences for him in terms of references for future agency selection processes, it is conceivable - given that some workers are accepted by

multiple agencies - that this worker will simply not reveal this particular employment arrangement, and as a result will not be penalised for his absence. In this instance, such an approach to temporary agency work can be viewed as relatively secure as there are no real consequences for unauthorised absence, and the worker can simply move to the next available agency.

5.4.2 <u>Reframing a lack of work as a secure situation</u>

For some temporary agency workers, even when less work is available, the situation does not inevitably give rise to a sense of employment insecurity. Instead, temporary workers use this time for a variety of reasons:

> No big problems one day work in one week, one day work next week. No problem, no big problem. Yeah, my dog happy I home! And my daughter, my daughter is very happy, mamma too much working, mamma home, very good, mamma relax (laughs)
>
> Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

> That's good for me, (if no) temporary job because they leave me to finish my study.
>
> Max, temporary agency worker (also student), Romania

> I don't want a permanent job, I want to pass my driving test and become a taxi driver so I can work when I want to
>
> Balvinder, temporary agency worker, India

For some temporary agency workers, a lack of work allows some workers time to return to their homeland, albeit for some migrants the return home is only considered a short-term visit, before returning to the UK:

Why stay here and pay the rent if I'm not working, I go back in my
country for three months, then after back here again

Fabian, temporary agency worker, Romania

When it's finished here and no work, no working at FoodCo, back to
my country to see family

Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

January and February no busy, I can go home

Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

The option of going back home was advantageous to Max, however this was
not to avoid a downturn in the availability of temporary work, but in order to
take advantage of the flexibility of being an agency worker:

Yeah it was good because the temporary job let me go two months or
how long time you want to go in your country for what you want to do

Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

As can be seen from these extracts, when work becomes scarce some
temporary agency workers do not appear too concerned but rather see this
quieter time as a good opportunity to return back home, before coming back
to the UK once again to resume as a temporary agency worker.

This section has examined AgencyCo workers who do not view their
experiences of temporary work at FoodCo as a cause for concern and has

provided evidence of how some temporary agency workers lessen the impact of employment insecurity.

5.5 <u>Conclusions</u>

This first data chapter examines temporary agency workers experiences of employment insecurity as they seek work and then aim to maintain work. It comprises three sections.

First, I highlight temporary agency workers' experiences of the AgencyCo recruitment process and outline why temporary agency workers are attracted to work at FoodCo, primarily because of the benefits of free transport to work and AgencyCo's laissez-faire approach to the English testing requirements. Consequently, AgencyCo has established a large pool of workers who have limited opportunities to find work elsewhere and these workers occupy the weakest position in the tripartite employment relationship.

In the second section of this chapter I provide insights into how temporary agency workers deal with employment insecurity, especially work insecurity and job insecurity. I explain how temporary agency workers with low levels of English are at the greatest risk of work insecurity. As AgencyCo establish a supply of workers which exceeds demand, these workers experience competition from agency co-workers, face an ongoing risk of no *work tomorrow* and are subjected to one-sided flexibility. Periods of lower production demand also increases their sense of job insecurity. In this section I also highlight how employment insecurity not only impacts temporary agency workers, but also affects the work experiences of FoodCo permanent employees too.

In the third section of this chapter, I examine temporary agency workers who view their employment situation as a more secure experience and I consider their experiences in terms of two analytical categories. The first category relates to the approaches they take to lessen the impact, or costs, of their employment insecurity, and the second category considers how these workers create a different frame of meaning to a lack of work. Despite

occupying the weakest position in the employment relationship, some of these workers can exercise their individual agency to help mitigate the impact of employment insecurity.

The following chapter will build upon the lived experiences of temporary agency workers who have found work at AgencyCo, and I will now explore their experiences of work on the FoodCo shop floor.

6.0 EXPERIENCES OF TIME AND WORK AT FOODCO: HARD LABOUR

6.1 <u>Introduction</u>

This is the second of three data chapters and focuses on AgencyCo temporary agency workers as they experience work at FoodCo.

Initially I focus on the role that temporary agency workers fulfil as part of what the literature refers to as the blended workforce, and in doing so I draw on theories of segmented labour markets which I discussed in chapter two. Central to such theories are assumptions that core-equals-stable-permanent work and secondary-equals-unstable-temporary work, with migrant temporary agency workers occupying the types of job associated with secondary work. However, whilst the current literature mainly focuses on segmentation in terms of job type, I extend this further and examine temporary agency workers lived experiences from the perspective of time, showing how the time taken up by work is materially different for temporary agency workers compared to permanent workers who are carrying out the same type of secondary work.

In this chapter l also examine the intensive work undertaken by temporary agency workers at FoodCo. For temporary agency workers, both the temporal and the work intensity aspects at FoodCo significantly impact upon their lived experiences, and these effects will be explained.

The second part of this chapter will examine how the gender of temporary agency workers plays a part at FoodCo, particularly from the point of view of job allocation, and I will also evaluate one of the dominant narratives that surrounds migrant temporary agency workers, that of a superior work ethic.

6.2 <u>The central role of temporary agency workers at FoodCo</u>

As discussed in chapter two, segmented labour market theory postulates that the existence of flexible labour market structures produces a need for a relatively inexpensive and flexible supply of temporary, and primarily migrant,

labour. In this sense, core functions are performed by permanent workers while the secondary sector is dominated by temporary agency workers working in poorly paid and unstable jobs which offer limited opportunities for progression. This peripheral, and primarily migrant workforce is utilized in response to fluctuations in customer demand and this is one of the reasons why temporary agency workers are central to the labour requirements of many UK food manufacturers.

This is the case at FoodCo, whereby primary, or core, roles are undertaken by permanent employees and require specific training, knowledge, and experience. Examples of such roles are team leaders, machine operators, and quality assurance (QA) technicians which attract the higher rates of pay. There are also clear secondary, or peripheral, roles at FoodCo, which are primarily lower-skilled packing duties and general operative (GO) roles. Such GO roles include hand erecting plastic crates, stacking boxes and other similar repetitive and low-skilled tasks. This study finds ample evidence in support of temporary agency workers fulfilling so-called secondary roles at FoodCo, as typified by the following quote from Owen, the Factory Operations Manager:

> Agency workers are a necessary evil. Because we're so seasonal and we're reactionary to the customer demands, we have to have agency to man the factory. Through the peak periods you can go from an average day of 200,000 bags produced to 450,000, you've got to get that resource from somewhere. You've got to be able to extend the shifts and you've got a finite number of permanent staff which are on the books and what have you, which you can only stretch so far. So you've got to top it up with agency. We use agency to man the factory so we can control labour costs. What we did two years ago was we brought AgencyCo into the mix, we used to use agencies before that, I can't remember the name of them but I remember he was a bit of a nasty git, the gangmaster, Frank, that was it, Frank's Agency

Owen's response is interesting for several reasons. First, Owen completely accepts that he must have temporary agency workers as part of his overall labour resource. He also knows the reason why – to satisfy the fluctuating demand for FoodCo's seasonal products. Second, his use of the phrase 'a necessary evil' informs us that although he accepts the need for temporary agency workers, he somehow resents, or has a problem, with this. Third, his unprompted comment that a previous agency labour provider was a 'bit of a nasty git' indicates a previous negative experience of engaging temporary agency workers at FoodCo.

The view that temporary workers are an essential element of the FoodCo workforce is also provided by a FoodCo supervisor and a member of FoodCo's permanent workforce:

> I don't think we could get away without agency through the peak periods, I don't think we could get away without them - not all of em. I think they'll always be needed.
>
> Camilla, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

> This place wouldn't exist without agency workers, because when they [FoodCo] need 'em, anyone, anyone will do, if you speak English or you don't speak English, or you've been sacked, or whatever, you're back, when they need you, they need you
>
> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

The views of Owen, Camilla and Malik suggest that temporary agency workers play a central role in providing an additional quantity of labour, whilst the

view of Noel, a Shift Production Manager at FoodCo, suggests that migrant temporary agency labour is central to FoodCo because of their qualities and skills, which are both required by FoodCo:

> We need the extra bodies at peak time, that's for sure. But we also need their [temporary agency workers] qualities, you know, and their skills. Maybe they [temporary agency workers] have dropped off a bit over the last few years, but most of the temps want to work, earn money, and get on with the job. It's hard work, not rocket science, but you've got to want it, be able to keep going, so the agency staff bring these qualities and skills to the party – we'd be sunk without 'em in summer
>
> Noel, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

As the accounts in this section imply, FoodCo employees regard temporary agency workers as central to their labour requirements by taking on the flexible function of the workforce. These findings concur with the literature reviewed in chapter three, section 3.2, of how low-wage employers use skills and labour shortage narratives to explain their perceived reliance on temporary migrant labour. Several FoodCo employees remarked that there has not been any recruitment for permanent staff for several years at FoodCo:

> Yeah, it seems to be more and more agency. They're not taking on [FoodCo are not recruiting permanent staff]. I think in the last five years especially, that they haven't taken on any permanent staff. Like before, agency would do like say three, four months of being agency and then after that time they would be taken on by FoodCo. Well some of our agency now have been here well over two years and still not been taken on. What I've heard, is that we [FoodCo] are not taking

on permanents, they're preferring agency, having more and more agency workers

Gill, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Malik offered some further insight as to why FoodCo management appear keen to keep temporary agency workers as the central element of their overall labour resource at:

In the past when an agency person gets a permanent job, when they know they're inside, they will work that extra hard to start with, to get in the good books, then after they have got the permanent job, after three months they decline. I mean the speed they work, how they're working, their attitude toward work, things like that. I've noticed that quite a few people, over the years, they will work so hard with the agency, they will be so helpful but as soon as they get a permanent job, after the three-month probation, they just change. Just completely change.

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Malik's belief is that agency workers are motivated and exhibit positive attitudes towards work whilst their employment arrangements are temporary, but that levels of motivation decrease when a permanent position is subsequently secured. In this regard, temporary agency workers would appear to be central to FoodCo's labour resource not only in terms of providing numerical flexibility and the necessary skills and qualities, but also in terms of their positive attitude towards work.

In line with many UK food manufacturers, FoodCo's permanent requirement for temporary agency workers frames the relationship between temporary

labour and segmented labour markets as potentially mutually reinforcing: employer practices, driven by industry dynamics, creates a permanent demand for temporary labour, and with a ready supply of potential workers this in turn enables segmented labour markets to further flourish. Furthermore, the structure of the UK food industry, discussed in chapter two, has facilitated the development of increasingly flexible employment and production processes that would not have been necessary, or possible, otherwise. As a result, the widespread use of temporary agency workers, the majority of which are migrants, can be viewed as constructed rather than inevitable.

Whilst this section has established the central, and increasing, role of temporary agency workers at FoodCo, I will now examine the position of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market in terms of job type and job time.

6.2.1 Job type and job time

Whilst theories of segmented labour markets focus on the types of roles undertaken by workers in the secondary labour market, the literature does not adequately consider the extent to which a temporal dimension impacts on those workers. The accounts which follow illuminate how job time, in addition to job type, can be explained as a further dimension when considering segmented labour markets.

Theories of segmented labour markets generally focus on secondary roles – such as manual packing duties - as being lower-skilled, subject to fluctuation in demand and undertaken by temporary, primarily migrant workers. However, some packing duties at FoodCo are also carried out by permanent FoodCo employees:

> I've been a packer here for 5 years. I only came to get some pin money, but I'm still here

> Gill, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

> I was two years working in agency, now I have six years as a permanent packer, yeah

> Micha, Ex temporary agency worker now a permanent FoodCo worker, Pakistan

> I've worked here sixteen years, as a permanent worker. I came here and worked as a permanent packer straight away

> Zoe, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

FoodCo deploy some permanent workers in secondary roles to provide on-the-job training to the constant supply of new temporary agency workers. Gill, Micha, and Zoe are three permanent employees who provide such assistance, whilst carrying out packing roles which are identical to those carried out by the temporary agency workers. In this respect permanent employees perform the same type of job as the temporary agency workers, which implies that, at FoodCo, both permanent and temporary workers are occupying the same position in the secondary labour market. However, considering labour markets as segmented solely by job type has limitations and to understand the role of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market there is a need to look beyond job type and to also consider job time:

> Disadvantages for them [temporary agency workers] is they have to work more hours like, where we're on set hours, we start at 7.30am and finish no later than 7.30pm, but agency can start sometimes at 6am and still be here at 830pm

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Zoe, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

By considering job time I argue that there are some significant drawbacks for temporary agency workers, compared to permanent workers who are also performing secondary type of jobs. Whilst the intense nature of the work undertaken at FoodCo will be outlined later in this chapter (section 6.2.3), it is evident that working fewer, and fixed, hours provide permanent workers with some respite from the physical demands of packing duties, whilst also enabling these workers to plan their time outside of work. On the other hand, temporary agency workers are often expected to work extended hours – with no prior notice - if the production demand is high, or to compensate for any problems experienced during the day, for instance machinery breakdowns or issues with raw material availability or quality.

In some cases, not only can the working day for temporary agency workers be extended to beyond thirteen hours, but the number of consecutive working days is also regularly greater compared to permanent workers. Whilst permanent workers only work a maximum of four consecutive shifts, temporary agency workers are often expected to work for more consecutive days:

Stay too much, and when working five or six days [for] thirteen hours………it's sixteen hours all together every day [including travel]

Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

So we know what is happening after 12 hours. There is no back-up plan, so we need to keep agency because we need to get through [produce] what we can with them.

Lucian, ex temporary worker, now a permanent FoodCo Team Leader, Lithuania

I never know when I go home, to check my daughter or feed my dog. We only go when we finish, maybe twelve hours, maybe thirteen hours, we never know when we will finish until everything is done

Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

I don't have [time to] learn English is errrr here, [because I] work six day per week

Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

These accounts help to identify an important differentiation in the secondary labour market based on segmentation not only by job type, but also by job time. Although the type of work undertaken by temporary agency workers is the same as for some permanent workers, the time that is taken up by work for temporary agency workers is considerably greater. This is important as the time that is taken up by work affects the lived experiences, attitudes and behaviours of temporary agency workers who are working in an environment which is low paid, mundane, and arduous.

Consequently, I conceptualize job time as comprising of active work time and passive work time, where active work time is the time workers spend undertaking the work which they are hired to do, and passive work time is the time spent on other activities which are related to their work, such as travelling to and from work and waiting for work to begin.

The following section will build upon this temporal dimension and examine the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in terms of their passive work time.

6.2.2 <u>Passive work time: no rest for the wicked</u>

One of the benefits, detailed in chapter five (section 5.2), of working at FoodCo is the provision of transport to the FoodCo site. Although the provision of free transport is undoubtably a benefit, getting to one of the two collection points is a difficult undertaking for some temporary agency workers, as in the case of Mehmet:

> Mehmet lives down past the canal, about a 45min walk to the pick-up point...I can't be expected to fetch him...he walked and ran yesterday and was breathless by the time he got to the bus.
>
> Field notes day 14, comments made to me by Casper, the AgencyCo bus driver

For temporary workers like Mehmet, a long walk to one of the collection points is not unusual. The following accounts of Monica and Shea illustrate this point further.

> After a long shift, maybe thirteen hours or more, agency workers only get dropped off in one of two places, we [permanent workers] get dropped off at home. If you're agency it can take you up to an hour longer to get here [to FoodCo] and to get home after work
>
> Shea, permanent FoodCo worker, Pakistan

> Yeah, and sometimes you can walk for ages before you get home.

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

In my own case, compared to Mehmet, I had a relatively straightforward journey to the bus collection point. Field notes from day 2 capture the essence of my typical start-of-day routine:

> 0530 Set the alarm and get up
>
> 0550 Leave home and walk to the collection point
>
> 0610 Arrive at departure point early, bus expected at 0630, but can sometimes be early. I felt that missing the bus would be big problem and could put in jeopardy my selection for future shifts
>
> 0620 Bus arrives (departed the collection point at 0625)
>
> 0655 Arrive at FoodCo. Disembark the bus and registered by Andrea, the AgencyCo supervisor. Our shift starts at 0730 but we are told by Andrea to be on the shop floor ready for duty at 0720
>
> 0700 Go inside FoodCo and view the labour plan on the agency noticeboard to check where I will be working. Take our bags and leave in an allocated, but unsecured, room.
>
> 0705 Go to the canteen and wait
>
> 0715 Walk to the changing area and get changed into personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE consists of a blue work coat and a coloured, disposable hairnet and beard snood. A condition of our appointment is to have our own protective – steel toe capped – footwear, which we are expected to wear to work
>
> 0720 Go through to the packing area and wait for the shift supervisor.
>
> 0730 Shift briefing by a FoodCo supervisor
>
> Field notes day 2

As the above itinerary illustrates, we arrive at the FoodCo factory 35 minutes before our shift officially starts and we are instructed to be ready on the shop

floor at 0720, 10 minutes before the start of our paid working day which is 0730.

As many of the shifts in the summer period are 13 hours long, a typical shift would end at 2030. The following field notes illustrate a typical end-of-day routine:

> 2030 Shift end – supervisor confirms we are free to leave. Walk to the changing area
>
> 2035 Remove PPE, walk to collect our bags and walk to the bus stop at FoodCo
>
> 2045 Bus departs
>
> 2105 Bus arrives at the first drop off point
>
> 2110 Bus arrives at the second drop off point (where I disembark)
>
> 2130 Arrive home
>
> Field notes day 2

The total time, from leaving home to arriving back in the evening, is just over 15 hours and 30 minutes, and the time that was taken up by work is similar for Max and Tamas too:

> I give an example for here. I wake up 5 o'clock, to walk to bus stop for 6. So I'm not late and miss bus. I waiting for bus for half hour…bus come half 6. I get here [at FoodCo] at 7, and I waiting for start work half 7. If we finish at 8.30 in evening – thirteen hours – I get home for 10pm. After bath and supper I sleep for midnight and up again at 5. It is life for me.
>
> Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

Thirteen hours, go home, showers, sleeping errrm eating, sleeping eight hours and again five o'clock wake up, take a crap, going to catch bus.

Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

The impact of extended working days is also summed up by temporary agency workers Monica and Josef:

Sometimes I get asked to work a sixth day, and I can't do that. I can't keep going I'm not a robot. There's pressure to work as many days as possible

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Thirteen hours work, sixteen hours total! And six days of sixteen hours, is tough

Josef, temporary agency worker, Hungary

The intensity of the routines for temporary agency workers is also apparent to permanent workers at FoodCo. In the following account Malik explains his own difficulties, and he is mindful of how this situation is magnified for temporary agency workers:

So, they [temporary agency workers] leave the house at six and they maybe wake up half five. And they get home nine o'clock at night in the summertime yeah, in the busy period. Maybe they get dropped off at the bus stop, and maybe they're walking for fifteen, twenty

minutes, probably longer. And when do they have time to cook for themselves, eat or anything or shower? And they have just the one day off, and they'll just be catching sleep back. What about their shopping? Everything is empty in the house - me and my wife are working and we're working only four days, but it's still so difficult because everything is empty at home. 'Cos you know you got the milk the bread, these kind of things don't have long use by date. You can't just stack it inside. So, I've spoken to a lot of agency, it's terrible for them, they all have the same difficulty, they go [to the shops] the one day they have off, by the time they wake up they have to quickly go shopping, get the stuff for the week, they're not spending time with their partner, family or anything.

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

This section highlights that the combination of both active work time and passive work time is significantly longer for temporary agency workers compared to permanent workers who undertake the same types of jobs, highlighting that job time is important when considering the role that temporary agency workers play in secondary labour markets.

The next section will now examine the intensive work experiences of temporary agency workers at FoodCo.

6.2.3 Intense work at FoodCo: working with lettuce, not for the faint-hearted

In chapter three, section 3.4, I discussed why low-paid work in food factories has become increasingly intense. Most of the workforce at FoodCo are engaged in unskilled work, including manual packing duties and general operative roles, and it is within this area that I will now examine how intense work affects the lived experiences of temporary agency workers.

A description of the various duties carried out at FoodCo was provided in chapter four, section 4.2.3). The working environment is cold, typically

controlled at less than 8 degrees centigrade, and the work is unrelenting, in so much that the pace of packing bags of product (into boxes or crates) is determined by the speed that the bags come down the production lines. Machines that place the salad products into bags are operated by FoodCo core workers and are not slowed down, even if packers cannot keep up the pace:

> 1715 'pack faster, pack faster. I want to go home'
>
> Field notes shift 1, comments made to me by Alfie, FoodCo Bagging Machine Operator

All temporary agency workers frequently experience intense work in the form of fast, repetitive work, which is also accompanied with scrutiny from permanent core workers, such as indicated in the account above, and the comment made by Alfie.

However, some of the pressure seems excessive:

> I think we're treated like slaves we cannot pack at more than 55 bags per minute, but sometimes we are expected to. It's hard work. Now, because when I work line 6, it's very fast. I have pain, I suffer from wrist pain regularly because of the packing
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Pressure is exerted on workers as managers are expected to meet orders, with the risk of losing business if orders are not fulfilled. This may explain how supply chain pressures influence workplace practices, where intense work

practices become embedded and normalized. In the account above, Monica refers to 'hard work' and implies that routine aspects of production are physically tiring, with potentially harmful consequences. In Monica's case, constantly packing bags into crates or cardboard boxes, over sustained time periods is painful work. Although FoodCo has a duty of care to provide appropriate rest breaks and rotation of work in hazardous conditions, some forms of exploitation or harm are embedded within everyday operational practices.

The harsh and intense working environment at FoodCo has a clear physical impact on temporary agency workers:

I work every day, I have pain, I have pain here [points to wrist], yeah

Anna, temporary agency worker, Romania

Packing makes your shoulders ache and your wrists and back

Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

And the back is broken

Ferdi, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

Same as everybody, problem with back, hands, everything. Push, push finish, push finish, push finish all the time told me push finish, push, push, push finish.

Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

All the time I'm 'jockey' [constantly supplying cardboard boxes to packers]. All the time, six days, thirteen hours every fucking day, and four lines. Not three but four lines. Four lines! It kills me

Tamas, temporary agency workers, Hungary

Beyond the physicality of the work at FoodCo, one temporary agency worker recounted the time that she woke up after having a bad dream about her experiences at FoodCo:

I was dreaming. The line was running too fast, I couldn't cope, I couldn't keep up, I just cried. I woke up and I was actually crying!

Field notes day 4, Agnetha talking to me as we left the shop floor to go on break together

These accounts from workers at FoodCo align with a growing consensus that working conditions in the UK food industry are worsening amid intense retail competition, which impacts grocery suppliers who are operating on small profit margins and are therefore driven to control their direct costs.

An Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC 2010) review into the UK food processing sector suggested that migrant temporary agency workers are more likely to be mistreated in the workplace and it has also been found that some migrant temporary workers in the food industry have been denied the correct breaks, a situation which also occurred at FoodCo:

1930 finish..... We should have had 30mins for our 2nd break but we only had 15mins....Tomas is fuming 'fuck them, I had my last break at 215'

Field notes shift 3

1800 finish, and no break since 1130...10.5hrs with one 15mins break...can that be right?

Field notes shift 12

My field notes confirm the nature of my own lived experience on the shop floor at FoodCo, in terms of the intense workplace pressure which is applied to temporary agency workers:

Whilst packing on line 3 with Bertha.....I have really bad backache.... I mustn't forget how painful this job is. My shoulders are burning, it's like they are on fire, but I cannot stop for more than a couple of seconds or the bags will pile up and go on the floor. After three hours Bertha couldn't straighten her fingers – her hand looked like a claw!

Field notes shift 18, packing bags on line 3

Struggle to keep up when I need to apply labels to the boxes and pack the bowls. The production line just keeps going whether I can keep up or not. The bowls just pile up on the conveyor and go on the floor

Field notes shift 15, packing on the bowl line

I'm a jockey today and it is constant walking, fetching boxes, empty pallets, moving full pallets – my feet are killing me. Carl told me he walked 25k one shift when he did this job!

Field notes shift 16, working as a jockey (supplying packing lines with boxes, crates, pallets)

The ergonomics are really poor....pallets, labels, empty boxes etc, nothing is to hand at all... Without setting the line up and laying things out to hand then this disaster will continue......frustrating, makes me cross.....makes you very emotional at the helplessness of not being able to keep up on the bowl line

Field notes shift 15, packing bowls on the bowl line

After only 37mins this morning my shoulders were burning (I looked at clock and it was 0807). I'm cannot see how on earth I am going cope with 13 hours of this today

Field notes shift 10

As time in the field passed, I developed coping mechanisms in to deal with the ongoing intensive nature of the work at FoodCo:

Leg is still sore from yesterday, and the day before, so I have taken ibuprofen and applied ibuleve (again) and the tubigrip is in place to support my left forearm, which is still sore. Also Vaseline to help with the chafing

Field notes shift 13, start of shift as a jockey

Given the harsh and unrelenting nature of the work at FoodCo, then it should perhaps be no surprise that the food industry has among the poorest health and safety records relative to other UK industries.

Whilst this section has highlighted temporary agency workers' experience of intense work at FoodCo, it is also clear that the physical demands of the packing duties also have an impact on the permanent workers too:

> Working here is hard on your body. I mean, last week I was on holiday so I've had twelve days off. Last night, after my first day back, come eight o'clock I was zonked, I couldn't even keep my eyes open. Didn't even talk to me husband. I was gone. I think I woke up on the settee with a blanket over me (laughing). And he said to me 'you all right?' and I went 'I'm just exhausted' I said. I was aching, I'm on painkillers, it's just a hard job. It is a hard job.
>
> Vera, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

> I have bad wrists, swollen from constant packing. Also bad back. If I continually every day work, I have a problem on shoulders, every girl who pack very fast they have problems. Err for example, Amy, she's a very fast packer also. And they always err put us on fast lines. So now here we both have a problem in shoulder
>
> Micha, permanent FoodCo worker, ex agency, Pakistan

> Gilbert swears all the time..........he tells me that he is knackered (he says) 'my fucking back is killing me'
>
> Field notes shift 17

> Vera tells me that she and others take ibuprofen every break to keep them going....
>
> Field notes shift 10

Whilst the intense nature of the work at FoodCo can be seen to impact some permanent workers, the FoodCo permanent employees do benefit from some respite. As I have seen, permanent workers have a shorter working day and a shift pattern which is a maximum of four consecutive shifts, whilst temporary workers regularly work six consecutive shifts of thirteen hours per shift. In this regard the impact of the intense shop floor experience is likely to have a greater effect on temporary agency workers than permanent FoodCo employees. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that many of the intense duties which were outlined in chapter four (section 4.2.3) are mainly carried out by temporary agency workers.

The following section will now explore how intense work at FoodCo is allocated to temporary agency workers in terms of their gender.

6.3 The impact of gender on the allocation of work

In chapter three, section 3.4, I highlighted that one particular pattern for the recruitment of temporary agency workers is gender based, and at FoodCo gender is found to play a part in how work is allocated to temporary agency workers.

Many male temporary agency workers see themselves, and are sometimes seen as, brawny manual workers, heroically manning the heavier aspects of the work on the shop floor, as typified by Ferdi, a young Bulgarian man who has been in the UK for 18 months and Rondon a young Hungarian man who has been in the UK for less than 12 months:

Packing to me is like working on the bowl line, it is boring and girl jobs. Because it's easy jobs because the girl is not going to stack the pallets or put the boxes on the pallet [like me] because it's too heavy

Ferdi, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

Yeah, yeah, I'm jockey and packing I think is a woman job (laughing)

Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

These views of what constituted women's work at FoodCo was also echoed by Tamas, a middle-aged Hungarian man who has been in UK for six years.

Sometimes it's like time is stuck, you know yeah. I was on the line, boss said 'push in salad' [meaning make sure no lettuce is trapped between the plastic salad bowl and the clip-on lid] What? Push? What is this job? This, this is the job? Thirteen hours and push in this fuckin salad, yeah! No chance. Please give other job. It's boring yeah, boring very boring. As I think this is no job, it's joke! It's a woman's job

Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Tamas was also happy to talk to me about his time working in a slaughterhouse in Shrewsbury and made a point of showing me a large scar on the top of his left hand, the result of a knife wound he suffered whilst he was dismembering a pig carcase. Given Tamas' experience of slaughterhouse work it came as no surprise to me that he would be somewhat bemused by the salad-pushing job on the bowl line at FoodCo.

Although the views of Ferdi, Rondon and Tamas indicate that, in their opinions, lighter or boring work equals women's work at FoodCo, this is where a paradox exists. Packing is very repetitive and could be regarded as light

work, in so much that individual bags of salad are not heavy. However, packing bags of salad at speeds of up to 55 packs per minute, with few breaks, for thirteen hours, in a cold environment is not easy work. Consequently, the job of a packer at FoodCo is intense and arduous work.

At FoodCo, it is not only the male temporary agency workers who view some of the roles as gender specific:

> Men can't pack good. They can't do two things at once. To be a good packer you need to be able to pack, get the next boxes ready and get all of the checks done
>
> Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

The view of Zelda is not substantiated by my own experiences at FoodCo. On several occasions when orders were required for departing vehicles, permanent, male FoodCo supervisors (blue hats) would pack on a spare line:

> Lucian [a FoodCo blue hat] jumps onto line 3 and packs. It is furious and rapid and several of us stand and watch in awe. He was like a machine. Watching him makes us all feel a bit inadequate
>
> Field notes, day 4

Zelda's view, that a man has an inherent inability to multitask, is a popular belief at FoodCo. However, as Lucian demonstrated, packing bags into boxes at speed is not limited by gender, and Monica's view below is likely to be more accurate:

> We [female temporary agency workers] are used as packers because men are not very good. Some [men] can be good at packing but they choose not to do it well because it is hard work, and they [male temporary agency workers] would rather jockey
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Monica's perception is in line with my own observations of the FoodCo shop floor. Although many male temporary agency workers are physically capable of packing, they avoid this repetitive, mundane, and demanding task and chose to position themselves for other temporary agency worker duties, such as stacking boxes and jockey roles. This is because stacking and jockey roles, although also physically demanding, can offer more opportunities for respite.

However, for those workers who are not physically strong enough for heavy lifting duties the intense packing work is one of the only jobs available for migrant temporary workers at FoodCo, and for this reason, the majority of FoodCo packers is women.

In this section I have explored how gender is linked to physical capability when certain roles are allocated to temporary agency workers at FoodCo, although some male temporary agency workers position themselves to avoid certain mundane tasks, primarily packing duties, and pass these jobs off as women's work. In the next section I will turn my attention to the notion of work ethic at FoodCo.

6.4 Temporary agency workers: the narrative of migrants' work ethic

In chapter three, section 3.2, I discussed one of the dominant narratives regarding migrant temporary agency workers, that of having a good work ethic. Previous studies have highlighted employer's comments about migrant temporary agency workers perceived superior attitude and work ethic when

compared to indigenous workers. The temporary workers at FoodCo shared several views as to why they felt they needed to work hard at FoodCo.

Agi, for instance, held the view that she needed to work hard to make up for her limited ability to speak English:

> You can work anywhere, why work here? My English is bad and I have few choice where to work. But you are English and you can work anywhere. With bad English I have to work hard, otherwise I have no work
>
> Field notes shift 1, my first conversation with Agi, who was given the job of showing me how to pack products on line 1

Tamas held the view that temporary agency workers didn't have a particularly strong work ethic, but it was more a case that compared to UK workers, migrant temporary workers were made to look like harder workers:

> English workers, I'm sorry to say, you are lazy because you have too many choices, have benefits. You can choose to stay at home, go to the pub whatever. I not work hard, but I work harder than English
>
> Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Tamas' view that temporary agency workers work ethic was superior only when compared to UK workers was substantiated by Noel, a FoodCo Shift Production Manager:

99.9% of our agency workers are non-English. Going back several years I can remember when I had three English agency workers start to do an induction on one day, after they'd had their main site induction, they had the departmental induction, and I spent an hour on that. Went through everything; all the health and safety side and you know, this is what we have to get into, it takes me an hour. When I was all done, they lasted an hour an half, and they all walked out. So spent an hour of my time inducting someone, who lasted only 90 minutes. They didn't fancy the work here.

Noel, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

Noel offered some further thoughts as to the reasons why he believed that migrant temporary agency workers had a stronger work ethic compared to local English workers:

I just think they [English workers] get a shock. I think it really is, can be, hard work in there [FoodCo factory shop floor]. I think it is shocking for them…and especially the young generation. And what I still believe, is that my generation, the way I came into it, has changed. I mean I've never been out of work so I've always, even you know if I've lost a job or you know been made redundant, I've got back into another job. And I don't think it's like that anymore. I think society has changed on the whole, and I think the younger English generation they, they're not, you know what I mean, they don't fancy that physical labouring. The migrant agency workers are used to doing their bit and the local lads don't want it

Noel, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

The narrative of migrant temporary agency workers having a superior work ethic would only appear to be relative to the work ethic, perceived or actual, of the local available workforce. However, this employers view, of a relatively stronger work ethic compared to local, UK workers is also the view of migrant temporary agency workers when comparing themselves to permanent, non-UK co-workers:

> You can see yourself, it is only us [temporary agency workers] who work hard here. The permanents get away with doing less whether they are from UK, Bulgaria, Romania…. it doesn't matter where they come from, if you are FoodCo you do less, which means we have to do more
>
> Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

> I have to work hard because Martha [a Polish permanent employee of FoodCo] goes for a cigarette too often
>
> Anna, temporary agency worker, Hungary

The views of Viktor and Anna again point towards migrant temporary agency workers not necessarily having a stronger work ethic, but of having to work harder to compensate for permanent co-workers, who are also migrant workers themselves.

Some permanent employees commented that temporary workers, overall, worked harder than permanent workers:

Yeah, like all folk, some are better workers than others. But I would say that agency workers work harder than us [FoodCo permanent employees]. Some of us [FoodCo permanent employees] work hard but some don't. It doesn't matter where folk come from, England or Poland, once they get a perm job some take things easy

Vera, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

It's not rocket science here, just hard graft. The perms here take it easy compared to you lot [AgencyCo temporary workers]. The perms come from all over the place too – England, Scotland, Pakistan, Poland, Bulgaria…..everywhere. It makes no difference where the workers come from, and it's the same for temps and perms, some people like to work hard and some don't.

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

The findings in this section challenges the essentialist view that migrant workers have a superior work ethic, although the evidence from this study does point towards two effects. First, migrant temporary agency workers have to apply themselves to their work either through necessity, based on limited English skills, or because of the relatively poor work ethic of their UK and non-UK co-workers. Second, the strong work ethic exhibited by some migrant temporary agency workers is observed as a feature of their temporary status, vis-à-vis permanent workers, and not necessarily because of their migrant status, as suggested in the bulk of the current literature.

As a result, it is conceivable that this relatively higher level of application from migrant temporary agency workers, towards their work, would be perceived by managers and supervisors as evidence of a superior work ethic.

6.5 <u>Conclusions</u>

This second data chapter has examined the central role that temporary agency workers play as part of a blended shop floor workforce at FoodCo. The experiences of temporary agency workers as they carry out intense work at FoodCo has been analysed in the following areas.

First, migrant temporary agency workers at FoodCo are recognised as being critical to the manufacturing operations by providing additional, low skilled labour to satisfy fluctuating customer demand. However, in addition to providing numerical flexibility, it is recognised that migrant temporary agency workers also bring specific qualities and skills which are not otherwise readily available. Furthermore, this analysis indicates that the centrality of temporary agency workers is increased further as FoodCo Management recognise a more positive attitude amongst migrant temporary workers towards the work required by FoodCo, in comparison to the attitudes of FoodCo permanent workers.

Second, the analysis in this chapter has shown that the position of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market is not solely determined by job type but that a temporal dimension is helpful to fully appreciate the position of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market. In particular, the extent of passive working time, as part of the overall job time, is shown to impact the lived experiences of temporary agency workers more than their permanent co-workers. The notion of job time helps to clarify our understanding of temporary agency workers lived experiences, especially when compared to permanent co-workers who are carrying out the same types of intense jobs.

Third, the intense nature of the work allocated to temporary agency workers at FoodCo has been examined. Although some permanent workers carry out similar tasks, it is the temporary agency workers who are significantly affected, as a direct consequence of the greater active work time that they

spend performing repetitive, mundane, and arduous tasks, which in some cases leads to physical harm and injury.

The second part of this data chapter moved beyond the centrality of temporary agency workers at FoodCo in terms of job type, job time and job intensity and examined the experiences of temporary agency workers at FoodCo in the face of narratives regarding gender and work ethic.

The gender of temporary agency workers at FoodCo was relevant for several reasons. First, some male temporary agency workers harbour the stereotypical view that certain jobs at FoodCo are women's jobs and consciously under perform in these roles to secure alternative but less arduous work. Additionally, some female temporary agency workers regard their male co-workers as either incapable or unwilling to perform duties which are primarily carried out by women.

The notion of a superior work ethic is a dominant narrative in the literature on migrant temporary workers, and this has been explored as part of this chapter. Rather than a superior work ethic, my analysis finds that temporary agency workers believe that they *have to* work harder for reasons of poor language or to compensate for the subjectively poor attitudes of their co-workers. The relatively poor work ethic of their co-workers is not necessarily determined by nationality or migrant status, but because of their employment type; temporary agency workers at FoodCo feel that they are expected to work harder than permanent workers, irrespective of the nationality or migrant status of their co-workers.

In the final data chapter, I turn my attention to the multi-faceted relationships temporary agency workers experience whilst at work, which is the third aspect of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers that this study addresses.

7.0 POOR RELATIONS

7.1 <u>Introduction</u>

This thesis has so far focussed on two aspects of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers at FoodCo. The first aspect considered precarious work and employment insecurity and explored the experiences of temporary agency workers as they seek work and then aim to maintain work (chapter five), whilst the second aspect has examined these agency workers as they undertake intense factory work (chapter six).

The third aspect of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers that this study addresses will now examine workplace relationships at FoodCo.

First, I will highlight the complex mix of nationalities that exist on the FoodCo factory shop floor and highlight how temporary agency workers experience nationalist bias. Second, I will examine how the tripartite employment relationship is experienced by temporary agency workers, particularly in respect to the expectations placed upon these workers by the management of both AgencyCo and FoodCo. Third, by examining the notion of the blended workforce, I will explore the workplace experiences of temporary agency workers whilst working alongside permanent co-workers. From the perspective of temporary agency workers, I also explore the approaches of the FoodCo factory management.

Finally, in this chapter, I explore how tactics of resistance are enacted by temporary agency workers to highlight how these workers, who are subject to intense work for prolonged periods of time, use such tactics to reveal a surprising degree of individual agency.

7.2 <u>Manufacturing relationships.</u>

In chapter five, section 5.2, I outlined the recruitment process that AgencyCo undertake to secure temporary workers for FoodCo. The agency workers at FoodCo are overwhelmingly migrants, mostly from EU countries, although some agency workers are also from outside of the EU. The dominant

nationality of the temporary workers is Bulgarian, followed by Hungarian, Romanian and Lithuanian. Three agency workers, Zelda, Kara and Max, provide views of their initial experiences of workplace relationships at AgencyCo:

> Because I speak little English. So, when I come to the UK my English wasn't good. My only words were, 'no', 'hi', 'hello', 'thank you' [laughs] – that was it! My daughter speaks English better and told me to contact AgencyCo. I'm from Lithuania and so AgencyCo were not interested because I was not like them [from Bulgaria]. Only when there were no more Bulgarians did they listen to me.

> Zelda, temporary agency worker, Lithuania

> So, I went to the AgencyCo offices and I just tell them I'm looking for a job and they ask something … they just ask me a question, in Bulgarian, and I didn't understand. Why would I understand? I'm from Hungary! And the lady just said to me oh come back when you can speak our language [laughs]. So, I was shy as well and I didn't speak English well. So, I just went to other agencies but they couldn't give me job as my English was bad. Then I went to the AgencyCo office again because my friends they said to me oh they have a lot of jobs and they are desperate

> Kara, ex agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker, Hungary

> When they [AgencyCo] need people, when it's very, very busy, they will bring any people, even those who don't understand English or Bulgarian

> Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

Another temporary agency worker, Viktor, suggests that a preference to recruit Bulgarian workers is primarily to make things easy for AgencyCo, not necessarily due to nationalist bias or because AgencyCo believe that Bulgarian workers are in any way superior:

> Don't like my way of speaking, no speak English, too many people Bulgarian. They [AgencyCo managers] prefer Bulgarians because it is easier for them, not because they are good workers
>
> Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

From these accounts, the formation of the initial employment relationship, between agency workers and AgencyCo, is seen to be heavily influenced because Andrea, the AgencyCo Co-ordinator, is Bulgarian, and favours workers from Bulgaria to undertake factory jobs at FoodCo. However, when the pipeline of Bulgarian workers dries up, then workers from other nationalities are hired to maintain a pool of temporary labour that exceeds demand.

Once hired, non-Bulgarian agency workers, feel that they are treated differently by AgencyCo, when they compare themselves to Bulgarian agency workers:

> It's just like a fact of life yeah, it's just the way it is that I'm Hungarian, and if I have a Hungarian boss then I get looked after more, so here [AgencyCo] is Bulgarians [agency] bosses and if I'm Bulgarian then they look after me. It can be a problem here, don't have any Hungarian bosses, so there is only work for Hungarians, and Polish and Romanians if all the Bulgarians have already got

jobs, yeah. And see, I'm not stupid yeah, any Bulgarian people if have Bulgarian boss, they give easier job too.

Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

In the above quote, Tamas - who is Hungarian - views the preference for Bulgarian workers by a Bulgarian boss as a perfectly normal situation, and furthermore, when agency workers from other countries are hired, it appears that the easier jobs are given to Bulgarian workers, and the harder, or least desirable, jobs are given to non-Bulgarian agency workers. Keziah, a Romanian and Anna, from Hungary have similar accounts:

Ferdi [a Bulgarian agency worker] hates packing because it's hard work, he'd rather jockey, so Andrea [AgencyCo Co-ordinator] gives him jockey work because she likes him because he is Bulgarian like she is

Keziah, temporary agency worker, Romania

Look, have you ever seen Lydia or Nadia [Bulgarian workers] on the rota for line 6? No, you won't because line 6 is the hardest work!

Anna, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Line 6 is the newest packing line at FoodCo and operates faster than any other line. Packers on line 6 have a difficult job keeping up and as a result this line is the most difficult line to work on.

Max, who is Romanian, also felt that he was treated unfairly by AgencyCo in comparison to a Bulgarian co-worker:

I booked 12 days holidays before Yuri [a Bulgarian agency worker] and they gave him his holiday but not me. It must be because he is one of them [Bulgarian]

Max, temporary agency worker, Romania

7.2.1 Two's company, three's a crowd

Although temporary agency workers are provided with a contract for services with AgencyCo, when these workers start on the shop floor, they primarily take their direction and instruction from FoodCo. The nature of the tripartite employment relationship, which I examined in chapter three (section 3.5), differentiates the employment relationship for agency workers compared to permanent employees who experience a more conventional employment relationship with their employer. The nature of the tripartite relationship presents particular challenges for temporary agency workers at FoodCo, as illustrated in the following accounts:

Listen, this is how crazy this place is. One-minute Andrea [AgencyCo Co-odinator] tells me to go to line 3, when I get there Camilla [FoodCo white hat] tells me to go to the bowl line! I cannot go to both!

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

I check the board before my shift starts to see where I am working, and I can see that I am a jockey today. When I get to the shop floor and start jockeying, Noel [FoodCo white hat] asks me what I am doing. I explain that I am a jockey today and he tells me to pack on line 5 instead. I explain that Andrea [AgencyCo Co-ordnator] has put me as a jockey on the rota. Noel smiles and says that he decides who goes

where. With this I leave my pallet truck and go to pack on line 5. When I get there Jan [another agency worker] is already packing. I explain that Noel has asked me to pack, and Jan remonstrates [his English is not very good] and gesticulates that I need to go away. Not only is having two bosses confusing and frustrating, but I also get a sense that Jan does not want me to take his job

Field notes, shift 5

Amir [FoodCo machine operator] has been pretty rude telling me what to do today.....I have had instruction from several different people, some FoodCo and some AgencyCo....difficult to know who to listen to

Field notes shift 14

Listen my friend, one minute they [AgencyCo] tell you to do this, and then the next minute they [FoodCo] tell you to do that. Me, I don't give a fuck about them [AgencyCo and FoodCo] because they don't give a fuck about me.

Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

At the end of the day, I run the show, as I'm the one who gets a bollocking if the numbers aren't good. If that means the temps get messed around then that's not really my problem

Noel, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

As these accounts illustrate, temporary agency workers in the middle of the tripartite relationship are often left confused and frustrated by regular

contradictory direction and commands from both AgencyCo and FoodCo management.

The mix of nationalities, at FoodCo, predicated by the lack of a common language, appears to complicate workplace relationships further:

> He [Viktor, Romanian] doesn't understand me, and I don't understand him. How can I help him or him help me?
>
> Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> It's just a joke 'ere now, people come from all over the world. No one can understand anything that anybody says!
>
> Vera, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

> It is, what it is. People come from lots of different countries. I try and make myself as clear as I can. We just keep calm and carry on!
>
> Camilla, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

This section highlights how the employment relationship is experienced by temporary agency workers. As AgencyCo initially prefer to select Bulgarian workers, temporary agency workers explain how their nationality affects their chances of both obtaining work, and the type of work which is allocated to them.

Once hired, temporary agency workers enter a tripartite employment relationship and receive direction mainly from FoodCo line management. The expectations placed upon these workers by both AgencyCo and FoodCo are a constant source of confusion and frustration and the FoodCo shop floor management play a pivotal role in the tripartite employment relationship, as

they determine the work activities for both temporary and permanent workers.

In the following section, I will examine the notion of the blended workforce and explore the workplace relationships of temporary agency workers whilst they work alongside permanent co-workers. This section will further highlight how nationality and language both represent and are constitutive of these relationships.

7.2.2 The mixed-up workforce at FoodCo

The previous section has highlighted some of the difficulties experienced by temporary agency workers in terms of navigating an employment relationship that involves both AgencyCo and FoodCo. The tripartite relationship has been shown to be difficult for agency workers. Some agency workers appear to be discriminated against based on their nationality, and some are also subject to contradictory instructions from both AgencyCo and FoodCo. For temporary agency workers, the complexity of their employment relationships extends further on the FoodCo factory floor as they work alongside FoodCo permanent employees. Such a workforce, which comprises both permanent and temporary workers, is referred to in the literature as blended and at FoodCo this represents a complex arrangement. The temporary element of the workforce at FoodCo consists of workers of many different nationalities, with a vast number of different languages and a wide range of English language-speaking ability, and this element of the workforce is also composed of workers with vastly differing lengths of tenure and experience at FoodCo, with some having worked at the site for over five years, and others only a couple of days.

In this section I explain how temporary agency workers, as part of the blended FoodCo workforce, feel unfairly treated in terms of being wrongly blamed for mistakes on the factory floor, having received little instruction or training. Agency workers, hindered by language constraints, are drawn into conflicts

between permanent FoodCo workers, and are also shown to receive fewer rest breaks than FoodCo permanent workers.

Research on blended workplaces has primarily focussed on the impacts on organizations, permanent workers and supervisors, and the lived experiences of agency workers have largely been overlooked. Views such as those provided by Rondon – an agency worker from Hungary – are insightful as he refers to the shop floor as mixed-up.

> I don't know much, but what I do know is that this is one mixed-up factory
>
> Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

The literature also suggests that conflicts have been known to occur between temporary workers and permanent workers and the following accounts point to this also being the case at FoodCo:

> Noel, the FoodCo Shift Production Manager, is not happy when he sees a mess on the factory floor – it looks as though somebody has dropped product on the floor. Gilbert [a permanent FoodCo employer] shouts 'it wasn't me it was that fucking numpty over there' and pointed to a temporary agency worker
>
> Field notes, shift 5

> Next thing a Warehouse Team Leader appears and says to me 'you're fucking the job up in the warehouse'. It appears that I am using the wrong crate/pallet combination. I explain I was following the Packing Team Leaders' advice, Amir, who is standing next me. The Warehouse

Team Leader looks at Amir and says to me 'ignore him, just use the correct combination', and walks away. Amir wipes his eyes mockingly, suggesting that the Warehouse Team Leader is crying. Amazingly, Amir then says to me that as it was only my first day on this particular job then I was bound to make a mistake! The cheek of it, I was only doing as he told me to!

Field notes, shift 11

But sometimes when they [permanent workers] are moving too slow I say to them 'please move faster'. And they say to me 'relax, relax my friend. Relax 'cos tomorrow you can stay at home. Relax, you're not my boss'. This makes me very angry 'cos they are taking the piss out of me

Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

The tendency to blame temporary agency workers for issues on the factory floor is a common theme at FoodCo:

Some people speak very angry, yeah. I know one lady [permanent FoodCo employee] she think she very smart but she's very stupid. Yeah, she is a QC [Quality Controller]. And all the time she speak very angry with people who work for agency. She blames us [agency workers] even when they [permanent workers] make mistakes too

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

I speak with the errr woman Pakistan [permanent FoodCo employee], she was very angry with me. [I ask] Why you speak [to me] like that

because I don't speak your name [language]? But I work for agency. Yeah. And maybe one or two people make a mistake, yeah? No just me, or agency

Dora, temporary agency worker, Hungary

'There was one accident yesterday, an agency worker was hit by the carousel [which brings boxes to the packing stations], she suffered a chipped tooth and a bruised cheek, and probably wasn't being careful. Please be more careful as this has created me a lot of paperwork'

Field notes, shift 10: Noel's (FoodCo Shift Manager) address at the start of the shift

This quote, by a FoodCo Manager, not only points the finger of blame at an agency worker for their lack of care but is also noteworthy for the lack of empathy shown by the supervisor towards the injured worker.

Apportioning blame, particularly when the facts are not clear, is a common cause of resentment amongst the workforce on the FoodCo shop floor and conflict is a regular occurrence. The following passage points to a conflict between permanent workers and me, an agency worker:

I'm packing on Line 1 with Selina [a FoodCo permanent employee]. Asif [a FoodCo machine operator] asks me to go to pack on line 3. Selina was clearly not happy and grabbed me. Selina says, 'Asif you are not the supervisor'. Asif ignores Selina and orders me to go to line 3. I say nothing but Selina yells 'no!' I'm standing there not sure where to go.

> Asif then gets Jon [a FoodCo Team Leader] who says to Selina that her line will be slowed down [to make it easier for her] and Jon tells me to go to Line 3.
>
> Field notes, shift 14

In this case, Selina was keen for me to stay packing with her on line 1 as this effectively made her job easier.

A recurring feature of the mixed-up FoodCo workforce was the implication of not having a common language:

> Language problems are a safety issue here. I would like to point this out, I was a jockey, I told the supervisor this too. I was pulling pallets from outside and one guy was in front of me, I said to him 'excuse me', and when you say excuse me you expect someone to at least to move a little bit if not more, because there was no way to get through, but he didn't understand 'excuse me' so he didn't move, so I had to quickly stop my truck. Because I thought I said excuse me and he will move, but no. So, I stopped my truck dead on the spot. Then the second time the same problem I almost, you know, collided with him because he was standing there and I, he seen me coming, and I told him excuse me and he was just standing there. Like if you see a car coming and you just stand there, you know, are you saying 'oh come on then, you can hit me it's alright!'. You get this kind of situation here all the time because some people do not understand any English. I even asked the trainers that are on site, 'how do these guys manage to pass the test?'
>
> Rondon, temporary agency worker, Hungary

I am a jockey today, Jan [a Romanian agency worker] is packing on line 12. I try and communicate with him. His English is very poor, he cannot understand me as I ask him if he needs any more boxes.

Field notes, shift 14

Paulina [a Polish agency worker] can understand very little English, when the line breaks down I try to strike up a conversation, but she cannot understand anything I am saying

Field notes, shift 15

And ok, I've known a few Pakistani lads whose English hasn't been the best but it wasn't as bad as some of the people working here now, but the Pakistani lads failed the entry test, they're not allowed to come in [and work at FoodCo] cause they couldn't pass the test, but then you get these people [some of the current agency workers] that don't even understand 'break time'.

 Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Language is a problem. Even the FoodCo Eastern Europeans [permanent workers] that we've got are complaining about the new ones [agency workers] coming in, yeah.

 Gill, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

But these people who coming here without English knowledge, this is the problem. Because I can't speak with them other language, only English or Hungarian, if somebody Hungarian. Now too many peoples

not speak any English at all and this is a problem for understanding the company rules

Kara, ex agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker

Because we don't understand each other. I don't know what's the problem. I can't explain for them how we need to pack, how we need to write. They can't write sometimes, even their own name. This is the problem. I can't explain or they can't write, so it's too difficult, and we end up arguing all the time

Anna, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Yesterday I saw the jockey sitting down, he was not feeling very well, I saw it. And I ask 'Are you okay?' And, I took for Camilla [FoodCo Shift Manager] and I told Camilla I don't think so he very well but I don't know what's the problem because he can't speak English. And after Camilla got a translator or somebody, I don't know. The guy was sick.

Kara, ex agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker, Hungary

As these accounts show, the limited English-speaking ability of many workers results in a range of issues on the factory floor, including an increased risk of accidents, inaccuracies in the packing processes, inaccuracies in the completion of factory paperwork, and even in the case of an employee who was taken unwell. The frustrations that this causes between, and amongst, both temporary and permanent workers is evident on a daily basis:

Really felt alienated today, the jockey [who was also a temporary worker from Romania] has been crazy fast all day, grunting, and pointing. I had no idea what he wanted me to do. The packers have

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been the same too. The lack of English has felt like a major barrier to me today

Field notes, shift 12

So it's really hard. Yesterday I had argument with one lady, a Polish lady [a temporary agency worker] because I tried to be patient, I'm not really that patient … but I tried to be patient, but yesterday the lady was really rude. And she spoke to me in Polish language and I … I couldn't be patient [laughs] yesterday. So I stopped the line and I took her to the team leader, I wanted to stop the line because the order was finished, it's enough. She kept on packing but we didn't need anymore. I have tried to work with them [non-English speaking agency workers] for four weeks now, they not speak any English! And I tried to explain for her what we pack, how many in boxes and how much the order. And she didn't understand. And she not try to understand, this is the problem. They [non-English speaking agency workers] not try to speak English, they just speaking their own language. And I don't understand because when I came here if I didn't understand anything, I didn't think that I have to speak with my supervisor Hungarian language, so I don't know. These people, this is really big problem, they not speaking English. They don't know the yes, no, sorry, excuse me, they not using anything.

 Kara, ex agency worker, now permanent FoodCo worker, Hungary

Amir, who doesn't speak much English, gesticulates that he wants 3 pallets moving, I start to move the first, but he grabs the truck off me and moves the first two and gives me the truck back to move the 3rd. I'm left standing like a lemon - Malik walks pass and says to me 'grumpy old Asian man'

Field notes shift 6

The inability of many temporary agency workers to speak English is found to be a key reason why most of these workers are consigned to a future in which there is no real prospect of a permanent role at FoodCo:

> Some of these [temporary agency] workers come 'ere thinking they can get a permanent job but they've got no chance 'cos they'll never pass the [FoodCo] English test
>
> Vera, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

> Look I know what it's like here, because I've seen it too many times before. It's nuts, temps [AgencyCo workers] pass the agency English test but they can't pass our [FoodCo] English test. That means they will never get a permanent job unless they get good at English, even though the agency [workers] do the same jobs as us [permanent FoodCo workers]. It doesn't make sense to me
>
> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

This section has highlighted clear issues regarding the inability of workers to understand each other at FoodCo, and the poor prospects of permanent jobs for temporary workers.

Unfortunately for AgencyCo workers, some FoodCo employees are seen to capitalize on the poor English of temporary workers, both to deflect blame but also for their own amusement:

> We [temporary workers] get blamed all the time for things that go wrong here that aren't our fault. Last week I was packing with Micha

[permanent FoodCo employee] when Camilla came over and told us we were packing 12 in box and it should be 15s. Well, Micha lied and said it was my fault because I couldn't read the paperwork properly. I was angry, how could she do that?

Anna, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Gilbert will take the mickey out of the temps all of the time. Once when an agency lad was a jockey, Gilbert asked for blue crates – but we don't use blue crates. This lad spent ten minutes looking for blue crates. Noel gave him [the agency jockey] a right bollocking for taking so long and Gilbert said 'but I asked for black crates – he obviously didn't understand me!'

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

The accounts that follow will highlight how a lack of training is a cause for concern as temporary agency workers believe that mistakes are inevitable due to poor training or lack of support on the FoodCo factory shop floor. On several occasions temporary agency workers receive little in the way of training or instruction, as this account from Monica outlines:

Sometimes agency [workers] do make mistakes, but they have no training. They are left to make mistakes. They are too new

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Tamas agreed:

When I joined here, I was shown for two minutes. Two fucking minutes to learn a job? How the fuck can I learn a job in two minutes? So much paperwork

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Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

My own notes from the start of my field work also captures my sense of desperation as I try and carry out my work on the shop floor with very little training or instruction:

Felt really dropped in it today: no real instruction or guidance from anywhere, neither AgencyCo nor FoodCo. Noel [FoodCo Shift Manager] was asking for vigilance at a pre-shift meeting to avoid 'product in seal complaints', completing traceability paperwork, and checking bag weights etc, and in return I really did not get any training, help or support. I can't help but think, 'why should I bother?'

Field notes, shift 4

The lines are behind today so I'm asked by a team leader to take a late break and to pack on line 5. I've not been shown what to do and when I cannot keep up with the packing, the bags overflow the conveyor and land on the floor. I have no idea how to turn the machine off. When the packer returns from her break she looks at me in horror because there are dozens of bags of salad lying on the floor. I try to explain what has happened, but she waves me away. I feel useless

Field notes shift 2

So far in this chapter I have examined how temporary agency workers have been drawn into shop floor conflicts and have been blamed for problems on the shop floor at FoodCo. Low levels of spoken English and a lack of training and instruction compound these issues.

The section that follows will now highlight the perceived unfair allocation of breaks at FoodCo, which is a contentious issue that affects the relationships between permanent and temporary workers. Break times are precious at FoodCo as they provide respite from the unrelating nature of the work on the FoodCo shop floor. If break times are not seen to be fairly distributed between all of the workers, both temporary and permanent, this results in disgruntled workers:

> They [permanent FoodCo workers] have more breaks – no question. And it's not fair. Whilst they are enjoying their smoko [cigarette breaks] we have to stay and do their work for them
>
> Viktor, temporary agency worker, Hungary

> As I am stacking on lines 1 and 2, which is nearest to the entrance to the factory floor, I can see who is coming and going. I notice that Shea and Layla [two permanent packers] are both leaving the shop floor more than anybody else, and that all the other permanent packers are, at some point, also leaving the shop floor. On the other hand, none of the temporary workers are walking past me to leave the shop floor. It strikes me that the permanent workers are having extra breaks, and that whilst they are away the lines carry on as normal – surely without Shea and Layla the lines should slow down? Does this mean that the temporary workers are doing Shea and Layla's portion of work in addition to their own? I assume so. Either that or we have too many workers in here
>
> Field notes shift 5

Breaks? Yes, we don't have enough 'cos the work here is back breakin' but the supervisors like to keep us [permanent workers] happy and let us sometimes take things a bit easy. It's a shame that the agency don't get more breaks too

Gill, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

Lazy fuckers, FoodCo [permanent workers]. I like to be kept busy, but it pisses me off when they [permanent workers] have more smoko [cigarette breaks] than us [temporary workers]

Tamas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Having more breaks seems to be a privilege for the FoodCo workers, and a variety of reasons are suggested as to why permanent workers have more breaks. Some workers also believe that female permanent workers are afforded more breaks:

I think permanent ladies have more breaks than us [agency workers] because of 'ladies problems'. I have 'ladies problems' too!

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Malik [a FoodCo worker] tells me that female FoodCo workers have more breaks than agency workers – 'although most of the women only go to have a fag'

Field notes shift 8

The most common underlying reason for taking extra breaks is to visit the smoking area:

> Gilbert [permanent worker] will always have extra breaks because he needs to phone and check on his Mum who is ninety something. We all know he's had a fag break 'cos when he comes back he always smells of fags
>
> Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

The sense of unfairness at the allocation of breaks is also felt at the end of the shift, when permanent staff are allowed to go home after 12 hours are completed, whilst agency workers stay for a further hour to clean up the factory shop floor:

> Mateus [an agency worker] was not happy because he was being made to stay. 'Why not the full timers [being made to stay]?' he was shouting.
>
> Field notes, shift 3

In addition to taking more breaks, blatant timewasting is also a way that permanent workers avoid work:

> Gilbert is leaning up against line 9 bagger and I ask him how he is. 'Ok' he says, 'I'm just having a little skive'. Skiving is a word which I have not heard for some time, although I know that it means to avoid work. 'Skive'?', I ask. Gilbert replied 'the work here is difficult at times so we

[FoodCo permanent workers] all like to have a little skive if we can. You lot can't though' [implying that temporary agency workers are not allowed to]. He grins from ear to ear. From what I can see, skiving is a very obvious and blatant way to avoid work

Field notes, day 6

Being a jockey is good for skiving

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

A further consequence of the inconsistencies of the mixed-up workforce is evidenced as permanent workers appear to take their work less seriously than some temporary workers:

Yeah, permanent workers [FoodCo] some days are working like this, [Tomas gestures packers slowly throwing bags into the boxes and are not packing properly] I don't like this, some permanents care less than agency [workers]

Tomas, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Too much people [FoodCo permanent workers] I told you is very lazy, he lying around all the time. Why work for him? Why?

Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

[Referring to FoodCo permanent workers] If you're nice, yeah, I help you. If you stood like this [indicating lazy], and every time you are

angry, then why I help you, yeah? Yeah, I'm nice one times, two times, and you stay all the time like that [again, indicating lazy]

Dora, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Sometimes Supervisors want an early finish and I push, but I only have two hands, not three hands, not four hands, I am having to work for two people [here he is implying that when he is working alongside a FoodCo worker he has to compensate for their laziness]

Benjamin, temporary agency worker, Romania

I push, push, push, push all the time. And she's [FoodCo permanent worker] not pushing, only working slowly

Ludmila, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

Sometimes he's a joker [FoodCo jockey]. I say please give me a pallet, I want a pallet, I need a pallet. He [FoodCo jockey] he say to me 'yeah, yeah, one minute'. Sometimes coming after, four minutes, five minutes. I say to the [FoodCo] jockey 'my friend I need a pallet'. The [FoodCo] jockey says to me 'Oh I forget, I forget'. He doesn't worry that he makes my line slow. I tell him again 'I told you many times'. He says 'oh I forget'. And smiles at me

Rondon, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

I needed some help. I asked the logistics guy [permanent worker] had he no intention of helping me with lifting a few trays.

Field notes shift 13

Interesting that the jockey boys are supposed to move the full pallets and I am to provide trays etc. In the interests of teamwork, and keeping the lines going, I move some full ones out of the way. The jockey boys do not seem to like this – gesture with hands low down [they want me to stop moving the pallet]. I suspect they see me as doing their job………….and maybe this may reflect poorly on them

Field notes shift 6

Some FoodCo employees remark how permanent FoodCo workers, who used to work for the temporary agency, have quickly taken on some traits of the permanent workers once they secured permanent contracts:

In the past what we see here is that once the temps have landed a permanent job they change. Almost overnight they want extra breaks, slower lines all the usual tricks

Noel, FoodCo Shift Production Manager, UK

It's laughable here you know. I've seen it so many times before. Temps who are on time, they keep up with the line, don't skive. We haven't taken on [permanent workers] for ages but if we do, if temps get the [permanent] jobs they'll soon get lazy like the others [permanent workers]

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

From these accounts, it is apparent that FoodCo management allow some permanent FoodCo workers to carry out their duties with less effort than

temporary workers, which does question the fairness of the shop floor supervision. This is examined in the next section.

7.2.3 <u>Follow the leader?</u>

This study has shown that FoodCo managers and supervisors have a pivotal role in the tripartite relationship in terms of providing directions and managing the blended workforce at FoodCo. The FoodCo shift managers are responsible for the overall running of the shift, whilst the team leaders are responsible for running the production lines. Sometimes though it is not clear as to who is in charge:

> I ask Josef 'who is the supervisor in here? I cannot tell'. Josef replies 'it is Jakob, but there is no point asking him anything, he's fuckin' useless so we sort things out ourselves'
>
> Field notes shift 4

> Now he's [Shiraz] a team leader, why? He don't know anything. When he work in bowl line, all day is very shit. Not finish the order, yeah?
>
> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

Most of the supervisors clearly like to exert some form of control over what goes on:

> We are only allowed to go for a break when 'BREAK' is shouted by a Team Leader or Supervisor, and sometimes we are left waiting until 'BREAK' is called, and the team leaders laugh amongst themselves. They think it is funny to keep us waiting.
>
> Josef, temporary agency worker, Hungary

Lucian, who is a Team Leader smiles at me and says sarcastically 'I have an even more exciting job for you now – go over there and make up some plastic trays'. He makes it very clear to me that he likes to be able to tell me what to do

Field notes, shift 10

Temporary agency workers feel that being in charge, and controlling activities for agency workers, is important for some of the managers and team leaders at FoodCo. As a result, a pattern of direct control emerges to influence the behaviour of agency workers. In this respect the supervisors and team leaders act as authority figures, provide direction to the agency workers, and monitor their performance. Such direct control is seen to rely upon the strength of the relationship between the supervisor (most powerful) and the temporary agency workers (least powerful) to maintain control on the shop floor.

Temporary agency workers believe that most team leaders have little regard for agency workers and provide little guidance or support. Agency workers also feel that these supervisors are keen to maintain control and to exert their authority:

I am a jockey with Jon [a Team Leader] today. Jon is really rude and just grunts. He offers no explanation as to what he wants me to do. Jon just points and provides one-word commands [for instance he points at a pallet and I assume that he wants me to move it!]. I notice that he is not so rude to the FoodCo workers though.

Field notes, shift 15

Jon [Team Leader] says 'fuck the bowl line', to Lydia [a female agency worker] who had replaced Duane [another agency worker] and was placing empty bowls on the line, 'go to line 8 and pack!' he says to Lydia

Field notes, shift 15

I'm packing on Line 4 and run out of black boxes, so I wait for some more to come around. Peter [a Team Leader] asks me why the line had stopped, so I explain that I have none of the black boxes. Peter tells me that I can use plain and is clearly frustrated with me for not knowing!

Field notes, shift 9

Malik, Rondon and Viktor provided further insight that some FoodCo supervisors dislike agency workers, whilst favouring permanent employees:

Most of them don't like you lot [agency workers]. They [supervisors] can't be arsed with having to explain everything and they [supervisors] think the agency bosses should do more. At the end of the day they [supervisor] just want to get the job done and go home

Malik, permanent FoodCo worker, UK

They [FoodCo supervisors] don't like us [agency workers] because we don't speak English so good, that's why they let the permanents go for more breaks and give them easier jobs

Rondon, temporary agency worker, Bulgaria

> Just watch Camilla [FoodCo Shift Manager], she let's all the FoodCo go off the [shop] floor but never ever agency. We have to stay all the time until break time.
>
> Viktor, temporary agency worker, Romania

> All the time you will see it. Permanents do not get the hard jobs, only agency get the most hard jobs and the team leaders do it this way all the time
>
> Max, temporary agency workers, Romania

This section has illustrated how FoodCo management exert control on the workforce. Temporary agency workers believe that permanent workers are treated more favourably by FoodCo management and regard this as unfair. The next section reveals how such perceived unfairness results in temporary agency workers exhibiting a surprising level of resistance in the workplace. A pattern of control from management, and resistance from temporary workers is seen to exist as a fundamental dynamic of life at FoodCo.

7.3 Tactics of resistance

The previous section has highlighted that FoodCo supervisors and team leaders regularly assert their control. Although temporary agency workers at FoodCo do not appear recalcitrant in terms of remonstrating against the expectations which are placed upon them, beneath the surface of apparent consent there is clear evidence of worker resistance.

The rationale for such tactics of resistance can be understood in the context of the preceding chapter in this thesis which highlighted the experiences of temporary agency workers both in terms of the types of job which were allocated to them at FoodCo, and in terms of the time which is taken up by their work. The work provided to temporary agency workers is often intense

and, in some cases, painful for the workers to carry out over an extended period (section 6.2.3). Alongside these intense lived experiences there is also the perception of unfairness from temporary agency workers, who feel that the effort which they must put into their work is greater than the effort provided by their co-workers irrespective of whether these co-workers are local, indigenous UK workers, or permanent, fellow migrant workers. Furthermore, amongst the temporary agency workers there is also evidence that gender plays a part in the allocation of tasks, with male temporary agency workers seeking to avoid mundane, repetitive, and lighter packing duties, which some view as women's work (section 6.3).

As outlined in chapter three, worker resistance occurs for different reasons, by different workers, in different forms and at different times, and showing how worker resistance exists is often not easy. The ethnographic approach of this study provided me with a unique window on this aspect of lived experiences and the following section will highlight observations in the field which show that temporary agency workers wrestled back some control over the labour process at FoodCo.

Agency workers deal with the intense nature of their lived experiences at FoodCo by employing various tactics, and the clearest reason for resistance at FoodCo is to provide some form of respite from the intense work and long working days, with only short and infrequent breaktimes:

> You see the permanents going for extra breaks all the time. The supervisors let them, but I wouldn't be allowed. It's easier for me say the bags are flat and to stop the line, at least then I can have a rest

> Monica, temporary agency worker, Romania

In this account, Monica claims that machinery is creating faulty products, which provides her with an excuse to stop the line and to gain some respite from packing, whilst the alleged issue is investigated by the machine operator. Obtaining micro breaks, which consist of a couple of minutes of unplanned downtime, is effectively a form of timewasting and this is important for Monica to gain some respite from the constant packing.

It is also apparent that creating downtime is a tactic used to deal with the perceived lack of fairness felt by some temporary agency workers towards their permanent co-workers:

> Camilla [FoodCo Shift Manager] lets the FoodCo people go for toilet and cigarette breaks. We [temporary agency workers] are expected to stay and carry on and do their work. It's not fair so whenever I can, when she's not around, I'll fill up the lightweight bin so I can get my extra breaks too
>
> Dora, temporary agency worker, Hungary

In this case, because permanent workers are leaving the shop floor, Dora finds a way to deal with the unfairness that she perceives. Dora fills up the container that is used to catch rejected bags which are underweight, with bags that are at the correct weight. Once the container is full, the line automatically stops and this requires Dora to intervene. Whilst the line is stopped, Dora can relax, albeit briefly.

To compensate for the intense work, perceived unfairness and lack of breaks, temporary agency workers deploy a range of tactics to waste time, as these accounts illustrate further:

Some boxes are provided to the packers by a conveyor belt – a type of carousel - and the packers need to grab the boxes before they go past. Tamas and Keziah [two temporary agency workers] have mastered the art of just failing to grab the boxes they need – this means that they have to wait for them to come back round. I can see that this is clever way to grab a few seconds rest, and the supervisors would never know

Field notes day 2, observations as I stand and hand erect plastic crates

I'm hand erecting plastic trays with Viktor today. This is a boring and physical job, but Viktor says to me 'go slower, this is an easy job. If anybody says we are too slow we can say it's because they [the crates] are slippy'. I understand 100% what he means, and it would feel odd if I didn't slow down too. Compared to being swamped with 55 bags a minute on a packing line, this is easy work

Field notes day 6, hand erecting 500 plastic crates with Viktor, a temporary agency worker from Romania.

Amongst these accounts of individual resistance, I regard Viktor's encouragement for me to go slower as a form of collective resistance, as I feel peer pressure to reduce my work effort.

In these examples, the temporary agency workers exhibit a form of soldiering and behave in a way that seems consistent to their situation as they perceive it. Whilst FoodCo Supervisors and Managers would regard this as misbehaviour, I only notice the tactics used by the temporary agency workers because of direct observation, as these tactics are subtle, to some extent cunning, and in most cases very unlikely to be detected by Supervisors on a busy factory shop floor.

In chapter six, section 6.3, I highlighted that male temporary agency workers try and avoid packing duties on the pretext that this is woman's work. However, a more plausible reason to avoid packing duties is to secure alternative, less repetitive and less arduous work:

> I'm assembling more plastic crates this morning and I can see Tamas trying to pack on line 9. Bags are going all over the floor and he's complaining that his hands are too big to fit in the box. Noel [FoodCo Shift Manager] goes over and Tamas is moved to another line. Ten minutes later Tamas comes over to help me with the crates. Tamas winks at me and says 'this is better for my back'

> Field notes day 5

> I'm packing today, and this is a nightmare, my hands are aching from grabbing the bags. I could keep up but it's so difficult, so I let some bags go on the floor, hoping to be moved to another job. After 15 minutes Camilla [FoodCo Shift Manager] replaces me with Dora and I'm asked to jockey with Malik. Strikes me that the way to avoid packing is to be bad at it, but I can't be bad at everything or I'll have no work!

> Field notes day 6

> I'm jockeying today with Max. It's hard work, constantly fetching and carrying boxes and pallets, but at least we get to go outside for the pallets. The fresh air and the natural light are most welcome. Whilst outside Max asks me about my studies. He tells me that he's an Engineering graduate and wants to work full time as an Engineer when he can confirm that his qualifications are correct for the UK. It was the first time work here at FoodCo has felt pleasurable; fresh air, daylight,

warmth, and some conversation. I can understand why temporary workers sometimes prefer to jockey than pack.

Field notes day 7

In addition to securing less intense (easier) work, these examples also illustrate a further point. Whilst packing duties have some, but limited, opportunities for the appropriation of time, the jobs that male temporary agency workers prefer to carry out present greater opportunities for the appropriation of both time and work: timewasting and periods of reduced work activity.

Having only a couple of breaks during a shift, which is thirteen hours long, not only means constant physical demands, but also limits the opportunity for refreshments:

It's 5pm and I now have the job of assembling 100 plastic crates for a late order which unfortunately won't take me long. I'm out of the view of the bowl line but I can see Tomas [temporary agency worker] but he can't see me. He's eating cherry tomatoes; he's trying to disguise the fact, but's he's picking them up one at a time and discreetly putting them in his mouth. Everybody knows that eating on the shop floor is a sackable offence. Tomas will know that too but he's taking the risk. He obviously thinks it's worth the risk. Our last break ended at mid-day, so it is likely that he's hungry

Field notes, day 6

It's been a very long day. I've been on the bowl line all day and it's not been good. The line has been stop/start all day due to problems with the machinery. The labeller has been playing up and we have had to

label 1000's of bowls by hand. Tedious, frustrating and the time has really dragged. My fingers are killing me from the repetitive motion of peeling labels off a reel and sticking them onto a bowl. Shiraz [FoodCo green hat] has been in charge today, but we've hardly seen him. As the day has gone on Viktor [Agency worker] has become increasingly mischievous and by 6pm he's had enough. Not only is he larking about – sticking labels on the back of Zelda without her realising - but he's also eaten some croutons and cherry tomatoes that should be going into the salad bowls. He was trying to be discreet but when he realised I had seen him he winks at me, smiles and says 'snacko'. I respond with a question. 'Snacko?', I ask, to which Viktor replies 'I'm starving, aren't you? This job has been shit today, boring, long and this food is keeping me going'.

Field notes, day 10

Tomas and Viktor's actions, eating croutons and cherry tomatoes which are intended for use in the salad bowls, provides evidence of a further resistance tactic which is deployed by temporary agency workers.

This section has highlighted a range of tactics used by temporary agency workers to secure some respite from their intense work and conditions. Such tactics include the securing of micro breaks or correcting perceived unfairness by creating downtime. Claiming to be relatively incompetent at a certain job, such as packing, to be given an easier job, such as erecting plastic crates, could also be regarded as gendered, as this tactic is only demonstrated by male temporary agency workers.

Covertly eating on the shop floor, possibly out of necessity due to the infrequent official break times away from the shop floor, was also observed. A notable theme expressed throughout these accounts is that the tactics enacted by temporary agency workers are specific to the combination of

conditions experienced by these workers, in terms of the intense work, perceived unfairness and lack of breaks. Whilst permanent workers also demonstrate resistance, the tactics exhibited by permanent workers are observed to be more overt, with an implied approval from management, such as leaving the shop floor for additional breaks.

The tactics of resistance observed in action on the FoodCo shop floor, are primarily carried out at an individual, rather than a collective level. In this regard there appears to be little evidence of collective organising around the issues which lead to the appropriation of time, work, or product, which maybe is not surprising given the relative individualism created as a result of a wide spread of nationalities, languages, transiency and tenure amongst the agency workers at FoodCo, along with a general sense of self-interest in order for individual workers to secure *work tomorrow*. Indeed, the only evidence of a more collective resistance effort is when a fellow temporary worker either turns a blind eye or exerts peer pressure by working slowly on a joint task.

7.4 <u>Conclusions</u>

This final data chapter has examined the third aspect of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers and explored their workplace relationships at FoodCo, showing how nationality and language both represent, and are constitutive of, these relationships. The complex, interconnected factory relationships were explored in several ways.

First, I have highlighted the diverse mix of nationalities that exist on the FoodCo factory shop floor and illustrated how temporary agency workers experience a nationalist bias, as only when a pipeline of available Bulgarian workers runs dry are non-Bulgarian nationals hired by AgencyCo. When hired, these non-Bulgarian workers are also often provided with the least desirable jobs.

Second, the effects of a tripartite employment relationship have been examined from the perspective of temporary agency workers, particularly in

respect to the expectations placed upon these workers by the management of both AgencyCo and FoodCo. The tripartite relationship is often confusing and ambiguous for the agency workers as both AgencyCo and FoodCo supervisors provide contradictory direction and commands.

Third, the notion of the blended workforce at FoodCo has been explored from the perspective of temporary agency workers. The workplace experiences of temporary agency workers, working alongside permanent co-workers, demonstrate that blending is not as smooth and homogenous as described in some of the literature. The workforce at FoodCo was found to be more mixed-up than blended, and the temporary element of the workforce was itself multi-faceted and complex. The AgencyCo temporary agency workers represent many nationalities, have wide ranging English-speaking capability, are of mixed tenure, and have various levels of experience of the FoodCo site.

Whilst previous research on blended workforces has focussed on the effects on organizations and permanent workers, this research reveals how the mixed-up workforce at FoodCo gives rise to shop floor conflicts between, and amongst, permanent and temporary workers. In some cases, temporary workers are unfairly blamed for mistakes which causes resentment amongst the temporary workers, whilst the evidence suggests that inadequate training for temporary workers also leads to genuine errors being made.

The fact that many temporary agency workers have limited English creates issues on the factory floor including increased health and safety risks and inaccuracies in packing processes and factory paperwork.

Fourth, FoodCo shop floor leadership was explored in this chapter to understand the extent that supervisors and team leaders exhibit favouritism towards permanent workers, compared to an apparent disregard for agency workers. Inequality in the blended workforce is evident as permanent workers can appropriate extra breaks, compared to their temporary co-workers. Permanent workers are regarded as lazy by their temporary counterparts, who by contrast are pushed to work hard by the FoodCo supervisors.

The final section of this data chapter examined the tactics of resistance deployed by some temporary agency workers who felt that they were treated unfairly, vis-à-vis the permanent workers. A pattern of control, by leaders, and resistance, from agency workers, emerged as a fundamental dynamic of life at FoodCo.

Resistance tactics are used by agency workers to lessen the impact of their intense work experience at FoodCo and to enact revenge for their sense of unfairness. In some cases, temporary agency workers appropriate time and work by soldiering or creating downtime to provide themselves with micro breaks as relief from the intense work, whilst some male temporary workers seek out work which provides greater opportunities for the appropriation of time and work. The infrequent, official break times also encourage the appropriation of product, as some agency workers covertly eat some items intended for production. The notion of shop floor resistance is significant in this study as many of the tactics of resistance exhibited by temporary agency workers are subtle and cunning, and some of these tactics reveal that temporary agency workers possess a higher level of individual, and concealed, agency which FoodCo management are unlikely to suspect.

8.0 DISCUSSION

8.1 <u>Introduction</u>

The aim of this study was to address several gaps in the current literature on temporary agency work. Whilst such work has been subject to extensive research, most accounts have considered outcomes from macroeconomic, organizational, or human resource perspectives. Few accounts have taken into consideration the view from below to consider the lived experiences of temporary agency workers from their point of view. This is surprising given the prevalence of temporary agency work in many areas of the UK labour market.

In this study I have given an ethnographic account of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers in a UK fresh food factory, focussing on three aspects: a) finding and maintaining work; b) carrying out work; and c) the relational aspects of being at work. The first aspect was examined in the first data chapter (chapter five) and considered precarious work and workplace insecurity, whilst the second aspect, which was explored in the second data chapter (chapter six), was the actual work which was carried out by temporary agency workers. Temporary agency workers, who had found work and were carrying out work, experienced multi-faceted employment relationships whilst at work. This third aspect of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers was examined in the final data chapter (chapter seven).

8.2 <u>Contributions</u>

In this section, I restate each of my research questions and explain how my findings from this study contribute to the current literature.

Research question 1: *What are temporary agency workers lived experiences of workplace security and workplace insecurity?*

To address this first research question, in the context of temporary agency workers seeking and then maintaining work, in the first empirical chapter I uncovered why agency workers were attracted to the work provided by

AgencyCo, and how some of these agency workers were subsequently able to reduce the effects of workplace insecurity.

8.2.1 New insights into precarious work and workplace insecurity

The literature, reviewed in chapter three, revealed a lack of consensus surrounding the concepts of precarity and insecurity (Sennett 1998; Beck 2000; Fevre 2007; Kalleberg 2009; Evans and Gibb 2009; Standing 2011, 2014; Swider 2015; Doogan 2001, 2015; Prosser 2016; Alberti et al 2018; Rubery et al 2018). Debates about precarity and insecurity overlap with discussions of segmented labour market theory (Doeringer and Piore 1970; Piore 1979) as central to theories of segmented labour markets are assumptions that core-equals-stable work and secondary-equals-unstable work, with migrant workers occupying the types of job associated with secondary work.

What constitutes as a standard form of employment and as a nonstandard form of employment has also been the subject of debate (Kalleberg 2000; Supiot 2001; Doogan 2001; Bosch 2004; Fevre 2007; Rubery et al 2018). As employers have pursued increasingly flexible working arrangements, some prominent theorists have suggested that employment is divided into two distinct groups, those in secure jobs and those in insecure jobs (Sennett 1998; Beck 2000).

Such a transformation of employment from secure, permanent, and long-term work to precarious, insecure, and short-term work remains contested, and disagreements amongst authors in this field are rooted in the availability, interpretation, and ambiguity of data (Fevre 2007; Doogan 2009; Choonara 2019).

For this study I have considered employment precarity as a structural condition faced by AgencyCo workers, who are dependent on temporary work assignments as their ongoing source of income. Employment insecurity is primarily conceptualised as both job insecurity and work insecurity, where job security is considered as a workers' ability to maintain their current job, and work security is their ability to secure replacement work (Vulkan 2012; Zekic

2016). In this thesis I regard employment insecurity as framed by the choices that temporary agency workers can make as they cope with their precarious employment situation. My findings provide further empirical data for this analytical separation, as some non-precarious (permanent) workers felt insecure, and some precarious (temporary agency) workers felt secure.

By taking a view from below, this thesis seeks to move these debates forward and provides empirical evidence of employment insecurity from the perspectives of those actors that are best placed to provide meaningful insights - temporary agency workers.

A fundamental requirement for a temporary work agency is an available pool of flexible labour which is ready to deploy at short notice, and in many areas different agencies compete for the same pool of labour. Furthermore, competing temporary work agencies have little scope to differentiate themselves as they primarily provide the same work offer, at national living wages, and similar conditions and jobs, which are low skilled and mundane. Given these unfavourable labour-hiring characteristics, when addressing the first research question, I considered two important questions: Why are temporary workers attracted to particular temporary work agencies? and how are temporary workers retained amid competition from other agencies? Temporary agency workers experiences of hiring practices have received little attention in the literature, and this study provides further insight into this aspect of temporary agency work.

Temporary agency workers are attracted to AgencyCo for two main reasons. First, temporary workers with a low level of English-speaking competency apply to join AgencyCo because the English competency entrance tests, part of the recruitment process, can easily be passed by any agency worker, irrespective of their English-speaking ability. In some cases, the tests are completed by family members on behalf of workers who are applying for roles with AgencyCo. Effectively, non-English-speaking temporary workers, who

have few alternative options of employment, are attracted to AgencyCo because they are confident that they will be hired.

Second, many migrant temporary agency workers at FoodCo either do not hold a UK driving licence, or do not have access to a car, and the provision of transport to and from the FoodCo site enables temporary agency workers to get to work. Consequently, a further section of the available temporary labour pool is captured by AgencyCo.

Once hired by AgencyCo, temporary agency workers are put under pressure to accept any shifts, and any roles which they are offered, even at extremely short notice. On occasions when temporary agency workers are unable to *work tomorrow*, the implied threat is that future offers of work will be withheld. The findings from this study demonstrate what is referred to as one-sided flexibility (Taylor 2017), with some employers using this flexibility to transfer risk to, and exert control over, workers. Given the lack of alternative employment options available to AgencyCo temporary agency workers, I argue that these workers are particularly susceptible to one-sided flexibility. The literature has not fully considered how temporary agency workers are exposed to an increased risk of one-sided flexibility as a consequence of the hiring approaches of temporary work agencies, and this thesis adds to our knowledge of this area of temporary agency work.

Whilst an extensive literature has examined precarious work and employment insecurity (Kalleberg 2009; Evans and Gibb 2009; Balch and Scott 2011; Anderson and Ruhs 2012; Geddes and Scott 2012; Thompson et al 2013; Potter and Hamilton 2014; Swider 2015; Prosser 2016; Scott 2017; Alberti et al 2018; Rubery et al 2018), this body of work has not fully examined how temporary agency workers respond to employment insecurity. Furthermore, whilst the current literature on precarious work predominantly focusses on the specificity of the worker's migrant status (Balch and Scott 2011; Geddes and Scott 2012; Anderson and Ruhs 2012; Thompson et al 2013; Potter and

Hamilton 2014; Scott 2017) this thesis has considered the specificity of migrant workers' temporary employment status.

This study found that some temporary agency workers at FoodCo reduce their sense of job insecurity by building an individual reputation and demonstrate a willingness to undertake any task that is offered to them. Within a harsh, cold factory environment such work often involves excessive hours, heavy lifting, hazardous tasks, cleaning dirty equipment, intense and repetitive packing and stacking duties. Workers who are prepared to carry out any task that is offered to them create positive individual reputations with AgencyCo, which in turn lessens their sense of job insecurity, as these workers increase their chances of being retained in their current jobs.

This study also identified other ways in which temporary agency workers exercise their individual agency to lessen the material impact of work insecurity. This was evidenced as some temporary agency workers rely on other forms of precarious work such as working as unregistered tattooists, working in car wash establishments and some workers who assist in running their landlords' shops, receiving cheaper rent in lieu of their labour. Whilst their ongoing job placement remains precarious, their sense of work insecurity is reduced as they are confident about finding various ways to maintain a level of income.

At AgencyCo, those agency workers who can improve their English also reduce their sense of work insecurity. The findings from this study show that workers who improve their English language skills improve their networks and contacts, as these workers can register at multiple agencies, increase their mobility, and obtain a continuous stream of temporary work assignments. For these workers, although their current job placement situation remains precarious, they consider this as a relatively secure situation owing to the overall demand for English-speaking temporary agency workers in the UK food supply chain.

The literature highlights the position of the temporary agency worker in the tripartite employment relationship that exists between clients, temporary work agencies and temporary agency workers (McLean Parks et al 1998; Kalleberg 2000; Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001; Storrie 2002; Davidov 2004; Claes 2005; Forde and Slater 2006; Goudswaard and de Leede 2014; Chambel 2014; Judge 2018). Whilst temporary agency workers are in the weakest position in this employment relationship, those workers who improve their English skills reduce this position of weakness as they move between multiple agencies and become more selective in the type of assignments they undertake. As a result of improving their English, temporary agency workers make their position in this employment relationship, and the labour market, less weak.

Although this study focusses on the precarious nature of temporary agency work, the findings reveal how such work also impacts FoodCo permanent workers. At FoodCo, permanent workers were found to question the security of their own employee status, believing that the compliant and flexible approach of many temporary agency workers would be a more desirable future workforce for FoodCo management. Little research has been carried out to understand how permanent co-workers are impacted by the precarious nature of temporary agency work and this study contributes to our knowledge in this area.

Research question 2: *What are temporary agency workers' experiences of the temporal aspect of their work, and of the intensity of their work?*

In the context of temporary agency workers carrying out work at FoodCo, in the second empirical chapter I examined the experiences of temporary agency workers from two perspectives. First, how the combined effect of job type and job time impacts on the workplace experiences of temporary agency workers and, second, the intense nature of temporary agency work at FoodCo.

8.2.2 <u>The combined effect of job type and job time</u>

Segmented labour markets have been broadly outlined in the literature as comprising a primary sector, dominated by non-migrant labour and characterized by reasonable salaries and secure jobs, and a secondary sector characterized by tedious work, employment insecurity and poor pay and conditions, carried out mainly by migrant labour (Doeringer and Piore 1970; Piore 1979; Atkinson 1984; Smith 1997; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Karlsson 2007; MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Scott 2017).

At FoodCo, the type of job which is synonymous with the secondary sector of the labour market is carried out by temporary agency workers but is also carried out by some permanent workers. Whilst job type is important to understand segmented labour markets, I argue that job time provides a nuanced perspective to further explain the role of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market.

I have conceptualized job time as the time that is taken up by work, comprising two aspects: active work time and passive work time. I define active work time as the time workers spend undertaking the work which they are hired to do, whilst passive work time is the time spent on other activities which are related to their work, such as travelling to and from work and waiting for work to begin. I argue that the combined effect of these two temporal aspects is significantly longer for temporary agency workers compared to permanent workers who undertake the same types of jobs.

AgencyCo temporary agency workers experience increased job time in several ways. First, whilst FoodCo provides transport for permanent workers from their homes, temporary workers are required to make their own way to one of two locations. This is also the case on the journey home, as temporary workers are dropped off at only two locations, whilst permanent workers are dropped off at their home addresses. By having to travel to and from the bus stops, agency workers have up to 60 minutes more passive work time each day compared to permanent workers. Temporary agency workers are also

instructed to be on the shop floor ten minutes before the official shift start time which amounts to 50 extra minutes of unpaid passive work each week.

Second, agency workers work up to thirteen hours each day, whilst permanent workers work a maximum of twelve hours per day, which are the contracted hours for FoodCo permanent employees. Third, permanent workers are contracted to work a maximum of four consecutive days, whilst agency workers – during peak summer months – are often expected to work up to six consecutive shifts, each up to thirteen hours per day.

Finally, by having none of the informal breaks that are afforded to permanent workers, agency workers endure up to 30 minutes more active work time, each day on the FoodCo shop floor.

In this study I have revealed how the job time for temporary agency workers is up to two-and-a-half hours more per day than permanent workers who are performing the same job types. By working alongside temporary agency workers, I gained first-hand experience of the intense nature of the work at FoodCo and it was evident that working fewer, fixed hours provided permanent workers with respite from the physical and mental demands of the work, whilst also enabling them to plan their time outside of work. On the other hand, temporary agency workers are expected to work extended hours – often with no prior notice - and more consecutive days, if the production demands are high, or to compensate for any problems experienced during the day, such as machinery breakdowns or issues with raw material availability. This leaves them with scarcely any time to attend for other aspects of their lives. I argue that job time has been overlooked when considering secondary job markets and this study offers a contribution to the literature in this area.

This temporal aspect is important in two ways. First, excessive job time has the potential to affect health, wellbeing, attitudes, and behaviours and is especially impactful for temporary agency workers at factories like FoodCo, where the work is intense, repetitive, and mundane. Second, I argue that the joint consideration of job time and job type helps to explain important

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differences in lived experiences for temporary agency workers vis-à-vis permanent workers. Even though the jobs which they undertake are of the same type – their lived experiences differ significantly.

8.2.3 The intense nature of temporary agency work at FoodCo.

The literature outlines a broad range of low skilled, mundane, and repetitive jobs that temporary agency workers typically undertake (Holgate 2005; James and Lloyd 2008; Rogaly 2008; Balch and Scott 2011; Potter and Hamilton 2014; Lever and Milbourne 2017; Choonara 2019) and there is also a body of work which highlights particular concerns regarding the workplace health and safety of temporary agency workers (McKay et al 2006; Dench et al 2006; Lloyd and James 2008). Despite this attention, the impact of the intense work that is experienced by many temporary agency workers in the UK food supply chain is not fully understood.

Consistent with the literature, the nature of the work at FoodCo is low skilled, mundane, and repetitive. However, based on the evidence from this study, the current literature does not go far enough to articulate the intense nature of the work undertaken by many temporary agency workers in the UK food industry. For instance, in their study of a meat processing plant, Lever and Milbourne (2017) comment that 'workers push themselves to physical and mental extremes' (p313), although what the workers do is not explained. Rogaly (2008) in his study of the UK horticulture sector, discussed the 'intensification of workplace regimes' although the areas under scrutiny did not include the actual work which was carried out by workers in the study.

An ethnographic approach allowed a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of temporary agency workers at FoodCo. Workers regularly complained of muscular and joint problems due to the unrelenting nature of the work on the FoodCo shop floor. Many wore support bandages to protect their wrists whilst repeatedly packing bags of product, and it was commonplace for workers to use ibuprofen gel or to take anti-inflammatory tablets just to complete their shifts. The packing stations were not ergonomic

and did not cater for workers of different heights. Standing and packing constantly on a thirteen-hour shift was back-breaking work. During this time, a packing operative was required to pack up to 40,000 bags and the effect of this work, in a chilled environment, was to leave their hands and fingers stiff and 'clawlike'. Temporary workers carrying out the jockey role were known to walk up to 25 kilometres during a thirteen-hour shift as they provided empty pallets, crates, and cardboard boxes to the packing lines. The physical demands of the work were exacerbated for temporary agency workers as break times were limited to two breaks of 30 minutes during a thirteen-hour shift. Permanent workers, on the other hand, were allowed additional, unofficial break times.

In addressing the second research question I have shown that working life at FoodCo consists of hard labour and long hours, regularly more than the 48-hours working week of the Working Time Directive. Whilst this finding is consistent with other research (Holgate 2005; Ruhs 2006; Forde and MacKenzie 2009) this study highlights a further limitation of the AgencyCo hiring process. Whilst it might be argued that temporary agency workers voluntarily choose to waive their rights to protection by signing an opt-out from the 48-hour rule during the induction process, this choice should be considered in the context of the precarious nature of temporary agency work, which may mean that there is no *work tomorrow*. In such a context, many temporary agency workers seek to maximize their income through working long hours. As such, temporary agency workers are merely given the appearance of choice. In order words if they did not make the *right choice* then they would have little chance of maintaining work and no chance of maximizing their income. This empirical finding adds to the notion of an architecture of choice (Standing 2014) that exists in precarious work, as AgencyCo expect temporary agency workers to both be available for work, and to work excessively long hours, if required to do so.

Research question 3: *What are temporary agency workers' experiences of the blended workplace?*

To address this third research question, I examined temporary agency workers as they experienced multi-faceted relationships whilst at work.

8.2.4 Mixed-up workplace relationships.

In the final data chapter (chapter seven) I investigated the workplace experiences of AgencyCo temporary agency workers as they worked alongside FoodCo permanent employees.

An organization such as FoodCo, with a workforce which consists of temporary workers alongside permanent employees is referred to in the literature as a blended workplace (Geary 1992; Ward et al 2001; Davis-Blake et al 2003; Broschak et al 2008). In the literature, flexibility and cost are the primary reasons given as to why organizations typically blend their workforces. Such organizations gain numerical flexibility by engaging temporary agency workers, alongside permanent employees, to smooth out staffing levels during seasonal fluctuations or other changes in market demand (Atkinson 1984; Smith 1997, 2001). By using temporary workers, who are on the payroll of a third-party employer (Davis-Blake and Uzzi 1993; Forde and Slater 2006), on an as-and when-needed basis, labour costs can be minimised.

The literature has concentrated mainly on the outcomes that such an arrangement has on organizations, permanent employees, or managers. For instance, research suggests that permanent employees who work as part of a blended workforce have poorer working relationships with their managers compared to permanent employees who do not have temporary agency co-workers (Davis-Blake et al 2003). Also, within a blended workforce, permanent team members feel a reduced sense of loyalty, are more likely to voluntarily leave the workplace and feel that they have a reduced employee voice (Davis-Blake et al 2003; Broschak et al 2008). The literature also highlights the day-to-day difficulties that workplace managers have as they

manage an occupationally and contractually divided workforce, along with having to navigate the relationships between senior managers of the client site and managers of the temporary work agencies (Ward et al 2001).

Research to date has not adequately considered the blended workplace from the perspective of temporary agency workers. Based on the findings from this study, I argue that the workforce at FoodCo is better conceptualised as mixed-up than blended.

The temporary agency workers at FoodCo are overwhelmingly migrants, from both inside and outside of the EU, whilst the permanent workers comprise a cohort of longer serving British workers, combined with EU migrants who had previously secured permanent contracts. As a result, the workforce at FoodCo consists of a wide variety of workers of differing tenures and experiences, and a vast range of languages are spoken on the factory floor.

In the case of FoodCo, I suggest that the term blended sugar-coats the reality of life on the factory shop floor. Whilst blending suggests a workplace which is smooth and homogenous, this study outlines that life on the diverse FoodCo shop floor was dissonant and complicated – more appropriately described as mixed up.

Two themes relating to this research question emerged from this study – one of language and one of training - and both themes have implications for the lived experiences of temporary agency workers. By examining these themes, this study contributes to the current literature to reveal how the mixed-up workforce at FoodCo gives rise to shop floor conflicts between permanent and temporary workers and increased health and safety risks for temporary agency workers.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how AgencyCo seek to attract and recruit temporary agency workers with low levels of English-speaking competence and that by doing so, AgencyCo tap into a pool of workers that have few alternative options of employment, other than to work for AgencyCo. I

revealed that as part of the recruitment process, AgencyCo intentionally make it easy for such workers to pass English competency entry tests.

The implication of this hiring policy is evident on the shop floor at FoodCo. Whilst the current literature has not fully explained the extent to which a multilingual workforce impacts mixed-up workplaces, the empirical evidence from this study indicates that temporary agency workers experience several adverse experiences because of their poor English language skills.

First, permanent workers capitalise on the poor English of some of the temporary workers for several reasons; to deflect attention away from their own mistakes, to blame temporary workers for other issues on the shop floor, or to simply to get an agency worker into trouble for their own amusement. Temporary workers who improve their English skills are, however, able to increase their individual agency to mitigate against these situations.

Second, on some occasions, arguments occur amongst temporary workers who claim that they do not understand what each other is doing. This is particularly evident on certain packing lines that require two packing operatives to work together.

Third, the evidence from this study highlights an increased risk of accidents to temporary agency workers who do not adequately understand risks in the workplace. Site rules are explained in English which results in many new agency workers not understanding what is required from them, as in the case of a temporary agency worker who inadvertently stood in the way of a pallet truck which was being operated by a permanent worker.

Although there is some literature on health and safety issues concerning temporary agency workers (McKay et al 2006; James and Lloyd 2008; Lloyd and James 2008) such research acknowledges that difficulty in obtaining data underestimates the problems that are faced. This study enabled me to obtain valuable data to contribute to our knowledge in this area, as further unsafe conditions that posed risks to temporary agency workers were observed during this study.

The second theme which emerged from this study was the lack of training which temporary agency workers receive. As a participant, I experienced the problems faced by new temporary agency workers at FoodCo. In the absence of any meaningful training, carrying out the work and completing factory paperwork is difficult. Mistakes are commonplace, and often result in chastisement from FoodCo permanent employees and management. The frustrations felt by temporary workers frequently result in shop floor arguments, particularly as temporary workers are acutely aware that perceived poor job performance would likely affect their chances of *work tomorrow* at FoodCo.

This study shows that some AgencyCo temporary workers do not fully understand how to carry out the jobs which they are allocated or are not aware of the FoodCo health and safety rules due to poor English and/or a lack of training. Such workers are invariably prone to mistakes and accidents compared to their permanent co-workers and are at risk of being seen as a bad worker.

The literature on the tripartite employment relationship has primarily been presented from the perspective of the organization (McLean Parks et al 1998; Kalleberg 2000; Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001; Storrie 2002; Davidov 2004; Claes 2005; Marchington et al 2005; Chambel 2014)

Such research has identified how client organizations maximise labour flexibility whilst minimising costs (Kerkofs et al 2010; Goudswaard and de Leede 2014) and how these organizations can establish an employment relationship with little obligation to workers (Druker and Stanworth 2004; Havard et al 2009).

Further studies have identified how some client organizations in a tripartite relationship effectively outsource their own internal requirements for permanent labour to temporary worker agencies via a temp-to-perm arrangement (Forde and MacKenzie 2009; Scott 2013). The attraction of such an arrangement is presented as a potential win/win/win situation with

temporary workers progressing from their position of employment precarity, employers bolstering their workforce with proven recruits from the temporary labour pool, and temporary work agencies benefitting from signing on fees.

Although a temp-to-perm arrangement has the potential to be a route into permanent employment for temporary agency workers, the findings from this study identify that the realistic chances of a permanent job at FoodCo are illusory for the AgencyCo temporary agency workers, for two main reasons.

First, this study highlights the light touch approach that AgencyCo follow when hiring temporary workers. Whilst AgencyCo do not apply any rigour to the requirement for English-speaking skills, the findings from this study show that workers who apply for permanent roles are required to pass a FoodCo English test that assesses both spoken and written competency. Although many permanent and temporary workers carry out similar roles, the level of English standards required by AgencyCo and FoodCo differ. If permanent roles do become available, temporary agency workers would not be offered a permanent job unless they significantly improve their English skills.

Second, the demand for FoodCo products is driven by seasonality (largely weather dependant) and by the relationship FoodCo have with their customers, who are primarily the big four UK retailers. Consequently, sales volumes are impacted both by poor summer weather, and retailer demands for favourable trading terms and price reductions. Such retailer demands, if rejected by FoodCo, often result in reduced promotional activity, delisted products, reduced product ranges in stores and a downturn in sales. Unpredictable sales lead to unpredictable manufacturing plans, and ultimately an increased requirement for flexible labour. In the case of FoodCo, as the Operations Manager highlighted, tapping into a readily available source of low-skilled, flexible temporary labour reduces labour costs and this is FoodCo's preferred approach to manning the factory. The evidence from this study is that due to the unpredictability of their sales volumes, FoodCo has

progressively reduced the recruitment of permanent workers, and maximised the use of flexible temporary labour. These findings are important as they affect the lived experiences of those temporary workers who have hope of escaping from their situation of employment insecurity, but who appear to have little chance of a permanent job at FoodCo.

Previous research into tripartite relationships also highlights that the co-operation between agencies and clients can be limited and focused primarily on short term transactions (Goudswaard and de Leede 2014). Such a transactional, or arm's length approach has been shown to affect the integration of temporary agency workers into client organizations, impacting on the approach taken by individual agency workers to either the agency or the client (Van Dyne and Ang 1998; Forde and Slater 2006; Chambel 2014). Surprisingly, the views of temporary agency workers in this employment relationship are underrepresented, given that these workers are the central actors.

Although the literature differentiates between the employment relationship (i.e., risk and administrative control) lying with the work agency, and the work relationship (i.e., supervision and coordination) lying with the client organization (Gonos 1997), previous research has not fully examined how these relationships are experienced or understood by temporary agency workers. This study found that temporary agency workers are regularly left confused by conflicting requests from both AgencyCo and FoodCo, and temporary agency workers at FoodCo are unsure of the role of AgencyCo and FoodCo, vis-à-vis employment relationships *and* work relationships. Temporary agency workers at FoodCo, most with poor English skills, do not know who to take direction from and as a result are often criticized for failing to carry out work instructions. Based on my findings, such contradicting direction is a frequent source of frustration and distress to temporary agency workers.

Furthermore, many agency workers feel that their relationship with AgencyCo is strongly influenced by the nationality of the AgencyCo Co-ordinator, who is Bulgarian, and Bulgarian temporary agency workers feel that they are provided with clear instructions from AgencyCo. On the contrary, many temporary workers from other countries feel that they receive fewer offers of work from AgencyCo and that an inadequate level of communication prevents them from doing a good job. Effectively, a nationalistic bias emerges as a Bulgarian hiring manager prefers to hire Bulgarian workers, although the findings of this study suggest that such a bias is primarily based on ease and convenience for the agency management, and not necessarily because of any perceived benefits in terms of worker output, attitude, or compliance.

The wide range of agency worker languages at the field site complicates the formation of factory relationships. The impacts of multiple nationalities and languages contributes to the mixed-up workplace, as miscommunication and a frequent lack of understanding as to what is required of temporary agency workers is rife. Although the literature has previously identified the challenges faced by temporary agency workers, who fulfil obligations to clients and agencies (Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001; Judge 2018) this empirical study further highlights how the efforts of temporary agency workers are impacted by the line managers of both AgencyCo and FoodCo.

FoodCo line managers allocate the work to temporary agency workers, provide instruction, determine the number of hours the workers are required for, decide when break times are taken and arbitrarily assign unofficial breaks to permanent workers. The impact that a client's line management has on the temporary element of a mixed-up workforce has received little attention and based on the evidence from this study I argue that FoodCo line management has a specific, and significant, role in the tripartite relationship.

For instance, FoodCo line management allocate jobs at FoodCo primarily based on a stereotypical, gender-based approach of male strength and female manual dexterity. Male temporary agency workers regularly refer to certain

roles, such as packing, as jobs for females and typically, the stacker and jockey roles are allocated to male workers as these roles involve repetitive lifting and are perceived to be heavy work.

The literature identifies that, compared to other types of non-standard forms of employment, temporary work has the highest concentration of women workers and that women are over-represented in lower-skilled, labour-intensive, and routine jobs such as packing (Flecker et al 1998; DiNatale 2001). The literature also points out that *women's work* is constructed as routine and repetitive jobs (Pollert 1996; Geddes and Scott 2012) and it was evident during my field work that stereotypes regarding women working in factories are commonplace at FoodCo.

The approach taken by FoodCo line management, when allocating jobs to the mixed-up workforce, is consistent with previous research which suggested that, in the UK food industry, 'men tend to be in charge of machinery and dangerous tools, whilst women are preferred for the nimble tasks' (Geddes and Scott 2012: 206). However, whilst a dominant theme in the literature is that women are preferred for nimble tasks, such as packing (Pollert 1996; Flecker et al 1998; DiNatale 2001), nimble does not mean that such jobs are easy or light. Whilst packing duties in some factories may well constitute light work, the empirical findings from this study reveal that packing duties at FoodCo are unrelenting and physically demanding. This study highlights that whilst packing lightweight bags of salad might sound easy, this is an intense and demanding job.

Migrant workers are a key component of the mixed-up workforce at FoodCo and the perceived superior work ethic of these workers is a key feature of the literature (Ruhs 2006; Coe et all 2007; Geddes et all 2007; Scott et al 2007; MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Castles and Kosack 2010; Balch and Scott 2011; Anderson and Ruhs 2012; Geddes and Scott 2012; Scott 2013; Thompson et al 2013; McCollum and Findlay 2015). Whilst this body of work highlights that many organizations perceive that migrant workers possess a superior work

ethic compared to indigenous workers, I argue that migrant temporary agency workers may indeed exhibit a strong work ethic but that this may be as a feature of their temporary status, vis-à-vis permanent workers, or indigenous workers, and not necessarily because of their migrant status.

The findings from this study suggest that many temporary agency workers regard permanent workers as lazy and that agency workers are expected to work harder to compensate for the laziness of FoodCo employees. None of the temporary agency workers who were interviewed during this study believed that they possessed a superior work ethic but, rather begrudgingly, they had no choice but to compensate for permanent employees at FoodCo, who were afforded additional breaktimes and were allowed, by their line management, to take things a 'bit easy'.

Based on the findings from this study, I argue that rather than a stronger work ethic based on the specificity of their migrant status, many temporary agency workers reluctantly demonstrate a relatively stronger work ethic due to the specificity of their temporary work status. In other words, their status as temporary agency workers requires them to compensate for their permanent co-workers.

The lived experiences of what the literature refers to as the blended workforce has not been adequately explored from the view from below and, by addressing this research question, I have filled this lacuna in the temporary work literature and have provided an inside view that reveals a far more mixed-up workforce, characterized by workers from many different countries and of differing tenures and experiences.

I will now address the second part of this research question and discuss new insights into how workplace resistance is enacted by temporary agency workers.

8.2.5 Shirking, soldiering, skiving, smoko and snacko

The view from below painted by this thesis portrays a perpetual risk of no *work tomorrow*, a working environment which is cold and harsh, intense, and prolonged hard labour, and a workplace which is complex, multi-lingual, and mixed-up. Against this backdrop, temporary agency workers might be expected to have limited agency to avoid, reduce, or otherwise resist the demands that are placed upon them, and the literature affirms that temporary agency workers have little influence in the workplace (Anderson 2010; Lee et al 2015). However, whilst the findings from this study confirm a pattern of control from FoodCo permanent workers and supervisors, AgencyCo temporary workers do exhibit a surprising level of individual agency to enact distinct forms of resistance in the workplace.

The literature relating to worker resistance is understandably linked to various forms of labour process. Early research was primarily an examination of largely collective forms of resistance, such as sabotage, work-to-rule actions, and union-organized strikes (Beynon 1973; Edwards 1979; Friedman 1977; Hyman, 1972) whilst later studies also considered covert, or more indirect, workplace resistance (Scott 1985; Martin 1988; Knights and Vrudubakis 1994; Prasad and Prasad 2000). An omission from both research perspectives is a consideration of the workplace resistance enacted by temporary agency workers.

The findings from this study show that the mixed-up nature of the workforce makes it difficult for temporary agency workers to enact collective forms of resistance, for several reasons. First, temporary agency workers vie for the opportunity to *work tomorrow* and rather than collaborate, many workers retain a keen sense of self interest to keep their current jobs. Second, culturally neither FoodCo nor AgencyCo encourage a spirit of collaboration, and teamwork is not an important consideration on the shop floor. Third, the vast range of nationalities, languages, experiences, and tenure of the mixed-up workplace highlights the heterogeneity of the temporary agency workers

which significantly reduces common ground. Finally, the transient and fleeting nature of temporary agency work ensures that many workplace relationships do not develop to the point that workers would necessarily build sufficient trust to co-ordinate their efforts for a common cause.

Based on the empirical findings from this study, I argue that temporary agency workers deploy individual acts of resistance to both the intense nature of the work at FoodCo, and their perceived lack of fair treatment vis-à-vis permanent workers.

The most obvious approach temporary agency workers use to resist intense work at FoodCo is to develop their English-speaking skills, as workers who are competent in English increase their labour mobility and therefore have more options in the labour market. However, this is not a short-term solution to resist the hard labour at FoodCo, and temporary agency workers adopt the following approaches.

Avoiding, or shirking, the intense work at FoodCo provides respite for some temporary agency workers and is enacted in several ways. For example, the notion that men can't pack is a widely held myth on the shop floor at FoodCo and is even promulgated by female temporary agency workers, the very workers who, in the absence of male packers, are left to do this difficult job. This myth suits many male agency workers, who have the capability to pack, but seek to avoid packing duties. This study sheds light on this illogical gender-based allocation of work and reveals how male agency workers position themselves to shirk packing duties, which they refer to as women's work, by appearing clumsy and inept at this task. The apparent inability of male workers to pack is also anticipated by FoodCo supervisors and, as a result, male temporary agency workers manoeuvre their way into other, less intense jobs.

The findings from this study support some of the traditional arguments in the literature on worker resistance. For instance, temporary agency workers at FoodCo demonstrate an ability to restrict the output of the manufacturing

process. The literature has historically labelled such a resistance tactic as soldiering (Taylor 1919; Mayo 1938; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939; Roy 1952, 1954; Ackroyd and Thompson 1999) and this thesis builds on this body of work by revealing how temporary agency workers at FoodCo are able to restrict the output of the bagging lines (soldier) by creating micro breaks - subtle misdemeanours carried out by temporary workers to provide momentary relief from the unrelenting and intense work on the shop floor. One such micro break is to create a short stoppage on a packing line, possibly only for one minute, on the pretence that the line had developed a minor problem. Temporary agency workers exhibit a surprising level of cunning as they deploy a range of soldiering tactics to build a series of microbreaks into their working day.

Debates exist in the literature regarding the extent to which resistance tactics, such as soldiering, are either known to management (Burawoy 1992; Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Paulsen 2015) or are carried out without management knowledge (Scott 1990; Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Prasad and Prasad 2000) and the ethnographic approach of this study was valuable to provide an inside view of the resistance tactics which are enacted by temporary agency workers. By participating on the FoodCo shop floor as a temporary agency worker, I was able to access hidden transcripts (Scott 1990) and observe first-hand the tactics used by temporary agency workers to secure a variety of micro breaks, which are individually performed, covert, subtle and unbeknown to FoodCo management.

Whilst limiting machine output is regarded as soldiering, and is a form of timewasting, more blatant timewasting is also observed at FoodCo. Skiving (e.g., taking excessive time to complete tasks, frequent time away from the shop floor, idly chatting etc.) is a term used at FoodCo to describe overt timewasting carried out by workers, and this form of blatant timewasting is clearly visible to anybody in the vicinity, including managers and supervisors. Importantly, temporary workers at FoodCo do not skive and the evidence from this study links specific patterns of resistance to employment status.

Whilst temporary workers enact covert and subtle tactics of resistance, permanent workers are more overt and blatant in their attempts to avoid work. For instance, temporary agency workers only leave the shop floor at the official break times, but permanent workers frequently leave the shop floor, primarily to enable them to take a 'crafty fag', an unofficial breaktime for permanent workers which temporary agency workers refer to as 'smoko'. Smoko, which is a further example of skiving, is a constant source of resentment for temporary agency workers and compounds their perceived sense of unfairness on the factory shop floor. The evidence from this study found that temporary agency workers who witnessed permanent workers skiving and taking regular smoko breaks, sanctioned by FoodCo management, responded by increasing the number of micro breaks (soldiering) which they carried out.

Based on the evidence from this study, both temporary and permanent workers at FoodCo deploy forms of resistance to help them to deal with the hard work on the shop floor. However, whilst permanent workers take additional breaks with the knowledge of FoodCo supervisors, the same supervisors appear oblivious to the fact that temporary agency workers can restrict the output of the production lines though the use of subtle and cunning micro breaks. This insight is important and reveals the surprising individual agency that temporary workers possess, which has not been adequately highlighted by previous research into workplace resistance.

Covertly eating factory raw materials on the shop floor is a further example of a less visible workplace misbehaviour enacted by temporary workers at FoodCo, and AgencyCo workers refer to this misdemeanour as snacko. Snacko is effectively theft and a further form of workplace misbehaviour presented in the literature (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Thompson et al 2013) and FoodCo clearly provides an environment where workers can easily appropriate product (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999) on the factory shop floor. Items which temporary workers use for snacko include cherry tomatoes and bread croutons, which are readily available and are also easy to eat discreetly.

Whilst the literature proposes that such grazing is 'one way in which workers relieve the monotony of the working day' (Thompson et al 2013), I suggest that at FoodCo, snacko has more to do with the limited breaks given to temporary agency workers who are carrying out intense work for long hours. Permanent workers were not observed taking snacko on the shop floor, possibly because of the risk of disciplinary action or because they had the luxury of additional smoko breaks. I argue that this study uncovered temporary agency workers engaging in snacko at FoodCo more out of a necessity for subsistence rather than to relieve the monotony of the working day.

Although there is a lengthy research tradition examining workplace resistance, empirically demonstrating how such misbehaviour occurs remains problematic from a research point of view, primarily for reasons of access. Also, little research has focussed on temporary worker resistance because the established view is that if permanent employees had problems resisting workplace controls, then resistance by more precarious workers, such as temporary agency workers, would be virtually impossible (Kalleberg 2009). In the case of this study, it is unlikely that I would have been able to unearth the cunningness of the temporary agency workers as they soldier and snacko without taking an ethnographic approach, which enabled me to find out how things really worked at FoodCo.

Whilst some previous research has suggested that workers in less secure employment are able to marginally improve their lot (Alberti 2014; Berntsen 2016; Ayaz et al 2019), this empirical study adds to the current literature to demonstrate the range of subtle, covert tactics of resistance that temporary agency workers can deploy to deal with both their hard labour and their sense of perceived unfairness.

Whilst temporary agency workers deploy resistance tactics which are unbeknownst to shop floor supervision, permanent workers are more likely to misbehave in ways which are known to supervision. This distinction is

important for several reasons. First, the literature highlights that management, to varying degrees, either tolerate, participate, or even depend on worker misbehaviour (Burrawoy 1992; Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Paulsen 2015) but the empirical evidence from this study only supports this for permanent workers. At FoodCo, I argue that management only tolerate misbehaviour from permanent workers, and not temporary agency workers. Temporary agency workers perceive this as unfair and enact revenge on this injustice to engage in methods of resistance which are subtle and covert.

Second, a vicious circle is in evidence at FoodCo, as the overt resistance demonstrated by permanent workers, and sanctioned by management, only serves to re-enforce a perceived sense of unfairness which leads to further acts of covert resistance from temporary agency workers.

Finally, at FoodCo, the nature of the misdemeanours carried out by temporary agency workers, such as shirking, soldiering and snacko, are seen to be materially different from the blatant resistance methods, such as skiving and smoko which are exhibited by permanent workers. As a result, this study highlights that employment status influences how workplace resistance is enacted, which is an important finding given the prevalence of temporary agency work and mixed-up workplaces in the UK.

The literature has highlighted that some organizations perceive that migrant workers adopt the least desirable behaviours of indigenous workers (Bauder 2006; MacKenzie and Forde 2009). The findings from this study highlight that migrant temporary agency workers may well adopt the resistance behaviours of permanent workers if their employment status changes. This study found that the overt and visible forms of resistance demonstrated by permanent workers, such as smoko and skiving, have been rapidly adopted by those temporary agency workers who have previously been able to secure permanent jobs at FoodCo. This is a significant finding and extends our knowledge of temporary agency work as migrant temporary agency workers

may well adopt the habits of permanent workers as a feature of their changed employment status, and not necessarily because of their migrant status.

Although most of the observations of resistance carried out by temporary agency workers at FoodCo were carried out at an individual level, isolated incidents of collective resistance also occurred. On several occasions during my fieldwork at FoodCo, fellow temporary agency workers encouraged me to slow down as I enthusiastically undertook certain tasks, such as the task of hand erecting crates for the packing lines or the job of supplying empty pallets to stackers. As a result, some peer pressure amongst temporary agency workers exists on the FoodCo shop floor, as temporary workers seek to capitalise on opportunities to subtly reduce their work effort.

In this chapter I have discussed the contribution that this thesis makes to the literatures on workplace insecurity, the nature of temporary agency work, mixed-up workplaces, and workplace resistance. In doing so, I have addressed the three research questions as follows. Firstly, in the context of temporary agency workers seeking and then maintaining work, I have provided new insights into how temporary agency workers deal with workplace insecurity. Secondly, in the context of temporary agency workers carrying out work, I have explained how the combined effect of job time and job type negatively impacts the lived experiences of temporary agency workers. Finally, in this chapter I have examined temporary agency workers as they experienced multi-faceted employment relationships whilst at work.

The cumulated views from below obtained from this study coalesce to highlight the concealed agency of temporary agency workers. From the outside, temporary agency workers appear to have little opportunity for individual agency as they are impeded by the structural barriers of temporary work and are also in a vulnerable position in a tripartite employment relationship. The literature has quite rightly highlighted the pernicious effects of temporary agency work which, as a form of precarious work, has the potential to lead to one-sided flexibility, increased employment insecurity,

poor worker experiences, and increased risks of worker exploitation. Much of the literature surrounding temporary agency work is invariably focussed on organizational perspectives and somewhat overlooks the views of the temporary workers themselves. As a result, and somewhat understandably, temporary agency workers are often portrayed to be in a rather helpless position.

Although my ethnographic approach brings new, and sometimes harsh, insights into the realities of life as a temporary agency worker, this study also helps to brighten the view from below. As this thesis demonstrates, temporary agency work does not inevitably consign workers to a helpless employment situation. Individual temporary agency workers can exert concealed agency to carve out and exploit small pockets of opportunity to ameliorate their lived experiences as they seek work, maintain work, and undertake work.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter begins with a brief overview of the issues that motivated this study of temporary agency work. I will then provide some reflections on the findings, generalisability, and limitations of the study. This thesis then concludes with a discussion of some of the potential opportunities for further research into temporary agency work which will have benefits for both policy and practice.

9.1 <u>Overview of the issues that motivated this study.</u>

This study has focussed on temporary agency workers, and whilst there is a significant body of literature which has considered temporary agency work, little research has concentrated on the view from below. I considered that further investigation into the views of these workers was warranted for several reasons.

First, widely used, and comprehensive sources of labour market data provide a relatively stable view of the temporary element of the UK workforce. For instance, the most recent Workplace Relations Study (WERS) survey reports that between 2004 and 2011 'there was little change in the use of agency workers' (WERS 2011) whilst the Labour Force Survey (LFS) reports that over the last ten years, the percentage of temporary workers (as a percentage of all employees, excluding those self-employed) ranges from 5.1 to 6.5% (www.ons.gov.uk, February 2021). Whilst the aggregated view presents a relatively stable picture, the positioning of temporary agency workers in the UK labour market is concentrated towards certain industry sectors, many of which are lower skilled and lower paid, such as the food supply chain. Based on my close association with food factory settings over the last 30 years I was aware that many food factories engage significant numbers of temporary agency workers in addition to permanent employees. In some food factories it is not unusual for the percentage of temporary agency workers (as a percentage of all employees) to fluctuate from 0% to over 75% and I believed

that the voice of such a significant element of the UK food supply chain workforce should be heard.

Second, in many cases, temporary agency workers are hired to carry out the same tasks as permanent co-workers as part of a blended workforce. However, the workplace experiences of temporary agency workers vis-à-vis permanent workers appear vastly different, and such differences are not adequately understood.

Third, given the prevalence and intense nature of temporary agency work, and the potential for distinct differences in workplace experiences between temporary agency and permanent workers, it is important to understand the approaches that temporary agency workers take to cope with their precarious and insecure employment situation.

Finally, the structure of the UK grocery retailing sector has undergone significant change over the last three decades which has had a bearing on temporary agency work. Competition has intensified, with a clear emphasis on low retail prices, and retailers have further strengthened their position in the grocery supply chain by relying less on suppliers of branded products. Suppliers of retailer's own label brands are at the behest of the retailer, and it is the retailer who controls many aspects of the supplier's business. As temporary agency workers are present in significant numbers in such food suppliers, it is important that the consequences of structural changes in the food retail sector are understood.

9.2 The findings of the study

I will now reflect upon the output of this research.

First, temporary agency workers at FoodCo are in a precarious employment situation with no guaranteed hours and therefore no guaranteed income. However, although these workers face employment insecurity, primarily in the face of job and work insecurity, some workers do respond to their weak

position in the tripartite employment relationship and demonstrate individual agency to lessen the impact of their employment insecurity.

Second, whilst temporary agency workers and permanent employees regularly undertake the same types of roles in many food factories, this study highlights how their lived experiences differ. In this thesis I explain the significance of job time, in addition to job type, when considering the role of temporary agency workers in the secondary labour market.

Third, the nature of the work carried out by many temporary agency workers is intense, mundane, repetitive, and unrelenting, and the ethnographic approach of this study conveys the physical and mental demands which are placed upon these workers.

Fourth, this study focusses on a salad processing factory that relies on a large pool of temporary agency labour to work alongside permanent employees. Such a blended workplace, which is commonplace in many UK food factories, is often presented in the literature as a relatively smooth blend whilst this study reveals a workplace which is far more complex and mixed-up.

Finally, at FoodCo, temporary agency workers demonstrate a surprising degree of concealed agency to covertly mitigate the impact of hard factory work, and to discreetly respond to the sense of injustice they feel when the permanent members of the mixed-up workforce are treated more favourably.

9.2.1 Generalizing

In chapter four, section 4.3.2, I discussed the process which I followed to select and access a suitable field site for an ethnography. Flyvbjerg (2006) and Small (2009) highlight that whilst individual cases can pose particular problems, a lack of generalizability regarding individual case studies can be reduced by the strategic selection of a suitable case (Flyvbjerg 2006), whilst Mitchell (2003) posited that generalizing from a single case was acceptable when 'based on logical inference' (p200).

As outlined in section 4.3.2, I considered Flyvbjerg's (2006) 'strategies for the selection of samples and cases' (p230) and decided that the most suitable case for my study would resemble Flyvbjerg's (2006) critical case. This would require me to obtain information from a site that 'permits logical deductions of the type, 'if this is valid for this case, then it applies to all cases' (p230). I felt that a suitable field site for a critical case would have the following three characteristics.

First, a site that engaged significant numbers of low-skilled temporary agency workers, carrying out repetitive and mundane tasks. Second, a site that attracted workers from a wide catchment area. This was desirable in order to reduce the possibility of cohabiting, or socially connected, temporary agency workers. Third, the preferred site was likely to be subject to significant fluctuations in production demand and was likely an operation with seasonal demands, which would likely present a precarious work arrangement for temporary agency workers.

Central to Flyvbjerg's (2006) critical case selection is the requirement to 'achieve information that permits logical deductions' (p230) and my belief is that this was achieved by this study. The three criteria I have outlined above - significant numbers of agency workers, from different communities, experiencing particularly precarious working arrangements – were all evident at FoodCo and this situation is typical of many operations within the UK food supply chain. Consequently, I argue that the findings from this study can be generalised and will be representative of many UK food manufacturers who supply the major retailers.

9.3 The limitations of this study

Although this research has increased our understanding of temporary agency work, it is important that I also reflect upon the limitations that I encountered during this study.

First, securing access to a field site was initially a challenge as finding a host and a temporary work agency who were both willing to participate was

difficult to achieve. However, through my industry contacts I was eventually able to locate a site that satisfied my criteria as a suitable case, as highlighted in section 9.2.1.

Second, whilst my experience from within the Food industry was helpful to secure access, I was mindful that my professional experiences should not unduly influence my fieldwork. Consequently, I immersed myself in the work that was undertaken by temporary agency workers at FoodCo to fully appreciate their lived experiences.

Third, my ethnographic approach also required me to think about how my presence and approach affected the research process. Before the start of my fieldwork, I became aware of the importance of remaining reflexive and throughout my fieldwork, particularly as I wrote up my field notes, I continuously reviewed how I could limit my impact on the events which were unfolding at FoodCo.

A further limitation of this study was the general lack of English amongst the temporary agency workers. Whilst the mixed-up FoodCo shop floor provided a rich source of data and demonstrated the diverse and complex nature of a contemporary food factory setting, the limited English of many workers reduced my options for semi structured interviews. I therefore accepted, prior to starting the interview phase of my fieldwork, that some interviews would yield little meaningful information and that some data would inevitably be 'lost in translation' (Davies 2019: 300). As many temporary agency workers spoke in their native languages, I was not able to capture their conversations in some settings, such as whilst waiting for the bus, travelling and during break times. As a result, some rich potential sources of data remained untapped.

In order to deal with the limited use of English amongst the workers at FoodCo, as time went by, and even through limited use of language, in many situations I was able to communicate with workers to determine how they felt and what they thought.

Finally, as this study followed the University of Nottingham's code of practice on ethical standards, ethical approval was granted on the basis that participants agreed to take part in the study with their knowledge and fully informed consent. As a result, observations were overt and information surrounding the research was made available for all participants. Covert research, if permitted, may have avoided the 'reactivity' of the participants impacting significantly on the results of the research (Bryman 2016), e.g., managers attempting to hide or reduce the worst aspects of the jobs and practices since they knew they were being observed.

I dealt with some of the limitations of an overt approach by demonstrating that I was someone who was willing to undertake any job that a temporary agency worker would be given, and in this way I felt that the workers at FoodCo paid little attention to my research interests.

Despite some inevitable limitations of my fieldwork, I am satisfied that I was able to achieve the purpose of my study, which was not to offer an absolute version of events but to write an ethnography which is 'more or less true to the extent to which its reader would in principle, be informed to cope in settings like the one described and analysed' (Watson 2011: 209).

9.4 Further opportunities for research: policy and practice

The food industry looks set to experience labour shortages for several reasons. First, flows of foreign-born workers into the UK have slowed since the BREXIT referendum in 2016, especially as the falling value of the pound has made UK wages less attractive to foreign workers. Second, under the post-Brexit points-based immigration scheme, many EU-born workers who work in the food supply chain occupy roles that fall outside the Government's list of eligible occupations for a skilled worker visa. Finally, there also appears to have been a large flow of foreign-born workers leaving the UK in the wake of Covid-19 (Henehan and Judge 2020).

A rational response from firms in shortage sectors would be to increase pay and conditions to attract and retain staff. However, the structural dynamics of

the UK food supply chain is such that this outcome is unlikely and so long as the UK is an economically attractive place to work, relative to a home country or other potential host states, forms of migrant labour are still expected to flow. Under the new immigration rules, more workers may find themselves outside of the rules, increasing their vulnerability to precarious work and labour market abuse. Against this backdrop, I suggest that future research into temporary agency work should endeavour to take a holistic approach to examine how practices throughout the UK food supply chain impact temporary agency workers.

Issues of accessibility and trust, towards and between all actors in the food supply chain are obstacles that will need to be overcome to enable ongoing qualitative research of temporary agency workers in mixed-up workplaces. Future research should seek to involve as many of the key actors as possible, as the work experiences of temporary agency workers are fashioned by the structures, practices, and influences from a wide variety of sources. Greater collaboration between these actors will help with accessibility and trust issues, and I believe that these actors could all support future research in the following ways.

9.4.1 The retailers

This thesis has illustrated that strong competitive forces within the grocery retail sector result in downward pressure from retailers throughout the supply chain, and these forces are particularly acute for suppliers of own label products. Given their dominant role in a food supply chain that relies on precarious employment, the major grocery retailers should be encouraged to play a part in future research programmes.

Retailers are currently expected to comply with the Grocery Supplier Code of Practice (GSCOP), which regulates their relationships with their direct suppliers, and are also required by law to publish an annual Modern Slavery statement to confirm the steps taken to ensure that slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in their business (or in any supply chain). Major

retailers are sensitive to their brand reputations and image and are also members of the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (Sedex), which is a widely recognized online database where registered companies openly share information about their labour practices, social and ethical performance.

Such initiatives suggest that retailers are expected to improve working practices throughout their grocery supply chains, and I suggest that future research should seek to build upon this requirement. To improve working practices throughout the grocery supply chain, retailers should be invited to support future research into temporary agency work in the UK food industry. A positive response, and greater involvement, from retailers may prove influential and encourage greater collaboration and improved access to potential field sites.

9.4.2 The suppliers

This research project, coupled with over 30 years of food manufacturing experience, has shown to me that food suppliers face big challenges in the face of the increasing expectations that are placed upon them by grocery retailers. Many food manufacturers, and especially those who supply own label products, maintain thin margins by cutting costs. Few food manufacturers regard temporary agency workers as valued stakeholders and I suggest that future research should examine temporary agency worker experiences across a variety of suppliers and environments. For instance, do suppliers of branded grocery items behave differently towards their temporary agency workers compared to suppliers of own label chilled foods? Does the form of ownership make a difference to the lived experiences of agency workers, e.g., family-owned firms, private equity, or PLC?

Temporary worker experiences may well vary depending on specific sectors and understanding causal factors for variation will assist in the formation of actions that benefit workers and organizations alike. Future research across a variety of settings will also increase our knowledge as to how HRM practices, and leader practices, vary across mixed-up workplaces and provide further

opportunities to build upon two of the key findings from this study. For instance, what impact does job time have on temporary agency workers in different settings? And to what extent do agency workers in different settings possess and enact concealed agency?

As additional knowledge is gained as to how food manufacturers manage their mixed-up workplaces, it is to be hoped that good practices can be established, communicated, and encouraged throughout the UK food supply chain.

The approaches that are taken to support temporary agency workers improve their English skills should also be considered in future research efforts. Temporary agency workers who improve their English also improve their knowledge of their workplaces, their training experiences, their adherence to site rules and workplace health and safety. Improved English skills will also assist migrant workers outside of their workplaces. However, improved English skills is also likely to lead to increased labour mobility for agency workers, and client firms may well offer little support. This is a tension that future research should explore.

Some retail suppliers will inevitably avoid unwelcome attention to their own practices which may include intense work, employment insecurity and excessive job time. However, enlightened employers may well appreciate that understanding, and improving, the lived experiences of the major element of their workforce is worthwhile.

9.4.3 <u>The agencies</u>

Temporary work agencies clearly play a key role in the tripartite employment relationship and should be encouraged to support future research efforts. My experiences at the beginning of this study demonstrated a reluctance from agencies to be involved, and my ethnographic approach partly reveals why agencies resist. Given their role in creating one-sided flexibility, and the line that agencies must tread to satisfy the demands of clients and the requirements of a large pool of labour that requires work, it was apparent during this study that AgencyCo, at times, operated below the standards that

many stakeholders would require. However, without the support of temporary work agencies future research efforts may well fail to obtain the insiders view of precarious and insecure work in UK workplaces.

9.4.4 Other interested stakeholders and the role of the state

The reluctance of many food manufacturers and temporary work agencies to engage in this project not only made this study difficult to initiate but also raises genuine unanswered questions regarding the rationale for such resistance. Organizations such as the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), the Association of Labour Providers (ALP), the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (Sedex), the British Retail Consortium (BRC), the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), the Chilled Foods Association (CFA), relevant Trades Unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which represent migrants, such as the Migrants Rights Network (MRN), are important stakeholders for future research into temporary agency work.

Finally, given that the UK food supply chain is expected to continue to depend on migrant temporary agency workers, further regulatory challenges persist for the UK government. Firstly, how does the state protect the most vulnerable workers, especially if those workers are migrants employed on temporary contracts, with limited Trades Union participation? Secondly, if there is to be an element of illegal (or irregular) migration, how does the state balance an approach that protects the potential exploitation of regular migrants, with pursuing irregular migrants? If the UK government has a role to play, what will be the shape of any intervention and what will be the likely impact on domestic and global competitiveness? Government policy should also consider how the transition to the new migration conditions can be as beneficial as possible, for organizations, for UK born workers, for migrant workers and for temporary agency workers.

APPENDICES

<u>Appendix A</u>

Prominent regulatory and legislative interventions affecting the UK labour market and Temporary Agency Work.

Significant changes which have affected the UK labour market since the 1980s are outlined as follows.

A1.1 The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)

A1.2 The Agency Worker Regulations (AWR) 2010

A1.3 The Introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW)

A1.4 The National Living Wage (NLW)

A1.5 The Immigration Act (IA) 2016

A1.6 The Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996

A1.1 <u>The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)</u>

The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) is an executive non-departmental public body in the UK, sponsored by the Home Office, which originally regulated those businesses – providers of temporary labour work - which supplied workers to agriculture, horticulture, forestry, shellfish gathering and food and drink processing and packaging industries (www.gov.uk, May 2015). As this PhD is concerned with temporary agency workers in the UK food manufacturing sector, then the GLAA is of particular significance.

Initially, The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) was established on 1st April 2005 by the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004, as a legislative response following the deaths of 23 Chinese cockle pickers in the 2004 Morecambe Bay cockling disaster and temporary work agencies operating in these sectors have, since 1st October 2006, had to be licenced by the GLA. Prior to the establishment of the GLA, the UK had one of the least regulated labour markets in the developed world and this apparent lack of regulation, together

with large-scale immigration, created a segment of the UK labour market which was at risk of exploitation by criminal gangs and unscrupulous employers (Gaus et al 2010), thereby increasing the risks of precarious work (see chapter 2, section 2.3.1).

In April 2017, the GLA was rebranded as the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) as part of reforms under the Immigration Act 2016, at which time the also government extended the authority's remit, allowing it to prevent, detect, and investigate worker exploitation across the entire economy.

Initially the GLA sat under the control of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and in April 2014 control of the GLA was switched to the Home Office. The GLA's mission is to safeguard the welfare and interests of workers whilst ensuring that labour providers operate within the law. To achieve this, the GLA first underwent a process of licensing which is intended to formalise both domestic and foreign gangmasters working in the agricultural, food processing and shellfish sectors of the UK economy. Beyond licensing, attention moved from getting gangmasters on board to ensuring that licensing standards were upheld and that the real value of maintaining a licence was realised. The GLA annual review (Balch et al 2009) outlined two aspects which were involved in this shift: firstly, developing improved intelligence, compliance, enforcement, and prosecution activity and secondly, ensuring that the outcomes of this activity are disseminated to enable to GLA to 'punch above its weight' (p8).

According to Wilkinson et al (2010) most temporary work agencies consider the GLA to be beneficial in terms of stamping out bad practice. A gangmaster survey, carried out by the GLA Annual Review independent research team in 2008, found that 79 per cent of gangmasters were in favour of licensing and 69 per cent felt that the GLA was doing a good job. Only 18 per cent described their contact with the GLA as burdensome (Wilkinson et al 2010). The Trades Union Congress (TUC) Commission on Vulnerable Employment Report (CoVE

2008) found that one of the GLA's strengths is that licensed labour providers now have an incentive to report informal or illegal gangmaster activity whilst Oxfam GB (2009) believed that 'the gangmasters licensing regime had clearly had a significant impact on the industries that were regulated by it' (p18).

However, Oxfam GB (2009) also outlined some deficiencies with the current GLA, particularly around GLA's role in enforcing immigration law and sharing information with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) which 'fundamentally thwarts its ability to fully achieve its goal of ending worker exploitation (p 19). In other words, Oxfam GB believed that such close collaboration with UKBA may prevent precarious and vulnerable workers from reporting exploitation and abuses, leading to the risk that they will work for unlicensed and more exploitative gangmasters (p 29).

To some extent, and rather ironically, the generally accepted success of the GLA (Wilkinson et al 2010, Oxfam GB 2009, CoVE 2008) also resulted in further criticism from Oxfam GB (2009) and the TUC (CoVE 2008) who claimed that the scope of the GLA was too narrow and that the GLA should be extended to include sectors such as construction, hospitality and care home workers, whilst Skrivankova (2010) also believed that the mandate of the GLA should be extended to also include the ability to prosecute cases of forced labour.

Although since April 2017 a broader scope has since been provided to the GLAA, allowing it to prevent, detect, and investigate worker exploitation across the entire economy, the licencing requirements still only extend to businesses operating as temporary labour providers to the original industries of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, shellfish gathering and food and drink processing and packaging.

A1.2 The Agency Worker Regulations (AWR)

The Agency Workers Regulations (AWR) basic aim is to give effect to the Temporary and Agency Workers Directive in UK law. As an EU member, the UK was obligated to implement the EU directive on Temporary Agency Workers which defined a general framework applicable to the working

conditions of temporary workers in the EU. The Directive aimed to improve pay and conditions for temporary agency workers and to contribute to the development of the temporary work sector as a flexible option for employers and workers (www.ec.europa.eu, May 2015). The EU directive was passed in November 2008 after being effectively blocked by the UK government (along with Denmark, Ireland and Germany) since 2002 (Evans and Gibb 2009), and member states were required to modify national laws within three years (from November 2008).

In the UK, the Directive was enacted into employment law from 1st October 2011 and as a result all three elements of the tripartite employment relationship – temporary agency workers, temporary work agencies and the client organization - are affected.

The AWR are intended to increase the level of employment protection provided to temporary agency workers, as the AWR state that a temporary agency worker who has worked in the same job for 12 calendar weeks qualifies for equal treatment in respect of pay and basic working conditions (annual leave, rest breaks etc.). Equal treatment in this regard is for the temporary agency workers to be treated as if they had been recruited directly, vis-à-vis permanently employed workers. Additionally, from day one a temporary agency worker must have access to facilities (such as canteen, childcare facilities etc.) and access to information regarding job vacancies. The AWR also state that pregnant temporary agency workers are allowed the take paid time off for ante-natal appointments, after the 12 weeks qualifying period (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills May 2011).

The client organization must, therefore, provide the temporary work agency with up-to-date information on employment terms and conditions so that the temporary work agency can ensure that a temporary agency worker receives the correct equal treatment, as if they had been recruited directly, after 12 weeks in the same job. Additionally, the client organization must provide temporary agency workers with access to facilities and information regarding

job vacancies. When it becomes apparent that a temporary agency worker will remain in the same job for more than 12 weeks, the temporary work agency must ask the client organization for information about pay and basic working conditions so that temporary agency workers are treated as if they had been directly recruited to the job.

By providing entitlements to temporary agency workers from day one and after completion of a qualifying period of 12 weeks, the AWR do provide some protection to temporary agency workers, in order to avoid their exploitation as simply a means of cheap labour, vis-à-vis an employer's permanent workforce. However, there were clauses within the AWR which affected the scope of the protection towards temporary agency workers, for instance the so-called Swedish Derogation or pay between assignments (PBA) model.

The Swedish Derogation was introduced into the AWR at the request of the Swedish Government and provided an exemption from the AWR as far as pay is concerned; it does not affect TAW rights to other provisions under the AWR such as annual leave after 12 weeks, day one rights and rest breaks.

The Swedish Derogation came into play when the temporary work agency offered the temporary agency worker a permanent contract of employment and paid the worker between assignments. By entering into a Swedish Derogation contract, the temporary agency worker gave up the entitlement to equal pay. There were rules about how much and how long a temporary work agency must pay temporary agency workers, and the contract could be terminated by the temporary work agency.

In summary, whilst under derogation contracts, temporary agency workers did benefit from some security through a minimum level of pay between assignments, although this came at the considerable cost of losing the right to equal treatment. This trade-off was particularly high and detrimental for temporary agency workers if they were being utilised on a long-term, continuous basis within a single client firm. As the rationale for the AWR is to improve pay and conditions of temporary agency workers, the Swedish

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Derogation was only allowed because of the pay that is received by the temporary agency workers between assignments (www.acas.org.uk, October 2015).

The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017) recommended the removal of the Swedish Derogation from the AWR. The government followed this recommendation, and the Agency Worker (Amendment) Regulations 2019 removed the Swedish Derogation provisions from the 2018 Regulations on 6 April 2020. Therefore, with effect from this date, all agency workers have been entitled to pay parity.

Just prior to the AWR, in autumn 2011, according to figures from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) there were 285,000 temporary agency workers in the UK. This rose to over 300,000 just after the regulations were implemented, and rose as high as 321,165, by winter 2012, which equated to 1.27% of the employed workforce in the UK. This figure was the highest that agency employment had been as a proportion of the employed workforce since LFS figures began to be collated in 1981, which suggested that the AWR did not have any effect of dampening demand for agency labour (Forde and Slater 2014).

A1.3 The introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW)

Prior to the introduction of the national minimum wage (NMW) in 1999, there were a variety of systems of wage controls focused on specific industries under the Trade Boards Act 1909.

The Wages Councils Act 1945, and subsequent acts, applied sectoral minimum wages and these were gradually dismantled, until the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1993 abolished the 26 final wages councils that had protected around 2,500,000 low-paid workers.

The decline of trade union membership over recent decades, which was weakening employees' bargaining power, was one of the reasons for the

Labour Party's minimum wage policy, particularly as those employees most vulnerable to low pay were rarely unionised.

Labour had returned to government in 1997, after eighteen years in opposition, and a minimum wage had been a party policy since as far back as 1986, under the leadership of Neil Kinnock.

The implementation of a minimum wage was opposed by the Conservative Party and supported by the Liberal Democrats.

A1.4 The National Living Wage (NLW)

In July 2015, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a new compulsory national living wage (NLW) would be introduced for everyone over the age of 25, beginning in April 2016. The NLW started at £7.20 per hour (50 pence more than the NMW, which was £6.70 as of October 2015), rising to £9.20 by 2020.

The British Retail Consortium (BRC), one of the leading trade associations in the UK representing 80% of retail trade in the UK (by turnover), stated that retailers would 'look closely' at the NMW to 'assess the impact, but stressed that the retail industry was not a minimum wage employer', and that 'median wages for hourly paid workers was already above the rate of the NMW' (Glotz 2015). At the time of the announcement of the introduction of the NLW, many grocery retailers backed up the view of the BRC and declared that they were paying staff more than the minimum wage.

As of 1st April 2021, the NLW applies to all workers from the age of 23.

A1.5 The Immigration Act 2016

The 2016 Immigration Act built on the measures introduced by the Immigration Act 2014 (the 2014 Act) to make it more difficult for those living illegally in the UK to access services such as bank accounts, rental accommodation, and employment.

The 2014 Act was introduced to tackle illegal immigration and, amongst other measures, imposed obligations on landlords to conduct right to rent checks on tenants and obligations on banks to check a prospective client's immigration status prior to opening a UK bank account. It also increased the maximum civil penalty for employers found to be employing illegal workers and restricted access to UK driving licences.

The 2016 Act further enforced these measures by imposing criminal sanctions on landlords and employers who deliberately did not undertake the necessary immigration checks. It also increased the obligations on banks to check and monitor the immigration status of current and potential account holders and provided immigration and police officers with greater powers to search and seize driving licences and vehicles driven by illegal migrants.

The key provisions of the act are as follows:

Labour market and illegal working

The 2016 Act makes illegal working a criminal offence in its own right, with a maximum custodial sentence of six months and/or an unlimited fine in England and Wales. This new offence covers all workers, whether self-employed or employed. Furthermore, wages paid to illegal workers may be recoverable under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The 2016 Act also makes it a criminal offence for employers to employ someone who they know or have reasonable cause to believe is an illegal worker. The maximum custodial sentence for employing an illegal worker was increased from two years to five years. These powers operate alongside and reinforce the existing system of heavy financial penalties for businesses that negligently employ illegal workers. It is therefore critical that businesses and any private individuals who act as employers have systems in place to check and monitor the immigration status of all employees. Failure to put these processes in place could lead to employers facing criminal charges.

This provision relates to the following services.

Residential Tenancies

The 2014 Act introduced the Right to Rent Scheme, which prohibited landlords from allowing adults to occupy property as their only or main home under a residential tenancy agreement unless they have immigration permission or a right to be in the UK. *Landlord* is defined widely and includes individuals or companies who let or license accommodation, individuals who take in lodgers and tenants who sublet their rented property.

Landlords are required to check the immigration status of all adult occupiers and failure to do so could result in a civil penalty of up to £3,000 per illegal occupier.

The 2016 Act introduced the following criminal offences relating to landlords and/or their agents:

1. The first offence is committed if a landlord/agent under a residential tenancy agreement knows or has reasonable grounds to believe that the premises are occupied by an adult without immigration permission. This applies where any adult is occupying the premises regardless of whether the adult is a tenant under or named in the tenancy agreement.

2. The second offence is committed if a tenant's leave to remain in the UK expires during the tenancy (having been valid when the tenancy was entered into) but continues to occupy the property and the landlord/ agent knows or has reasonable cause to believe this has happened and does not take reasonable steps to terminate the residential tenancy agreement.

Landlords or agents found guilty of the above criminal offences may be subject to fines and/or a maximum of five years' imprisonment.

Furthermore, the 2016 Act enables landlords to evict illegal occupiers more easily. The Secretary of State will have the power to serve a notice on a landlord informing him that an occupier does not have immigration permission to be in the UK. The landlord will then be able to serve a notice to terminate the tenancy by providing a minimum notice period of 28 days.

The landlord's notice will be enforceable as if it were an order of the High Court.

UK Driving Licences

The 2014 Act provided the UK Government with the power to revoke UK driving licences held by illegal migrants. However, immigration officers did not have the power to seize revoked UK driving licences as it was the responsibility of the licence holder to return the revoked licence to DVLA and failure to do so is a criminal offence.

The 2016 Act provided two new measures:

1. power for police and immigration officers to search people and premises, in order to seize revoked or unrevoked UK driving licences of illegal migrants; and

2. created a new criminal offence of driving whilst unlawfully present in the UK, which can carry a custodial sentence of up to six months and/or a fine. The vehicle involved can also be impounded and, upon conviction, the court may order its forfeiture, even if it does not belong to the person found guilty of the offence.

Therefore, if an immigration officer has reasonable grounds to believe an individual is in possession of a UK driving licence and is not lawfully resident in the UK, he may enter and search the premises and the individual in order to seize his UK driving licence. If the individual is driving or the immigration officer has reasonable grounds for suspecting the individual to have been driving whilst in the UK without immigration permission, the immigration officer may arrest him for a driving offence and seize the vehicle. If the

migrant is convicted of the offence, the court may order forfeiture of that vehicle, regardless of whether it is owned by the illegal migrant. Therefore, vehicle owners should seek confirmation of the immigration status of all potential drivers.

Bank Accounts

The 2014 Act prohibited banks and building societies from opening current accounts for individuals who do not have immigration permission or a right to be in the UK.

The 2016 Act goes further and introduces measures to prevent illegal migrants from continuing to operate existing bank accounts. This will include accounts opened before the 2014 Act came into force and accounts which were opened during a period of lawful stay which has now ended.

Under the 2016 Act, banks and building societies are required to regularly check the immigration status of its account holders. If it establishes that a client is an illegal migrant, it will have a duty to report this to the Home Office.

If the account holder is confirmed to be in the UK illegally, the Home Office will have the power to:

1. require banks and building societies to close the account as soon as reasonably practicable; or

2. apply to the courts to freeze the account until the illegal migrant leaves the UK.

If the bank or building society conducts the checks required by legislation, there will be no repercussions. It must make arrangements with specified anti-fraud organisations or a specified data-matching authority for the purpose of enabling it to carry out immigration checks and it would have to bear the costs for conducting these checks. Therefore, banks and building societies must undertake reasonable steps to check the on-going immigration status of its existing clients.

Employers must be aware that the 2016 Act gives immigration officers powers to seize and pass on evidence. They can do so where there are reasonable grounds to believe the item or information concerned has been obtained through, or is evidence of, an immigration offence and where it is necessary to prevent it being hidden or destroyed. Immigration officers will no longer be required to defer to the police. Therefore, the 2016 Act creates new powers to allow immigration officers to search for and seize evidence of illegal working (such as payslips or time sheets) or of illegal renting (such as tenancy agreements and lettings paperwork).

Fees and charges

The 2016 Act introduces the Immigration Skills Charge (ISC) which will fund skill shortages for UK workers. The charge applies where employers sponsor skilled workers under Tier 2 of the Points Based System who are not UK nationals or those settled in the UK, EEA nationals or nationals of Switzerland.

An ISC will be levied on Tier 2 employers at a rate of £1,000 per person per year. However, PhD roles, Tier 2 (Intra-company Transfer) Graduate Trainees and Tier 4 (General) students switching to a Tier 2 route will be exempt.

A1.6 The Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996

The Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996 updates much earlier labour law, including the Contracts of Employment Act 1963, the Redundancy Payments Act 1965, the Employment Protection Act 1975 and the Wages Act 1986. It applies across the whole of the United Kingdom.

The key provisions of the act are as follows:

The ERA set out the rights of employees in situations such as dismissal, unfair dismissal, parental leave, and redundancy. In 1997, the Labour government proposed an amendment to the act – strengthening the right of an employee

to request flexible working time – which was subsequently passed by Parliament.

Employee's may have been given these rights previously contractually, either within business' employment policies or within employment contracts of service. The Act now enshrines those rights in statutory law.

Important rights given to employees or strengthened by the ERA include:

<u>The right to be given employment particulars</u>

Section 1 (2) of the ERA 1996 states that the main terms between the employee and employer must be recorded in writing and given to the employee within two months of starting employment.

The document might be an employment contract, or a shorter written statement of particulars. Signing creates an enforceable contract between the employee and the employer. A statement may also tell the employee their statutory employment rights.

<u>Disclosures and detriment</u>

Under the ERA 1996, an employee may not disclose any company's confidential or private information to a third party.

<u>Sundays, time off and suspension</u>

An employee has a right to receive paid leave for public duties and responsibilities such as jury service.

<u>Dismissal: notice and reason</u>

Under Section 86 of the Act, reasonable notice must be given before the termination of the contract. That applies to both the employee and the employer.

The duration of a reasonable notice period depends on the employment duration of the employee. If the employee has worked for more than one month then a minimum notice period of one week should be issued in case of

dismissal. After 2 years of service, the duration of a reasonable notice period increases to two weeks. After 3 years, the duration increases by another week to 3 and so on to a maximum of twelve weeks' notice. However, the employer can also issue pay in lieu of notice if this is mentioned in the employee's contract of employment.

<u>Unfair dismissal</u>

Section 94 of the Act prevents the employer from unfairly dismissing the employee. An employer must specify the reason that resulted in the employee's dismissal.

Dismissals related to the following are considered automatically unfair:

- health and safety concerns
- assertion of statutory rights
- request for flexible working

Valid (fair) reasons mentioned in s. 98(2) to dismiss an employee are as follows:

(a) relates to the capability or qualifications of the employee for performing work of the kind which he was employed by the employer to do

(b) relates to the conduct of the employee

(ba) is retirement of the employee

(c) is that the employee was redundant, or

(d) is that the employee could not continue to work in the position which he held without contravention (either on his part or on that of his employer) of a duty or restriction imposed by or under an enactment.

Additionally, the employer has the right to dismiss the employee under s98 (1) for some other substantial reason.

<u>Redundancy payments</u>

Section 135 of the Act gives an employee a right to compensation if his or her job becomes obsolete (redundant) – provided he or she has worked under the employer for a specified duration to become an established employee.

To qualify for the redundancy payment, the employee must have had a working relationship with the same employer for two years (s 155). Employees who have reached retirement age are not entitled to redundancy payments (s 156).

The employer can avoid paying the employee compensation by dismissing him or her for a different reason, such as misconduct or capability, as mentioned above.

Redundancy payments are calculated using the length of the service and the age of the employee. If the employee is under 21 years old, half a week's pay will be given for each year. If employee is between the age of 21 and 40, one week's pay will be given for each year. If the employee is over 40, one and a half week's pay will be given for each year. The upper limit of the redundancy payment is set almost equally to the National Minimum Wage per week.

<u>Employer insolvency</u>

Section 182 gives protection to the employee in the case that the employer has become bankrupt and there is no money remaining to pay him or her. If it is established that the employer has become insolvent, the Secretary of State will compensate the employee out of a National Insurance Fund on behalf of the government.

Appendix B

B1.1 List of the top ten UK grocery retailers by sales: 2015 to 2019

Rank	Company name (parent/country or HQ)	2015 £m	2016 £m	2017 £m	2018 £m	2019 £m	% change 2018-19
1	Tesco	41,259	41,458	42,644	43,445	44,302	2.0
2	Sainsbury's	23,168	23,228	23,967	24,017	24,088	0.3
3	Asda (Walmart)	22,066	21,409	21,952	22,843	23,031	0.8
4	Morrisons	16,122	16,317	17,262	17,735	17,536	-1.1
5	Aldi	7,705	8,744	10,181	11,334	12,280	8.3
6	The Co-op	8,267	8,316	8,353	8,257	8,928	8.1
7	Lidl Group	5,700	6,450	7,350	8,100	8,726	7.7
8	Waitrose	6,086	6,246	6,355	6,430	6,370	-0.9
9	Marks & Spencer (UK food)	5,510	5,649	5,940	5,903	6,028	2.1
10	Iceland Foods Ltd	2,636	2,745	2,945	3,084	3,249	5.4

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C1.1 Research ethics – confirmation of approval

Subject	Ethics Review for your Research project
Link to Outlook Item	**Click here**
From	**Fuller Stella**
To	**Carter Peter**
Cc	**Adam Golberg**
Sent	**04/12/2015, 13:49:23**

Dear Peter

Project Title: An ethnographic study of temporary agency workers in the UK food manufacturing industry

I am writing to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis of the documentation submitted.   This opinion was given on 4ᵗʰ December 2015.

The following conditions apply to this favourable opinion:

1. The research must follow the protocol agreed and any changes will require prior NUBS REC approval.

2. When the research project has been completed you must submit a report stating that is has been completed using the agreed protocol. This can be done via e-mail.

For further information about the School's Research Ethics Committee or approval process, please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Adam Golberg at adam.golberg@nottingham.ac.uk or +44 (0)115 846 6604.

Good luck with your research

Stella

Stella Fuller

Research Support Administrator

Nottingham University Business School

University of Nottingham

Jubilee Campus

Wollaton Road

Nottingham

NG8 1BB

0115 84 67581

Working hours

9:00 – 5:15 Daily

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RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST: STAFF/DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Research ethics approval is required for every research project that involves human participants or their data, whether that project is externally funded or not. Research projects may not start without ethical approval.

Please complete this form electronically and email it to Stella Fuller (stella.fuller@nottingham.ac.uk), along with any annexes, from your UoN email account.

Research Project Title:	PhD: An ethnographic study of temporary agency workers in the UK food manufacturing industry

Doctoral students should name their supervisors under "co-investigator" and add [PhD] before the project title.

Principal Investigator	Peter Carter
Co-Investigators (and affiliation)	Laurie Cohen, Marek Korczynski, Wendy Chapple
Project Funder(s)	Self-funding

Project start/finish dates	Oct14 – Oct 19	Date of Ethics Application	23/11/15

Questions about the appropriate REC to review the application:		
Will the study involve recruitment of patients through the NHS or the use of NHS data or premises and/or equipment?		N
Does the study involve participants age 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. people with learning disabilities)		N

If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes', then you may need to seek approval through an NHS Research Ethics Committee. If this applies to you, please contact the University's Research Governance team

(sponsor@nottingham.ac.uk) (and cc adam.golberg@nottingham.ac.uk) before proceeding with this application.

NUBS LREC cannot approve projects which involve: the administration of drugs, placebos etc to research participants; tissue collection; the infliction of pain; or invasive, intrusive or harmful procedures.

Questions about involvement of researchers from outside NUBS:		
Are colleagues from another school or institution involved in the research?		N
If you are leading the project, does this application cover their involvement?		N/A
If they are leading, have they obtained ethical approval for your involvement?		N/A

1) If a project is led from outside NUBS, ethical approval by her institution will normally be accepted in lieu of a NUBS REC review. In such cases, please complete this page only and attach a letter confirming ethical review. Similarly, NUBS REC will normally be willing to write to external project partners to confirm that we have reviewed the project. It would be up to their respective institutions to decide whether to accept our review or to carry out their own – you should not assume agreement.

2) Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University of Nottingham's Code of Practice on Ethical Standards and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. **This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data**.

3) Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the School Research Ethics Officer (adam.golberg@nottingham.ac.uk) and may require a new application.

4) Brief summary of project goals:

> To carry out an ethnographic study within a food processing facility in the UK. My intention is to work alongside temporary agency workers and to share the experience of their working life, which is without the security of permanent employment

Brief description of research methods to be employed:

Participant observation and semi structured interviews

Questions about consent	Y	N
Does the research involve vulnerable groups: children, those with cognitive impairment, or those in unequal power relationships (e.g., students)		N
Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g., students at school, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home, employees)	Y	
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and/or full informed consent at the time? (e.g., covert observation)?		N
Questions about confidentiality		
Will research involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given? Will data collected be (or potentially be) used for any other purpose?		N
Will the research involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?		N
Will any payments, compensation, expenses, or incentives be offered to participants?		N
Questions about the potential for harm		
Will the study involve discussion of personal or sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, commercially or legally sensitive topics)?		N
Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?		N
Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?		N
Is there a possibility that the safety of the researcher may be in question beyond everyday risks (e.g. in some international research in trouble spots)?		N
Location of the research		
Will any of the research take place outside the UK?		N

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions above, please explain your reasons below, and any steps you will take to deal with the ethical issues

raised. Please note that answering 'yes' will not in itself adversely affect the chances of approval. For guidance on completing this section of the form, please contact adam.golberg@nottingham.ac.uk

I will require access to a food manufacturing site in order to carry out this study. For this I will need at least one gatekeeper. My intention is to enquire with potential agencies in order for me to gain access to a suitable field site. Once access has been secured with an agency, I would also require approval from the host site. In this regard I expect that I will effectively require two gatekeepers, one from the agency (i.e an account or branch Manager) and one from the client (i.e a Human Resources Manager)

I suspect that gaining access may not be straightforward for a number of reasons. Firstly, the food industry has been subject to some unwelcome exposure in recent years from undercover journalists who have sensationalized some poor industry practices. This may make host sites nervous. Secondly, some agencies may not want their temporary workers revealing too much information. Finally, agency workers themselves may feel uncomfortable if they believe that information that they provide will be relayed to managers, co-workers etc.

Despite these difficulties, I will explain that my research has the potential to be very valuable to agencies, clients and temporary workers who will all stand to benefit if we can improve our understanding about how an agency worker deals with their 'temporariness'.

5) To what degree will individual research participants and organisations be anonymised in the research outputs? Please list any potentially-identifying characteristics that you may wish to use. Please attach a copy of your participant information sheet and/or consent form (where appropriate) as annexes.

The proposed site and the provider of the agency labour will not be named and will be anonymous. I will use appropriate pseudonyms to prevent identification of people, products or unique processes. Company information will be treated as confidential

Useful links:

A link to the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics can be found on Nexus

http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/business/nexus/index.phtml?sm=645&smt=6&st=222

ESRC Framework for Research Ethics

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/research-ethics.aspx

UK Research Integrity Office Code of Practice for Research

http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/

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Information for Research Participants - ethnography

This information is to advise you of a research project which I am carrying out at this workplace.

The research is called an ethnography which, broadly speaking, involves me working in this workplace, carrying out activities, working alongside yourselves, observing 'how the organisation' works and understanding the 'culture' of this particular workplace.

This information sheet is designed to give you full details of the research project, its goals, and what you will be asked to do as part of the research. If you have any questions that are not answered by this information sheet, please ask.

What is the research project called?

A study of temporary agency workers within the UK Food Manufacturing Industry

Who is carrying out the research?

Peter Carter, a PhD student

What is the research about?

Temporary agency workers, like yourselves, are now used by approximately 40% of manufacturers within the UK food and drink industry. This research project will look at agency workers both in terms of the work which you do and also how you deal with the insecurity of temporary work. With so many workers now engaged in temporary jobs, it is important that we understand your experiences

What groups of people have been asked to take part, and why?

Temporary agency workers

What will research participants be asked to do?

For this ethnography I do not require yourselves to do anything other than what you would normally do as part of your daily activities. As I am

interested in the 'culture' of the workplace, or to put it another way, 'the way things work around here', then I am interested in observing and understanding how activities are carried out. I will primarily observe what is going on, and any conversations with yourselves will be informal as I am interested in your own thoughts about life as a temporary worker. I am looking forward to my involvement with yourselves over the next few weeks as this will help me to find out more about what working in a temporary job is like. I would appreciate your honest views, as this will really help me with my research.

What will happen to the information I provide?

I will make field notes to capture my observations and discussions with yourselves, which I will use later in my PhD to help me understand 'the way things work'.

Anything which I observe, or we discuss, will be treated as confidential and every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity. You will be referred to by a pseudonym (a 'false name'), to avoid revealing your identity. Notes from my observations or discussions will not intentionally contain details which would reveal your identity (or the identity of any other individual). The information gathered during this interview is intended primarily for the purpose of my PhD research project, but may also be used to assist future research into this subject, for instance, via appropriate journal articles and/or relevant conferences. I have also explained this to your agency and the client (host) site, and re-iterated that we will make every effort to maintain anonymity.

What will be the outputs of the research?

Information from my research will form a large proportion of my PhD thesis. There is a possibility that my research could be used as the basis for relevant journal papers and conference presentations.

Contact details

Researcher: Peter Carter, lixpjc@nottingham.ac.uk

PhDSupervisors:

Marek.Korczynski@nottingham.ac.uk; Wendy.Chapple@nottingham.ac.uk;

Laurie.Cohen@nottingham.ac.uk

Complaint procedure

If you wish to complain about the way in which the research is being conducted or have any concerns about the research then in the first instance please contact my PhD supervisors (details above)

Or contact the School's Research Ethics Officer:

Adam Golberg
Nottingham University Business School
Jubilee Campus
Nottingham NG8 1BB
Phone: 0115 846 6604
Email: adam.golberg@nottingham.ac.uk

Nottingham University
Business School

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Information for Research Participants - interviews

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may change your mind about being involved in the research at any time, and without giving a reason.

This information sheet is designed to give you full details of the research project, its goals and what you will be asked to do as part of the research. If you have any questions that are not answered by this information sheet, please ask.

What is the research project called?

> A study of temporary agency workers within the UK Food Manufacturing Industry

Who is carrying out the research?

> Peter Carter, a PhD student

What is the research about?

> Temporary agency workers, like yourself, are now used by approximately 40% of manufacturers within the UK food and drink industry. This research project will look at agency workers, like yourself, both in terms of the work which you do and also how you deal with the insecurity of temporary work. With so many workers now engaged in temporary jobs, I feel it is important that we understand your experiences

What groups of people have been asked to take part, and why?

> Temporary agency workers

What will research participants be asked to do?

> I would very much appreciate you agreeing to take part in an interview, which will last no more than 1hour. Our discussion will help me to find out more about what working in a temporary job is like. The interview will not be too formal and will be 'semi structured' as I am interested in your own

> thoughts about life as a temporary worker. I would appreciate your honest views, as this will help me with my research.

What will happen to the information I provide?

> I would like to record our discussion in order for me to compare and contrast your experiences with that of your fellow temporary workers. Information we discuss will be treated as confidential and every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity. You will be referred to by a pseudonym (a 'false name'), to avoid revealing your identity. Notes from our interview will not intentionally contain details which would reveal your identity (or the identity of any other individual). The information gathered during this interview is intended primarily for the purpose of my PhD research project but may also be used to assist future research into this subject, for instance, via appropriate journal articles and/or relevant conferences. I have also explained this to your agency and the client site, and re-iterated that we will make every effort to maintain anonymity.

What will be the outputs of the research?

> Information from my interviews will form a large proportion of my PhD thesis. There is a possibility that my research could be used as the basis for relevant journal papers and conference presentations.

Contact details

Researcher: Peter Carter, lixpjc@nottingham.ac.uk

PhDSupervisors: Marek.Korczynski@nottingham.ac.uk

Wendy.Chapple@nottingham.ac.uk

Laurie.Cohen@nottingham.ac.uk

Complaint procedure

If you wish to complain about the way in which the research is being conducted or have any concerns about the research then in the first instance please contact Marek Korczynski (details above)

Or contact the School's Research Ethics Officer:

Adam Golberg

Nottingham University Business School

Jubilee Campus

Nottingham NG8 1BB

Phone: 0115 846 6604

Email: adam.golberg@nottingham.ac.uk

D1.1 <u>Interview guide for the semi structured interviews</u>

Interviewer notes

A) Recap of the Research Questions to help focus the interview

Research Question 1:

What are temporary agency workers lived experiences of security and insecurity related to work?

1. Potential contribution: precarious work and workplace insecurity

(Assess whether TAWs feel insecure, e.g. do they collectivise to build security? What is the time frame for insecurity; daily? weekly? 4/5 days? Is there a group sense of security? If workers do not feel insecure, then why not? Work tomorrow? What does this mean to TAWs?)

Research Question 2:

What are temporary agency workers experiences of the temporal aspect of their work, and of the intensity of their work?

1. Potential contribution: the combination of job time and job type
2. Potential contribution: role of gender in the allocation of jobs to TAWs

(How do the workers feel about the time they are working and the types of jobs that they do? How do they feel the jobs are allocated? Is this fair or unfair? Reasonable, logical (to them), based on male or female?)

Research Question 3:

What are temporary agency workers experiences of the mixed-up workplace?

(mixed-up – what does this mean to the workers, how do agency workers get along with the permanent workers? The supervisors? Fellow agency workers?)

1. Potential contribution: role of the leader – quadripartite not partite relationships
2. Potential contribution: mixed-up workplaces

3. Potential contribution: TAW misbehaviour

(what do the supervisors do? Do the supervisors decide who works, and who doesn't? do you think the supervisors are fair? Do the supervisors treat temps differently from perms? If so, how? Do the perms treat temps differently vs other perms? If so, how? As a temp, do you feel that you are treated fairly? If not, why not? How does this make you feel? What do you do about this?)

B) Reflexivity/social relations of the interview process

Opening / generalizing questions - these are vital to build trust

Soft questions, committed respectful but not prying – get people talking openly, this implicitly build trust

i.e.Hi, how are you? What job are you working on today?

(with these opening questions, I feel that I can place myself alongside the worker. I will be able to expand on the reply and demonstrate my understanding of the work which agency workers are asked to undertake. By sharing our experiences, we will build our rapport)

How did you come to get this job?

How long have you worked here?

Who do you work for? (FoodCo or AgencyCo?)

Do any of your family or friends work here?

So, what does this job mean to you?

If FoodCo offered you a full time (permanent) job, would you accept? why? why not?

Follow up questions – flow from the RQ's – use my contextual knowledge to build respect from interviewee

'Work tomorrow' is a very familiar phrase, what would you do if there was no 'work tomorrow'?

Have you ever said no to 'work tomorrow'?

If so, how did you feel? And……..

What response did you get?

How do you spend your days off? (with this question I am seeking to understand how this time off is viewed by the workers – relief ? fear ? relaxing ? looking for other work ?)

When I'm packing, I get shoulder and back pain, is this something which affects you too? (if so, how do you deal with it?) **(implicitly positions me as a TAW)**

What are your thoughts when 'new starters' arrive on the shop floor, ready for work? (with this question I am wondering whether the new starters are seen as a threat ? or maybe whether they are pitied ?)

As an agency worker, we work anything between 4 and 13 hours on a shift. Do you come to work expecting 13hrs, and how do you feel if we are asked to finish 'early'?

We get picked up by the bus at 630am, and sometimes it can be 9pm when we get dropped back off, so we have a long working day. It is cold, we are busy and the work can be hard, so can you explain to me what helps you to get through such long and busy shifts?

Having said that the work can be hard, what in your opinion would make the work easier, or maybe more bearable?

In what ways do you think that working at FoodCo is different, for agency workers compared to full time workers?

When you are working, do you feel like you are working for the benefit of FoodCo, for the benefit of AgencyCo, for the benefit of yourself…………or any combination? (with this question I'm looking to establish how (if) an agency worker sees the 'tripartite' relationship)

What would make you want to leave FoodCo? (a question to explore evidence of any loyalty?)

<u>Experience questions</u>

Of the various jobs (or lines) which you have worked on at FoodCo, which is your favourite? (and why?)

Could you describe for me what the difference is between a good day and a not-so-good day at FoodCo?

Have you worked for any other agencies, and if so, can you explain any differences between the current agency and any previous one's?

Native-like questions – looking for an answer in their own words/phrases etc.

As you know we have a meeting at 730am every morning – if you needed to explain the purpose of this meeting to a friend (who didn't work at FoodCo) what would you say?

During the 730am meeting, the supervisors often speak to us of the need for team work.

What does teamwork mean to you? Is there co-operation / control within the group: does this come from within the group or enforced by management; is teamwork desired by management only – if so why? Or is teamwork evidenced 'internally' (evidence of peer relations) – if so what are the rules of engagement?

Can you describe examples of where you have seen evidence (or lack of evidence) of team working?

The meeting also talks about H&S each morning;

If your partner / friend / wife / husband / children ask you about your working day, how do you describe what you have been doing?

As an English agency worker, I have found working at FoodCo difficult at times as there are many different languages being spoken. Can you explain to me how you cope with understanding what is going on when so many languages are spoken?

After the interview

Also record personal feelings about the interview; what went well? What could have gone better?

The mood, feeling and responsiveness of the interview; rapport; positive/negative

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