

# **The Slaughterhouse Experience: A critical case study of workers in the British Industrial Meat Processing Sector**

Jake Pointer

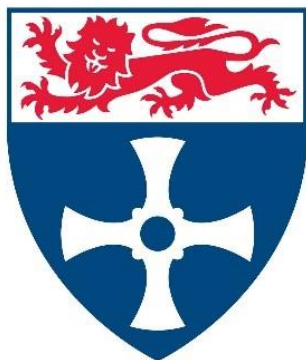
Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of

Philosophy

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology

Newcastle University

22/09/2023



**Newcastle**  
University

## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes to the 'Sociology of the Slaughterhouse' (York, 2004) by mapping out the experiences of industrial meat workers in The United Kingdom (UK). It utilises primary qualitative data to distinguish both what these experiences are and how they differentiate between workers based on ethnicity and job type. It heavily draws upon fields of 'dirty work' theory and migration to help understand the social and psychological forces which mould these experiences.

British Industrial Meat Processing Sector (BIMPS) employers often favour hiring migrant workers over their UK counterparts. Narratives from employers suggest that there is a 'need' to hire migrant workers due to difficulties recruiting UK workers. Yet, upon investigation, there were benefits for employers to hire migrants, including higher degrees of control, the possibility to pay less, and creating access to wider labour pools through family and friends. At the same time, the argument from employers that UK workers are simply 'bad workers' proved false, with plenty of UK workers finding employment, working hard, and enjoying their jobs.

Once hired, workers reported several difficulties in the workplace. Strenuous physical labour, psychological difficulties from exposure to slaughter, workplace aggression and intra-group conflict were common. Concurrently, workers found a sense of shared endeavour with colleagues, pride in their skills and knowledge, and deep meaning in their work. The occupational community provided workers with opportunities for camaraderie and leisure activities. Many of these problems and benefits cut across ethnicity and job types. However, migrants were found to be paid less and sometimes receive the 'worse' jobs but did benefit from a 'migrant solidarity' which was absent for UK workers.

The thesis indicates that whilst ethnicity did affect some aspects of work, overall, workers, regardless of background, had similar experiences. Job type affected this to some extent, especially for MHIs/OVs but there was still much overlap between both ethnic groups and occupations.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have been more than fortunate in the support given to me by many different people. Firstly, a more than deserved thanks to my two supervisors Ruth McAreavey and Tracy Shildrick who have provided an endless supply of feedback and constructive critiques, without which, this thesis would be half of what it is.

Many thanks must also go to Newcastle University, the Economic and Social Research Council and all the staff in the GPS office for their support. The IT service desk also deserves an honourable mention as they have helped on more than one occasion with seemingly (to me) impossible-to-solve IT issues. Leeann and Sarah also deserve thanks for supplying me with regular cover work and therefore a few extra quid in my pocket.

Finally, a special thank you to my family, particularly my Mom and Dad, Kyle, and Nanny Janet, and to my colleagues and friends (many of which are one and the same), Jennifer, Julia and Mark Allender, Melisa Maida, Gemma Molyneux, Claire Boden, Angela Plessas, Gustavo Aguilar Miranda, Federica Consentino, Pilar d'Aló and Natalie Partridge.

## **Abbreviations**

BIMPS - British Industrial Meat Processing Sector

BMPA – British Meat Processors Association

EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission

FQR – Foreign Qualification Recognition

FBO – Food Business Operator

FSA – Food Standards Agency

FSS - Food Standards Scotland

HSE – Health and Safety Executive

MBW - Meat Businesswomen

MHI – Meat Hygiene Inspector

MOC – Manual for Official Controls

NCS – National Careers Service

ONS – Office of National Statistics

OV – Official Veterinarian

PIA – Plant Inspection Assistant

PITS – Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress

QA – Quality Assurance

QC – Quality Control

RCVS – Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

'I enjoyed each and every aspect of the job, the heavy lifting, the mess, the killing, it was all part of my job, and I enjoyed every bit of it' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'No windows, no heat, in the cold, boning out all day long; I wouldn't recommend it to anyone' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

The British Industrial Meat Sector (BIMPS) is an unusual working environment. With fast-paced and highly physical tasks combined with ever-present death, blood and gore, there is no other workplace quite like the abattoir. Bataille (cited by Leach, 1997: 21) once claimed 'the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a boat carrying cholera'. Vialles (1994: 19) describes how the abattoir had to be banished from the city walls to create the 'place that is no place'. For Utopianists, the place of abattoirs has always been far from central to the perfect society. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, the slaughter of animals and cleaning of carcasses was to be carried out in 'special places outside the town' by slaves, for fear it would 'destroy one's natural feelings for humanity' (More, cited by Vialles, 1994: 1). Wells (2005 [1905]: 184), in his *Modern Utopia*, takes this a step further 'In all the round world of Utopia there is no meat. There used to be. But now we cannot stand the thought of slaughterhouses'.

Yet despite these progressive philosophical ideas, which have existed for centuries, the meat industry in the UK, and most of the world, is larger than ever, with the BIMPS currently employing around 97,000 employees (BMPA, 2020a) who kill and process some 1.2 billion land animals per year (Viva, 2022). Whilst difficult to ascertain the precise figure, approximately 90%+ per cent of the UK population eats meat (Wunsch, 2023), although the amount of meat consumed per capita is declining (Stewart et al., 2021). Although the consumption rate remains high, customers need not become familiar with the process of meat production (Smith, 2002; Joy, 2010). As Elias (2000: 103) documents, processing (or carving) of meat in the Middle Ages was a distinguished position, but over time this task has been allocated to 'specialists' who operate 'behind the scenes of social life'. This thesis aims to provide a thorough



account of the experiences of this 'invisible' workforce (Daniels, 1987) from the point of recruitment and throughout their time in the BIMPS.

My inspiration for this project was sparked after reading an academic article entitled 'A Slaughterhouse Nightmare' (Dillard, 2007). It describes extreme violence in US abattoirs and the psychological consequences of such work, from drug use to 'being hauled off to the mental hospital' (ibid: 7). Having been vegan for around 3 years at this point (cf. Chapter 3), I had a substantial interest in meat production mainly regarding the moral and environmental implications (Springmann et al., 2016; 2018). This view was largely animal-focused though and gave little thought to the workers involved. Dillard's (2007) article turned that viewpoint on its head. Shortly after, I read another article concerning the positive relationship between slaughterhouse location and local violent crime rates in the US, coined the 'Sinclair Effect' (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). This eponymous term referred to Upton Sinclair's (1985 [1906]) investigative research in Chicago meat packing facilities in the early 1900s. This research served as the basis for his novel, *The Jungle*, about the fictionalised Rudkus family, who migrate from Lithuania to pursue a better life in the US. After taking employment at a local meat facility, the working conditions and the surrounding areas drive the family to ruin and, in some cases, literally to death. *The Jungle* served to highlight some of the worst labour issues of the day regarding working conditions, pay and exploitation of a largely migrant workforce by employers. The reading of this novel provided the inspiration for this project. Could a similar study be conducted in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain?

The role of migrants in the UK labour market is well documented. Similar to in *The Jungle*, migrants often take the lowest jobs on the British socioeconomic ladder (Lee-Treweek, 2012). They face several challenges which are absent for local workers such as language barriers, being unfamiliar with local norms/cultural differences (Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Fernandez-Reino, 2021) and being vulnerable to exploitation from employers (Forde, et al., 2008; 2008). Concerning UK agriculture, recent literature indicates that migrants occupy a precarious position, with the work demanding a highly flexible, physically capable, and low-paid workforce (Hoggart and Mendoza, 2002; Rogaly, 2008; Scott and Rye, 2021). More specifically, the small amount of literature on migrants in the meat sector indicates several highly problematic and yet underreported issues. An EHRC (2010) report found numerous incidents of bullying in

the workplace towards migrants, difficulties around pay, and workers being denied toilet breaks. Lever and Milbourne (2017) found several issues among migrants employed through work agencies. With such a scarcity of literature on meat plants and migrants and with migration being an important contemporary issue, especially with Britain's recent exit from the EU, the time seemed perfect to pursue such a study.

Originally, the focus of this study was to explore the experiences of migrant workers in the UK sector, as Sinclair (1985) had done in the US. Indeed, employers in Chicago were able to exploit workers largely because of the structural disadvantages migrants faced (ibid). Other literature from the time and historical accounts indicates similar findings (Commons, 1906; Halpern and Horowitz, 1999). However, throughout the research process, it became apparent that it would be impossible to exclude the experiences of UK workers in the project. By 'UK worker', the project refers to anyone who is a citizen of The United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and The North of Ireland) or a British Overseas Territory. Another factor which needed differentiation was the different kinds of meat workers. The term 'meat worker' encompasses a large number of roles which vary in the skill and qualifications needed, pay, status, cleanliness, task variation and so on. A job on the line, for example, may require no qualifications or prior experience whereas an Official Veterinarian (OV) requires specialist training and has a much wider variety of tasks and responsibilities.

The small amount of UK literature indicates other problematic practices, such as UK workers being actively avoided in the recruitment process and being on the receiving end of bullying in the workplace (EHRC, 2010; Tannock, 2015). Whilst research on the UK meat sector is somewhat rare, there are more studies centred on the US meat sector. This research highlights exceptionally poor treatment of migrant workers by employers, managers and other colleagues (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Ribas, 2016; Waltz, 2018). Other studies have found issues surrounding the mental health of workers (Eisntiz, 1997; Dillard, 2007; Baran et al., 2016; Hendrix and Dollar, 2017). The spillover effects of slaughterhouses onto local areas have also been documented, especially through the work of Broadway and Stull (2006; 2008; 2013). In addition, the place of meat in both 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain and elsewhere has come into question in recent years. Whilst historically seen as a staple food in a healthy diet, the nutritional benefits of meat have come under debate (Orlich et al., 2013; Kahleova et al., 2020).

Processed meat, in particular, has come under fire after being linked to several health conditions (WHO, 2015). Additionally, meat production contributes significantly to climate change (Springmann et al., 2018; Poore and Nemecek, 2018). Some advocates have argued for a drastic reduction in the quantity of meat being consumed to meet climate change targets (Stewart et al., 2021). Finally, how animals are to be treated and whether they should be killed for meat has become a modern moral conundrum (Regan, 1991; Singer, 2015).

Although for outsiders it may seem difficult to understand why anyone would choose to work in an abattoir, both US and UK-based research has found positive experiences for workers. Meara (1974) uncovered how US and Turkish meat workers create honour in their work. Thompson (1983) provides details of social solidarity amongst workers through shared endeavour. Perhaps the most vivid account of the experiences of UK workers was carried out by Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990). They investigated a British abattoir and found several unique behaviours amongst the workers regarding establishing a workplace hierarchy, pride in work, the formation of the occupational community and connotations of masculinity attached to the work. Hamilton and McCabe (2016) and McLoughlin (2018) looked at the emotions of workers within meat facilities and how workers regulate them. McCabe and Hamilton (2015) researched identity-making processes among Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs). Indeed, these studies indicate that workers can build up strong senses of identity, particularly through hard work and the skills gained on the job. This adds an extra layer of complexity to the scenario. Scholars of 'dirty work' have regularly investigated how workers in such roles cope with their work and the techniques they use to mentally deal with any associated psychological challenges (Baran et al., 2012; Bosmans et al., 2016; Deery, et al., 2019). The literature shows how, despite large difficulties faced by workers such as stigma from outsiders, regulation of emotions and hard physical labour (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Victor and Barnard, 2016) they are still able to draw meaning, enjoyability, social relations and a sense of identity from their work.

In the early stages of the research, it became apparent that the task ahead would be more complicated than researching labour issues faced by migrant workers in the meat sector. As a result, the research aims were devised in such a way to as remain

both open to any and all findings and to strive for, as far as possible, ethical neutrality (Weber, 2011). In other words, the aims took an 'assume nothing' approach. The project aims are

- 1) To explore the lived experiences of workers in modern BIMPS facilities
- 2) To understand how, if at all, these experiences differ between different types of workers
- 3) To engage with various stakeholders, including workers, managers, and employers to understand the processes at work that influence the experiences of workers in the BIMPS sector

From these aims the following two research questions were formulated

- 1) What are the lived experiences of workers in the BIMPS sector?
- 2) What influences, if any, differentiate these experiences?

To fulfil the aims and answer the questions, data was drawn from 29 semi-structured interviews, two focus groups and two diary-keeping exercises carried out with individuals with experience working in the BIMPS. Two in-person visits to BIMPS facilities took place to supplement this data. Differentiation was made where appropriate between British and migrant workers and between different job roles (e.g., Slaughterers, MHIs, OV's etc.). The thesis is made up of eight chapters including this introduction. The remainder of this chapter summarises the following seven chapters.

Chapter 2 brings together and reviews existing theoretical and empirical knowledge of relevance to this project. It begins by reviewing the UK labour market and how this assimilates and uses migrant labour. It then analyses the key themes embedded within the literature on the UK meat sector. Finally, it surmises the field of 'dirty work' literature which this thesis utilises throughout much of this research and assesses the utility of this theory.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology. This follows the three stages of research as described by Loseke (2017). First, it provides the planning and research design phase

including identifying the research philosophy, precisely which group was to be researched and the ethical implications. My position as a researcher needed substantial consideration, particularly as a vegan researching the meat sector which is discussed in detail. The second stage, the execution, elaborates on how the recruitment of participants was done, the research methods utilised and the challenges of data collection. The chapter concludes with the data analysis methods.

Chapter 4 describes the 'journey to the abattoir' and the various influences in place which shape the roads of individuals who arrive at the sector. This chapter is split into two sections. The first considers UK workers and looks at the different routes they take and the cultural influences, especially during their pre-adult years, which make meat work a viable work option. The second section focuses on migrants, who have a two-step journey of first arriving in the UK and then taking up work. Both sections examine the role and practices of employers in recruiting workers.

Chapter 5 analyses the typical workday experiences of working in the meat sector. It starts by addressing the pre-arrival stage (the commute) and work times, then moves on to the tasks which workers regularly carry out. Of particular note was the physical and fast-paced nature of the work. A key concept in this chapter is the idea of 'affordance' (Gibson, 2014), that is, what an environment offers ('affords') its inhabitants. A typical BIMPS facility created many affordances for workers including the smells, noises, cold and, of course, the mess produced by killing and butchering animals.

Chapter 6 examines workers' relationships. This chapter was again split into two sections. The first section analyses the relationship workers have with outsiders i.e., those with no experience or knowledge of working in the BIMPS. The second half considers workers' relationships with each other, especially how the 'occupational community' is built and functions. Whilst the occupational community afforded several benefits for workers, it also proved problematic at times. Workers were not accepted into the community simply because they worked at the same place but had to navigate workplace norms and engage in banter. Workers often reported varying degrees and types of workplace aggression, including physical aggression, from their colleagues.

Chapter 7 analyses the place of emotions in the workplace. It was evident that working in the BIMPS can be an emotionally taxing job, not least in that it involves killing animals. How workers mentally negotiate this, and other challenges, is a key component of understanding what it means to work in the BIMPS. Workers utilised a large range of strategies to negotiate these emotions including using 'occupational ideologies' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999), fulfilling obligations towards the animals and focusing on the positive aspects and/or necessity of meat production.

Finally, Chapter 8 provides a summary of the research and the conclusions drawn following the data analysis before offering suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The chapter investigates the current academic literature to contextualise the 21<sup>st</sup>-century British Industrial Meat Processing sector. To do this, it first gives a brief account of changes in the UK labour market and how these have affected the BIMPS. This includes the effects of deindustrialisation, the rise of the service economy, the increase in what Goos and Manning (2007) refer to as ‘job polarisation’ and the increase in migrant labour within the UK labour market. It then moves on to a thorough review of the literature on the UK meat sector more generally. This aims to highlight some of the more idiosyncratic aspects relevant to this thesis such as the tasks, the environment, and the psycho-social adjustments that workers make to operate in this sector successfully. Finally, this chapter assesses the utility of ‘dirty work theory’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) in understanding the social dynamics of the BIMPS such as the threat of outside stigma and how workers build positive occupational ideologies.

### **2.2. The UK Labour Market and the BIMPS**

In the 1950s, Britain began to deindustrialise (Tomilson, 2021). Deindustrialisation may be defined as ‘the diminishing proportion of either national production or the labour force of the richest Western nations engaged in the primary and secondary industrial sectors’ (Scott and Marshall, 2005: 142). In the UK, several industrial sectors, perhaps most notably the coal sector, saw a rapid decline in production and employment (Strangleman, 2017). It has been argued that deindustrialisation is the natural outcome of economic success and that, following this, a progression towards a tertiary or ‘service’ economy will prevail (Ferguson and Ferguson 1994; Rowthorn and Ramaswamy, 1997), an economic process that Bárány and Siegel (2018), refer to as ‘structural transformation’. In the UK, this has been the case. As of 2018, the service sector makes up around 80% of the UK GDP in comparison to around 51% in 1920 (ONS, 2019a). In comparison, the manufacturing or ‘secondary’ sector, equates to around 15% of the UK GDP as of 2018 (ibid). These processes have affected the meat sector in a peculiar way. On the one hand, the sector is arguably more industrialised than ever. For example, there is a growing number of larger,

industrialised abattoirs in the UK, and a reduction in smaller, family-owned abattoirs (AHDB, 2022). Similar processes can be seen at the sales end of the meat sector, with drastic declines in independent high street butchers and rapid increases in nationwide supermarkets offering industrially processed meat (Caroli et al. 2010; Simpson et al., 2014). At the same time, the BIMPS has adapted to the same influences which have fuelled deindustrialisation. One of the major reasons for the reduction in the labour force in manufacturing roles is because of increased automation of work previously done by hand (Sennet, 2009; Salvatori, 2018). This has, to some degree, been the case with the BIMPS. Many of the tasks are still done by hand, such as the stunning and slaughtering of larger animals (Vialles, 1994; McLoughlin, 2018) but much is now automated (Ritzer, 2019). For example, McCabe and Hamilton (2015: 101) describe how, in the case of chickens, the entire process is now almost completely done by technology, including slaughter, which is carried out by a mechanised 'neck cutter'.

### **2.2.1. Job Polarisation**

Job polarisation entails an increase in both higher and lower-paid work with a reduction in the 'middling jobs' such as clerical office-based work (Goos and Manning, 2007). These middling jobs can often be replaced with technology or be outsourced abroad, such as call centre work (Goos et al. 2009). As Autor et al. (2003) elaborate, this is especially the case with routine tasks, which often require continuous repeated use of particular skills, which are more easily replaced with computers. Of course, not all tasks, especially non-routine tasks, can be replaced or outsourced, and this kind of work is often found at both ends of the wage spectrum (ibid; ibid). Managerial, technical and creative jobs, for example, require complex problem-solving and communication skills which are difficult to replace with technology (Böhm, 2020). At the same time, there are jobs which do not necessarily require formal education or specialised skill sets but are still difficult to automate such as care work, waitering, work involving driving (delivery, taxi work) etc. (ibid). Likewise, many tasks in the BIMPS are difficult to automate, not least because they deal with live animals (Wilkie, 2010). Thus, whilst automation can be used to an extent, it cannot fully be implemented.



Another influencer in job polarisation in the UK is politicians keen to develop the 'knowledge economy' by emphasising the attainment of better, more developed skills in the workforce (Lloyd and Payne, 2016). Whilst there is no agreed sociological definition of what a skill is, skills that are 'credentialised' almost always hold a higher employment value than those that are not, such as 'soft skills' (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). As such, there has since the 1990s been a governmental push to increase access to higher education, especially for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Weedon, 2017). The attainment of higher education generally leads to the pursuit of, and growth of, higher-skilled work (Oesch, 2013). As Green et al. (2016) found, between the years 1986 and 2012 in the UK, the number of jobs requiring higher education from applicants increased from 20% to 37%. The other side of this social change, however, is that those who do not pursue higher education often find a limited number of employment options and have little choice but to take the 'lower jobs' (Rosenbaum, 2001).

Several authors have distinguished between these two types of work and used various criteria for doing so. Piore (1979), for example, differentiates between the 'primary sector' and 'secondary sector'. A primary sector occupation is generally that which is of higher status, better paid, in a pleasant environment and has progression opportunities (Leontaridi, 2002). This contrasts with their secondary sector counterparts which offer less pay, less job security and fewer progression opportunities. Similarly, Goos and Manning (2007: 119) separate the 'lovely' from the 'lousy' jobs; the former being 'mainly in professional and managerial occupations in finance and business service' with the latter being 'mainly in low-paying service occupations'. Shildrick et al. (2012) go further by making sub-distinctions within these lower-paid occupations. They identify 'low-paid work', 'precarious work' (work that is contractually short term) and 'poor work', which they define as

'Not only low paid and insecure, it is poor-quality work, often requiring no or low formal skills or qualifications and providing little room for the expression or development of skills, often done under poor terms and conditions of employment' (ibid: 24).

Bárány and Siegel (2018) make the distinction between low and high-skilled service work and note its increase in the US since the 1950s. However, they class

‘manufacturing’ as a separate category of work as it is not a service, and also note how wages in this sector occupied a middle position in the wage distribution, demonstrating the difficulty in labelling manufacturing work as low/high skill.

Indeed, where meat work is concerned, it is difficult, if not impossible, to fit the entire sector within a category of ‘secondary sector’, ‘lousy’, ‘poor’ or ‘low-skill’, henceforth referred to simply as ‘lower jobs’<sup>1</sup>. A regularly cited distinction between these jobs and their ‘higher’ counterparts is formal education, in that it is often required for higher jobs (Shildrick et al. 2012). Indeed, for many of the roles in the meat sector, higher education is not a requirement (Lloyd and James, 2008). Oftentimes, roles utilise physical capital and may not require any prior knowledge or experience at all from workers, such as workers hired through agencies (EHRC, 2010). Yet at the same time, occupations such as Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) and Official Veterinarians (OVs) need degrees for their work (McCabe and Hamilton, 2015). Another distinction is that lower work requires little skill and/or is routine (Autor et al. 2003; Bárány and Siegel, 2018). Certainly, there are accounts of meat work where a single repetitive manual task is constantly carried out and can be mastered quickly (Thompson, 1983; Ritzer, 2019). However, some would argue meat work requires a great deal of skill, especially the use of knife skills (Vialles, 1994). These highlight the problematic nature of characterising a sector as completely occupying the lower end of the job polarisation spectrum. Therefore, it is more accurate to analyse each job on its own characteristics.

That said, there is one aspect that does appear to place the meat sector in its entirety within this category of ‘lower jobs’: its status, or lack of. Of course, status is subjective (Ashforth, 2001), but because of the nature of the sector (which will be discussed in the following sections), meat work, in the eyes of many, generates low occupational prestige (Treiman, 1977; Baran et al. 2016). This status even affects those jobs which are generally seen as ‘higher’. OVs, for example, who in a clinical role garner much prestige, are not afforded the same status when working in the BIMPS despite using many of the same skills (McCabe and Hamilton, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> It is recognised that this term is not unproblematic and is meant to be used only for convenience throughout this thesis.

### **2.2.2. Migrant Labour**

Because of the lowly status of meat work and what this entails (physical tasks, low pay etc.), it has frequently been argued by the BIMPS that UK workers do not want to work in this sector and therefore migrants must be brought in to fill these labour gaps (Lever and Milbourne, 2017; BMPA, 2020b). As of 2021, EU-born migrants were overrepresented in several manufacturing sectors such as factory work (15%), food preparation (14%) and 'low-skilled factory work and construction' (13%) (Fernandez-Reino and Rienzo, 2021). Whilst these figures are high, the BIMPS dwarfs these sectors with a 62% migrant workforce as of 2020 (BMPA, 2020a). Like other sectors, the BIMPS asserts that there is a need to hire migrant labour to fill these gaps (ibid). However, Anderson and Ruhs (2010) maintain that these claims are merely narratives and that, in reality, employers have their own interests in hiring migrant workers.

#### *Employers*

Employers may perceive migrants to be 'good workers' and to possess a higher work ethic which encourages positive discrimination in their favour (Ford, 2011; McAreavey, 2017). This ensures they are placed at the front of the 'hiring queue' (Waldinger and Litcher, 2003), a finding found consistently in the BIMPS (Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Once hired, employers can use migrant workers as points of entry into migrant networks to further recruit workers (Anderson, 2000), which has again been documented in the BIMPS (EHRC, 2010). Furthermore, migrants often have fewer job choices than UK workers for several reasons. A lack of Foreign Qualification Recognition (FQR), where employers give less credit to foreign qualifications, may act as a significant hindrance to migrants (Ozkan, 2018). For instance, to practice clinic-based veterinary care in the UK, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) requires vets to have an RCVS-recognised degree. If a vet does not have such a degree, they must pass the Statuary Membership Exam as well as pay a fee of £2500 per attempt (RCVS, 2021). However, this is not a requirement for MHIs or OV's (NCS, 2021; FSA, 2021) creating a potential career path for those unable to access clinical vet work. Low language proficiency can also hinder the number of jobs migrants can do, leaving a smaller pool of potential job opportunities. Assembly or construction work, for instance, often relies more on an individual's physical capital rather than language capabilities (Thiel, 2013). Some jobs on the line do not require a high (or

even moderate) level of English, and for employers, it may be easier to have a single nationality with a common language, such as Polish, than several nationalities and thus languages (Lloyd and James, 2008).

Another reason for hiring migrants is they are often seen to be more flexible (McCollum and Findlay, 2015). Because of the dominance of the 'big four' supermarkets in the UK, this has led to more fierce competition for sales, with purchases often being made on price over other factors such as quality (Caroli, et al., 2010). The seasonal rhythms for food production, as well as the variations in demands for specific products, entail 'just in time' systems for hiring workers (Geddes and Scott, 2010). 'Just in time' workers are hired as and when the market fluctuates, often quickly and at a low cost (Garrapa, 2017). Work agencies can help facilitate this work system by providing a flexible, often temporary, workforce for firms (Shubin et al., 2014; Forde and Slater, 2016) and the BIMPS regularly utilises this method of employment (Caroli et al., 2010; Hamilton and McCabe, 2016). Of course, as Tannock (2015) notes, not all agency workers are migrants and not all permanent staff are UK workers, although generally, as found in his study and elsewhere (EHRC, 2010), it is the case agency workers are often migrants. Thus, migrants often face the barriers of being both a migrant worker and an agency worker concurrently. Lever and Milbourne (2017) found their meat plant favoured hiring migrant workers using both zero-hour contracts and through work agencies. Once hired, they could be brought in and sent home without prior knowledge with no pay. Likewise, Tannock (2015) records accounts of workers being called in at 6:00 a.m. only to be sent home immediately without pay. The EHRC (2010) found the same in their inquiry, as well as agency workers receiving shorter breaks, lower pay and sometimes working every day of the week. Lloyd and James (2008) found agency workers in three separate meat plants were paid between 70-84 per cent of the wages that the lowest paid direct workers received, 20 days holiday compared to 28 days received by direct staff and received no sick pay or pension schemes whatsoever. Additionally, agencies may overlook certain nationalities over others, including British workers and requests for particular nationalities have been documented from employers (ibid; ibid). Lever and Milbourne (2017) also found workers were stratified based on nationality to keep competitive tensions high between ethnic groups, which served to increase production. Additionally, segregation based on ethnic group has

been recorded many times in the US (Halpern and Horowitz, 1999; LeDuff, 2000; Ribas, 2016), suggesting this is not unique to the BIMPS.

### *Migrant Workers*

Castles et al. (2014) note how migrants are sometimes seen as 'helpless victims' which negates their agency. In reality, there are reasons migrants may take 'lower jobs'. Migrants can compare their current conditions with their previous situation in their home nation. The 'dual frame of reference' (Reese, 2001; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003) postulates that whilst the working conditions of the new country may not be ideal, they can still be a significant improvement to those in their home nation. Furthermore, Piore (1986) theorises that migrants may consider their social status as that which they had in their home nation, which neutralises their new 'lower' status. Indeed, for some migrants in the BIMPS, it is not the type of job itself that is important, simply having a job at all is sufficient (Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Sending money back home in the form of remittances may make migrants more willing to take work that local workers may not. The pay in the new role may be worth significantly more than their own currencies, and therefore a short-term, lower-paid job may become an investment for the future (Datta, 2012). This arguably benefits the home nation as a whole in the form of new supplies of financial capital and employment networks (Portes, 2019). Whilst away, migrants may learn new work skills and increase their language proficiency, skills which they can use in their home nation (Hagan and Wassink, 2016). These skills may be difficult to learn or expensive at home but accessible and cheap in others (Dustman et al., 2011). In this manner, migration may be seen as an investment in the individual, which may reap both financial and non-financial rewards in the future (Sjaastad, 1962; Castles et al., 2014). Indeed, quantitative evidence has found support for the 'skill-upgrading hypothesis,' that migrants with newly acquired skills will attain higher wages and a better quality of life upon returning home (Reinhold and Thom, 2009). In addition, accepting lower-paid work can be seen as a way to enter the UK labour market, potentially acting as the 'steppingstone' to better opportunities further on (Geddes and Scott, 2010). Migrants are often aware of what employers look for in migrant workers and the low regard they have for local workers (Shubin, 2014; Tannock, 2015) and modify their behaviour accordingly. As Shubin et al. (2014) summarise the 'ideal' migrant worker comes into being through the 'other's desire'. This has been documented in the BIMPS, such as

McAreavey (2017) finding a Czech applicant lying on their job application at a local meat facility by claiming to be Polish, which they knew was the ethnicity favoured by the employers.

### **2.2.3. UK Workers**

Popular discourses in the media often frame the British working class as lazy, docile, and underserving, which then acts as a scapegoat to hire migrant workers (Tyler, 2013; 2020). Meat firms have been found to operate in alignment with this ideology. Tannock (2015) found one employer stating that

‘[Local] workers don’t understand that what employers look for in their workers has changed, and, like it or not, they have to accept that an employer like St Merryn wants workers who are willing to work twenty-four hours around the clock, to be available, to work hard, to show a good attitude. But they don’t accept this’ (ibid: 422)

As Shildrick et al. (2012) found, work agencies tasked with supplying local labour often focus on the ‘failings’ of the local workless population rather than the barriers which stop them from entering local jobs. In the case of the BIMPS, there are real structural barriers which often prevent potential local workers from entering the sector. An EHRC (2010) report found work agencies were unlawfully withholding job opportunities from British applicants and reserving them for newly arrived migrant workers whom they saw as having a higher work ethic. Tannock (2015) found that managers ‘exhausted...the population’ in the local area by verbally abusing workers to the point of making them quit. Additionally, Scarborough (2000) asserts that supply chains often place great pressure on workers to meet production demands. Many authors both in the UK and elsewhere document both the physical and mental pressures put on workers in the meat sector, especially regarding the speed of the work (Lloyd and James, 2008; Cohidon et al., 2009; Caroli et al., 2010; Slade and Alleyne, 2021). These issues, coupled with difficulties in collective action, mean local workers may ‘embrace workplace exit as their best option for having some degree of control over their working lives’ (Tannock, 2015: 426).

## 2.3. The British Industrial Meat Processing Sector

The BIMPS is a complicated and unusual working environment. It often poses unique challenges which workers must overcome. These include the physical characteristics of the work such as the speed and tasks and the psychological and social adjustments workers need to make to operate successfully within the BIMPS. These aspects will now be expanded upon.

### 2.3.1. The Tasks

Perhaps the defining characteristic of the industrial meat processing sector, both in the UK and abroad, is that it uses the 'disassembly line' (Inkson, 1977). Not only does it take apart and restructure a whole 'object', (as opposed to assembling a new product such as a car), but it is also the only sector which uses live 'raw material' in the form of animals, rather than wood, steel etc. (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). Indeed, it has been speculated that Henry Ford was inspired to utilise this disassembly technology in reverse to produce cars following a visit to a Cincinnati slaughterhouse (ibid). Regardless, many of the roles in the BIMPS and abroad are 'on the line', insofar as the line determines how tasks are done and at what speed (Ribas, 2016). Ritzer (2019) elaborates that the expanded use of technology in the US industrial meat processing sector deskills many of these tasks. This, in turn, reduces the need for many of the traditional skills and knowledge needed in meat production such as skinning and fine cutting (Simpson, et al., 2014).

However, the concept of 'deskilling' is not a simple reduction in skills. For example, whilst technology has been brought in, this may demand the use of new skills not required before, such as operating the machinery correctly. Striffler (2002: 308) who conducted ethnographic work in a US chicken factory noted that, in his plant, jobs categorised as unskilled, in fact, required 'an immense amount of skill'. As he expands

'The job of *harinero* is extremely complicated. In a simple sense, the *harinero* empties 50-pound bags of flour all day long. The work is backbreaking, but it requires less physical dexterity than many of the jobs on the line. At the same time, the job is multifaceted and cannot be learned

in a single day. Controls on the breeder and rebreeder need to be continually checked and adjusted, the marinade needs to be monitored, the power needs to be shut on and off, and the flour needs to be replaced with fresh flour' (ibid).

Thus, at least some of the work has demanded the 'reskilling' of workers rather than 'deskilling' (Rafner et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a limit to how far some tasks can incorporate technology. For example, McLoughlin (2018: 9) found that the stunner, who rendered animals unconscious using a pneumatic gun prior to slaughter, garnered respect from his colleagues due to his 'mastery of a difficult skill'. Whilst the gun did the stunning, it had to be used by hand to ensure it was placed correctly on the cow's head. There are also differences between the types of animals being processed which affects the use of technology. As Hamilton and McCabe (2016) found, chicken processing is now almost completely automated. However, larger animals whose body shapes are more complex cannot be processed as easily with technology and must therefore be done, at least partially, by hand (Vialles, 1994). Furthermore, whilst tasks might be individually deskilled, this does not mean that workers learn several skills and therefore are able to do many tasks. Caroli et al. (2010) found that by rotating jobs, they became 'multi-skilled' and in some cases, the higher-skilled workers were expected to move between jobs as and when required. Vialles (1994: 95) found that not only is skill required from the use of knives, but it also directly affects workers' position in the workplace hierarchy. The new workers would start by cleaning and gutting, which required 'no particular skill' but would work their way up to more competent tasks such as flaying. Thus, whilst meat work may have been deskilled through the use of technology, this is not to say workers cannot obtain skills at all.

### *Health and Safety*

Because of the nature of the work, the BIMPS can often be dangerous and raises several issues regarding health and safety. In 2020, workplace injuries by sector in the UK were highest in 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' with 3940 injuries per 100,000 workers, compared with an 'all industry average' of 1,770 per 100,000 (HSE, 2020). This sector also has the highest fatal injury rate with 41 deaths from April 2020 to



March 2021, the highest rate in 5 years (HSE, 2021). This is not only the BIMPS but includes wider farming and fishing industries. More nuanced data from previous enquiries show the food and drink sector has an especially poor record of health and safety (Lloyd and James, 2008). The combined meat processing sector (divided into 'meat' and 'poultry' processing) is the highest sector for injuries overall, with over 200 major injuries, plus 1000+ minor injuries, reported per year (BMPA, 2014). However, initiatives such as the Recipe for Safety, which was introduced in the 1990s have reduced the number of workplace injuries in the UK by over 60% as of 2015 (HSE, 2015).

The majority of the physical risks posed are towards workers on the line. These include cuts and other injuries due to working with machines or equipment such as knives (Thompson 1983; Schlosser, 2002), slips on wet floors (Lloyd and James, 2008), attacks from animals (Eisnitz, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 2005; HSE, 2020), various repetitive-motion related problems (Personick and Shirley-Taylor, 1989) and heavy lifting (EHRC, 2010). These injuries may, at least in part, be down to the high pressures on workers, especially in regard to speed (Lloyd and James, 2008; Stull and Broadway, 2013). Kristensen (1991) found a positive correlation between high job strain and rates of injury in meat plants in Denmark. So fast is the speed that Hendrix and Dollar (2017), as part of their 'Meatpacking-Methamphetamine Hypothesis' suggest workers may use drugs to, amongst other things, circumvent biological needs to enable them to meet the demands of production.

### **2.3.2. Psychological and Social Aspects**

Working in the BIMPS can be an emotion-evoking occupation. Being surrounded by death and working in a fast-paced, industrial environment requires psychological attributes from workers, which often take time to generate. To reveal this emotional transformation, Victor and Barnard (2016) created a four-stage process of adjusting to the role of slaughterer, based on qualitative research on slaughterhouse workers in South Africa. It not only highlights the psychological processes but also how workers adjust to some of the social demands of the work. This process, however, was created only concerning slaughterers and therefore is expanded upon here to include other roles within the meat sector. One of the main aspects it shows is how workers 'normalize' the work, that is, by 'making the extraordinary appear ordinary' (Ashforth

and Kreiner, 2002: 215). Much of the literature supports this process but there is also evidence which contradicts it, suggesting it may not fully apply across job roles or cross-culturally.

### *Stage 1 – ‘Becoming a Slaughterer’*

According to Victor and Barnard (2016), this stage is characterised by the ‘mental trauma’ of the first kill and workers suffering from nightmares. Regarding mental trauma, following his killing of two steers, Lesy (1987) reports several signs of shock including trembling, shaking and unreasonable laughter. Pachirat (2011: 72) describes viewing the line for the first time as ‘shocking’, as it ‘offers a haunting image of vast destruction’. Simpson et al. (2016) found that it is not just slaughter that could stimulate shock, the task of ‘cutting up a pig’s head’ offered the same reaction for new butchers. Furthermore, Dillard (2007) found nightmares to be common among slaughterhouse workers in the US whilst Herzog (1983) recorded that students who worked on their college farm in the US would often dream about the animals killed after slaughter.

### *Stage 2 – ‘(Mal)adjusting to Slaughter Work’*

The second stage involves heightened emotional responses such as fear, anger, guilt and shame, personality changes such as not being able to think clearly, a reduction in the emotions described in Stage 1 and heightened aggression. A reduction in certain emotions is well documented in the literature. Eisnitz (1997: 75) quotes one worker as saying ‘you become emotionally dead’ following extended exposure to slaughter. Grandin (1988: 210) identifies this as the ‘mechanical approach’ to slaughter, where ‘The person doing the killing approaches his job as if he was stapling boxes moving along a conveyor belt. He has no emotions about his act’. This is achieved partly through a ‘de-animalization’ process, where the animal is ‘compartmentalized and commodified with its own processes and market value’ (Hamilton and McCabe, 2016: 342). Thus, animals become ‘sentient commodities’ (Wilkie, 2010: 115). This process is captured by a quote from one of McLoughlin’s (2018: 17) participants ‘You stop seeing the animal, you only see a process’. However, this does not mean that there is a reduction in emotions in their entirety. Herzog and McGee (1983) found students who carried out slaughter sometimes reported feelings of satisfaction afterwards. Meara (1974) and Simpson et al. (2014; 2016) found workers generated feelings of pride from their extensive knowledge and honed skills in the preparation of meat.

Similarly, Hamilton and McCabe (2016) found that MHIs were proud of the efficiency of their work. They also expressed concern for animal welfare, but ‘did not include an expression of compassion or pity for the birds beyond ensuring that their deaths were painless’ (ibid: 342).

This contrasts with other accounts where animal welfare appears to be at the bottom of the priority list. Eisnitz (1997: 92) quotes one worker as saying ‘they say that the smell of blood makes you aggressive...and it does. You get an attitude that if that hog kicks at me, I’m going to get even’. Dillard (2007: 6) reports accounts of workers inflicting purposeful cruelty on animals ‘just for fun’. Where the task of slaughter is concerned, Grandin (1988: 210) identifies this as the ‘sadistic approach’ where ‘the person starts to enjoy killing and will sometimes do extremely cruel things and torment the animals on purpose’. This is also in line with Stage 2’s assertion that workers become more aggressive, indeed, some may argue slaughter is by default an aggressive task (Hutz et al. 2013). Aggression has also been demonstrated towards colleagues and for several reasons other than slaughter. Richards et al. (2013) found meatworkers in Australia, when compared to farmers, scored far higher on ‘propensity-for-aggression’ scales, specifically concerning physical aggression and hostility. They suggest this may be due to the job being ‘characterised by unpleasant work, difficult workplace relations and a work environment that is often pressured and dangerous’ (ibid: 408). Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990: 6) found a range of aggressive behaviours from employees, often directed at ‘weaker members of the team’ including ‘harassment’ and ‘degradations’. These were to establish and maintain the informal workplace hierarchy and to ensure workers kept up with the speed and standard of work set by the team. An EHRC (2010) report found agency workers to be at particular risk of receiving verbal and physical abuse in the workplace, with most of these workers being migrants. Press (2022) found the same in a US meat processing facility, with managers regularly shouting at migrant workers to increase efficiency. However, Tannock (2015: 424) found UK workers can be subjected to workplace aggression. As one worker suggested, their use of ‘bullyboy antics’ was used by managers knowing they could rely on the use of migrant labour to replace UK workers if necessary.

### *Stage 3 – ‘Coping and Maintaining the Work’*

The third stage involves psychological defences, finding strength and meaning in work and engaging in both constructive and destructive coping tactics. The emotional

numbing effect described earlier (Grandin, 1988; Eisnitz, 1997) may be described as a form of 'emotional detachment', which McLoughlin (2018) sees as a necessity for the ideal slaughterhouse worker. Workers often find meaning in work by emphasising the purpose of their roles such as providing food or, in the case of inspectors, keeping the public safe (McCabe and Hamilton, 2015; *ibid*). Regarding coping tactics, some literature has found more positive approaches, such as taking days off work to recover (Kristensen, 1991). More pious workers may turn to religion as a coping strategy. Ben-Yonatan (2021: 365) found with Jewish Israeli Slaughterers that 'As meaning trumps actions, the mind overcomes emotion, and humans dominate animals, providing the slaughterers a continuous reminder of the divine order and of the mandate to follow God's commandments'. Grandin (1988) calls this the 'sacred ritual approach' to slaughter. Other accounts find more destructive coping strategies. Baran et al. (2016: 364) suggest alcohol is used by Slaughterers to reduce 'empathetic suffering', that is when 'being closely involved with the intentional killing of animals may result in the inflictors of such suffering—the slaughterhouse workers—to take on aspects of the suffering themselves'. Eisnitz (1997: 88) quotes one Slaughterer as saying 'A lot of them have problems with alcohol. They have to drink, they have no other way of dealing with killing live, kicking animals all day long'. As well as to assist in meeting the biological demands, Schlosser (2002) and Hendrix and Dollar (2017) suggest that increased methamphetamine use among slaughterhouse workers in the US could be used to cope with the emotional demands of the work.

There is also evidence to suggest a lack of coping ability in workers. A recent systematic review of the mental health of slaughterhouse workers concluded that, cross-culturally, slaughterhouse work is associated with lower levels of psychological well-being in comparison to the general population (Slade and Alleyne, 2021). Several studies have found mental health disorders to be prevalent in meat industry workers. Emhan et al. (2012) found, among slaughterhouse and supermarket butchers, higher rates of depression, anxiety, somatization, and psychosis in comparison to regular office workers. Lipscomb et al. (2007) found depressive symptoms to be higher in African American women working in poultry production in comparison to their non-Hispanic white colleagues. This was possibly due to 'low social support, concerns about hazardous work conditions, and job insecurity' (*ibid*: 295). In a follow-up study, Horton and Lipscomb (2011) found that longer tenure at the role decreases the

depressive symptoms of workers, suggesting a 'healthy worker survival effect' may be present. Hutz et al. (2013) found that mental illness in Brazilian chicken plant workers fluctuated depending on job type. In their study, workers involved in the cutting stage had the highest levels of mental illness, followed by evisceration, reception, packaging, freezing, and finally administrative workers who had the lowest rates of mental illness. They concluded that the higher the exposure to occupational stressors, the increased chance of workers developing psychopathologies. These stressors included, *inter alia*, the cold, 'dirt of entrails and excrement', 'fetid odour', 'intense pressure from the supervisors', 'impossibility of interaction due to the intense noise', 'harassment and humiliation', 'great physical effort' and 'serious risks of falling and being crushed' (ibid: 298). Alongside slaughter, the automated way in which work is now carried out can affect workers mentally. As Ritzer (2019: 197) explains 'workers are reduced to fast-moving cogs...forced to perform repetitive and physically demanding tasks'. As already noted, specialization of the labour process and the relinquishing of tasks to machines reduce the need for traditional meat skills and physical capital (Simpson et al., 2014). Emotionally, this can cause feelings of regret, nostalgia, and a loss of meaning for longer-term workers, such as UK high-street butchers who they found preferred the 'old dirtier ways' (ibid: 763). Caroli et al. (2010) recorded that higher levels of mental strain were caused by UK and French workers being inadequately prepared to deal with the demands of multi-skilled, often fast-paced work. In France, Cohidon et al. (2009) found psychological well-being was reduced in workers due to low-decision latitudes, low social support, and high job strain.

#### *Stage 4 – 'Psycho-Social Consequences of being a Slaughterer'*

The first of these consequences is spillover into home life. Eisnitz (1997: 76) quotes one worker as saying, 'I'd blow up at the drop of a hat, come home every night and find something to complain about, take my frustrations from work out on my family'. Early morning starts have been found to disrupt workers' sleep patterns outside of work (Cohidon et al., 2009) Quantitative research supports these spillovers not only into home life but into wider society. Broadway (1990) found an increase in local violent crime rates following the opening of a meat plant in Garden City in the US, although this could partly be explained due to the rapid population growth that followed the opening of the plant. Fitzgerald et al. (2009: 175) found that increases in violent and sexual crime were positively correlated with slaughterhouse location in the US,

summarizing that slaughterhouses, at least in the US, 'have a unique and insidious effect on the surrounding communities' (ibid: 175). Jacques (2015) conducted a similar study finding a strong positive correlation between slaughterhouse location and arrests for violent crime. She recorded that 'the mere presence of a slaughterhouse' in a county led to a 90% increase in crime rates against the family and a 166% increase in arrests for rape when compared to counties without slaughterhouses (ibid: 609).

The second consequence is experiencing social isolation. Some studies have found slaughterhouse workers to be stigmatised due to their work, what Goffman (1990a) would identify as stigma via a 'blemish of character'. Simpson et al. (2016) record accounts of butchers being on the receiving end of verbal abuse from members of the public due to their involvement with slaughter. Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990: 9) found workers would avoid discussing their work with outsiders to avoid any 'ghoulish interest' in their work. However, at the same time and contrary to experiencing isolation, meat workers have commonly been found to have a strong occupational community (Salaman, 1974). Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) found workers would often congregate outside of work and pursue leisure activities together such as hunting. Ribas (2016) found workers from ethnic minorities would have stronger social ties with those from the same ethnic group and would regularly meet up outside of work. Thus, social isolation refers more to workers' relationships with outsiders rather than each other. However, McCabe and Hamilton (2015) found that MHIs were stigmatised by their non-inspection colleagues. This was based on them being seen as an unnecessary cost to the factory and was reflected in their having no shower or changing facilities, unlike their other colleagues. Research carried out by Pope et al. (2013) found that Food Business Operatives (FBOs) sometimes resented the presence of OVIs due to them replicating work they felt they had already done. On the other hand, they welcomed the rubber stamp given by MHIs as this was seen to reassure customers of quality assurance, highlighting a complex relationship between the two.

## **2.4. Dirty Work**

Meat work has often been described as 'dirty work' (Ackroyd, 2007; McCabe and Hamilton, 2015). The term 'dirty work' was first coined by Everett Hughes (2015 [1951])



to describe work that is disgusting or may wound one's dignity. However, as McCabe and Hamilton (2015: 106) warn, jobs in the BIMPS vary substantially, so using a blanket label may 'conceal more than it reveals'. Ashforth et al. (2007) agree; that whilst individual workers are at risk of being bunched together with their colleagues, in reality, different sectors have many roles in terms of status. This section will first elaborate on what dirty work is and then assess how useful dirty work theory is in the analysis of meat work.

#### **2.4.1. What is Dirty Work?**

In a sociological sense, dirt has a double meaning, a) dirt in the literal sense or b) an object or symbol which preferably is hidden away from society (Douglas, 2002). Both kinds of dirt are perceived as a threat to social order; being matters 'out of place' (ibid: 44). An occupation is not simply 'dirty' or 'clean'. Which jobs are designated as dirty depends on the perspective of the individual and this is likely to be influenced depending on the current social and moral order (Dick, 2005). This is influenced by culture, including class, regional and national cultures (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). Ideological beliefs reproduce the social and moral order and the breaking of this assists in identifying which jobs are dirty. It is important to note that whilst subjective, workers will often see themselves through the lens of valued others (Ashforth, 2001). 'Rules of avoidance' which lend themselves to ideas of 'contagion and purification' help draw where these orders are (Douglas, 2002: 6). One way to adhere to these 'rules' by those who consider them below their status is to designate the dirty jobs to others, usually downwards in the social hierarchy. Dick (2005) uses the example of a surgeon whose job may be to remove an organ but will designate the disposal of it to the assistant nurse as it is seen as below their status. In addition, there are certain jobs which are often referred to as the '3D jobs', that is, dirty, dangerous, and demeaning, a neologism translated from the Japanese 3K jobs (Connel, 1993)<sup>2</sup>. The categorisation of which jobs are dirty can change over time. Actors were once regarded as devious by feigning authenticity, whilst now hailed as one of the most prestigious professions (Kohansky, 1984). On the other hand, since the financial crash of 2008, once regarded as creators of wealth and the bringers of business to the UK,

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<sup>2</sup> The third D sometimes stands for difficult, dull, or demanding (Piller, 2016).

investment bankers have gone from 'high-flyers' to 'crooks' (Stanley and Mackenzie-Davey, 2012).

#### **2.4.2. Dirty Work and the BIMPS**

There are parts of dirty work theory which are useful in analysing the BIMPS. To assist in determining which factors make a job 'dirty,' Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) created a typology of 'taints' These are *physical taint*, *social taint*, and *moral taint*. Physical taint is that which is created through the handling of dirty matters or 'pollutants' (Ackroyd, 2007) and/or working under unpleasant conditions. Jobs involving cleaning or the removal of others' waste are often seen to be such jobs (Perry, 1998; Nagle, 2013; Vlijmen, 2019). Furthermore, physical taint may be produced from more dangerous work, which can demand a level of 'physical capital' from workers such as strength (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Much of the work on the 'shopfloor' contains several dirty matters such as blood, gore, offal, urine, and faeces (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Ackroyd, 2007). This occurs during the transformation stages of turning a live animal into a meat product ready for the supermarket shelf, during what Vialles (1994: 44) refers to as the 'nameless void'. These environments often produce strong smells (Thompson, 1983) and loud noise due to the use of machines (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). However, not all environments are like this. Some staff may work in cleaner, quieter office environments (Pachirat, 2011). Additionally, BIMPS work is often dangerous (Lloyd and James, 2008). Thus, there is a strong argument to be made that BIMPS work is physically tainted (Ackroyd, 2007).

Social taint is 'rubbed off' onto workers when working with a socially stigmatised group, what Page (1984) refers to as a 'courtesy stigma'. Workers in these roles include caregivers (Martinez, 2007) and prison guards (Tracy and Scott, 2006). In addition, work of a servile nature may be classed as socially tainted. Moreover, the fact someone has been hired to do that work in the first place can lower the status of the work. Anderson (2000: 20), when referring to domestic workers, elaborates that 'the very hiring of a domestic worker lowers the status of the work she does – the employer has better things to do with her time'. Social taint does not appear to be especially present within the BIMPS. It could be argued that for UK workers, working alongside the stigmatised group of migrant workers could be socially tainting (Lever and



Milbourne, 2017). The fact that migrants have been brought in to 'serve' the UK public by doing work which is often disregarded may potentially generate social taint. Thus, it is unclear to what degree the BIMPS is socially tainted.

Morally tainted work involves occupations where the morality of the work is questionable such as sex work and debt collection (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Hardy and Saunders, 2014). Illegal work may fall under this taint such as drug dealing which is condemned by wider society (Duck, 2014). BIMPS work, for some, might be morally tainted, namely in that it centres around the killing of animals for food which, it can be argued, is unnecessary (Joy, 2010). Whilst in the UK, killing animals for food is widely 'socially sanctioned' (Göring, 2014), Smith (2002) argues killing must be kept out of sight for customers to maintain a clear conscience. Williams (2008) believes the moral responsibility for this falls on the customers, and purposefully avoiding investigating morally questionable acts (such as buying meat) equates to 'affected ignorance'. To combat this taint, companies may foster discourses around the 'humane' treatment of animals in 'hygienic' environments, which allow 'social and ethical distancing' and give 'diminished responsibility' to the customer (Smith, 2002: 50). Thus, the meat plant becomes a 'heterotopia of deviation' where behaviours which go against the wider accepted norms can take place unquestioned (Foucault, 1967)

Rivera (2015) expands on this taint typology to include emotional taint, which is generated when work evokes unpleasant emotions for workers to deal with. She gives the example of immigration border control agents who have to deny entry to the US to Mexican migrants, which may be psychologically difficult. As discussed in detail above, work in the BIMPS may be 'emotionally tainted' in that it demands workers be able to deal with the potentially emotionally difficult task of being near to/carrying out slaughter as well as other emotional stressors such as high job strain and low social support (Cohidon et al. 2009; McLoughlin, 2018). Additionally, certain jobs may create sets of 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979; Collinson, 1988) where certain emotions are permitted, and others are not. McLoughlin (2018: 330), for example, found that pride and frustration with other workers were permitted but that, overall, 'emotional stoicism...dominates the work of killing'. Any 'Eruptions of emotion [were] quickly controlled as they defy company-defined feeling rules' (ibid: 333).

### *Breadth and Depth*

Not all roles in the BIMPS necessarily deal with these taints to the same degree. Dirty work theory accounts for this, proposing it is possible to know precisely how dirty a job is (Kreiner et al., 2006). This is achieved by measuring the 'breadth' and 'depth' of the dirtiness of the work. Breadth is how often contact with dirt is made, whereas depth is how close the contact is made with the dirt. An example of a job with a high breadth and low depth is working in a car factory, which may entail long hours in unpleasant conditions but rarely comes into close contact with dirt. On the reverse side of things, a job with a low breadth and high depth may be a news reporter who periodically engages in an especially unpleasant story such as a murder (ibid). Finally, Kreiner et al. (2006) identify jobs with a high breadth and high depth as 'pure dirty work'. A sewage worker, who works long hours and has close contact with the waste products connected to sewage may be one such example (Reid, 1991). As the one who carries out the task of killing, it might be argued that the Slaughterer has the most tainted task at all with a high depth and breadth of both physical and moral dirt and therefore qualifies as 'pure dirty work'. Other roles in the BIMPS have varying degrees of breadth and depth in their work. Inspectors work under similar conditions to Slaughterers but do not have the same level of depth regarding physical or moral taint by not being near slaughter. Office staff meanwhile can physically and psychologically distance themselves from the dirtier side of tasks by staying within the pleasanter environment of the office (Striffler, 2002; Pachirat, 2011). Grandin (1988), for example, found that the owners of meat businesses would often face their windows away from the plants to avoid being reminded of what was happening within them. Workers can therefore 'role distance' themselves from the especially dirty parts of the BIMPS (Goffman, 1990a).

Of course, it could be argued that the BIMPS is not dirty at all. What is regarded as dirt is ultimately subjective (Douglas, 2002; Dick, 2005; Hughes et al., 2016). As Ashforth and Kreiner (2014) note, the role of culture, historical and demographic context all influence what is considered 'dirty' and even then, opinions are often far from unanimous (Ashforth et al. 2007). For example, certain body parts of animals whilst seen as inedible in the UK (brains, organs etc.) are considered delicacies in other nations (Montanari, 2012). For some, there may be no moral qualms about killing animals for food at all (Rolston, 1988). Joy (2010) puts forward the concept of the

three Ns of Justification, where it can be argued eating, and by extension producing, meat is *normal*, *natural*, and *necessary*. There may be no emotionally tainting aspects of meat production for some workers. Those who have grown up on farms or in rural areas and witnessed killing from a young age may have no psychological difficulties with slaughtering (Herzog and McGee, 1983). These examples highlight that dirty work theory cannot be universally applied. Rather, it must account for exactly which jobs it regards as dirty, to what extent and the effect this has on those who occupy these job roles.

### *Invisible Work*

Conterminously, dirty roles are often what Daniels (1987) refers to as ‘invisible work’, that is, work which is unmarked, i.e., it is deemed socially insignificant. Invisible work is not necessarily that which cannot be physically seen but includes jobs that are not considered to be valuable, especially if the work is noneconomical (Brekhus, 1998). This definition is not sufficient to be applied to meat work, however, as it is regularly regarded as significant, even if in a negative sense. Meat workers often see their work as anything but insignificant, being charged with meanings and connotations of strength, masculinity, and toughness (Meara, 1974; McLoughlin, 2018). The reactions of the public to high-street butchers’ bloodstained uniforms suggest slaughter is not an insignificant act in the eyes of wider UK society (Simpson et al., 2016). Meat work is also highly economical by providing jobs and contributing to the UK’s GDP (BMPA, 2020b). Thus, meat work is not invisible in the original sense of having no social significance.

However, Hatton (2017) expands on the idea of invisible work by identifying three sub-categories. Firstly, work that is not considered to be ‘real work’ because it has been naturalized by society and is therefore ‘culturally invisible’. In more male-dominated societies, women who attend to home caring duties may be seen as invisible because it is the culturally expected norm rather than ‘work’ (Daniels, 1987). Second, work that is seen to fall outside of sociolegal standards i.e., criminal work. Whilst meat work is legal, it does arguably fall outside of widely held socio-moral standards, reflected in its morally tainted status (Joy, 2010; Singer, 2015). To help reduce the saliency of this moral taint in the customer base, BIMPS work is often invisible in Hatton’s (2017) third sense, in that it is ‘spatially invisible’ i.e., geographically distant from mainstream

society. By making the abattoir 'banished from the city walls' it serves to 'not give people ideas' of what occurs within them (Vialles, 1994: 19). It is in this final sense that BIMPS work is rendered invisible, being carried out in areas far outside of the view of the public (Lever and Milbourne, 2017).

### *Prestige*

Taint can affect a job's occupational prestige (Treiman, 1977; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Tracy and Scott (2006: 17) found, for example, that prison officers in the US obtained low occupational prestige by doing socially tainted work and felt they were regarded as 'glorified babysitters'. This does not apply to all dirty jobs though. In the same study, firefighters, despite their roles being 'rife with taint', were widely considered to be 'America's heroes' (ibid: 16), with participants drawing on ideas of 'running into burning buildings' to create a prestigious image of their work. Baran et al. (2016) suggest that meat work generates low levels of occupational prestige due to its physically and morally tainted nature. Furthermore, the most repetitive and 'low-skilled roles' are often regarded as 'bottom end', in other words, they are at the lowest echelon of the occupational prestige hierarchy (Lloyd and James, 2008).

It has been theorised that dirty occupations may affect one's sense of self-worth. Social Identification Theory posits that individuals strive to see themselves in a positive light and people often use the judgements of others to assess their worth (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Ashforth, 2001). If a job is considered 'dirty' or low prestige, this may pose a threat to this 'identity goal' (Dick, 2005). An occupational identity will contribute to a social identity and thus involvement in dirty tasks will likely affect an individual's self-image (Baran et al., 2012). However, whilst society at large may interpret a job as dirty or of low prestige, that does not mean distinction cannot be generated within the job itself, using what Hughes (1971: 340) refers to as 'dignifying rationalizations'. An example of these rationalizations is via the use of 'Occupational ideologies', which help neutralize the stigma that comes from dirty work and create new systems of worth (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). These ideologies include refocusing, recalibrating, and reframing.

Reframing is commonly used in the BIMPS, where the inherent meaning of the work is modified to view the work through a more acceptable lens. Workers often utilise

what Ashforth and Kreiner (2014) call a 'necessity shield'; which is granted to work which is regarded as a necessity. This is more easily conferred to physical and socially tainted jobs, whilst morally tainted work may be seen as more 'evil than necessary' (ibid: 84). Meat production can be framed as a necessity in that if people want to eat meat, slaughter, and all it entails, has to take place (Herzog and McGee, 1983). This has the double effect of placing some of the 'blame' onto the customers themselves as it is they who create the demand for meat, the workers are merely filling this demand (Ashforth et al. 2007). *Infusing* is a tactic where a job is charged with a specific meaning. However, there are instances in meat work where the opposite appears to be true. Workers often reduce the significance of slaughter as 'just something that has to be done' (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990) or by claiming 'it's just a job' (Hamilton and McCabe, 2016). Whilst close to other tactics such as 'accepting' and 'neutralization' (Ashforth et al. 2007; Bosmans et al., 2016), this might better be described as 'defusing', where the task is rendered meaningless.

Recalibrating involves workers disregarding the judgements of society at large and placing their own values on their work. Techniques regularly found by 'dirty workers' have likewise been found in the BIMPS. Duck (2014: 11) for instance, notes drug dealers who gain prestige for being the 'best street hustlers in the neighbourhood'. Meat workers also regularly point to the skill needed to carry out their work, especially when using the most significant tool in the abattoir, the knife. As Vialles (1994: 95) explains, the knife is the tool 'par excellence, always carried, always kept razor sharp'. She observed a similar informal hierarchy that was based on skill, the higher the skill, the higher the place in the hierarchy. Furthermore, the marker of a true meat worker was when 'the boss gave him a knife-holster and steel. There was no ceremony attached, but everyone knew this was tantamount to an investiture' (ibid: 96). Similarly, McLoughlin (2018) records how one of her participants was regarded as a 'legend' due to his longevity (34 years) in the role and his ability to carry out his tasks competently. Deery et al. (2019: 12) found the ability to deal with dangerous situations for abandoned building cleaners was a source of pride; 'The threat of violence fostered an occupational subculture of cohesiveness and self-sufficiency [and] also conferred a certain honour on the work'. Again, meat workers have been found to draw on the mental traits needed for their work as sources of esteem. Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990:

8) quote one worker commenting that 'only one in a thousand has the stomach for this job', emphasizing the value inherent in having the qualities needed for such work. In support of this, Lee-Treweek (1997) confirms that the need for 'toughness' is a regular source of value-making in dirty jobs. Where honour is concerned, meat workers have been found to generate honour through competence. As Meara (1974: 270-271) reports, through her study of Turkish butchers and US supermarket meat cutters 'honour is due the man who makes fast smooth work out of a cold, heavy lump of meat'. Finally, Johnston and Hodges (2014) reveal how with security guards, respect is given to those willing to put their own physical and mental well-being at risk for the benefit of the job. The same is present in the BIMPS. Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990: 6) report that the Slaughterer occupies the highest place in the informal social hierarchy by representing the boundary between life and death; thus, this task was only allowed to the 'leading members of the gang'.

Other methods of maintaining and protecting a positive identity include the use of social buffering and defence tactics (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007). Social buffering is where workers form a social network to enhance social support and insulate themselves from outside stigma (ibid, 2007). As noted earlier, workers have been found to form close social circles with their colleagues to help shield themselves from outside stigma. Once created, the group can then work together to enact 'social weighting', that is, differentiation from outsiders with a focus on comparison in favour of the inside group (Bosmans et al., 2016). For example, Vines and Linders (2016) found that professional poker players would distinguish themselves as the 'real' players (through commitment, knowledge of the game etc.) from the casual players or 'suckers'. Likewise, Simpson et al. (2014) found that UK high street butchers made distinctions between themselves and supermarket butchers, whom they regarded as 'not real butchers'. This contrasted with their 'authentic trade practices' which were made possible through extensive knowledge, skill and experience which they believed the supermarket butchers lacked. Perhaps a little harshly, Blythman (2007: 94) summarised the role of the supermarket butcher as follows 'all [they] have to do in most stores is lay it out on the counter and watch that it sells before the date specified on the batch'.

### *Gendered and Classed Work*

Dirty work is gendered, regularly being regarded as 'man's work' (Tracy and Scott, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, dirty work is often interpreted as working-class by both wider society and workers themselves (Simpson et al., 2016). As Connel (1995) elaborates, masculinities are reproduced by collective social practices that take place in various institutions, such as the workplace. As a result, a working-class masculine culture in certain working environments is not uncommon and this may be sustained in numerous ways where 'dirty workplaces' are concerned (Collinson, 1992). Within these cultures, masculinity often needs to be 'proven' rather than assumed by successfully engaging in specific activities such as the tasks (Vandello and Bosson, 2013). Perhaps the cornerstone of 'manly work' is work that involves manual tasks, which are continuously often categorised as working-class work (Slutskey et al., 2016). As one painter and decorator in Simpson et al.'s (2022) study on working-class workers commented, manual work, in his opinion, was 'proper work'. As Altreiter (2021) finds, manual work not only allows for the use of traditionally masculine physical tasks but also represents honest work; free of control and authority. Paid employment also allows men to sustain what Hanlon (2012: 109) calls 'Breadwinner Masculinities' which allows them to take on the roles of 'earners as well as carers'. The caring role is facilitated vis-a-vis the earner role in that the wage earned can then be used to provide for the family. Indeed, as Lamont (2000) found, working for the benefit of the family is a strong source of dignity, esteem, and purpose for working-class men. On the other hand, Wilcott and Griffen (1997) found that unemployed men felt being out of work posed a threat to their masculine identities; the disempowerment of being unable to contribute financially to the family was especially emasculating. Additionally, Simpson et al. (2014; 2016) found in the butcher's trade that discourses of sacrifice and distinction were used to draw ideas of the traditional breadwinner. Self-denial for the butchers in the form of the limitations of the job allowed the provision of a 'better life' for their children who may have 'aspirations to do something more' (ibid: 763). Finally, regarding the BIMPS, the product being produced, meat, is widely seen as, quite possibly, the epitome of a masculine foodstuff, consistently linked to dominance, violence and as a source of protein which sustains the body and promotes sexuality and vitality (Twigg, 1983; Joy, 2010; Adams, 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> Although certain 'dirty jobs' may be seen as feminine, such as care work (Lee-Treweek, 1997).

As well as what working-class masculinity includes within the workplace, it is equally important to analyse what it rejects. Manual work and wage-earning regularly exist in tandem with a dismissal of educational attainment. In Willis' (1977: 94) classic study on working-class boys, 'doing' something had more merit than the 'account' of it i.e., learning was best done 'on the job' rather than studying it, with study representing a 'deflection' of direct activity. Thus, qualifications were left to the 'ear'oles' i.e., those who submit to authority (ibid). The result is that practical skill and ability trump academic attainment (Altreiter, 2021). As Lamont (2000) found, practical competency and dedication to work were sources of self-esteem rather than the pursuit of education, sentiments which are regularly found in the meat sector (McLoughlin, 2018). Another rejection is of those who represent the non-masculine i.e., people who do not belong. Women, for example, are often seen as not belonging in the masculine workplace due to their perceived femininity being incompatible with male work (Collinson, 1992). Although dated and not in a UK context, Meara (1974: 275) reported in the case of Turkish butchers that 'Women's participation in the work is unthinkable'. Likewise, gay men are arguably seen as the opposite of masculine due to the lack of sexual interest in women (Connell, 1995). Indeed, at Ackroyd and Crowdy's (1990: 8) UK abattoir, workers 'evinced extremely prejudiced attitudes towards women' and gay men. However, more recent data suggests that, at least for women, participation in the UK meat sector and abroad is increasing with a changing perception of meat work as a 'man's job' and greater diversity inclusion commitments by meat companies (Lloyd and James, 2008; MBW, 2021). Finally, where food is concerned, men who abstain from eating meat can be interpreted as not 'real men' (Twigg, 1983). As Nath (2011: 270) summarises, eating meat satisfies 'the desire of men to prove that they are not girls'. Thus, the masculine identity of those who do not consume meat may have anything from sexuality to rational ability to appetite questioned (ibid; Nath, 2011; Adams, 2015; Bourdieu, 2015).

### *Agents*

A final aspect of dirty work, which is relevant to this thesis, is that the presence of dirt may act as a deterrent to working in a particular job for potential employees. The BIMPS supports this claim, with the BMPA (2020a) asserting that:



‘Most people, while they eat meat, find it difficult to work in its production partly because of the obvious aversion to the slaughter process but also because it is a physically demanding role.’

As Hughes (1962) notes, whilst dirty work may be seen as undesirable by some, it is still (sometimes) recognised as necessary by the wider public. As a result, ‘agents’ are brought for the benefit of society at large. It has been argued that these agents are the migrant workforce, who are regularly found in low-status, ‘dirty’ jobs (Piore, 1979; Briggs 1993; Lee-Treweek, 2012). This is true in the BIMPS, which has an especially large migrant labour force (BMPA, 2020)<sup>4</sup>. Participants from several studies have found both migrant and UK participants asserting that local UK workers simply do not want to do such work and thus the BIMPS has no choice but to hire migrant workers (EHRC, 2010; Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). As discussed earlier, there are barriers for local workers and employers may favour hiring migrants as well as migrants having their own motivations (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). Therefore, there is a limit as to how far dirty work theory can explain the large presence of migrant workers in the BIMPS.

Whilst ‘agents’ may be brought in; it is not always the case that local workers do not want to do dirty jobs. Hughes et al. (2017), for example, found all the refuse collectors/street cleaners in their study were from the UK. Often those who can afford to have a low commitment to these jobs will take them, such as students or the retired who may use this work as supplementary income and be in a position to drop such work if needed (Piore, 1986). Other accounts have found local workers derive great enjoyment from working in dirty roles (Baran et al. 2012; Deery et al. 2019). The same can be said of the BIMPS. Although dated, Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) found their workforce to be entirely made up of UK workers. Furthermore, whilst several studies have found large migrant populations, none found workforces to be made up of migrants in their entirety (EHRC, 2010; Lever and Milbourne, 2017).

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<sup>4</sup> More recently, the Association of Independent Meat Suppliers has called on the UK government to use prisoners due to a ‘recruitment crisis’ following Brexit and COVID-19 (Edmonds, 2021).

### **2.4.3. Is Dirty Work Appropriate in Analysing the BIMPS?**

After reviewing the literature, it may be surmised that dirty work theory is appropriate for analysing the complex social and labour dynamics of the BIMPS. BIMPS work is often physically, morally, and emotionally tainted but to varying degrees. Dirty work theory accounts for this variation by measuring the breadth and depth of work. Several strategies that dirty workers use to sustain their occupational identities and repel outside stigma have been identified using numerous occupational ideologies and defence tactics. As already noted, in Victor and Barnard's (2016) framework of the process of adjusting to meat work, coping tactics are a key stage of the work. There is much overlap here where occupational ideologies and defence tactics are concerned, and thus dirty work theory is well suited to help assess these aspects of BIMPS work. It also highlights that, oftentimes, 'agents' are brought in to carry out the work for the benefit of others, which may be useful in understanding why the migrant population in the BIMPS is so high. Of course, dirty work cannot account for all the social and labour dynamics in the BIMPS and therefore needs to be used in conjunction with other appropriate theories. Furthermore, it is imperative to remember that what is 'dirty' is not only subjective but dynamic and thus can fluctuate depending on the time, place, culture, and the individual in question.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

For Loseke (2017) the research process is comprised of three stages, *planning*, *execution* and *analysis*, and this chapter is structured along these phases. The planning stage involves research philosophy, research participants, positionality, and ethics. The execution stage elaborates on the process of recruitment and the four research methods used and the final stage involves data analysis.

The collection of data proved to be a difficult challenge for many reasons. Meat workers might be described as a 'hard to reach' population at the best of times (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Meat facilities are almost always cordoned off to the public and literature suggests migrant participants have a history of mistrust where research is concerned (Katigbak et al., 2016). The addition of COVID-19 throughout most of the fieldwork added extra complexity. These challenges are elaborated on further in this chapter.

### **3.2. Planning**

Sarantakos (2012) notes, that if the design process becomes a 'ritualistic straightjacket' it can restrict the research by becoming too rigid. As a result, a certain degree of flexibility was permitted throughout and so the methodology was the 'servant' as opposed to 'the master' of the project (Firebaugh, 2008).

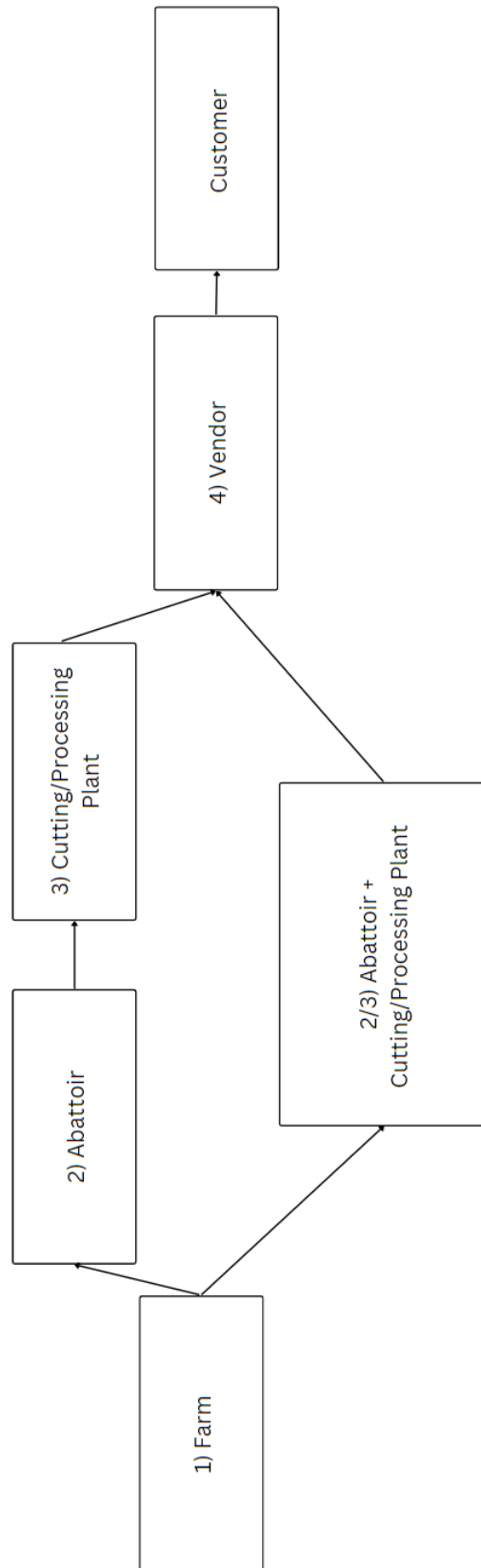
#### **3.2.1. Research Philosophy: Phenomenology**

Phenomenology provided the underpinning philosophical basis as the project focused on how workers experience everyday life in the BIMPS. Experience is central to phenomenology, specifically, the relationship between experience and consciousness (Zahavi, 2012). As Husserl (2002: 7) asserts, phenomenology does not deal with measurable, quantitative facts, rather it attempts to achieve a 'cognition of essences'. In other words, it tries to describe how things are seen 'from the inside' or what Merleau-Ponty (2013: IX) refers to as 'the other point of view'. In this way, it is through experience that the world becomes available (Zahavi, 2012). Additionally, phenomenology asserts that reality does not exist in a vacuum but rather is influenced

by context including individuals' attitudes, experiences, social-cultural influences etc. (Crossan, 2003). As the project sought to answer how the wider influences affected the participants' experiences, this approach fitted well as a research philosophy.

### **3.2.2. The Participants**

The term 'meat worker' encompasses many jobs in different environments such as butchers, livestock farmers, slaughterers, supermarket workers etc. These roles, whilst centring on meat production/selling, vary substantially in their tasks, responsibilities, working environments and so on. Because the project researched industrial meat workers, it was imperative to identify which workers fall within this category (Loseke, 2017). The supply chain for the meat market was split into four stages: 1) the farm, 2) the abattoir, 3) the processing/cutting plant and 4) the vendor (see Diagram 1). Sometimes stages 2 and 3 merge into one, where the animals are slaughtered and processed at the same site (McCabe and Hamilton, 2015). Stages 2 and 3 fit within the BIMPS framework in that they are in industrial environments and are in the processing stages. The farm stage was not included as farms produce and grow animals rather than process them. There are also differences in how they operate e.g., farmworkers are not bound by the rapid pace that the line demands of processing workers (Ribas, 2016). In addition, vendors, (high street butcheries/supermarket meat counters etc.) were not included. Like farm work, they do not work 'on the line' and the working environments are not industrial; these workers are often based in shops and have regular interactions with customers (Meara, 1974; Simpson et al. 2014; 2016). As well as those workers on the line in stages 2 and 3, managers, vets, auditors, cleaners, and office workers were all recruited as they work closely with the line workers. Whilst all jobs at meat facilities in some way contribute to meat production, they vary substantially regarding pay, educational requirements, skill, messiness, closeness to animals and other factors (Pachirat, 2011; McCabe and Hamilton, 2015). It was the intention from the beginning to recruit a diverse range of participants to capture any variations in worker experiences due to differing job roles and nationalities. Some participants had experiences in multiple occupations within the BIMPS. A full account of the characteristics of the participants is provided in Table 1.



**Diagram 1**

**Table 1**

Participant Characteristics	Men N = 17	Women N = 10	Total N = 27
<b>Nationality</b>			
British	9	3	12
Polish	3	4	7
Romanian	2	2	4
Spanish	2	0	2
Chilean	0	2	2
Nigerian	1	0	1
Danish	1	0	1
<b>Age</b>			
21-30	8	3	11
31-40	3	4	7
41-50	2	2	4
50+	4	1	5
<b>Job Experience<sup>5</sup></b>			
MHI	4	4	8
OV	2	2	4
Slaughterer	4	0	4
Cutter	4	0	4
Boner	2	0	2
Packer	0	2	2
Quality Assurance/Control	2	0	2
Compliance Auditor	1	0	1
Graduate Scheme Worker	0	1	1
Machine Operator	0	1	1
Technician	1	0	1

<sup>5</sup> Whilst many participants had experience in several roles, their main/current role is used for quotations throughout this thesis e.g. (Jake, British, MHI)

Halal Inspector	1	0	1
Hygiene Team Leader (HTL)	1	0	1
Hand picker	0	1	1
Palletizer	1	0	1
Dispatcher	1	0	1
Recruiter	0	1	1
Senior Technical Administrator	0	1	1
Senior Veterinary Officer	1	0	1
MHI Area Resource Manager	1	0	1
Head Vet	0	1	1
Field Vet Manager	0	1	1
PIA	1	0	1
<b>Animals Worked With</b>			
Pigs	8	5	13
Cows	7	6	13
Sheep	4	5	9
Chickens	4	2	6
Turkeys	4	2	6
Rabbits	1	0	1
Ducks	1	0	1
Camels	1	0	1
All <sup>6</sup>	6	1	7
<b>Total Duration (years)</b>			
Less than 1	2	2	4
1-5	8	4	12
6-10	2	4	6
10-20	2	0	2

<sup>6</sup> 'All' was not taken in the literal sense of every possible animal but interpreted as the more common farmed animals of pigs, cows, sheep, chickens, and turkeys.

20+	3	0	3
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### 3.2.3. Researcher Positionality

Positionality is characterised by an individual's worldview and their own position in relation to the research. Generally, this is regarding three areas a) the subject being investigated b) the research participants, and c) the research context and process (Gray and Holmes, 2020). The researcher's positionality can affect how they report and interpret data (Dean et al., 2017). This can cause research bias which, generally, is something to be avoided in social research (Hammersley and Gomm, 1997; Fielding and Thomas, 2016). There were two key positions which I held throughout this project. The first was the researcher position. As a researcher, I felt obliged to uphold the integrity of sociological research by attempting to achieve, as far as possible, unbiased research (BSA, 2017). This was to fulfil the obligation towards participants of representing them in as truthful a way as possible. However, no social research can be truly unbiased (Underwood et al., 2010; Gray and Holmes, 2020), which was particularly relevant concerning the second position, being a vegan.

As far as I am aware, there have been no studies conducted by a vegan on meat workers in the UK or elsewhere. Veganism certainly acted as a threat to the desired ethical neutrality, especially near the start of the research. My supervisors were regularly pointing out how my writing leaned more towards an anti-meat stance, despite my efforts not to do so. The purposeful inclusion or exclusion of certain data/literature etc. allows the researcher to arrive at a desired, but false, conclusion (Hammersley and Gomm, 1997). This was not what the project aimed to do. Through practice, experience, and constant feedback this issue did ebb with time. Additionally, it was, sometimes, difficult to read or hear about animals being killed for food. However, this was not a substantial issue as I was already aware of the process of meat production prior to the study. Exposure to both academic (Dillard, 2007) and fictional (Sinclair, 1985) literature gave me an idea of what to expect before the study began and I already felt I was mentally capable of conducting such research. Being a vegan also posed an issue regarding interaction with the participants. There seemed no obvious advantage of making a point of being a vegan to the participants. However, there did seem to be a potentially large disadvantage; veganism is not held in high



regard in the meat sector. The meat industry is perhaps by definition anti-vegan, if only insofar as it can affect business. Furthermore, there have in recent years been plenty of examples of vegans clashing with the meat sector in some form, whether it be through activism, online disputes or vegan products encroaching on the meat market (Menendez, 2019; Abboud, 2020). Whilst I did not/do not engage in this kind of activity, there was always the risk I would be associated with one of these sub-groups of vegans (Merriam et al., 2001). Due to this, there was concern that meat workers might consider this project to be biased by searching for data that aligns with the worldview of vegans. As a result, the principal position taken throughout was that of a researcher as detailed above, with the vegan position becoming a secondary/discrepant role (Goffman, 1990b). Not being forthcoming with the vegan position raised ethical issues which needed considerable consideration. I believe I handled this as carefully as I could and that it allowed me to conduct the research with care and integrity for both the participants and me.

#### **3.2.4. Ethics**

Ethical approval was granted by the Newcastle University Ethics Committee. Beauchamp and Childress' (1994) four significant ethical principles were used as an ethical base. These principles consist of a) respect for autonomy, b) nonmaleficence, c) beneficence and d) justice. As with most (if not all) social research, ethics are an ongoing matter and as such, the ability to adapt and address new, often unforeseen ethical considerations when necessary was essential (BSA, 2017). Prior to the interviews participants were sent the *Information Sheet*. This contained all the pertinent details of the study such as the aims, confidentiality, data usage etc. (see Appendix 1). Following this, participants were sent the *Consent Form* (see Appendix 2) to provide informed consent. Both these documents were translated into Polish and Romanian by a university-approved translation service. This ensured participants could read and comprehend them if their English proficiency was low. Some participants were able to read the English version but were sent the Polish/Romanian version to ensure comprehension. Participants sometimes appreciated this extra effort

'I reading information about the project, thank you for the Polish version  
[laughs] it's nice' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

The initial use of e-signatures to sign the consent forms proved somewhat problematic. Some participants were unfamiliar with how to use this technology and unsure how to sign it. This created both an ethical and practical issue in enabling participants to give written consent. This was resolved by making the early decision to obtain consent from all participants verbally at the start of every interview. As all the interviews were audio recorded, this made the transition unproblematic. Following the interviews, all participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and all identifiable details given were changed such as company and/or colleagues' names (Thomas and Hodges, 2010). Pseudonyms were chosen per the participant's demographic, for example, British male participants were given male British names to create an accurate reflection of them in the research (Fazio et al., 2011).

One of the earliest and largest ethical issues was the withholding of the vegan position from participants. This issue took significant time and consideration to be fully addressed. By being forthcoming with participants, it risked them refusing to take part or modifying their answers to not provide me with any negative data about the meat sector such as workplace bullying, animal cruelty, poor hygiene practices etc. However, by not disclosing being a vegan to participants, I felt I was not being genuine and was somewhat deceiving them. McDonald and Montford (2014) recommend vegan researchers suspend their refusal to eat meat if the need should arise during fieldwork to foster good hospitality, if a participant were to offer an animal-based food product, for instance. However, I would consider this to be unethical, as it provides a misrepresentation of who the researcher is to the audience (Goffman, 1990b) and breaks the researcher's own personal ethical principles. Fortunately for this project, as most of the research was carried out online this was rarely an issue. During the visit to Highland Sheep, I was offered a coffee and cow's milk whilst on a short break and simply had it without the milk, which I would have done in any case. Ultimately, the decision was made to not reveal the vegan position as it served no obvious benefit to the research as far as I could see. If a participant were to ask about my position regarding eating meat, I would have been truthful (BSA, 2017). This did occur once when a participant asked if I was a vegan to which I replied in the affirmative. I believe the reason he asked was that I was asking questions about the nature of the killing, and he detected unease in my voice. He had also made a joke about vegans earlier in the interview which I did not laugh at (this was partially due to a connection issue

and not hearing exactly what he said). Once he was assured that I was not 'digging up dirt' he was happy for the interview to continue and the data to be used. This was during the fourth interview, so was early in the fieldwork. As more interviews were undertaken, I became more apt at remaining objective through experience. A more regular occurrence was negative comments towards veganism by participants

'I call veganism an indirect extinction of domesticated animals because that's what it is' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer).

These sentiments are not uncommon among anti-vegan individuals/groups (Cole and Morgan, 2011) and I had heard/read them before on many occasions online. During such comments, I stayed firmly within the researcher position. Whilst it was uncomfortable to hear, I interpreted these comments as valid data and thus did not shy away from them.

There was potential for psychological distress when discussing sensitive topics, for both participants and me (Draucker, et al., 2009). Coyle and Wright (1996) note that it is an ethical obligation for researchers to be prepared for such occasions. Unconditional positive regard was always given to participants (Rogers, 2003). A list of third-party services (such as The Samaritans) was drawn up to pass on to participants should they require it, although this was never needed (Draucker et al., 2009). Topics predicted to arise were animal cruelty, bullying, racism, and alcohol/drug use, which had been identified in the literature (Dillard, 2007; Fitzgerald et al., 2009; EHRC, 2010; Ribas, 2016). Indeed, these topics did, at times, emerge. Occasionally, when discussing a sensitive issue, participants demonstrated some distress. This was often to do with work affecting their mental well-being and came from participants differing in both nationality and job roles (see section **7.4.**).

However, some sensitive issues came up which were not foreseen, with one participant standing out above the rest. This included him detailing being in foster care due to his parents' relationship as a child and using his mother's money to pay for prostitutes. The participant elaborated on his openness to these issues

'I've no shame, I've no boundaries, I don't know why I've got very few boundaries, I could quite easily discuss sexual technique with me mother and me father, [people?] get really embarrassed, I can't understand why but I'm stuck, I don't have them boundaries apparently' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

After this statement, I was somewhat at a loss for what was appropriate to say. The only thing I could think to do was to acknowledge his openness and gently steer the conversation back to the research. There were other times throughout this interview when the participant appeared genuinely saddened when discussing his upbringing and parents. Indeed, examination of past events is one of the more common forms of distress for participants (Decker et al., 2011). Likewise, at times like this, it was difficult to know precisely what to say or do. My initiative told me to allow him to speak as he wished and respect his autonomy (Beauchamp and Childress, 1994) but not to push at all. At one point he seemed to realise he was going down a tangent driven by emotions and reverted to the interview questions himself suggesting he did not want to talk about it further, which I respected and obliged. Near the end of the interview, he attempted to dismiss the worth of his opinions partly due to his lack of knowledge on the current local abattoirs

'I don't know, if they shut down Bradford I don't even know where the nearest slaughterhouse is these days, Huddersfield's shut I think, [name], I don't even know where they do their killing anymore, no idea... Who am I to give advice to people?' (Marek, Polish, ex- Slaughterer)

'Your opinion is just as important as everybody else's' (Jake)

I responded as I did because I wanted to make him aware his contribution was valued; indeed, his transcription was drawn upon substantially in this thesis. It was hoped by doing this the participant would feel some benefit from having taken part and assisted the project (Decker et al, 2011).

In addition, I needed to consider my own welfare. Researching sensitive issues can affect the researcher such as evoking distress, exhaustion, feelings of guilt etc.

(Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Being prepared is an essential part of ensuring personal well-being (Fenge et al., 2019). I became familiar with the Newcastle University well-being service in the event I needed support, although this was not required. Prior to the study, I was already familiar with what happens in abattoirs regarding animals. Although I knew it would be difficult, I felt I was able to psychologically deal with this kind of research through prior desensitisation (Dickon-Swift et al., 2007). Indeed, there were occasions where extreme violence towards animals did arise (**trigger warning**)

‘Shooting a bovine with a gun and then jumping on top of it, because it comes out of a trap, you've got to jump down, 6 foot, jump on it and put a three-foot spring into its head, to mash it's brains up, you're getting tossed about like a rodeo, like you can imagine, cos it don't like it and the sheep, it was either, you could tong them, electrocute them, give them an electric shock, you could either shoot them or get them with the crowbar, used to have a 2 foot, ‘big dick spanner’ we used to call it, for doing the big nuts, used to run round hitting on the head with that’ (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

Whilst this type of talk was rare, it was not uncommon for participants to detail slaughter or the sometimes enormous quantities of animals killed, ranging from a few hundred to ninety thousand per week. Whilst this was uncomfortable at times, I drew resilience from the knowledge that this data would be used for the project. In this sense, it was I who framed the research as a benefit to wider society at the personal cost of some exposure to sensitive issues (Decker et al., 2011).

Another ethical risk was that participants may have had heightened expectations of what the study would achieve (Mey and van Hoven, 2019). There was one occasion where after an interview, a participant was disappointed to find out the study would not be making any immediate changes to his workplace, particularly concerning COVID-19

‘I thought this was, all the information I tell you and all that other people would tell you about the factory, I thought it would be investigated but it's not that sort of thing, is it?’ (Dave, British, Hygiene Team leader)

Following his question, the aim and the purpose of the study were re-explained and that his contribution was still highly valued, to which he was happy for the data to still be used. Measures were taken to avoid instances such as this as much as possible to not give the false illusion that this research would make substantial changes to participants' lives (Israel and Hay, 2006). The purpose of the study and what it aimed to achieve was made clear on the Information Sheet and participants were able to ask any questions about the study both prior, during and after the interviews.

Finally, one of the biggest and most unique risks was the presence of COVID-19 and the threat posed in ensuring both the participants and my physical safety. Originally, the approach was to interview participants in person at a place convenient for them. However, in-person meetings may have put both the participants and the researcher at risk, breaking the nonmaleficence principle (Beauchamp and Childress, 1994). As a result, all interaction with participants was to be carried out digitally or via telephone to adhere to COVID-19 guidelines and university procedures. The visit to the abattoir entailed COVID-19 safety procedures such as the wearing of a facemask, washing of hands, and social distancing where necessary. As a result, avoidance of COVID-19 issues was achieved as much as possible.

### **3.3. Execution**

Following the planning, the execution of the project began (Loseke, 2017). This broadly entailed two tasks. Firstly, the task of recruitment, which proved to be the most challenging part of the fieldwork, followed by the data collection. The second task was to carry out the appropriate research methodologies.

#### **3.3.1. Recruitment**

I originally planned to interview between 25-35 people. This target was based on a mix of practical and epistemological factors such as how much time and resources were available and predicted challenges as well as a number high enough to give an accurate representation of the BIMPS workforce (Sarantakos, 2012). However, I was concerned, particularly near the start of the project, about not getting enough participants both in total numbers and heterogeneity. Finding individuals with experience in abattoirs and cutting plants was not a simple task. Apart from their workplaces, there was no obvious location where meat workers congregated. The

geography of BIMPS facilities means it is not easy to directly access industrial meat facilities as most of these are in rural areas and are accessible only to employees, customers (such as farmers) and approved visitors (Pachirat, 2011; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Whilst it was possible to go and stand outside these facilities to recruit participants, this was a last resort that ultimately was not required. Most BIMPS facilities in the UK are based in the south of England, with a small number located near Newcastle upon Tyne where this project was based (Meat Management, 2021) meaning long-distance travel would have been needed. Additionally, access to workers via their place of employment may depend on the consent of gatekeepers, such as managers. Managers in meat facilities may be reluctant to allow access to their workforce from outsiders as employees might reveal negative aspects of their companies (Lever and Milbourne, 2017). It could not be assumed that this was the case for all meat facilities, but if these kinds of issues were to take place in a given workplace, managers may be less than willing to provide access to their workforce. Slade and Alleyne (2021) state employers may be concerned that research could lead to policy changes in the workplace, or that animal welfare may be a motivator for the research, resulting in scepticism and a reluctance to take part. Additionally, meat facilities were hotspots for COVID-19, with several major breakouts occurring in the UK (Levitt, 2020; McSweeney, 2020; Lakhani, 2020; Middleton et al., 2020). This meant visiting meat facilities in person became, for most of the study, an impossibility for safety reasons.

Furthermore, recruiting ethnic minorities has historically been a difficult task in social research (Katigbak et al., 2016). According to the BMPA (2020), 62% of the BIMPS workforce is of non-UK origin which created some unique difficulties in recruitment. Firstly, language. For many roles in the meat sector, good English comprehension is not a necessity (EHRC, 2010). Logically, this suggests there was always the possibility that migrant workers may not understand the study if their English language skills were not sufficiently advanced (Almalik et al., 2010). Secondly, I had the problem of knowing where to find these workers whilst they were not at work. There did not seem any obvious place where migrant meat workers might congregate outside of work hours. Thirdly, mistrust is an issue for migrant workers (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). If the researcher is not considered an 'insider', they may be regarded as unable to understand the migrants' experiences (Liempt and Bilger, 2018). Experiences of

discrimination and/or broken trust by wider society may further encourage distrust (ibid). One participant gave an example

'I came on the strength of an invitation that I was promised by a friend...I believed I had a place to live and a job to start with and I came over straight away with my husband and small child [when we arrived] we did not have a place to live, neither of us have a job to go to [soon after] we were told by this friend who was a person I had known for fifteen years... we had to move out of his place, I must add that unfortunately that my story is not an isolated incident, I do know a lot of people [who] have similar stories' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator).

Whilst this experience did not dissuade this participant from taking part, it is possible others may have been reluctant due to similar experiences of broken trust. Trust not only needs to be gained but also maintained throughout the research, meaning it became an ongoing process (Armstrong et al., 2022). The qualitative nature of the study allowed for more personal interaction which, in turn, helped establish trusting relationships with participants (Morris, 2015). I tried to accurately represent the study on the project website, and I was always prepared to answer any questions they may have to help keep this trust.

Finally, and without making any assumptions, the typical meat worker may not have been inclined to assist with this project for two reasons. First, meat work is often a highly demanding occupation both in terms of physicality and time. It is not unheard of for workers to start exceptionally early and finish late (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990) and, in some cases, work every day of the week (EHRC, 2010). These constraints sometimes created difficulties in finding a suitable time for a 30–60-minute interview. Secondly, whilst researching I was given the impression that the typical meat worker may not be interested in assisting an academic study. Participants occasionally alluded to as much

'The minute I saw your post I thought I'd answer it because I know the industry as a whole, they're not very open people...I think that's a lot of what



the meat industry is missing, we're just not very open people' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'I know how hard it is to find people to talk to do research, I know that in the company I work at, I think other people know me, I would struggle to find even one person to talk to me honestly and openly and a lot of things would be not said' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

There were many instances where I tried to contact meat workers directly online and would get either no reply or a short message declining to take part. Sometimes workers would initially show an interest only to stop replying halfway through the exchange. The reasons for this were uncertain. As Marcus said, meat workers may not be an open group with less interest in helping outsiders (Merriam et al., 2001; Ryan et al., 2011). To help deal with this, emphasis was placed on the vouchers to encourage participation even if only for financial gain. Indeed, the 'pragmatic' reasoning behind using vouchers to encourage recruitment and retention is one of the most common arguments for such practices (Largent and Lynch, 2017). However, some potential participants on Facebook commented that the initial vouchers offered were not enough. The amount originally chosen was a £10 voucher for an interview as this seemed reasonable. Following the comments, this appeared to be a misjudgment on my part. The vouchers were subsequently increased to £20 an interview to closer reflect the value of the participant's contributions. As well as an incentive, I did feel a moral obligation to provide vouchers as social beneficence for the participants (Różyńska, 2022). Conversely, to the comments made by some, many participants were unaware they received a voucher upon completion of the interview (despite it being written in the Information Sheet). However, the vouchers continued to be used both as a possible incentive to participate and to recognise the contributions made by participants (Zutlevics, 2016).

### *Recruitment Strategies*

Several recruitment strategies were utilised: the first being social media. Social media platforms have several advantages for social research; a massive user base, they are inherently 'social' which may encourage participation, the use of profile data to find

specific groups/individuals and the removal of geographic constraints (Rife et al., 2014; Piacenti et al., 2014). Social media also allows the user to modify their profile to convey a particular image of themselves (Rogers, 2013). This method was multifaceted in its approach and gathered the most participants, a total of 18. It utilised both active and passive methods (Gelinias et al., 2017). A Facebook page was created, my LinkedIn profile was modified, and a project website was created. All displayed basic information about the study such as targeted participants, what the process involved, the compensation (a £20 Love2Shop e-voucher) etc. The profiles were made authentically to give participants an accurate idea of what the study entailed (Henderson and Bowley, 2010) and took the position of researcher. On the website, there was a short section about me under the title 'The Researcher' with the information 'PhD student in the Sociology department at Newcastle University' with a 'keen interest in understanding the social dynamics within contemporary industrial meat processing' written below. It was desirable to foster trust, friendliness, and a sense of welcomeness for potential participants, which can be an issue for an outsider researching minority groups (Ryan et al., 2011). To add some informality, I added extra information concerning my interest in boxing, languages, reading and video games and a photograph. This was to help create a more approachable feel for participants and away from a strict image of academia. Additionally, it was intended to reduce any power imbalance that may have been present (Swain and Spire, 2020). I believe I am an approachable and friendly person, and that the website conveyed this well.

The project information and website were circulated in three ways. Firstly, by messaging participants directly. This approach was highly active, in that direct contact was made specifically with the intent of participant recruitment (Gelinias et al., 2017). This was done via two platforms, Facebook and LinkedIn. To find potential participants, searches were conducted to identify profiles who had listed either their current or previous employment status within an industrial meat facility in the UK. A typical example might be 'Meat Hygiene Inspector at Top-Chicken, 2017-present' (pseudonym). On finding a potential profile, a short message was sent to the user and a link to the Facebook Page/project website. Messaging participants directly had the advantage of removing gatekeepers in that all communication was carried out in a private space (Henderson and Bowley, 2010). LinkedIn was particularly useful as it was on a professional platform making it easy to create a profile where the study was

the central focus. Indeed, some people messaged me first after seeing the details of the study. In total, ten participants were gathered this way.

The second method of circulation was by joining meat-orientated Facebook groups. Facebook groups are often 'online communities' (Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). As online communities are usually named after the people or purpose they serve (ibid), terms such as 'meat, butcher, slaughter etc.' were searched. I was able to join several meat groups this way. Some allowed access directly by clicking 'join group'. Others had a set of questions that required answering such as why I wanted to join the group, whether I had experience in the meat sector etc. These answers were then sent to the group administrators who act as 'internet gatekeepers' (Laidlaw, 2012). Those who accepted my requests were subsequently posted in. This was both an active and passive approach in that I actively found the groups but ultimately the participants would decide if they wished to make contact (Gelinas et al., 2017). Eight participants were gathered in this way.

The third circulation method was joining online migrant groups. Like the meat groups, I joined many migrant-orientated Facebook groups such as Polish, Romanian, Bulgarian etc. These were found by searching relevant terms in both English and native languages such as 'Polish UK, Romanian UK, Polska, Wielki Britannia' etc. Once in these groups, I would post a link to the Facebook page and wait for replies. These efforts were unsuccessful and did not result in any participants; there may have simply not been any meat workers in these groups. Furthermore, the posts were in English so participants may not have understood them. Facebook does offer its own translation service which has demonstrated a high accuracy rate (Zakariya et al., 2021). Nonetheless, there is always the chance these translations were not fully accurate and therefore comprehensible. Simple English was used to try and minimise this. However, there were many instances where people mistook the study for a training school for butchers, with people requesting details of how they could enrol and train with the hope of gaining a job. For reasons completely oblivious to me, almost all these requests were from people in Asia such as The Philippines, Thailand etc. How they found this study remains a mystery. By seeing words such as 'meat', 'worker' and 'university' together in the advert (see Appendix 3), viewers may have mistaken this

for some kind of 'meat university'. When this occurred, a reply would be given explaining that this was an academic study, not a butchery school.

Another internet-based strategy was contacting relevant organisations and/or businesses. With all contact, details of the study were provided with emphasis placed on how the study may benefit the industry and workers, as well as the £20 vouchers participants would receive. A degree of personalization was used by including the specific name of the organisation and how they may be able to assist. Personalization has been shown to increase response rates, hence the extra effort taken here (Heerwegh et al., 2005). There were four organisations/businesses which were contacted. First, advocacy groups. These were generally NGO groups that specialised in assisting migrants to adapt to life in the UK. There is a long history of community-based research highlighting the potential benefits for both the researcher and NGOs (Ryan et al., 2011; Radonic et al., 2021). The advocacy groups were generally responsive. Emphasis was placed on the benefits the study could provide for the NGO, primarily in the form of data on migrants working in the BIMPS sector and the challenges they face. Despite 42 groups being contacted, the majority were unable to help. Mostly this was because they simply had no contacts who worked in the BIMPS. However, one Polish participant was contacted and successfully interviewed following this strategy. The second organisation type was trade unions. Around 10 trade unions representing the industrial meat sector were contacted such as the British Meat Processors Association (BMPA) and the Association of Independent Meat Suppliers (AIMS). The majority did not respond to my emails and those that did, such as the BMPA, expressed their inability to help, usually with no reason given. In this sense, the trade unions were acting as gatekeepers and were either denying access or simply not engaging. The third organisation was veterinary practices. In the UK, abattoirs are required to work with OV's who monitor animal welfare and hygiene, and enforce the laws concerning BIMPS facilities (APHA, nd). I contacted several veterinary practices in the Newcastle area to see if any of their staff had experience working in abattoirs. Whilst this did not provide any participants directly, one practice advised contacting a company that specialised in providing OV's and other staff to UK abattoirs. I emailed this company and subsequently recruited one participant. The final organisation was industrial meat companies. During one interview, the participant directed me toward the Meat Management (2021) online directory of several hundred UK abattoirs and

cutting plants. Using this, I emailed 116 companies. The majority, approximately 95%, did not respond with the remaining 5% replying to express their disinterest in taking part.

### *Non-Internet based Strategies*

Three non-internet-based methods were used. The first was convenience sampling, that is, recruiting anyone who is easily available to take part in the study (Patton, 2014). This was the first strategy used and involved asking friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances etc. whether they knew of any suitable individuals. In one instance this strategy was used at a webinar session after a presentation I delivered, which recruited one participant. Patton (2014) notes this is likely to be the most common strategy used by researchers and at the same time the least desirable, not least in that it drastically limits who can be used and thus the data gathered. As Morse (2010) notes, convenience sampling may be an easy way to enter the field, but the sampling should not be limited to this sole strategy. Certainly, convenience sampling helped make a good start, but other strategies were not only desirable but necessary. This strategy gathered a total of six participants.

The second non-internet strategy was snowballing, which involves referrals from other participants (Sarantakos, 2012). Enquiring if participants can recommend other suitable recruits can offer 'information-rich key informants' (Patton, 2014: 451). If someone has been recommended to take part, they likely hold a special significance to the original participant and therefore may be highly suitable for the project (ibid). At the end of each interview and focus group, participants were told that if they knew of anyone interested in taking part then it would be greatly appreciated if they could pass on the details of the study. Three participants were found this way, usually colleagues of the interviewees, sometimes including their partners whom they had met whilst at work.

The final non-internet strategy was the use of posters to advertise the study, a common recruitment strategy and one of the first to be deployed in this project (Miller, 2007). A recruitment poster was created using the online service Canva (see Appendix 3) and was made to appeal to key audiences (ibid). Academic jargon was avoided, and the information was written in easy-to-understand terminology. This poster was

subsequently translated into Polish and Romanian using Google Translate. These were checked by a Polish and Romanian friend respectively to ensure comprehension. Once complete, these posters were printed and distributed. The difficulty in finding meat workers was that there was no obvious location where they might congregate outside of work. Nonetheless, two places were chosen as potential recruiting locations. Firstly, butcher shops, the logic being that individuals who work in the meat sector may be more likely to seek out premium quality meat. This has been documented in a study on American meat cutters (Meara, 1974). Also, during some of the interviews, participants expressed their distaste for mass-produced meat and their preference for butcher shops

‘I was thinking of buying a fillet steak yesterday and if I want one, I'll go to a butcher's shop and buy it’ (John, British, ex-Cutter)

Another participant had left the industrial meat industry to open his own high street butchery suggesting ex-BIMPS employees may seek out work in a more retail-based workplace. Around 20 such shops were visited in the Newcastle and Sunderland areas. Secondly, migrant shops, such as Eastern European grocery stores. The rationale here was since the BIMPS has a high migrant employee population (BMPA, 2020b) it may be that these migrants frequent such places outside of work. Shops that cater to a particular ethnic group hold a certain significance in that they act as a ‘focal point connecting the host country and the home country’ (Wang and Lo, 2007: 186). In the UK, Burrell (2009) documents the importance of Polish shops for Polish migrants, in that they offer both familiar products and that they represent a symbolic relationship to Poland for their customers. As a result, approximately 17 posters were distributed in migrant shops in Birmingham whilst I was visiting home for Christmas of 2020 as well as around 14 in the Newcastle and Sunderland areas. Unfortunately, despite a total of around 50 posters being distributed in the butchery and migrant shops, no participants were gathered in this way. Why this is so is uncertain, but it may have been that meat workers did not visit the shops, did not see them/understand them, were simply not interested or the owners took the posters down shortly afterwards (Ellard-Gray, 2015; Kristensen and Ravn, 2015). Whatever the case, the posters were completely unsuccessful.

Once recruited, some participants occasionally commented on why they chose to take part after being made aware of the study. Some were willing to speak to me because of my researcher position

‘Putting [my] history down for prosperity, you never know in two hundred years' time someone might come across it...just the thought of it, that's why I like doing it' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer).

Additionally, many participants expressed interest in helping the study for the sake of assisting the research, with some refusing to accept the shopping vouchers. Participant motivation appeared partly driven by ‘research altruism’, that is, the desire to take part to assist humanity or the development of the research rather than for personal gain (Carrera et al., 2018).

### **3.3.2. Research Methods**

Four methods were used to collect the primary data. The principal method was semi-structured interviews, with focus groups, logs and field trips being used to gather supplementary data (Morgan, 1997; Wilkinson, 1998). Due to geographical reasons as well as COVID-19 restrictions on social distancing, most contact with participants was done digitally (usually via Zoom) or via telephone (Lobe and Morgan, 2020).

#### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

As already mentioned, gaining access to places of work was difficult. Therefore, this method was chosen as it allowed the discussion of work experiences outside of the workplace. It allowed for a free-flowing, open interaction by steering the discussion in the desired direction by asking appropriate questions (Morris, 2015). It enabled the participants to tell how they experienced work within their world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019) aligning well with the phenomenological approach of this research (Høffding and Martiny, 2016). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 48) conceptualise the interviewer as a metaphorical miner and/or traveller. To gather ‘interview knowledge’, the miner ‘digs’ by asking the right questions and knows when to press to gather objective and ‘uncontaminated’ data. The traveller meanwhile goes along with the ‘local’, becoming familiar with their lives and their stories. The stories can then be recorded and interpreted. This project mostly used the traveller approach and used a

set of questions to initiate and guide the discussions. Participants were generally allowed to speak about whatever they felt was relevant. Attention was kept on the participants' narratives as they unfolded which sometimes stimulated impromptu questions or 'digs' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Galletta and Cross, 2012) which led to greater depth. Most of the interviews (26) were carried out via videocall with a small number (3) done by phone call.

Before the interviews, participants were identified as being in one of four categories, with each category having a slightly different set of questions. The categories were:

- 1) non-migrant/current worker
- 2) non-migrant/ex-worker
- 3) migrant/current worker
- 4) migrant/ex-worker

If participants were ex-workers, the questions were modified to the past tense. If the participant was a migrant, then questions were asked about their decision to come to the UK, how the process went etc. whereas if they were British, they were asked about where they lived and how they started in the meat sector (see Appendix 4 for all four sets of questions).

A regular issue throughout the interviews was participants not showing up (Sarantakos, 2012). The worst case of this was when four interviews were scheduled within five days and none of the participants attended. Why this was so is not certain. Attempts were made to help reduce this, such as placing emphasis on the £20 shopping vouchers they would receive as well as sending a reminder of the interview the day before. Whilst absenteeism was high, the intended number of conducted interviews was still achieved.

### *Focus Groups*

Two focus groups were held via Zoom. These gathered data by utilising group dynamics which are not present during a one-to-one interview (Stewart et al., 2007). An array of viewpoints was gained using a non-directive style of moderating (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). It was hoped that a synergism effect would be created where



participants work together to provide a greater range and depth of data (Morgan, 1997). This would enable questions or discussion points to be made by participants which I did not think to ask. Participants in the focus groups all had the interview first to ensure a) they were suitable to take part and b) that they wanted to participate further. The groups were segmented by ethnicity, with one all-British group of three participants and one all-migrant group, with one individual each from Nigeria, Chile and Romania. This was to help create a comfortable and safe setting for workers for two reasons. First, participants may identify more closely if they were from a similar background (Stewart et al., 2007). Indeed, some migrants told how they felt closer to fellow migrant workers having gone through similar experiences. Secondly, to create a safer environment for participants to speak within (ibid). For example, if a migrant participant had something negative to say about UK workers, they might be less inclined to say it in front of British participants. There was an original aim of three groups to be held, one all-British group, one migrant group and one group of managers (both British and migrant). Whilst the British group was not difficult to organise, the second and third planned groups proved much harder. This was due to a combination of finding participants with fluent enough English, a suitable time, participants' ability to use digital software and a willingness to take part. As a result, the second group was made up of a mix of managerial and non-managerial migrant participants. This did not seem to have a large impact, however, and the participants appeared comfortable in each other's presence despite the differences in hierarchical position.

An issue that was especially disruptive during the focus groups was a poor internet connection (Sullivan, 2012). If one participant had a connection issue it significantly affected the 'turn-taking' that is essential for focus groups (Morgan and Hoffman, 2018). Measures were taken to avoid this, such as ensuring a high-speed internet connection on my part and asking the same from participants. However, it is likely data was lost due to these connection issues (Sullivan, 2012).

### *Log Exercise*

Following the semi-structured interview, participants were invited to take part in the log exercise which entailed the keeping of a seven-day work diary (see Appendix 5). Diaries often capture experiences and are useful in avoiding difficulties in memory recall in that diaries are usually written shortly after the event (Alaszewski, 2006)

Additionally, diaries are useful in documenting that which is not readily observable (Elliot, 1997) which was relevant since abattoir work is almost always hidden and therefore unobservable (Vialles, 1994; Fitzgerald, 2010). The diary started with a brief guide on how to fill it in and a simple set of questions to gather information on the participant, such as their name, how long they had worked there and the kind of tasks their work entailed. Following this, six simple open-ended questions were provided for each day, such as 'Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?' and 'How was your lunch break? What did you do?' etc. Participants were free to answer these whenever they pleased and could do so throughout any given week. The diaries were sent via email and were filled in digitally. Once complete, they were returned for analysis and a follow-up interview was arranged to discuss the findings.

Only two participants (out of a targeted five) filled in the log and took part in the follow-up interview. Whilst a larger number of participants did agree to complete the log, most did not return it. As Sheridan (1993) notes, some people are predisposed to be diarists by having a personality type that lends itself towards documentation, collection etc. As participant Marcus stated, 'we're not very open people', therefore detailing their work may not have been of great interest to participants. In addition, many participants discussed the physical and tiring nature of their work, and therefore this extra work might have not been a priority (Elliot, 1997). There was also the issue of language. The two participants who did complete the diaries were both British and had fluent English skills. The migrant participants who agreed may have had struggles understanding the diary, despite it being written in simple English. Language issues were sometimes an issue throughout this research (see below), so this was a possibility. In the end, only one of the diaries was used as the second produced data from a Danish abattoir and was deemed as not fitting in within the BIMPS framework. The data gathered from the one suitable diary was drawn upon in this thesis and, therefore, was worth pursuing.

### *Observation of Abattoir and Processing Plant*

Two separate visits were taken to observe the identified working environments. These trips were only one day each, to gain a snippet of daily life in the BIMPS. In this sense, they might be thought of as 'mini-ethnographies'. The purpose was to see first-hand the working culture within these facilities and to interpret these findings (Harrison,

2018). The first visit was to a chicken processing plant in England organised by the Newcastle University Agriculture Department. It was a group tour held for students, which I was permitted to accompany. This facility will be referred to as Chickensmiths. The second trip was a private visit to a Scottish sheep abattoir, henceforth referred to as Highland Sheep. This was arranged by a participant who put me in touch with the on-site OV. During this trip, I accompanied the OV on her daily duties and was able to talk with both her and her colleagues. There was no doubt of my outsider status on both trips, particularly at Highland Sheep, with many workers giving me suspicious looks (Okely, 1992). Certainly, I was unable to 'blend in' on either visit (Moffat, 1992). On one occasion I was directly asked by a worker who exactly I was and why I was there. After my response, they appeared to quickly relax once aware I had no authority there. On another occasion, during a break, a manager told me to put my white jacket back on despite being in an area away from the processing and having been granted permission by the OV to take it off. I was given the strong impression this manager was trying to assert some authority over me as a newcomer, to let me know 'who's boss' as it were. I obliged her request/demand.

### *Language Issues*

Language difficulties did, occasionally, arise. These were more common with migrant workers although they periodically occurred with British participants. Difficulties in communication due to language differences can affect the depth and detail of the collected data (Smith et al., 2008). Certain terminology, phrases and expressions may have no direct translation and therefore it can be difficult to draw the same meanings once translated (van Nes et al., 2010) which questions whether 'conceptual equivalence' is possible (Smith et al., 2008). As a result, there was always the risk of data being skewed or lost in translation (Gawlewicz, 2014). In this sense, the translation becomes 'a question of culture before being a question of vocabulary' (McLaughlin and Sall, 2001: 206). Some even argue that social reality is uniquely experienced depending on one's native language suggesting that it is near impossible to fully understand in a different language (Chapman, 2006). Bowler (1997) suggests that when researching minority groups, researchers should obtain at least an elemental level of their native language to assist in basic communication.

Prior to this study, I knew Spanish (to around a B1 level) and Polish (around A2). As it was predicted a larger number of Polish workers may be interviewed, I enrolled in a Polish language course. These Polish skills assisted in some instances, particularly with recruiting one participant whose English proficiency was quite low. It was also used to build rapport with participants, who generally responded well to my knowledge of Polish. Generally, participants' English was to a level where a conversation could be had without much difficulty. A Polish interpreter was required for one interview. The use of interpreters is not fully agreed upon in social research. Interpretation involves the relinquishing of power from the interviewer into the interpreter's hands (Smith et al., 2008), which some argue turns the interpreter into a gatekeeper (Kaufert and Putsch, 1997). Additionally, there may be multiple ways to translate a sentence, which leaves the responsibility of choosing to the interpreter (Liamputtong, 2012). If the interpreter is not a trained researcher there is a chance they may 'make their mark' on the data by trying to translate it in a way the researcher can understand rather than directly. Whilst this may be done with good intentions, it can reduce the validity of the data (ibid). My interpreter was not research trained, although a briefing was held before the interview to discuss the purpose and aims of the interview and study.

### **3.4. Analysis**

Once the data had been gathered the third stage of the research began, the analysis. The first task was the transcription of the data. In the case of the interviews, focus groups and log entries/interviews, this was done by uploading the audio recordings to a transcription website, otranscribe.com, and transcribing each recording. Whilst this did entail long periods of work time, it enabled extra familiarity with the data and avoided any ethical issues of outsourcing the data for transcription (Hennessy et al., 2022). As Hammersley (2010) suggests, transcription is not simply a case of listening and typing. Whether to include an array of mannerisms such as coughs, pauses, laughs, back-channel noises etc. needed consideration, a necessity of any transcription process (Cook, 1990). The transcriptions aimed to reflect each participant's individuality by including unique phrases or ways of speaking (Green et al., 1997). A good example of this was whether to transcribe any grammatical errors directly made by participants, which was especially relevant with the migrant workers. As a rule, these errors were kept in order to create an accurate representation of the participants. Ultimately, what was included or not was made on a case-by-case basis.

Laughs, significant pauses/body language, emphasis on certain words etc. were often included as they gave extra context to what was being said.

Whilst transcription does place the power within the hands of the transcriber (Bulcholtz, 2000), as valid a representation as possible was always strived for whilst only removing anything that was felt to have no contribution to the data at all, such as certain utterances ('um', 'uh' etc.) or constantly repeated phrases (e.g., 'you know'). In the case of the observations, these were written up from memory in a 'salience hierarchy' (Wolfinger, 2002) in that I wrote what was salient to me following the trips rather than a systematic note-taking method. After Chickensmiths, this was done digitally back in my office on the same day. As there was around an hour bus trip to take between the site and returning to Newcastle, there was always the possibility that some of the details were lost. The findings were also written up as a blog post on the Sociology PGR website (Pointer, 2020). The Highland Sheep notes were handwritten in a nearby café following the visit. Learning from the experience of the Chickensmiths' visit, this was done as soon as possible to ensure as much was recalled and documented as possible. These notes were later written up and edited digitally to provide a usable piece of data to be drawn upon.

Once fully transcribed, the transcriptions/notes were uploaded to the analytical software NVivo for coding. NVivo is a relatively simple and user-friendly technology. In total, 40 sets of transcriptions/notes were analysed. This was done via thematic analysis, by identifying significant pieces of dialogue and then grouping them by theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Once a theme was identified it would be coded. The code given would be a 'summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute' (Saldaña 2015: 3). Some of the more significant codes in terms of quantity of references included 'Animals', 'Bullying', 'Community', 'Enjoyment', 'Halal/Kosher', 'Skill/Knowledge', 'Vegetarian/Vegan' and 'Pay'. In total, 38 codes/themes were identified with numerous 'child codes' amongst them. An example of this would be 'Health and Safety', which acted as the code, with 'injury', 'illness', 'COVID-19' etc. being the child codes to help add more specificity to the reference. One of the difficulties, especially near the beginning of the coding phase, was identifying a theme which fitted into multiple codes (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). For example, if a worker reported an injury related to handling animals, it needed to be determined if

that would be appropriate to put in the animal code or the Health and Safety code. This was overcome by simply placing them in both codes. The codes were made using a grounded approach, in that specific codes were not sought after, rather, the data was looked at as a blank slate to find what patterns and relationships emerged (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). These were then used to inform the empirical chapters, by taking the codes and using the emerged patterns to provide the content to be analysed. In this way, it was the data that led the way rather than testing a hypothetical or already-established theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

### **3.5. Summary**

The methodological planning and subsequent execution of this research was a long and difficult task which had numerous aspects for consideration. It utilised a phenomenological research philosophy to inform the research design (Zahavi, 2012). Those involved in the processing stages of meat production were identified as the most relevant workers as these were individuals exposed to the industrial side of meat processing and that which it entails. An extensive range of recruitment methods were used to gather the data, with varying degrees of success. The final set of data was gathered via a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, log exercises, and field trips (Morgan, 1997; Elliot, 1997; Morris, 2015). The data were transcribed, analysed and utilised to shape this thesis and answer the research questions. There were numerous challenges throughout the research such as language and technology issues both of which were acknowledged and addressed (Smith et al., 2008; Padayachee, 2016). There were several ethical issues that needed attention and were addressed prior to and throughout the research process (BSA, 2017). The results of this extensive research process were used to inform the empirical chapters of this thesis, namely the experiences and implications of working in the BIMPS.

## Chapter 4: The Journey to the BIMPS

‘Even my parents who are farmers and understand the food supply chain they were saying ‘Are you sure you want to work in an abattoir?’ (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

### 4.1. Introduction

Many a time, when discussing this project with friends, acquaintances etc. a common question asked would be something paraphrasing ‘Who would want to work in an abattoir?’. This is a legitimate question, which might be better phrased as ‘What motivates people to seek employment in the BIMPS?’. For an outsider, there might be no obvious reason to work in a job centred around routinised killing (Baran et al, 2016). However, for the workers, the reasons were wide and varied. For UK workers, motivations to join the BIMPS were often shaped by early life experiences such as growing up in rural areas and/or farms. Often workers had a passion for meat work and did not necessarily enter strictly for the financial rewards. As one worker put it

‘I’m one of those people who has never worked a day in their life, I’ve had idiots pay me to do something I’d do for nothing’ (Barry, British, MHI)

The motivations of migrant workers tended to be more economically focused, in that, for them, when working in certain parts of the labour market, any job would do; the wages were the most important aspect. On the other hand, some migrant workers did intend to use the BIMPS as a potential career path. As one migrant worker elaborated

‘You have two types of migrants, one of them is ‘I’m just coming here for a certain amount of time, I don’t mind the job I’m doing as long as it pays me decent for what the job I’m doing and I’ll leave after that’ and then you have the other type that says ‘well I’m starting on this job and I want the progression into it and if I don’t see the progression I’ll move to a different job’ (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

Migrants were actively recruited by employers far more than their UK counterparts, with employers often valuing their supposed better work ethic and higher degrees of control. Employers went to extensive lengths to disseminate job advertisements within migrant labour pools, including sending advertisers directly to universities outside the UK to attempt to find suitable candidates. Employers rarely sought out UK workers, with these workers having to take the initiative to join the sector themselves and using a variety of methods to do so. This was strikingly similar across different job roles for both UK and migrant workers.

This chapter aims to map out the 'journey to the abattoir' and explore the complex mixture of influences which shape this path. To do so, it will first provide a brief history of the BIMPS from the early days of backyard slaughter to the modern meat sector. Secondly, the social and economic influences, group motivations and the role of employers will be discussed and analysed in relation to UK workers, followed by the same analysis for migrant workers. These two sections discuss themes around workers' backgrounds, the different routes of entry into the sector, the personal motivations for entering, the pull and push factors (especially for migrants) and so on. This chapter also highlights the different motivations in relation to workers' backgrounds such as education and early life experiences. Where appropriate there are some areas of overlap between UK and migrant workers which are discussed as one to avoid repetition. For both groups, a key concept to understanding their relationship with employers is the 'recruitment relationship', that is, how workers relate to employers regarding recruitment. Following these discussions, a summary of the findings will be provided.

#### **4.2. A Social History of the BIMPS**

Prior to the opening of public abattoirs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (circa 1875), slaughtering of livestock in Britain was carried out in private abattoirs, located in marketplaces, backyards and within butchers' own homes (Otter, 2008). The methods of stunning were often brutal or non-existent, fuelling humanitarian concerns over the development of 'humane methods' of slaughter (MacLachlan, 2008). The presence of livestock and slaughter in city centres led to issues of water contamination, stench, and animal excrement in the streets (Wohl, 1983). Furthermore, what was considered civil in terms of how to consume animals began to change (Elias, 2000) which initiated



the shift in responsibility for meat processing to specialists 'behind the scenes' (Fitzgerald, 2010). These social shifts paved the way for the opening of regulated, industrialised, out-of-sight public slaughterhouses which are found today. Modern BIMPS facilities are typical of the 'post-domestic society' (Bulliet, 2005) as they are mostly (if not always) located in rural areas, thus maintaining both physical and geographical distance from urban customers. One participant made a comparison between these two production methods

'If you were to go back say fifty, seventy years it would be a normal occurrence for you to kill a lamb or whatever in your back garden and store it for you or your family or friends [but now] because it's become so easily accessible for people they don't have to go through [all that], you go to the shop, your lamb chops are there, you buy them, take them home, cook them and that's about it, there's not much else to it really' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Poulain and Dorr (2017: 27) refer to this as the 'desacralization of food' where there is both less awareness and appreciation for the difficulties in producing food which has left the final product 'lacking both identity and symbolic significance; anonymous and soulless'. For most customers, familiarization with the process is neither needed nor desired (Turner, 1996; Joy, 2010). In addition, the rise in the mass production of meat has coincided with the reduction of smaller independent abattoirs, a trend still in motion today. The AHDB (2022) report that in 2015 there were 192 red meat abattoirs in the UK, down to 151 in 2021. However, the size of the average abattoir has steadily increased, with 64.9% of cattle abattoirs being able to process over 50,000 head a year and 85.5% of sheep abattoirs processing 100,000 a year in 2021 (ibid). The increased capacity of abattoirs may be best summarized by a participant's comment

'I think if you went down there Jake your fucking head would off with the capacity that they do' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

Thus, the modern BIMPS facility is a powerhouse of production and yet is thought of by few; out of sight and out of mind, the customer need seldom consider where their meat comes from (Smith, 2002). However, two parties which regularly concern

themselves with the BIMPS are employers and employees through work-related interests.

### **4.3. Employers and Employees**

The 'employment relationship' is defined by Gospel and Palmer (1993: 3) as 'an economic, social and political relationship in which employees provide manual and mental labour in exchange for rewards allotted by employers'. Additionally, the 'psychological contract', relates to what each party feels the other owes them above that which is specified in the working contract, e.g., to feel safe at work, be respected etc. (Lewis et al., 2003). What might be termed the 'recruitment relationship' is central to uncovering the journeys to the BIMPS. Data gathered here and other recent literature (McAreavey et al., 2023), illustrates how the recruitment relationship between the BIMPS and potential workers is strained at best. For UK workers, this relationship is essentially 'one way' in that they had to approach businesses themselves for their own reasons. For migrants, hiring practices, as have been found elsewhere (Mackenzie and Forde, 2009; Shubin et al., 2014; Cangiano and Walsh, 2014) are riddled with difficulties and complications.

#### **4.3.1. UK Workers**

In recent years, widespread discourses have framed the unemployed British working class as lazy, docile, and undeserving (Tyler 2013; 2020) i.e., those who have no valid excuse not to work (Shildrick et al., 2012). By identifying the working class as the problem, attention is drawn away from issues surrounding access to work and places the onus of responsibility onto the unemployed (Shildrick, 2018). In a BIMPS context, Tannock (2015) demonstrated this in his research on a Welsh meat facility. Despite participants describing the difficulties of working at the local meat factory (bullying, hard physical labour, long hours etc.), the lack of UK workers was nonetheless put down to laziness. Some participants in this study took a similar position

'It's hard labour, you're pushing dozens of kilos every day, you're getting knife skills, it's hard and it takes a long time and most of the British won't like to do it, they would rather just stay home getting benefits or looking for some easy jobs' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

There was also the suggestion that UK workers were not emotionally or physically resilient enough to endure the conditions of working in the BIMPS. Many participants gave examples of workers who would leave shortly after starting

‘I had a lot of lads used to come in from the careers centre, used to bring them in and they would be there half a day, never come back’ (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

‘Every time when I had a British person and I would like to give him a job, so I spent one day from doing induction...but when they start after a few hours they just walked outside and its constant thing...the job is too hard’ (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

‘It's probably because of the environment, its cold, humid long hours, early start, smelly, noisy, everything you want, or don't want [laughs] and usually UK nationals don't want these jobs’ (Alexandra, Romanian, Head Vet)

In neoliberal states, such as the UK, ‘all conduct is economic conduct, spheres of existence are measured by economic terms and metrics’ (Brown, 2015: 10). Individuals become economic actors, and thus the responsibility to be productive and contribute falls on their shoulders (Feldman, 2019). Workers become ‘entrepreneurs of themselves’ (Foucault, 2004) in that they are theoretically under the control of their material and working conditions and are thus individually accountable (Elliot, 2021). Through this worldview, those who fail to fulfil this responsibility are labelled immoral, deficient, or lazy whilst those who succeed receive the credit (ibid, Tyler, 2020). These binaries provide an easy, convenient, uncomplicated explanation as to why there are fewer UK workers in the BIMPS than migrants (Tannock, 2015; BMPA, 2020a). However, they fail to consider other sociological factors which hinder access to BIMPS work. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that there are idiosyncratic qualities of the BIMPS which pose unique physical and mental challenges. Performing and/or working near slaughter is charged with moral considerations, which acts as arguably the largest deterrent to BIMPS work (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014; Simpson, et al., 2016). The emotional resilience required to deal with this is not necessarily needed in other industrial jobs such as car production (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Victor and Barnard,

2016). Furthermore, hard manual labour often entails significant demands on the body and environmental hazards (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). The adage of large quantities of bodily excretions, such as blood, organs etc. creates what many see as a disgusting environment (Douglas, 2002; Ackroyd, 2007). Secondly, the 'us versus them' dichotomy fails to account for those who do work in the BIMPS. Several participants gave accounts of UK workers behaving contrary to these claims by being hardworking, resilient and enjoying their work

'When you're training for it or getting used to it it's hard work, it's hard physical labour but once you're used to it and you know what you're doing you just breeze through it' (Barry, British, MHI)

'I've worked myself even taking heads off of cattle and sheep etc. it is pretty labour intensive' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I'm usually quite happy just stuck on my own, like splitting things, like cutting the beef' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'I wouldn't say I loved it but if ten was loving it and zero was hating it, it was definitely a five or six, it definitely felt like a job well done and you knew you'd done a day's work when you'd finished as well' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

Despite the evidence that the UK working class are able and want to work when circumstances permit (Shildrick et al., 2012), employers often recruit in ways that avoid making contact with the local British unemployed and instead focus on migrant labour pools (Mackenzie and Forde, 2009; Tarrabian and Thomas, 2020). An EHRC (2010) report found work agencies were five times more likely than the processing firms they represented, to hold the view that UK workers had a lower work ethic, with some firms refusing to register UK workers altogether. Yet one participant claimed that the opposite was true. Indeed, none of the British participants in this study were actively recruited by their respective employers but rather sought out work in the meat sector themselves and had several methods of doing so.

### *Saturday Lad*

The first method of employment was what might be loosely called the 'Saturday lad route'. Several workers noted how one of their first jobs had been somehow related to meat, often whilst still at school

'I started in the meat industry at thirteen, I asked for a part-time job at a local farm, butchers' (Barry, British, MHI)

'I'd been working on a Saturday for a butcher, just cleaning up and that you know like a Saturday lad...the young lad that was working there full-time left and the butcher said to me 'do you want a job?' and I ended up working at the butcher's shop' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

'There was a lad I used to go to school with at [place], I went down and said 'are there any Saturday jobs?', started straightaway, used to bunk off school and work through the week' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'A lot of the Welsh folk I work with, they've been working since they were really young, one of the guys he goes 'I used to go to school some days in the week and I used to work in the slaughterhouse the other days', it's just something they've grown up doing' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Simpson et al. (2014; 2016) found similar findings in their study of butcher's shop workers, with many of their participants starting as a 'Saturday lad' and moving to full-time work following school. To some degree, the reasons for taking these jobs were in line with Willis' (1977) findings that, for working-class boys, any job would do and that there was no pattern to job choice other than it was manual. The key function of work was simply to provide a method of earning money. Some participants' experiences were in alignment with this assertion

'It wasn't a decision it was just I had a fall out at the butcher's shop, and it was just a job that was advertised, and I needed work and I went for an interview, and they gave me the job so it was just a needs-must sort of thing' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

'It paid really really well, so, nightwork in particular paid well...when I was a late teenager, I could be earning ten pounds an hour doing that, which at the time was a whack of money' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

In John's case, as work was a 'needs-must sort of thing', this created an acceptance of the limitations of his 'field of possibilities' (Bourdieu, 2015). However, not all the Saturday lads (or 'lasses') took work purely for financial reasons. Others used this work to facilitate other interests in life

'I liked shooting and hunting and the easiest way to get permission to shoot and hunt on a farm is to work for them and then, just the meat business came along with it' (Barry, British, MHI)

Additionally, for some, a lack of qualifications and literacy skills hindered access to work elsewhere. For a wide range of social and economic reasons, working-class children consistently attain lower qualifications whilst at school (cf. Rosenbaum, 2001; Evans, 2007). As educational qualifications are charged with high levels of cultural capital (Bills, 2003) low educational attainment limits individuals' 'life chances' (Weber, 2019) where jobs are concerned. Thus, it may be the case only a limited number of work options are available

'I finished school with no education at all, I couldn't read and write very well, I left with no academic certificates whatsoever, and then my dad got me a job, believe it or not, on a YTS scheme in an office [laughs]...it wasn't working out because I couldn't read and write properly and stuff but I was working on a Saturday at the butcher's shop for a bit and then his young lad left and he said 'do you want a job?' so I went and worked there full time' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

As Rosenbaum (2001) found, this 'downward spiral' into low-paid work is often through a combination of poor efforts on the parts of teachers and employers in engaging students in school and work but also a disinterest on the parts of students themselves. John's situation echoes Shildrick et al's (2012) findings that following school with little or no qualifications, workers would often find themselves embarking on numerous

training schemes and moving through the revolving door of several low-paid jobs/unemployment. John elaborated further on this situation

'I worked in the butcher's shop on and off for, I don't know, 3 years and then I left there and worked at a slaughterhouse in the cutting room but did overtime in the slaughterhouse... and then I went back to the butcher's shop after working at the abattoir' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

For the Saturday lads, entering the BIMPS was often 'by accident' (Willis, 1977: 133) in that it was not necessarily pre-planned, it was simply a convenient and viable option following school. However, there were several other routes which British participants took to enter the BIMPS.

### *Formal Routes*

The second method of employment was the 'apprenticeship route'. Two participants elaborated on how they had gone through vocational training schemes prior to full-time work. Notably, in Barry's case, his route appeared to be a combination of the Saturday lad and apprenticeship routes

'I did the YTS scheme, you wouldn't remember the YTS scheme, but it was a government training scheme with a second firm, seventeen pounds thirty a week, four days working for your boss and one day in college, there I did my associateship and me affiliateship to the institute of meat I didn't want to go to university back then as I was young and stupid and I wanted a wage' (Barry, British, MHI)

'I just happened to land an apprenticeship job at an old shop in [place] and that's where we started, I mean I had a passion for it right from the word go... basically my apprenticeship was shop retail to start off [and then] I went to [a] processing plant' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

As Altreiter (2021) surmises the taking of apprenticeships following school offers both valued manual labour and the ability to earn wages, rather than continuing through the

'slower' route of further education. Atkins (2017) notes apprenticeships and higher education are often seen as separate entities leading to differing career paths. These sentiments were captured by Barry's comments 'I didn't want to go to university...I wanted a wage'. However, this did not mean working in the meat sector was not a viable option following higher education. One participant elaborated on how she had taken the 'graduate scheme route'

'I was doing a degree in agriculture and animal science, I finished that in July and then I rolled off onto the manufacturing graduate scheme for Morrison's and through that, we kind of had choices as to where we'd like to start and because my wider knowledge is farming, agriculture and livestock it made more sense for me to fall into the meat sector, just to gain that knowledge cause I know what happens pre-farm gate, it's just figuring out what happens post-farmgate and the full farm to fork supply chain' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

Industrial work has often been regarded as 'lower work' (Piore, 1979; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Generally, work that fits under this bracket does not require higher education (Rabossi, 2021). Yet as McCabe and Hamilton (2015) note, labelling an entire sector as secondary/dirty can halter a more critical analysis of the situation. A more nuanced view reveals that 'secondary sectors' can offer more 'primary sector' type roles such as managerial or specialist roles (Leontaridi, 2002). As Laura went on to explain

'Morrison's has a good reputation, it's all obviously assured high welfare and also that's kind of location-wise that was good for me but also Morrison's has three abattoirs...as a graduate, I basically worked in all the different departments so as it's such a big site there's a lot to learn, so I spent time in each department just with what we class as team managers so as a graduate I roll in as a team manager' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)



Whilst other methods were more by accident or to pursue a wage, Laura's reasons were less concerned about pay but included the high welfare standards of the organisation, opportunities to learn/progress and to enter at the higher position of team leader.

### *Workers' Background*

Parental influence, cultural context and environmental factors have all been demonstrated to affect career aspirations and choices throughout adulthood, (Howard and Walsh, 2011; Fouad et al., 2016). It was perhaps not too surprising then that almost all these UK workers had some childhood experiences related to farming and/or rural activities with many having a familiarity with typical tasks found within meat facilities

'All of my family are farmers, livestock farmers' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

'At fourteen, I slaughtered me first animals, sheep, and cattle, I learnt to skin, we had the farm, so we were actually breeding them, feeding them, killing them, cutting them and selling them on a mobile butcher's shops' (Barry, British, MHI)

'Where I live it's very country-orientated, so everyone goes out shooting, everyone partakes in stalking venison, meat's a big thing where we are' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Indeed, growing up in a rural environment is one of the strongest determinants in individuals pursuing rural-based career paths (Somers et al., 2011). At the same time, Lehmann and Taylor (2015: 613) note how early involvement with tools and practical activities can make taking manual work the 'natural' thing to do. Furthermore, being exposed to the potentially emotion-evoking activities of meat work from an early age (slaughter, cutting etc.) helped emotionally 'prime' workers for job similar roles (Wagner, 1979).

At the same time, there was a minority of UK workers who had no prior link to meat work before entering the BIMPS

‘[I used to do] just odd jobs really, bit of window cleaning, bit of labouring’  
(Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

‘I worked at Alton Towers’ (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

When UK workers had no prior experience before entering the meat sector, it was generally the case that workers took roles which required no qualifications or experience. Many of these roles could be taught quickly or learned on the job

‘I got in, they showed us around...we were led into a room where we had to take our shoes off and put PPE on and stuff like that and, it was actually kind of weird because I went in with all my motorbike gear and no one told me to take it off, they just sort of lead us into this room put this thing on...and then that was it you started your job’ (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

With no former association with meat, farming, slaughter etc., the reasons for seeking work in the meat sector for UK workers were varied. Prior to entering the BIMPS, Dave appeared to be caught in what Shildrick et al. (2012) refer to as the ‘low pay, no pay’ cycle by going through a string of low-paying ‘odd jobs’. The cleaning role taken at the BIMPS acted as the latest of these occupations, however, it also served to break the cycle. As McDonald et al. (2005) show, the major difficulty in this cycle is not finding work but *keeping* it. Dave at the time of interviewing had amassed a 22-year tenure at his chicken plant, a stark contrast to the anecdotes of UK workers lasting a matter of days or hours. In terms of how the job was obtained and the reasoning for the role, Dave used the ‘word of mouth’ route

‘Me ex got us a job there actually...it was a job; you know what I mean?’  
(Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

It has been long established that informal social networks are a powerful resource in finding work for the unemployed but are often restricted by locality and pay (Watt,

2003; Newton et al., 2005). Nonetheless, Dave's reasoning is in line with Willis' (1977) findings that these jobs simply offered a method of making money. In this regard, the job was 'functional' in that it offered an alternative to unemployment (Thiel, 2013). Working for a living to provide income, stability and resources for partners, children etc. has long been established as a key marker of worth for working-class men (Sennet and Cobb, 1993; Lamont, 2000; Simpson et al., 2014). Indeed, Shildrick et al. (2012) found that almost any role was preferable to being unemployed for working-class individuals. The other method and reasoning given by a different participant was the ease of access to the work

'I just wanted a change of life, so I moved down to Cornwall, and I just applied for this factory job, and I was pretty much guaranteed the job, that's what the person said, so I just, it was a safe place for me to go' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

Here both accessibility to the work and the security it offered acted as motivators for taking the role. This may be described as a 'high uncertainty avoidance' (Hofstede, 2001) approach to finding work as the job was both 'guaranteed' and 'safe'. Like some international migrants, internal migrants may take these 'lower roles' to achieve a nonmonetary goal (Piore, 1986). Whilst it provided a necessary income, this was not the main reason for taking the job in this instance, rather, it was a means of moving to Cornwall (Winch ie and Carment, 1989).

#### **4.3.2. Migrant Workers**

The lack of UK workers in the BIMPS is mitigated by the large presence of migrant workers; the BMPA (2020a) reports that some facilities have up to an 85% migrant-based workforce. Because of the supposed gaps left by UK workers in the BIMPS, there is a widespread idea that there is a 'need' for migrant workers which helps justify why agricultural firms hire migrants over UK workers (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). In agriculture (amongst other sectors) 'informed stereotypes' surrounding migrants ensure that they are often put at the front of the 'hiring queue' by employers (Scott and Rye, 2021). Migrant workers have often been described as, amongst other things, 'hardworking' (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; McAreavey, 2017) and this has been found in horticulture as well as meat work (Rogaly, 2008). In line with this image, both British

and migrant participants were almost universally in agreement that a higher work ethic was one of the chief reasons that migrants were hired over UK workers

‘They preferred to employ Eastern Europeans definitely...better work ethic...there were a couple of Thai guys that worked there as well and their job was just sharpening knives, that's all they did they just sharpened knives all the time, but they were the sharpest knives you could imagine’ (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

‘Always when I work there was Polish or Russian woman, because we do faster... hundred per cent yes’ (Agnieszka, Polish, Handpicker)

‘Immigrants are always hard workers, *a/ways*, it doesn't matter where you come from’ (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

The hardworking assertion was made throughout various job roles, including the more qualified roles such as vets. Following this assertion, theories as to precisely why migrants work harder were put forward. Employers and recruitment agencies have been found to shape the image of the ideal worker and migrants are often aware of what this image is (Findley et al., 2013; Shubin et al., 2014). Participants knew that if they fulfilled this stereotype, they would be kept on for work. There was also the suggestion that migrant workers have what might be termed a ‘migrant mentality’ i.e. that they had to work harder to prove their worth

‘It's just the mentality they have, they know that they 'I'm in another country, I have to do this, I have to do, I have to prove myself in order to keep my job and [inaudible] no way back’ (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

‘This is the mental for Polish and Romanian people..., like me I am Polish so I want to do everything better and more and more...Polish people think like 'okay I came to work here so I can do everything to have the money and this is a hard job that nobody want to do' that Polish and Romanian people 'oh I can do that, it is easy look at me it's very easy' and he show

that he can do that and after he need to do that because if he's good of something the company keep him for this position' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

Other participants mentioned the risk that migrants sometimes took to arrive in the UK. Thus, the jobs they received were more valuable to them than to their British counterparts meaning they were willing to work harder to ensure continued employment

'As a migrant, you come in here and you want to keep with that job that you came for because you risk, it can be your savings, you can be, some people may be coming here they took a debt to come in here and find a job and work, so the migrants before they working out what they're doing meanwhile the British people say 'well if I don't like it I'll leave now and I'll find another job the next day or something like that' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

Closely related to 'hardworking' is the ability to be 'flexible', with employers putting a premium on hyperflexible workers (Forde et al., 2008). This can be on a longer-term basis, such as just-in-time workers for season-dependent work (Rye and Scott, 2018), or on a more day-to-day level where workers may be needed immediately (Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Again, migrants often knew this and would, accordingly, modify their behaviour, at least according to one British participant

'We work with the majority Polish, and I've worked with Romanians, Hungarians in the past and they'll work as many hours as you want... I mean some of the guys they work seven days a week and they're happy working seven days a week as well' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Central to shaping and controlling this workforce was the use of work agencies, a common method of finding workers in the BIMPS (EHRC, 2010; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). For employers, the use of work agencies allows for a flexible and temporary workforce that can be used to meet peak demands but also can be disposed of as needed (Forde et al., 2008; Shubin et al., 2014). Participants detailed how this could be useful for employers, but detrimental to their own wellbeing

‘They tend to call first the people that have been registered the longest so for newly registered people it can be a long wait...it can be quite difficult to get an employment contract...I had a situation where I work just one day in a week and sometimes, I would turn up for work and I would have been told an hour and a half later that is all he can offer me today...where there is a need to stay after hours, the workers on permanent contracts are leaving work according to their schedule...however agency workers in that situation are expected to stay, it's not even an option, they don't get asked whether they can stay longer than they were originally told, it doesn't matter if there is a case of child care, nothing is important, you are expected to stay for as long as you are needed, if you can't, you hear that there are cases where is going to be no work for you tomorrow’ (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

These types of difficulties for employees in the BIMPS are well documented (Lloyd and James, 2008; EHRC, 2010; Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Because migrants have less labour market power (Hopkins, 2017), they may have little choice but to accept these working conditions which gives employers a far greater degree of control than they would over UK workers (Anderson, 2010). On the other hand, one of the benefits for employees of using agencies was that this could be a pathway to full-time employment

‘If Morrison's like them and they'd like to stay, after twelve weeks they can leave the agency and roll onto a Morrison's contract, so they know they've then got a full-time job’ (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

This aligns with previous findings which found that agency workers in the meat sector universally preferred permanent work contracts over agency work and often saw this as a steppingstone to permanent work (EHRC, 2010).

### *Pay*

Another motivation for employers to hire migrant workers was that they were more likely, for a variety of reasons, to accept lower pay (Bryson and White, 2019). This contributes to the ‘migrant pay gap’ which is found globally (Amo-Agyei, 2020). The BMPA (2020b) deny that migrants are employed due to the cheapness of labour

'It is important to note that, contrary to popular belief, migrant labour is neither cheap, nor cheaper than UK nationals. For the same jobs, migrant employees are paid the same wages as UK workers' (BMPA, 2020: np)

However, participants disagreed with this claim and gave examples of either themselves or their colleagues accepting lower wages

'They don't get paid as well, which I don't agree with, a lot of them are given places to live...we had a lot of Polish workers where I used to work and a lot of them were given caravans to live in as if it was an extra bonus to their job so you got free accommodation and it's just an old caravan in a field, it's not nice, that's considered their bonus because they got paid less...personally, I feel like they are used as cheap tools' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'I know they were paying less to Chilean people than they were to the locals, so the pay rate was lower, and it was because they get their tickets paid for them to go to Falklands so that was the balance like 'okay we'll pay for your ticket, but we'll pay you less' that was kind of like the agreement' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'They don't get paid as much as the white [British] guys...I think the minimum wage that they get paid is between fifteen and sixteen pound an hour, the white [British] people, whereas the Polish, you're looking at ten, eleven, twelve pound an hour, even though some of them are just as skilled, they can do more or less all the jobs as well...so a lot of these owners think 'cheap labour really' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

One Spanish participant noted the difference between different migrant groups and pay. He told how employers paid less to new Polish MHIs following Poland's accession to the EU in comparison to Spanish MHIs who were present before then

'[It was] Spanish mostly at first, then it changed it to Polish and other countries that my company and other companies could offer even a lower salary or, they were happy to bring people from these countries that have low salaries so they were very happy to receive the UK, you know twenty, twenty-five thousand pounds a year because it sounds here like a lot of money when it's not...they do it on purpose, they offer as low as possible' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

From a Marxist perspective, employers will attempt to buy labour for the cheapest price (Laycock, 1999). A lower price in terms of wages coupled with an apparent higher work ethic/flexibility means, in the eyes of the employer, a better value for money when employing migrants (Rogaly, 2008). Sometimes, as seen in these examples, these lower wages are justified by providing other resources in place of direct pay, such as accommodation or travel expenses. This arrangement, however, can be modified to benefit the employer. For example, a 'sleeping regime' (where employees work and live at the same site) such as the caravans described by Marcus, removes any geographical constraints of access to work. This allows employers to have a just-in-time system in place to meet labour demands at a moment's notice if necessary (Ceccagno and Sacchetto, 2019).

Of course, migrants first must accept these working conditions and, in this study, participants gave multiple reasons for doing so. This was almost always related to their situation back home and applied to migrants across the job spectrum

'They just said in their countries at home, politically it's not very stable and they also get taxed exceptionally high amounts on poor wages, so a lot of people find coming to the UK and the wages are really good, so they'll stay kind of three to four years on a good wage, send a lot of money home, save up' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'The money was better than in Spain, in Spain there was still low wages, not improving the salary, same long hours, same as in here' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)



'In terms of amenities, like now here we have twenty-four hours light, water and all of those social amenities which are lacking in my country [Nigeria], you can catch a bus for five hours, so it's pathetic, so you cannot compare the two, they are incomparable' (Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

One participant went so far as to compare the histories of the UK and his native Romania

'I like the stability, I mean, I'm looking to UK history and even though there were some troubled periods as well, living in Romania and learning about Romanian history, every fifty years something has changed, someone has come and changed everything so yeah that's one of the things' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

Unstable economic conditions such as poor economic prospects or political unrest often act as one of the chief 'push factors' of migration (Lee, 1966; Castles et al., 2014) which can make for potential labour pools for employers (McCollum and Findlay, 2015). In a UK context, this was perhaps best exemplified in 2004 and 2007 when Poland and Romania joined the EU respectively, allowing for free movement between these nations and other EU states (Salt and Olkowski, 2014). With fewer mobility barriers due to a lack of immigration policy, employers and/or work agencies could recruit directly from abroad and disregard hiring locally (Mackenzie and Forde, 2009). Indeed, direct recruitment from abroad is a common strategy used by secondary sectors (Fellini, Ferro and Fullin, 2007). The BIPA (2020b: np) reports that four out of five businesses in the BIMPS report having to recruit workers from abroad due to a 'national shortage of UK workers with the skills required to fill butchery roles'. This recruitment relationship fits within the narrative that there is a 'need' for migrant workers (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). As a result, participants described several methods that employers used to advertise jobs abroad. One strategy was overseas visits to colleges/universities by companies to find potential recruits. This method was common for recruiting inspectors/veterinarians in particular

'I was in Poland, and I think [the company] was at my school, I was on the college, veterinary college, technician veterinary school so [they] every year send some office worker to our school to [have] a meeting to show us what the life will be like in the UK' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

'When I was a student, I remember they came at our university with flyers, giving to students and advertising and putting the flyers on the labels, on the walls for it for the university so everybody could see it, so yeah most people they knew about this company' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

As a specialist role, it makes sense that employers would target universities to acquire those with the required veterinary qualifications and knowledge. Specific targeting of migrant labour pools is a common strategy for work where there are difficulties in recruiting UK workers (Cangiano and Walsh, 2014). This may be the most 'straightforward' way to fill vacancies, as migrant labour pools often have a large number of recruitable workers (Bach, 2007). Online recruitment is another relatively new yet common method of making contact with potential employees (Brandão et al., 2019). Indeed, some participants voiced how they found the vacancies online

'I see the information on Facebook about that we need a veterinary technician' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'I got the job when I was in my country, so I found it online and I applied and I was given the opportunity to come and work here' (Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

One participant, who was in the unique position of marketing the adverts for meat inspectors in Scotland, confirmed that online recruitment strategies were one of the main avenues for recruitment of OV's in particular

'Trying to reach more people via more forums so we kind of invested to have our ad published in all the vet publications we could find and Twitter and LinkedIn and Facebook and everywhere else we could actually find so

yeah advertising and marketing basically' (Alexandra, Romanian, Head Vet)

Utilizing online resources is one of the most prevalent methods of international recruitment offering a cheaper and more practical way of advertising job roles across borders (Waxin and Brewster, 2020). Social media is an especially effective tool in online recruitment (Broughton et al., 2013). These methods were often aimed at specific labour pools, particularly those with veterinary training. Moving to the UK not only offered an opportunity to work but also allowed these vets to continue practising their chosen profession rather than taking another unrelated role

'It's just something that makes it a good opportunity and makes it easy, that I like, I thought I would like that it still could get me on my field of work, I wouldn't be working as a waitress, I'm still on the vet world' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

Additionally, many of the migrant participants, like their British counterparts, had early childhood experiences connected to meat which enabled a smoother transition into the meat sector

'My family is having a farm, a sheep farm, I like to go there even though I can't see myself [there] one hundred per cent of the time' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'In Spain my old relatives they used to live in small villages, so they used to do the killing of the pigs themselves, so I'm used to see it, I was used to see that, the killing of the birds in the farm' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

However, many migrants had no experience working within the meat sector

'I worked for a company, a big international company, AC Nelson, that conveys the market research...I am a photographer...a 'Food Technologist' so a person who is responsible for checking the quality of foods in the kitchen...I also used to do sewing, I was a tailor, and I also had an online clothes business' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

'My goal was actually studying IT, software, that's what I used to specialised and, one thing to another and now I'm doing this' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'I was a restaurant manager...then I worked in Canada for a little bit as like a manager's assistant and housekeeping supervisor, mostly in the hospitality industry' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

In conjunction with unstable conditions at home, stable working/living conditions and (relatively) higher wages can act as strong 'pull factors' to migrate (Castles et al., 2014). This may be in the form of better work opportunities, a higher standard of living and so on. Both British and migrant participants alluded to as much in their comments

'They've come here with the intention to make money, that's their sole intention really, so whatever hours they get, as long as they are getting paid for it and they're probably thinking 'this is more than I'd be getting paid back home anyway' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'Everything is cheaper if you work here, you can buy anything that you want, you can save your money for a holiday and everything, so I really like that life and I decided to live here' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

Whilst these roles may not provide prestige or status, these generally are not reasons migrants take such work, rather they allow the fulfilment of the role of 'wage earner' (McArdle, 2019). Garip (2012) identifies this type of migrant as the 'income maximiser', that is, one whose principal purpose is to earn as much financial income as possible. Nonetheless, workers may use strategies to address these lower statuses, such as keeping in mind the temporality of the role

'I know I'm not going to do this forever, I know this was an opportunity to leave my country and not to spend too much money, to come straight with a job' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

As has been widely documented, the dual frame of reference allows migrants to compare current circumstances to those back home (Reese, 2001; Könönen, 2019). If they come out favourably, there may be a strong incentive to accept these new conditions

'I was asking one of the Polish guys 'If you were doing this job in your country how much would you be getting paid for it?' probably like a fraction of the wage, about three, four-pound an hour, here they get paid ten-pound, eleven pound an hour or so' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'The pay was acceptable for a short while, it's acceptable in comparison to what I was getting here [Spain] which was nothing...they offer low salaries but its relative, it's high for poor countries like Spain, east Europe countries blah blah blah, so it's acceptable for us' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

It has been argued that entry-level jobs can act as 'steppingstones' to better-paid work through the acquisition of skills and experience and then moving onto better positions (Jovanovic and Nyarko, 1997) but this hypothesis has been criticised for its real-life applications (Shildrick et al., 2012). Indeed, British participant Abdul seemed to believe the idea of progression in the BIMPS was unlikely

'Not just the migrants, even the English guys, I don't think they would think to themselves 'Oh yeah, one day I'm going to become a...' I guess people don't have that aspiration of becoming a 'Oh I'm going to become the manager of a slaughterhouse' like, it's just work for them, it's like someone working in Morrison's or Tesco, working on the till' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

However, contrary to this sentiment, many migrant participants largely supported the idea of progression, which acted as a pull factor. Many believed that starting in the

BIMPS, often at the lower-level occupations, was a potential way to advance to better jobs

‘A lot of us see it as the beginning of a career and quite a few people actually progress into new roles, some rather quickly, some take a bit longer maybe but there is a career progression opportunity’ (Alexandra, Head Vet)

‘The possibility to promote, in my first job in a few months I already promoted to Official Veterinarian and then in a year and a half I applied for this job, so the way I see it as long as I can grow and improve in my career then I am happy to stay’ (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

‘I recently got promoted to the senior and already having a team of three people because if they see that you have potential, they will promote you for it there is also this career progression that I can see that kind of keeps me there cause I could achieve a lot over there’ (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

It would seem there were opposing views on the idea of progression between the UK and migrant workers. As Geddes and Scott (2010) suggest, what is seen as ‘dead end’ for a UK worker may be seen as a ‘steppingstone’ for migrants. Migrants may be willing to accept low-status, low-paid conditions in the short term but they will not necessarily accept these conditions for long. As Alberti (2014) notes, workers may take up such work to gather skills and experience to reinvest in better jobs down the line. However, it must be noted that these sentiments were generally found more in specialist ‘non-routine’ roles (Autor et al. 2003) such as veterinary or administrative jobs, rather than those on the shopfloor where such opportunities for professional development and progression were harder to obtain.

It should be noted that not all the motivations to migrate were fuelled purely by economic reasons. Kierans (2023) notes how migration to the UK is usually due to one of four reasons, work, study, family, or asylum/resettlement. However, for some, their motivation was, at least partially, due to a fifth reason; an affection for the UK

'I think I was thinking about moving to the UK anyway because I've always been in love with the country...I've always wanted to live in London and whenever you are in Poland and you watch all the movies in London and stuff and then you have that thing, that, how to say you have the picture in your mind 'ah' of living in UK looks like' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

'I love the country, I love the people, and I decided to move...the culture of the people, I like the politeness of the British' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

Like UK participant Andrew, the taking of these 'lower jobs' may act as an enabler to achieve a greater goal, in this case, moving to the UK (Piore, 1986). In this way, these migrants fill the loosely defined role of 'expatriate', who 'fills the gap between the tourist, on the one hand, and the semi-permanent or permanent immigrant on the other' (Cohen, 1977: 6, cited by Cranston, 2017: 2). Uriely (2001) identifies this as 'working tourism' where the motivation to move may be to live a 'transnational lifestyle' and lower end work is used as a means to an end.

### *Family*

Whilst the earning of higher wages, progression and/or expatriatism may directly benefit individuals, the 'new economics of labour migration' posits that often the family functions as a main motivator to migrate (Czaika and Reinprecht, 2022). In 2018, this was the third most popular reason to migrate to the UK (Kierans, 2023). Migrating for the benefit of their families was also a reason given by some of the UK participants

'[In Poland] He's building his own house and they're going to do the electrics now and the water and the plan is sooner or later at some point in their life they're going to move back there and live there for the rest of their life' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'He came over to the UK [from Poland] to pay for his daughter's education to become a doctor' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Money sent back home to families in the form of remittances can act as a strong incentive to migrate and take advantage of higher wages elsewhere (Bakker, 2014). It also lends support as to why migrants may accept more secondary sector work as it is viewed as a temporary investment in their longer-term future back home (Piore, 1986; Alberti, 2014). However, one participant had the intention of creating his long-term future in the UK by relocating his family there

'I am a family man...you have a future for your children, is better, with good future for my children, it's better for them here than in my country, totally different...within six months I work then I'll be able to bring them down'  
(Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

Whilst Kamaru acted as the 'pioneer', for some, family members or friends had already paved the way, thus they filled the role of 'followers' and joined them in their chosen destination (Castles et al., 2014). Sometimes, the pioneering family members or friends were already working in the BIMPS, which provided an easy method of entering the sector, not dissimilar to the informal social networks (Watt, 2003; MacDonald et al. 2005) used by UK workers. It was noteworthy that this method was used by migrants in a wide range of different jobs

'I came to UK for family reasons, my family was moving here so I was here as well and just started straight away in the factory that I work in now...[A friend] said 'this bacon factory is recruiting people' and said 'if you want to you can just come here, you sign with agency and you can start away' and that was it' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'A friend actually she was going to work [in the Falklands] and she said, 'Oh you want to come and work?' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'I knew a lot of people that was in the UK, not only in the meat industry but also they were in small practice in big animal practice, and they were doing quite well, the conditions were quite good so I wanted to give it a try, usually my plan was just to come for a year but it's on for three now almost' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)



'I knew a guy who was from Australia he ended up in the Falkland Islands...so he was actually the one that contacted me and said 'Hey, are you interested in coming down here to work?' and I didn't even know where the Falkland Islands was at that time, so I had to ask Google 'where is the Falkland Islands?' and I said 'well, why not?' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

These familial/friendship linkages help create migrant social networks, which play a key role in influencing migration patterns (Boyd, 1989; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). The social capital afforded by being within a migrant network helps ease the social, economic, and emotional costs of migrating alone (Light et al., 1989). As Massey (1990) elaborates, this then 'feeds' the network by incorporating new members which reduces the risk further for subsequent migrants as the network expands. Employers can take advantage of this by making already-employed workers aware of job vacancies and allowing this information to then flow through these networks (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). This strategy can produce 'self-sustaining labour' as repeated cycles of new migrant workers arrive (Rodriguez, 2004) and helps employers keep recruitment costs down (Cangiano and Walsh, 2014). Some participants commented on this strategy

'I'm planning towards that, actually, the company wanted me to bring them along but I was not prepared for then, because I am the one to sponsor them, in terms of the financial aspect of it, so the company is assisting in getting the visa and everything done for them but I will pay the bill...I still need to work to get some money in my account then get a very comfortable accommodation for them before bringing them down' (Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

'We've had quite a number of people coming through to us through recommendations through their friends who already work for us, so they keep bringing their friends and family, acquaintances from down south or from their home country' (Alexandra, Romanian, Heat Vet)

Indeed, there was evidence to suggest that migrants would be more willing to encourage their families to join the meat sector than their UK colleagues, especially

regarding their children. As UK workers asserted, they were unlikely to recommend meat work to their children and reproduce similar career identities (Boyle, 2023)

‘It’s because I think the industry is far too challenging and hard on every aspect of your life that personally, I hope that what I do in my working everyday life I get to achieve enough so [my son] doesn’t have to do what I have to do’ (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

‘I’d want them to experience it to some extent, especially to have that understanding of where their meat comes from but maybe not work in the industry itself’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

‘If I did have a child, no... it’s a tough hard job, but I’m still glad now that I did it because, yeah nothing is ever going to be that hard again no matter what other job I’ve done it’s not been as physically gruelling as that and its, yeah so I’m pleased I did it but not for my kids, or even my nieces and nephews, it’s that whole thing of wanting more for your kids than you had for yourself isn’t it?’ (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

However, migrants were more likely to recommend working in the BIMPS to their children, although this sentiment was found more in MHIs and OVs

‘You do have to like it to stay there but I don’t see any problems why my children would go on the meat industry’ (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

‘If my son or my children want to work in an abattoir or meat sector, I don’t think it’s going to be strange...I can encourage them, this is one thing I love doing too [?] I will support them and I am very sure they would be happy to work in the meat sector’ (Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

Another instance of employers trying to tap into the migrant network was the distribution of ‘refer a friend’ leaflets within workplaces, as one participant demonstrated in Image 1

**GRAB A GRAND** £

# REFER A FRIEND

**RECEIVE £750 OR £1,250**

For **JUNE & JULY ONLY** we are increasing the rates when rewarding employees for referring friends / family members to come and work for Dunbia

**HOW TO GET INVOLVED:**

- Submit completed 'Refer a Friend Form'
- New applicant to complete a 'Job Application Form'
- Incentive payments in 3 installments will be paid to the Dunbia employee referring a friend, once the new starter has completed a satisfactory 1, 3 and 6 month period.
- 'Refer a Friend Form' available from HR Department

\* Unskilled roles include General / Senior Operatives  
\*\* Skilled roles include Grade 1 slaughterers/butchers (primary), Team/Room Leaders (retail)  
Gross payment subject to normal deductions for PAYE & NI

MONTH	1	3	6	TOTAL
Referral 1	£250	£250	£250	£750
Referral 2	£250	£250	£250	£750
Referral 3	£250	£250	£250	£750
Referral Bonus	N/A	N/A	£1,000	£1,000
For 3 people who remain for 6 months Awarded when the 3rd person meets the 6 months point				
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>£3,250</b>

MONTH	1	3	6	TOTAL
Referral 1	£250	£500	£500	£1,250
Referral 2	£250	£500	£500	£1,250
Referral 3	£250	£500	£500	£1,250
Referral Bonus	N/A	N/A	£1,000	£1,000
For 3 people who remain for 6 months Awarded when the 3rd person meets the 6 months point				
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>£4,750</b>

Image 1: 'Refer a Friend' Leaflet

As the participant elaborated

'The situation is that the current workers are encouraged by the company to recommend and bring in new workers and they are simply given financial incentive for that' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

Word-of-mouth recruitment strategies are powerful, as family and friends have a high 'source credibility' which affects the trustworthiness and believability of the information provided (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Of course, this tactic rests on the assumption that workers will indeed allow the vacancies to enter and flow through the network, which was often not the case with the BIMPS workers. This attitude was found in many different job roles

'For me and my husband our reactions to the leaflets that the company introduced to recommend your friends, our response was *'we like our friends'* [and therefore will not be referring them]' (Zosia, Machine Operator)

'I will never recommend this place for anyone' (Agnieszka, Polish, Handpicker)

'I say to them 'avoid [company name]' ...I try to provide them with contacts 'this is another company that you can work with, that have better conditions and I have worked with them, and they are nice people, management are quite supportive blah blah blah' and provide them with not only, not what to do but what to do instead' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

Interestingly, this was often the case with UK workers also, implying being a UK worker did not necessarily offer much protection from some of the worst aspects the BIMPS had to offer

'I would say everything possible to recommend not doing it' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'If they're desperate and need a job, go for it, you know what I mean? But like (my partner), she's been there before and I wouldn't, she wouldn't go back, but if she did, I wouldn't really want her to go back' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

'Don't do it! It's not worth the hassle and the wear and tear on your body and stuff' (Gordon, British, Boner)

Contrary to what might be expected, negative word-of-mouth has been shown to have an insignificant effect on influencing the job choices of others (Collins and Stevens, 2002; Jaidi, et al., 2011). This may help explain why companies continue to use such methods as there is a low risk of dissuading potential employees; simply making them aware a job is on offer is enough. Nonetheless, the reasons for not recommending the work were significant and varied. Some participants (both British and migrant) were

not entirely satisfied with how jobs were described. Questions about the accuracy of the work on offer were raised by some

‘This annoyed me because it was through an agency and they sort of described it as a chicken factory and because I'd worked in a bacon factory before I thought it was just going to be like ‘oh chicken breasts and chicken nuggets and packing them and stuff like that’ but it was only until I got the job that I found out it was an abattoir, so lack of communication again...they definitely sugar-coated it, for sure’ (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

‘In Romania when you hear this position ‘meat inspector’ you think you are going to be in a very good position, which it is somehow, but it's not how people think...cause we don't know exactly how it is...we can't really talk with people and say ‘oh how is the job itself?’ they present it in a way which sounds very good and high level, which somehow is true, I am not saying they are lying or something but they are just, like you've got their product and they're trying to sell it, I think they've got a very good marketing strategy’ (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

In this sense, employers may be ‘encoding’ the image of their jobs in certain ways with the expectation that potential applicants will ‘decode’ it in the desired manner (Hall et al., 2013). As has been found elsewhere (McAreavey et al., 2023), a misrepresentation of work produces significant difficulties in the BIMPS recruitment relationship; with the realities of the work differing significantly from the expectations of new employees. In the case of Andrew, the recruitment agency may have tried to symbolically redefine the chicken abattoir as a ‘factory’. It was noted at Highland Sheep that signs around the facility also used the word ‘factory’ rather than ‘sheep abattoir’ or ‘slaughterhouse’. As Thompson (1991: 412) bluntly puts it ‘death work by almost any other name does not sound quite as harsh’. If an individual is not a part of the migrant network, this limits their ability to verify the authenticity of a job role (Gill and Bialski, 2011). At the same time, migrants may have heightened expectations of what the receiving nation has to offer. The title of ‘meat inspector’ may evoke certain expectations of what the job entails; which if not met produce disappointment and maladjustment (Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Bhugra and Ayonrinde, 2018).

## *Barriers*

As well as these motivations, participants also spoke of barriers which prevented them from taking work elsewhere. The first, and possibly most obvious, was language barriers. The majority, if not all, 'higher' jobs in the UK require competent levels of English to perform (Iredale, 2001). In addition, many 'lower' jobs, especially those which require communication with customers/clients need good English skills (Cambridge English, 2016). The BIMPS, due to its largely manual-based tasks coupled with a lack of interaction with customers, is one of the few industries that does not require a high level of English (EHRC, 2010; Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Many of the participants voiced how English proficiency affected occupational opportunities and work experience

'For the immigrants coming in here sometimes this is the only job that they can actually do that doesn't require them speaking English' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

'It's really easy to get the job, like incredibly easy, you don't have to have any skills, you don't even have to speak English that well to get a job in a bacon factory' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'This factory get me even though I cannot speak good English, they get every person like Romania, Latvia, Russia, even they not speak English' (Agnieszka, Polish, Handpicker)

In this sense, those with low levels of English can 'survive' in that they can do their task, but not much else (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). Even in the more skilled jobs, such as meat inspection, a high level of English was not necessarily needed

'In inspection, you don't need to speak fluently English, you must know the name of pathology. We have a procedure if I find TB, I scream 'TB!' and everybody know what we made, we have a MOC, that is a procedure, that's universal' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'If you're working just on the line as meat inspector you don't really need the language you just need to know how to use a knife' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

In one case, an employee reported how their employer would assist potential employees to get around any language barriers at the recruitment stage

'When we applied we had to do these tests, these English and Maths tests and they were just so easy, it's ridiculous, it's like what is two plus fifteen or something like that and then this one guy who I applied with on the day, he couldn't speak English but the person who was running the recruitment was helping him get the answers right so he got the job anyway regardless of whether he could speak English well or not' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

Because turnover is often high at BIMPS facilities (Lloyd and James, 2008; Caroli et al., 2010) it may be the case that it is easier and/or more cost-effective to constantly hire new migrants rather than address issues of retainment. Like Striffler's (2002) account, job applicants seemed to be processed in terms of quantity, not quality. Because firms often want a flexible workforce, they may resort to a 'soft' model of human resource management, where efforts and leniencies are made which benefit both the employer and employee (Geary, 1992). Another issue which several migrants noted was a lack of Foreign Qualification Recognition (FQR) (Ozkan, 2018). Obtaining correct levels of recognition for equivalent qualifications can be a barrier for even highly skilled migrant workers (Hawthorne, 2015), which partially explains why migrants often take work for which they are overqualified (Chiswick and Miller, 2008). This was especially prominent with the MHIs and OVs

'I was try finding something on my degree but was really hard because in England if I want to work like a technician vet I need to be registered like a veterinary nurse or something like that, this is the extra cost for me, and my English was not enough good to pass the exams' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

'In the UK if you want to work as a vet you have to validate your degree, I mean they do the Royal College for Veterinary Surgeons, they do recognise

degrees from other places but it's mainly Europe, I think Canada, US, more first world countries so from South America, or Latin America they don't recognise my degree, that's why I couldn't come and just work as a vet' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

To validate non-recognised qualifications, the Royal College for Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS, 2021) charge a £2,500 examination fee, keeping migrants financially excluded from practising in a clinic-based setting (Datta, 2012). Similar to FQR, a lack of what might be termed 'foreign experience recognition', adds an extra hurdle for migrant veterinarians

'Everyone was asking for UK experience, so it doesn't matter if you have experience as a vet, which I only did in sales in fairness, but I did have some experience from the uni but they wanted specifically UK experience and it was usually minimum six months,' (Alexandra, Romanian, Head Vet)

Where practising veterinary care, so important was having UK experience finding work even on a voluntary basis proved impossible

'I was looking to volunteer, I was looking to do all sorts, but nobody even wanted to accept me as a volunteer... so I was willing to gain that experience in my own time myself but even that proved impossible' (Alexandria, Romanian, Head Vet)

These issues, whether in isolation or combination, reduce the labour market power of migrants, which can act as another incentive for employers to hire them (Hopkins, 2017). Because of fewer opportunities, migrants may be more fearful of losing their jobs and therefore accept poorer quality work due to a lack of viable alternatives (Judge, 2018). Employers have been found to limit the mobility of workers themselves (Fellini et al., 2007) as was found in this study

'When you sign the contract with this company you sign it for one year and if you leave before one year you have to pay £950, of course, nobody wants



that, so if you want to quit you want so you get one year working' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

Businesses and recruitment agencies can act as intermediaries which may offer 'package deals' to migrants in the form of travel arrangements, loans etc. (van den Broek et al., 2015). However, in return for this, migrants may become financially obligated to stay with the company for a set period (Hammer and Adham, 2022). Interestingly, one participant did not mention this financial obligation but felt he was more morally obligated to stay with his company following all the assistance they provided

'The company that I work with do all the visa processing, so they really tried, they pay for all the visa processing, all this stuff, even these payments I made in my country, like some tests I did, COVID tests, TB tests, they refunded me back when I got here, it's a very easy journey because it was done by the company that was based here...so if I did not show appreciation to them then I am not a good person so the way I can show appreciation is to show I am committed' (Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

This attitude was unique in this study. Whilst several participants reported high levels of 'career commitment' (commitment to a career in the meat sector), only this one example demonstrated a high 'organisational commitment', that is, commitment to a specific organisation (Cohen, 2003). Why Kamaru demonstrated such commitment when few others did is unclear. Like himself, many other participants reported having assistance with visas, transport and so on yet for several reasons (which will be discussed in the following chapters) had little interest in staying with their specific organisation.

#### **4.4. Summary**

The journeys to the BIMPS are affected by a combination of wider social influences, personal motivations and, perhaps most important of all, the recruitment relationship, which is strained at best and dysfunctional at worst. For UK workers, this relationship was almost non-existent. Employers made little to no effort to contact the local UK workers. As a result, these workers generally took it upon themselves to enter the

sector and used several methods for doing so, with the most common route being the 'Saturday lad' role. Most UK workers had some prior link to farming/meat production before joining the meat sector, which influenced their decisions to join. This was partly due to having a familiarity with the work activities that are present within the BIMPS such as slaughtering, butchering and so on. Quite often the motivation was because it was simply a method of earning money (Willis, 1977). However, some joined due to a passion for the production of meat.

The recruitment relationship between migrants and the BIMPS was more complex. Employers often took the position that there was/is a 'need' for migrants (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010) coupled with a rhetoric of UK workers being lazy (Tannock, 2015). Interestingly, participants often agreed with this sentiment themselves. At the same time widespread discourses of migrants being hardworking, which participants agreed with, made hiring migrants favourable over UK workers. Migrants, as participants in this study confirmed, can be paid less, and make for a flexible workforce which can be used and disposed of as and when necessary. The presence of several structural barriers, especially language issues, limits migrants' labour market power, making them more dependent on lower-quality roles. Employers can enact their own barriers such as financial penalties which lock workers into their jobs. To recruit migrants, an arsenal of methods was used to disseminate job advertisements including online recruitment, the use of recruitment agencies, word of mouth via migrant networks and in-person recruitment from within the host nation. However, migrants did have their own motivations for joining such as gaining higher wages in relation to their own nation, opportunities for progression and in some cases the complete relocation to the UK to join family members or for a new way of life. What was also noteworthy was that most of these issues affected migrants across the job spectrum, from more routine manual work (Machine Operators, Hand Pickers etc.) to non-routine cognitive work (Technicians, OVs etc.).

## **Chapter 5: Employee Experiences Working in the BIMPS**

'You're walking into a place, covered in blood, covered in excrement, I mean, is what it is, I mean what can you expect from a place like that?'

(Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

### **5.1. The Inside of an Abattoir**

The kill floor of Highland Sheep is a long, corridor-like, industrialised room. Everything is made of metal or concrete, except the glass for the tiny windows near the end of the process. A single, mechanised line of hooks with sheep carcasses attached flows down the centre and does not stop for almost anything. All around there is a buzz of activity. Everywhere there are workers, mostly men, labouring away at their single allocated task. Whether it be cutting, skinning, cleaning, inspecting or even killing, the formula is the same; wait for the sheep, carry out the task, repeat. It is seemingly never-ending, with the odd break here and there between loads. During this period, the room is vacated for a quick but efficient rinse down before the next wave of sheep arrives. The air is thick with moisture, which seemed to be a mixture of blood and sweat evaporating in the air. Our COVID-19 facemasks shield our noses from the smell. Alongside this, the noise is deafening; heavy machinery is all around us, making conversation near impossible. Gesturing takes over as the main form of communication. Three colours make up this scene, red, white, and grey. The red from the blood is just about everywhere, the floor, the walls and, of course, the workers. Pockets of their white uniforms which have avoided the spillage can be noticed here and there. These become more apparent further down the line where the work becomes cleaner. The concrete and metal make up the remaining grey.

This is the memory I have of when I first entered the working area of the sheep abattoir, the 'nameless void' as Vialles (1994: 44) calls it. Certainly, it felt as if I was passing through a 'portal' into a different world, one with no familiar points of reference (Vaught and Smith, 1980). As far as I could tell, this was a normal, standard day like any other, my guide did not hint at anything to the contrary. Although I was there for only one day (as well as the Chickensmiths trip), the complexity of the average workday in an abattoir was plain to see. In this chapter, I will attempt to answer the question, how do

employees experience working in the BIMPS? Both the day-to-day and longer-term experiences will be included. Day-to-day wise, details of the work times and places, typical work tasks and the role of health and safety will be provided. More long-term experiences such as the physical and mental well-being of workers as well as the effects on life outside work will be discussed. This chapter will draw on the data and the relevant literature to create a thorough account of the experiences of workers in the BIMPS. Meat work is carried out mostly by men but a not insignificant number of women (approximately 36%), a variety of British (38%) and non-UK workers (62%) and a range of age groups (BMPA, 2020b; MBW, 2021). Meat work is diverse, drawing on many different sets of skills. However, the one aspect that ties everyone together is the overall mission of the meat sector, to transform live animals into edible products fit for human consumption I.e., food.

## **5.2. Working Times**

One of the fundamental organising principles used in contemporary Western society is time. The modern sociotemporal order, despite being based largely on convention, is so strong that it is often taken as 'a given, inevitable and unalterable' (Zerubavel, 1981: 42). In industrial societies, where time is bought by employers, time is separated into units; with working time separated from leisure time (Adam, 1990). As one participant concluded

'Long hours, night shifts, weekends sometimes so this all together are part of the industry which is breaking the people' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

In alignment with this statement, workers seemed generally dissatisfied with several aspects of their working hours, such as the starting times. Because of the large degree of specialisation (Smith, 2010) in meat work, it requires that almost every role type be on-site at the same time, thus early starts were a near-universal experience for workers across the job spectrum

'Working in a slaughterhouse, one of the worst things from my point of view was the hours...most of the times you can go to a slaughterhouse when they are starting at five' (Paco, Spanish, MHI)

'If you're starting at quarter to seven in the morning, you're leaving the house at five, quarter to five and especially Christmas time when you're finishing four, five o'clock, I mean you're leaving in the dark, coming back in the dark, you don't even see the sunlight' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'Didn't like the early mornings... started at 4 in the morning and finished about 1 o'clock, so the early mornings were a bit of a hassle' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

Those who work in rural areas are more likely to work non-traditional hours than their urban counterparts (Saenz, 2009). At Highland Sheep, the facility began operations at 5:30 a.m. By the time I arrived for my visit at 7:00 a.m., work was well underway. This was a paradox to the outside world. The rural English and Scottish villages I drove through were tranquil, most of the inhabitants presumably still asleep. However, from 5:30 a.m. onwards the abattoir was in full swing, with, I estimated, 50+ employees labouring away at all stages of the production line. Early starts are likely to be during darker times, as was also the case on my visit to Highland Sheep. Thus, meat work often fits in the night-to-day shift pattern. Work, safety, and health are all optimised when working hours remain within the forward day-to-night cycle, rather than night-to-day (Barling et al., 2016). Indeed, early starts have been shown to have adverse effects on meat workers specifically (Hutz et al., 2013). Furthermore, for some, the reason to get up early added to this difficulty

'It's hard waking up half past four, I don't have a problem with it if I'm going to a farm if I'm going to see some animals working as a vet, but waking up half past four, or half past five, every day, five days a week to go be in this slaughterhouse... it's just a tiring job and it's not something that, it's hard to think of someone who can be passionate about this' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

Harmonious (as opposed to obsessive) passion for work or an activity generally promotes well-being and engagement with the task at hand (Phillipe et al., 2010). When passion acts as a motivator, individuals are often willing to engage in challenges to achieve their goals (Fredericks et al., 2010). Early starts may be seen as one such challenge, which, in this case, is made more difficult due to a lack of passion for the

work. A lack of passion will often lower motivation for work but is also less likely to contribute to workers' well-being (Phillipe et al., 2010; Pradhan et al., 2017). In addition to the early starts, it may be the case that work takes place through the night or on weekends. As one participant succinctly summarised

'Basically, the factory goes on for twenty-fours' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

Night/shift work has also been shown to have several negative effects on workers largely due to disruption in the circadian rhythm, with social life, sleep, performance at work and several other factors being disturbed due to out-of-the-ordinary work times (Harrington, 2001). Additionally, the amount of work time *in total* can vary for BIMPS workers. Again, this seemed to affect almost all workers regardless of ethnicity or occupation

'I am doing an average of extra work of twenty-thirty hours per week...of my current duty as a manager' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'I was working there for ten years doing twenty-hour shifts and all sorts of nightmarish, I mean starting at one in the morning and finishing at nine at night wasn't uncommon for me' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'In my contract I have thirty-seven hours, but we have a rota always at Friday at night, for the Monday, that you know, and I see my rota okay I have another five days, because the Kepak and other big plants working many hours, sometimes more like twelve hours per day' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'You start at six o'clock every morning...you're working till five o'clock and then in my case, I was also in the cleaning team so from five o'clock you're cleaning till eight o'clock so you can see it's some pretty long days' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

In the UK, between the years 1992-2019, the average amount of hours worked across all sectors ranged from 37.2 to 38.1 hours per week. This dropped slightly during 2020-21 to 35.3 hours per week, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (ONS, 2023). However, as of July 2022, agricultural workers work on average 41.4 hours per week, an average of 6.2 extra hours. Like early starts and night shifts, working long hours can have adverse effects such as exhaustion, stress and an impediment on people's ability to self-care (Kamarade et al., 2019). Despite the dissatisfaction from workers and potential negative effects, some workers preferred the working schedules offered by the BIMPS

'It's quite hard hours, some days I'm in at five o'clock but then you can be leaving at two o'clock, which suits my lifestyle really well, I like getting up early and it's nice to have your afternoons to do something, it's Monday to Friday working so you get weekends off which is quite nice as well' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'[If I were to get another job] the hours might be different, I work half-past five till two o'clock, so I've got the rest of the day by the time I get home, I get home at quarter past two and I've got the rest of the day' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

At least for some, the benefit of finishing early outweighs the cost of the early start times (Molstad, 1986). It may have been that these workers had a more 'morning type' personality (Harrington, 2001). Furthermore, Laura, in particular, seemed passionate about her work having studied agriculture and animal science at university, suggesting for her these challenges might not be as difficult for those with less passion (Fredericks et al., 2010). One participant was in the unique position of being contracted by a firm specialising in halal slaughter, which also gave him some desired flexibility which was denied to workers hired directly

'I prefer to take Fridays off, I mean for me four days, I like working four days it's enough for me, Monday to Thursday and my boss will go in on a Friday, I mean you've always got that flexibility' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

However, many of the MHIs and OV's in this thesis were also hired by an outside firm but none mentioned flexibility as a benefit of their working arrangements, suggesting a difference in work models between businesses and/or Slaughters and inspectors/vets.

### **5.3. Spatial Aspects**

Both Highland Sheep and Chickensmiths were in rural areas. Highland Sheep was located outside a tiny Scottish village in an isolated area of the countryside. Chickensmiths meanwhile was located on the outskirts of a small English town as part of an industrial estate. Both facilities were hidden from the everyday gaze of the general public. Unless a purposeful journey to these facilities was needed, there appeared to be no other reason to visit these areas. By locating BIMPS facilities in distant locations, workers may have to travel long distances to report to work

'I had to drive, sometimes I have to drive one hour to drive to the slaughterhouse' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

'After few months I ask my company to change my location because was around the forty-five miles per one way so was the very very long distance' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

The 'locational calculus' of a workplace will largely depend on its ability to recruit the workforce. Thus, there are two options in relation to recruitment, locate the workplace near the workforce, or get the workforce to travel to the workplace (Walker, 2002). In the case of BIMPS work, the strategy is usually the latter. As Hanson (2002) notes, for the individual, travel time is measured by their wage rate; foregoing a certain number of minutes (or indeed hours) of wage earning to travel and then assessing whether this is worth the cost/benefit to the worker. However, the participants in this study were less concerned with the financial cost of travelling and more preoccupied with the extra energy required



'How they treat workers sometimes to travel hundreds of kilometres to do inspections, it's ridiculous, you have to travel too many kilometres and people get tired easily' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

'The work isn't tiring, it's the driving that makes you tired, yeah sometimes when you're just sitting there driving back that's when your eyes start shutting on you... especially when you're just driving down the motorway it's sometimes hard to keep concentration especially when you're doing it day in day out' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'Sometimes when I working sixty, sixty-two hours per week I am tired and it's a dangerous driving but I driving because I don't have a choice and then next point if I am having some accident what will be happen with my family and me?' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

The tiredness described above is characteristic of driving fatigue (May, 2011). It was noteworthy that longer distances to work were prevalent for staff hired through outside firms. These workers were far more likely to be told where to work by their firm rather than decide for themselves. However, directly hired staff did not complain of such problems, and in some cases, only had to travel minute distances

'[If I were to get another job] I live like round the corner it takes us like five minutes to get there, I might have to get another job where I have to get a bus, loads of buses and stuff like that' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

Like time, short distances to work appeared to outweigh any potential benefits of working elsewhere in this example (Molstad, 1986). Whilst the majority of the participants travelled from urban areas, a small number of participants did live local to their workplace. Indeed, hiring the local unemployed was traditionally the principal form of recruitment in European agricultural work (Rye and Scott, 2018). A combination of locals moving away for 'better' work, an increase in the use of international labour pools and locals being framed as bad workers means this now occurs far less (Tannock, 2015) but as Dave demonstrates, is not completely absent.

### 5.3.1. The Workplace

As well as the location, the actual working environments themselves were of significance, being highly unique in many ways. From the two visits, it would be forgivable to mistake these facilities for any other industrial workplace. From the outside, they could have produced anything (there was a barn-like building at Highland Sheep that might have been a small giveaway). Signs were referring to the abattoir as a 'factory', implying connotations of 'manufacturing' (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Whilst this may have been simply an industry term, it is not uncommon for work related to death to modify certain language to symbolically redefine it (Thompson, 1991). Like Pachirat's (2011: 23) first impression of a US slaughterhouse, these facilities presented 'only the generic face of mass production'. At Chickensmiths, visitors first passed through a set of office spaces such as a small waiting room, a working area with desks, computers, office chairs etc. and a conference room. Entering through this area felt like the transition between two worlds, a buffer zone. Whilst we had not quite reached the 'portal' (van Gennep, 2019) to completely step into the 'different world' (Vaught and Smith, 1980), certainly this felt like the lead-up, a sort of metaphorical bridge. Whilst in the everyday office space, I was conscious that, not far away, out-of-the-ordinary work was taking place. This knowledge produced an uneasy feeling which is difficult to express. Normally, there are several physical and psychological layers between the inside of a meat facility and the public, key markers of a 'post-domestic society' (Bulliet, 2005). Physically, these include the distance, the gates, the exterior of the plant and any gatekeepers blocking entry. Physical distancing fosters psychological distancing, where the want of the final product does not necessitate seeing the process. However, to research a meat facility in person is to extract oneself from this societal norm. Clearly, I had not gone through the process of normalization in the sense Ashforth and Kreiner (2002: 217) describe where the 'extraordinary is rendered seemingly ordinary'.

Whilst the outside of the facility was relatively banal, the inside was quite the contrary in terms of what it afforded. 'Affordances' are what is offered, whether good or bad, by an environment to its inhabitants thus creating a link between the two (Gibson, 2014). Sights, dangers, security, food, and water are all affordances, as are smells, a more notable affordance of a BIMPS facility. Indeed, as I got closer to the Chickensmiths plant, the first sense to be stimulated was smell. Thompson (1983: 217) summarised

the smell of his abattoir as 'extremely difficult to describe and yet impossible to forget'. At Chickensmiths, the smell was, in fact, easy to describe, but perhaps difficult to fully appreciate unless experienced; certainly, it was impossible to forget. The only word I can use to describe the smell is chicken; intense, overpowering, perhaps even unstoppable, chicken. In contrast, the smell at Highland Sheep was not as strong, however, this may have been because we had COVID-19 facemasks on, shielding our noses from any present odours. Considering that we were near farm animals, blood, organs and faeces, I would speculate this was the case. The natural adaption/habitation to new smells occurs once there is no longer a need to pay attention to them and can therefore be safely ignored (Cobb, 2020). It occurred to me at Chickensmiths that my unaccustomed senses were likely not equipped to deal with the smell and that hardened workers would fare better having adapted over time. However, the participants, especially those working on the shopfloor, largely went against this idea

'You're going to have to put up with quite a smell' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'Every time my car its smell not good when I park there, when I'm home I smell like a slaughterhouse, so the smelling is one hundred per cent sure' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

'What I don't like is the environment really... the smell sometimes the environment in general... it's not like working in the office, smell of fragrances stuff like this [laughs]... it's dirty, it's smelly, you have to be prepared for it' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

'You've never smelt anything like it, and it would hit you in the face, going in your mouth, it was all over your hands' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

Thus, the smell of meat facilities may be something that is rarely fully accustomed to. In addition, both facilities afforded a cacophony of industrial sounds. At Chickensmiths, with it being a group tour, it was near impossible to hear the tour guide thanks to the surrounding machinery. As a result, I resorted primarily to sight to analyse what was

around me as listening to the guide, despite his best efforts, was almost pointless. It was a similar situation at Highland Sheep. With it being a private visit, the OV and I often relied on gestures such as pointing and nodding to communicate as being heard became all but impossible. The wearing of COVID-19 facemasks also blocked any ability to lipread. Similar findings have been found elsewhere. Thompson (1983) elaborates that non-verbal gestures became the main form of communication due to the noise in his ethnography. Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) found shouting to be the main form of communication in their abattoir. This was partly due to the noise of machines, although they also found this to be the case during quiet times, possibly due to the workers' aggressive nature. Accompanying this, in both facilities, loud music was being played by large speakers installed in certain locations. One participant welcomed this

'There is the music in the background, so it's really helping for me because I don't think about something, I am on the line, I can listen to the music, okay it's noisy because the machines but you can listen to the music...you can sing a song as well with the radio and time is better you are not the boring like usual so I think this is the, one of the something to be not boring'  
(Piotr, Polish, PIA)

So powerful is the presence of music, that it has been reported that workers may imagine their own. Thompson (1983) found workers in his beef plant would either sing to themselves or tap their feet to imaginary music to battle what Roy (1959) calls 'the beast of monotony', providing some 'activation' from the potential mindlessness of such work (Scott, 1966; Ashforth and Fried, 1998).

The smell and sounds of the abattoir could be detected prior to entering the kill floor. After entering, sight took over as the primary sensory stimulus. Almost fifty years ago, Inkson (1977: 2), in a New Zealand meat plant, noted how 'blood spurts and splatters across clinically white garments; animal carcasses, swinging on their hooks, roll slowly past, throats cut, heads dangling grotesquely, while the men sever and slash with their razor-sharp knives'. This extract, whilst dated, perfectly describes the inside of Highland Sheep, albeit with some machines involved. This kind of work generates what Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) refer to as physical taint, which is created by dealing

with matters which are 'disgusting'. In the BIMPS, this taint is generated by what might be regarded as a sub-type of dirty work, that is 'gory work'. Gory work, like 'death work' (Thompson, 1991) is work which involves the handling of internal organs, blood, muscles etc. Certainly, this is one of the defining features of the BIMPS. As a result, a major component of the abattoir, more so than the processing facility, was the affordance of mess, especially near the start of the line. Blood was nearly everywhere. As the line went on, the floor became scattered with sheep's body parts, hooves, skins, heads etc. Each of these by-products had its own waste chute in the wall. Whilst workers would toss them down, some would miss their target and simply land on the floor. This appeared to be a consistent problem, so a job was created to deal with it

'The cleaner stood out as he was not on the line per se but moved around the others picking up bits and pieces, like hooves that had fallen on the floor instead of down the waste chute. He also wore orange so was easier to notice and was smaller than everyone else, and this gave him the seeming manoeuvrability he needed to quickly move around and under carcasses and workers. He was almost like a little goblin scavenging around to see what scraps he could find' (Fieldnotes)

Far from unique, the presence of mess and 'dirt' has been reported in many meat facilities (Pachirat, 2011; Baran et al., 2016; McLoughlin, 2018). Certainly, mess came up regularly in the interviews

'[It's] just annoying really because there was a mess everywhere, you're trying to keep it clean but there's that much going on' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

'Obviously, to pull out the guts, skinning in the Falkland Islands that was absolutely terrible because it was really really hot and it was just nasty, all the sheep was dirty and just, ugh' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

'You're trying to skin sheep, they're covered in shit, literally, you're trying to take the udders off some of them and the abscesses in the udders or anywhere on it are literally putrid' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'What I don't like is the environment itself because we work more in the dirty area, that's the thing that I don't like, I don't like the thing that we get quite dirty, it's quite a messy job... because you are always covered in like you say blood' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

Despite being a defining characteristic of the BIMPS, most workers felt disdain for the surrounding mess. On one occasion, a worker commented on the mess in terms of her expectations and reality

'When I came to do this, I was like 'wow, I am going to work in a slaughterhouse in the UK, this is the real thing, the first world, this must be great, beautiful, wonderful like it must work perfect!' And the first slaughterhouse I got to, it was worse than the slaughterhouse I had been in Chile, like a mess and everything, I was like 'it was worse!' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

The 'dual frame of reference' is used when migrants compare their current situation with that of their home nation. Generally, though, it is applied in the sense that migrants will move to a new country yet, despite potentially poor conditions afforded by the host nation, still consider themselves 'better off' than before (Reese, 2001; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). However, in terms of messiness, the UK was worse than the home nation (Chile), an example of 'unmet expectations' (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). In an extreme example, the mess caused an employee to quit their job

'I ended up just leaving and the reason why I left was because it was just so dirty and so unhygienic, the workers around me were dropping pieces of chicken on the floor and picking it up and putting it in the crate to ship off to supermarkets and McDonald's and stuff like that, so I don't want to be a part of this, I'm done, so I left' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

In contrast to Highland Sheep and the accounts given by participants, Chickensmiths seemed (to me at least), quite clean. The major difference was that the birds arrived already dead, with Chickensmiths only carrying out the processing stage. All the unwanted parts of the chickens, (the head, the feet, the feathers etc.) had all been

removed prior to their arrival and there was very little (if any) blood. Of course, as it was an arranged visit, there was the possibility a special effort was made to keep the facility clean. As part of the audience, I was privy to the usually segregated 'back' of the processing facility (Goffman, 1990b). As the visit was scheduled beforehand, the staff had time to produce their desired impression of the plant. Whilst I felt, at face value, the presentation was sincere, one participant questioned this authenticity when I told him about this visit

'What would be interesting would be to go as a prospective, someone who wants to learn the industry, that would be really interesting because then you'd be able to see what it's like behind closed curtains because for a tourist it's still going to be a closed curtain experience, we used to do tours all the time from schools...but I can tell you now everyone put on a different face around [visitors]' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

The final environmental affordance was the cold. Whilst at Highland Sheep, we did not spend an excessive amount of time in the cooling area, at Chickensmiths many areas of the facility were chilly. This was to keep the recently killed chickens cool and therefore fresh. As meat products are highly perishable (Caroli et al., 2010) keeping them cold was essential. Whilst not unbearable, it was uncomfortable. The cold has been noted in several accounts of meat work (Meara, 1974; Lloyd and James, 2008) as well as by several of the participants

'It's the cold that used to get to me, just standing on a concrete floor, a wet concrete floor, just the cold coming up all the time' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

'Normally you're working at eight degrees so you're working in a fridge in a cutting room, if you're in the railed room it's about nought degrees so you're cold, quite miserable because it's cold, I don't know if anyone actually enjoys the cold' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'If I was in the killing room, it was warm and hot because it was just, in the line they were killing the lambs and they were just going all the way through,

if you go to the cutting room it was minus five, I think, yeah zero to minus five, the temperature so you're moving between the cold and hot' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Working in the cold has been linked to health issues around respiration, circulation and musculoskeletal pain (Makinen and Hassi, 2009). However, there was one exception where disliking the cold was concerned

'We used to work in temperatures -6 to the point where the meat was frozen and we were trying to cut it up, you could cut yourself and you wouldn't bleed, it was that bad, but I loved it' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

#### **5.4. The Tasks**

From the data, there was a large emphasis on the division of labour, a cornerstone of the industrial society (Durkheim, 2013). As one participant succinctly summarised

'Now it's more Fordism; one man, one job' (Barry, British, MHI)

Whilst more complicated than this summary, many jobs in the BIMPS, especially those on the line, do align with Fordist principles, particularly the third principle of tasks being broken down into their constituent parts (Walker and Guest, 1952). Many participants, especially those on the line, commented on how their work was often defined by a singular task. However, this was demonstrated best during the visits

'Inside the working areas were large machines, which in various ways, processed the chicken. Slicing, freezing, cooking, bagging, skinning; there was a machine for everything. Many of the workers engaged in these machines had seemingly monotonous tasks, often involving repetitive motions such as continuously unloading a box of chicken pieces into a machine' (Chickensmiths Fieldnotes)

Whilst line work is already divided (ibid), these jobs were broken down further into subtasks. As an instance, the bagging of the chicken was divided into three smaller tasks. The first man would pick up the bags and pass them to the second man, who



would then fill the bag with chicken and pass it to the third man who would seal it and place it on the conveyor belt to be taken away. Thus, the baggers were reduced to 'the passer', 'the filler' and 'the sealer' (my terms). Another example was the task of impaling cooked chicken carcasses onto a passing metal spike. This was the sole action of this role, lift, spike, lift, spike. The now impaled poultry then moved past several waiting employees who performed highly precise tasks; one removed each right leg as it passed, then the next removed the left leg and so on. The outcome of this meticulous process was ready-to-ship sandwich fillers, pizza toppings, soups and pastry fillings (Striffler, 2002). For this system to work, employees had to stay with their given task

'People come in and you're doing this job people don't rotate, which I probably don't agree with, and the reason why is because the employer doesn't want everyone to learn everything because they need you to do this job so you become really good at that so productivity can go up' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

'They don't get trained for the whole spectrum, you get trained to this one job in these large and medium-sized slaughterhouses, they just get paid for legging or bellying, they don't do everything so it's cheapness of labour' (Barry, British, MHI)

By not training workers to do various tasks, this promotes specialisation, that is competency in a singular given task. According to Smith (2010), this is due to a combination of improved dexterity, saved time by not switching tasks and the use of machines, which altogether, increases efficiency. However, whilst beneficial from a production perspective (Ritzer, 2019), many negative effects have been noted for workers operating within this type of work system such as depersonalisation and alienation from work (Doray, 1988; Braverman, 1998). Participants, especially meat inspectors, sometimes described the mental effect singular-tasks work had on them, particularly regarding working automatically

'If you are an inspector in poultry, it's one of the worst and most boring jobs I've ever done but I've done it for one year...you are staying in the same

place, maybe you are rotating after half an hour to a different, just to give a break to the brain you know, so automatic everything...I've said so many times it's death for the brain' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'It's hard to think of someone who can be passionate about this, basically, you're like a robot, you're just standing in front of a line that goes and goes and goes and one per minute, and you just do the cuts you have to do and put the stamps you have to do and that's it, there's not much more than that' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

'We change position every half an hour because if you are a longer time your brain is like a off because you do every time the same job so it's really boring for me...the chicken are more healthy than the pigs so you stay and you don't do anything...you are on the line but you start thinking about something different [if] it will be interesting job, you have no time to thinking about the something but if you start thinking about something that means like it's really boring'' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

These match Thompson's (1983: 226) experiences, who found he could work with 'virtually no attention paid to the job'. Ashforth and Fried (1998: 311) refer to this as the 'Mindlessness of Organisational Behaviours' which occur under six coexisting conditions such as easily categorised stimuli, minimal required effort, and no interruption. This can lead to what is sometimes known as 'boreout' which reduces development and meaning for workers (Stock, 2015) and increases the likelihood of poor self-reported health, stress, and workability (Harju et al., 2014). Contrastingly, there was one MHI who found inspecting *red meat* on the line to be anything but boring

'[It's] exciting because every job is different, I could be in a large slaughterhouse today and I could find tuberculosis, I could find, well I couldn't [name?] a lot of diseases that I don't see very often, but it puts me knowledge to use, I have to think, it's something different, like what's happening here, how is this going to affect the carcass and the meat? If I get an abscess in the heart okay, where is that abscess, has that pus been

pumped around the body, in through the bloodstream and affected the carcass in any way? So, things like that, it's always something unexpected coming up, yeah it could be tedious like in a chicken plant when you're doing eighteen thousand an hour, thirty-six thousand an hour in the big ones, so it can be tedious but I like red meat, pigs cattle sheep and there's always something there to test your knowledge' (Barry, British, MHI)

Although all work on the line had the potential to be monotonous, inspectors often agreed that working with chicken was the most boring of work. However, regardless of animal type, workers preferred variation in their tasks, which was easier to attain for some. Workers who were not bound by the line reported substantial differentiation due to more responsibilities in their daily tasks

'So I go from taking samples for microbiology tests and the swab samples, meat samples from different parts of the pigs, of course, different bones, we make sure we comply with our legal documents, for export such as America, Philippines, Korea, China, that we export different things and just day to day compliance... when packing, you're only focusing on packing and that's it, same as in hygiene...in compliance you look at everything [and] that gives you more understanding of how the business is working on how things should be and I think I just want to get more knowledge on everything' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'I have to check your knife, is it clean, if you're doing the right procedure if you're having the right behaviour to be safe in the line...inspect everyone so like 'you don't have earrings, you don't have piercings, check your nails, check your boots, check your entire, your apron, if it is clean', make sure they come back to the room like pretty clean...we check the dates, for the rotation for the coolers and the freezers...make sure that everything is clean, tidy up in the back, like proper stock and also the labels, that was something we were not in charge but we were kind of managing to do the proper labels for all the different countries' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Thus, for those not bound by the line, mindlessness and boredom did not appear to be a regular issue. However, line workers did report some variation in their tasks, with some plants apparently favouring training in several roles

‘They like to move people between departments if possible and if their skills suit it just so they’re upskilling all their workers to understand all the different departments because it’s so diverse they’re not just killing one species, they’re killing three, so if you can train someone to work in all three departments then that person is really flexible for you’ (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

As this abattoir was a three-species abattoir, more flexibility from workers may be desirable than for a one-species abattoir. This goes contrary to the specialisation described by other participants (Smith, 2010; Ritzer, 2019). Other participants commented on how they have moved around regularly and thus became ‘multi-skilled’ (Caroli et al. 2010)

‘You can be taken to a different part of the facility every day...everybody really is expected to do everything, at the moment even the permanent workers who are more likely to do one type of job’ (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

‘When I wasn’t on the boning line I could do everything else, so I could do the [tail-liners?] the production of bacon, sausage and burgers, black pudding and haggis and all that sort of stuff or I’d be quite happy to go and cut/split [prime?] beef all day or they could send me out in the van, or they could send me to the shop for the manager...no there’s one other guy who can do the same as me, chopping and changing all-day’ (Gordon, British, Boner)

‘If you know how to work different jobs, one day you could be taking heads off, the other day you could be skinning the legs, the other day you could be taking the insides out, I mean if you know how to do it, yeah you could rotate around’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Thus, it appears to be on a plant-by-plant basis as to whether workers move around which would seem mutually beneficial to both the business and employees. Interestingly, even a singular task could still produce variation

'With cattle you get all sorts of cattle, you'll get small cattle, nearly like the size of a big sheep, and you'll get bulls, I'm talking over a ton in weight, humungous, to the extent where they have to be shot outside because they can't bring them in and you'll get, the other day we had Scottish highlanders with horns, so I mean horns to the extent where you can't bring them inside because they wouldn't fit in the box, also have to be killed outside, but I mean every day is a new experience' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Garson (1994) found similar findings, with tuna line workers enjoying skinning more than cleaning as there was more variation in this task. It may be summarised that not all line tasks are equal in their monotony. 'Chickenwork' may provide the most monotonous of jobs partly because more of the line is mechanised such as slaughter being carried out by a machine and requiring minimum input from workers (McCabe and Hamilton, 2015). Working with cattle, however, provided more variation in the dimensions of the animals and therefore could not be mechanised.

#### **5.4.1. Gender**

Finally, regarding the division of labour, participants suggested that some jobs were more suited to women than men. Therefore, a gender-based division of labour was present to some extent

'You tend to find men bone out because they're stronger and women trim because they're a lot more kind of nimble and also they're also a bit tidier with trimming, so if you're trimming an expensive cut, you want somebody who's careful with what they're doing because they've got an eye for it, which can often be women because they're a bit more...picky [laughs] picky is not the right word, another word for picky...more attention to detail' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'You would have to wash the contents of the pig's large intestine out and that's how you make sausage skins, and then they would get put in brey, that was the worst job of all the jobs and yeah I couldn't do that but there was another lady that would do that [laughs] [it's a ] woman's job, because it's quite delicate, it doesn't sound delicate but it's a very fragile thing' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

This division of gender by physical attributes has been found in other accounts of meat plants (Fink, 2000). This may not always be the case, however. Pachirat (2011: 73) in another meat plant found the gendered division of labour had little to do with the physicality but was important in maintaining the image of meat work as 'men's work'. It was sometimes suggested, by both male and female participants, that women may not have the mental fortitude that men have to work in such an environment

'If they could do the job then I'm sure no one would say no to them, like I said, even for a lot of men it's not something everyone can do, and I guess a lot of women, it might sound very, what can I say, sexist, but [inaudible] don't have as strong a stomach as, I guess a lot of people look at it as more of a manly job you could say, I mean I'm sure they wouldn't say no to you if you know how to do the job and you can keep up' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I said 'you need to be prepared to work in this kind of environment', especially if they were girls who were asking me because for some people it might be a shock, if you've never been in a slaughterhouse and you go there and you see how they shoot the animals, how they kill them, all the process you might get into a shock' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

However, some participants noted how women were doing the more 'manly' work, including the role of slaughter

'There is a slaughterhouse where actually there are women that are working there, Redfen in Peak District in Buxton, Redfen is having few women

slaughterman, slaughterwomen actually, I was quite, oh my god why are these women here and some of them are really pretty, a few of them actually and if you would see that woman on the street you wouldn't believe that she's doing that' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'I find at our local slaughterhouse, we're really lucky to have it, they're employing two female slaughtermen, and I would always choose a day when they're on, because they are exceptionally good and they're both Estonian, and they are beautiful girls, the number of farmers who go 'oh have you seen her down the slaughterhouse?' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

These findings go against prior findings concerning the exclusion of women in masculine workplaces (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Collinson, 1992) suggesting that it is not women themselves who may be rejected, but more so femininity and its perceived incompatibility with 'manly work'. Thus, in alignment with Abdul's claim, it did appear to be the case that providing women could do the work to the required standard they would be hired even for the dirtiest and arguably most 'manly' roles.

#### **5.4.2. Migrants**

Where both types of labour and treatment of workers were concerned, differences appeared to be present for migrant workers on the line. It was sometimes noted that migrants were given different tasks to do than their UK counterparts. These tasks were seen as worse jobs and were often paid less

'Romanian people are on the line and Irish people are as well on the line but as well, Romanian people have a harder job with the knives and the using the manual things and the string, but Irish people have washing carcass, and giving the samples on the carcasses, using the knife as well but this is the position who have more money so, I think that can be a little bit not fair because Polish and Romanian people can't have the position who have the local people on the line, the better money' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)  
'The British folk, they tend to be a lot more skilled workers, so they'll be doing the skinning and taking the heads off whereas the Pakistani workers

they're just there looking for a job, I mean they might not get paid as much so they'll be doing stuff like just the loading or pushing the carcasses out the fridges, the more tedious jobs' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Differences in job types depending on nationality have been a regular finding amongst academic works both in the UK and the US (Halpern and Horowitz, 1999; Ribas, 2016; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). Whilst this has often been seen as unequal treatment (as Piotr attests to), it could likewise be the case that the British workers in a given plant have more skill, particularly if they have a background in the meat sector as found in Chapter 4. However, one migrant worker also told how they were not permitted to speak to their colleagues as a way to increase efficiency

'Some people cannot talk, if I work with some other person, like Polish, when we have little chat, you know still working, still doing but you're not allowed to talk... because they think if we talk, we are not working but wasn't like this, they just want job to be done and that's it' (Agnieszka, Polish, Handpicker)

Preventing migrant workers from talking has been found elsewhere (EHRC, 2010). This might be seen as a 'divide and conquer' method of management whereby prevention of communication allows for a greater degree of control (Lever and Milbourne, 2017). However, the notion that migrants are always given the worst job, which is found in much of the UK meat sector literature (Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017) was found not to be true. In one case, a participant told how the management structure in her plant was made

'There was a Polish HR person, and the union, all of the union work was done by Polish people, and it was highly unionised... the sort of middle management they were, I'd say half the people were Polish... I'd say there was six directors, at that sort of director level, three of them were Polish' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer).

Indeed, many participants told how their managers were migrants who did not have to deal with the 'dirtiest' aspects of the job.



### 5.4.3. Physicality

There were two manual demands that participants universally agreed characterised working in the BIMPS, the first being physicality. Physical tasks are typical of industrial production-orientated jobs (Walker and Guest, 1952; Burawoy, 1985; Garson, 1994) with meat work being no different. Whilst many participants commented on the physicality, the following 'thick description' (Geertz, 2000) from one participant truly summarised this widespread feeling

'It's brutal, it's hard work, Jake, you know, from the minute you walk in, to the minute you finish it's grafting, a lot of heavy lifting and everything you know...there wasn't no messing about it was non-stop work when you know, you weren't talking, well you was having a chat obviously because I was working, if I was working with you cutting pigs up, you'd go on one side of the table I'd go on the other and there'd be a pig fall on it, I'd cut up one side of the pig you'd cut up the other and then the next minute there's another pig fall on the table, so you know, you'd have a little bit of banter but you'd just be working you know, full time it's very very busy, *hard work*, *very hard work*, very physical' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

The visits also demonstrated the physicality of the work. At Highland Sheep, the tasks at the start of the line which involved the stripping away of all that was not needed (the head, the hooves etc.) were especially visceral with the use of tools and heavy machines. Endurance and strength were seemingly essential. Some participants reported instances where workers did not have the ability to carry out the work

'I had one kid I mean he was built like a, literally, a brick shithouse, I was the powerlifter there at the time, lifting all the big heavy stuff, and I thought 'ah smashing I've got someone here to do my work for us' and literally, it was a 225lb four quarter of meat, you had to swing it, pull it up on your shoulder and carry it about 12 yards to put it on a bandsaw and he couldn't lift it, literally couldn't lift it' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

Thus, even those with the apparent physical capital required to do such work may struggle (Shilling, 2010). Simply being a 'brick shithouse' was not enough. However,

one participant questioned the management's decision to put him on a task he was not physically suited for

'I'm five foot four so I couldn't reach so, that was another thing, they end up putting you on jobs you're not suited to, like I don't have any muscle, anyone can see that, but I was stacking these big heavy crates, twenty kilograms plus of chicken pieces on these crates that were taller than I was' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

Whilst some participants then were more suited than others to carry out these physical tasks, it nonetheless still affected them

'It's a tough job, it's a physical job, a colleague a really good colleague from the FSA, one of the good ones he was telling me the other day 'this job you think it makes you fit cause you're always like working and you wake up early so you're like, you take advantage of your day and you're standing and walking and doing like physical work but what it does really is it makes you exhausted, it makes you tired, it makes you old' and that's it, it's just a tiring job' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

Indeed, overly physical work has been shown to cause several health-related issues, including exhaustion (see **5.5.**). Combined with physicality, the second characteristic which many participants discussed was speed

'It's a very stressful environment the bacon factory was because you've got lines on conveyor belts that bring the packets of bacon and they move really fast, so you've got to have someone at the end packing them all up' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'It's a fast plant, whereby we cover a lot, we examine a lot of animals, like, per day we do about four hundred pigs per day, so almost twenty thousand, to twenty-five thousand per month so it's a lot of animals we are slaughtering so and it's a fast plant' (Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

'I started as a packer on the joint line, and it was really fast, that was so fast, after I think two days, I was thinking I will quit I will take my hat and I will just get out' (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

The speed of the work was also plain to see during the two visits. At both Highland Sheep and Chickensmiths the lines were set at particular speeds. Whilst not breakneck, they were fast enough to ensure workers would finish one task and then attend straight to the next. Any lapse in concentration or momentary distraction would almost certainly mean a carcass would pass unprocessed. As a result, the workers never stopped for a moment. Like the division of labour, participants understood why speed was essential for the modern BIMPS facility

'When you're serving half the country suddenly time becomes an issue, money becomes a bigger issue and so does speed and everything else, everything ramps up so dramatically' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Allowing the line to dictate the pace of the work ensures the work is kept under constant control by managers (Ritzer, 2019). However, this is not necessarily beneficial for the workers. Speed can make the task harder by adding social pressure to those on the line. As workers commented, working slowly or causing a blockage was not without consequences from fellow workers

'The job itself was easy, it's just stacking bits of bacon on the pallets, it just comes at you at such a speed that you do get a bit stressed and then the people around you get stressed because you're slow' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'If it's blocked at one point the whole line has to stop and everything gets delayed and they do try and sort it out otherwise they introduce nerves and tension' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

'They're a bit slower and I don't know I think they think they can just do what they want, that they can just work at their speed when, if you're on a line and you need to be fast you need to be fast, you know what I mean? So

sometimes they will get telt [told], they will be telt to hurry up' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

These assertions are in line with previous findings; as Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990: 6) found, the inability to keep up with the line would involve harassment aimed at the slower workers due to their 'inferior performance and general inadequacy'. These are 'normative social influences' aimed to ensure workers work fast to conform to workplace norms (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). In addition to social consequences, both speed and physicality had effects on the body of workers, which influenced several areas of Health and Safety in the workplace.

### **5.5. Health and Safety (H&S)**

As might be expected from a 'high-risk industry' (Personick and Taylor-Shirley, 1989) there were many sources of injuries to meat workers. Thompson (1983: 227) noted the 'wide assortment of bandages' that could be seen on the workers of his plant, however, during my visits I saw no such signifiers. However, from speaking to the workers, cuts and/or stabs appeared to be an almost mundane component of the BIMPS experience. Such is the apparent prevalence of cutting oneself, one employee surmised that meat work necessitates a willingness for physical sacrifice (Bradford and Boyd, 2020) as a matter of course

'You have to be willing to cut yourself, right, you have to be willing to get cut at some point' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

For participants who worked in the meat industry around the 1970s/80s, injuries were simply part and parcel of the job

'When I started there was no metal gloves, no metal aprons, like that, two scars on me legs, knife went in at the front went out at the back of me leg... my old gaffer told me, when I first started, he said 'get out of this game before you're twenty-five otherwise you'll not walk after you're forty, and yeah I've got a bad back, but you know, engineers are the same, mechanics are the same' (Barry, British, MHI)

'Many a time, we stabbed ourselves in the legs and he had to go to the [hospital]...many a time we had to go up there and have me leg stitched up, cause, the knife just went straight through' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

That said, participants working in the BIMPS in the 21<sup>st</sup> century often took a similar stance regarding their injuries

'There's people a lot worse off than me for the COVID waiting for a [inaudible] and things like that, that's the way I see it, I can still cook and clean and drive the car and stuff like that, I'm not bedridden or waiting for operations and stuff...I've seen people stab themselves and that and refuse to go to the doctors but no, you *have* you to go you cannot work here, there's one Polish guy who was famous for it he'd just try and shrug it off, it's like no you've *actually* stabbed yourself, go to the doctor, that guy was just a machine' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'His thumb just completely dangling down but that's, his first reaction was 'well put a towel, finish what I'm doing first and then we'll go and get it looked at' and I was like 'that sums up butchers for you' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Since the Recipe for Safety initiative was introduced in the 1990s, significant safety measures have been put in place (Lloyd and James, 2008). At both Highland Sheep and Chickensmiths, full personal protective equipment (PPE) was required at all times. White coats and trousers, thick rubber working boots, hairnets and hard hats were all worn, which are standard clothing for workers in meat facilities (Stull and Broadway, 2008). The importance of the hardhat became apparent when I banged my head on a large metal hook whilst at Highland Sheep. Workers using knives would wear chainmail gloves for protection and keep their knives in white plastic sheaths when not in use. However, not everywhere in the UK provides PPE to its workers, as one participant elaborated

'Down there in the Falkland Islands, they don't give you any PPE [or] plastic gloves or anything it's just your bare hands...I was skinning so you have to cut up the legs and then you have to pull it, pull it down to the sides like that

and so I was just completely skinless on my arms like that for the first two-three weeks' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

Furthermore, despite the measures provided to workers in Britain and The North of Ireland, participants still incurred many laceration-based injuries

'There's like a hundred blades in this machine and they're like a razor blade and you put the meat down and it pushes the meat towards the blade, and it chops the meat and some people if they're changing the product will try and get the meat out with their hands. Well, you shouldn't do that anyway and I've seen a couple of people cut their fingers like that' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

'This guy was playing around with the knife and then he turned around and then he did like a [motion], the other guy I think got like ten stitches, ten stitches in the arm' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Additionally, there were occasional reports of workers losing digits of their hands

'They used the bandsaw for the first time and sliced all their fingers off and, it's not uncommon. I remember we had in the shop, even in a nonmeat processing plant where time is an issue, we had the owner in A and E I think it was for six hours in the end, he had half his thumb attached on his left hand where he'd cleavered through half his thumb' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Another issue which workers reported was dermatological issues. Whilst the clothing and PPE helped (BMPA, 2014) they could not prevent everything

'When a lot of people first start, they have really sore hands, cause you're not used to the pressure on your hands and you're using your hands all day' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'Me hands were white from me fingers because of all the scars and lack of blood flow' (Barry, British, MHI)

'When I started doing this job now, I remember, I got like cists I remember my thumb, it hurt really bad, I got a cist here, another one here, so yeah my hand was hurting bad and you just had to keep going and with these hours, I don't know ten hours working and you had to keep on going so yeah that was hard at first' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

Furthermore, some participants mentioned issues related to backs and shoulders, indicators of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) (Harmse et al., 2016)

'You see some old butchers who have butchered and carried the beef for like forty years and they're actually disfigured, [inaudible] walking and one shoulder's about sort of six inches higher than the other one, you know we've all got like bad backs or bad knees or trapped nerves here and there' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'I've got a bugged back because of bending over a sheep [cratch?] all day in the cold and the wet, nothing ergonomic back then' (Barry, British, MHI)

'Everyone who is working in the factory and is staying on the line will at some point will get some back pain so now, if for example when I worked in agency and I have to go to the production for doing knife test with the potential butcher so I spent like one hour on the line with people to have a look at so my back was with pain so I can't imagine that I can go now for twelve hours, so yeah back pain is standard thing' (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

'I was literally crippling myself, as I say, I was a back shop butcher as well as a slaughterman, but you're lifting weights all the time, my spine started crushing' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

Highly physical, fast and repetitive tasks are major contributors to the development of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) (van Tulder et al., 2007). Indeed, these injuries are more common in sectors that involve continued repetitive motions, such as factory-based manufacturing work (Gun, 1990). Attempts were made to prevent this common injury

‘So often in abattoirs, people will move down the lines, so they'll swap every thirty minutes, well it depends where you're working but we'll say an average of every thirty minutes you swap to prevent repetitive strain injury’  
(Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

Job rotation, that is, the systematic movement of employees between tasks at given time intervals (Malinski, 2002), has been found to have several physical benefits including the prevention of RSI (Jahncke et al., 2017). Additionally, it can provide mental benefits such as increased motivation (Mohsan et al., 2012). Interestingly, some participants did not think this was necessary

‘You're just making the same movements all the time, so your muscles, just like doing karate you get that training where you're using the same muscles, same time, the same way and just get used to the movement so it makes it easy for ya’ (Barry, British, MHI)

Finally, some participants discussed the issue of blame when it came to injuries in the workplace. In their experience, it was the case that the workers were held responsible for their own health and safety

‘If something will happen they will always blame the person...I was sometimes in shock because from my point of view that was definitely not his fault from the person but health and safety were doing this so tricky that after that I was thinking 'yeah no it's his fault'’ (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

‘The table went all the way in the air, we're talking about three meters high, and the table dropped right in front of my face and when we went to



complain about it he said it was your fault [laughs]' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

### **5.5.1. Animals**

There were the occasional reports of injuries caused by the animals themselves. Several factors increase the chances of injury from animals including noise, isolation from the herd, entering the animal's flight zone (personal space), rough handling, breed (Grandin 1988; 1989) or improper execution of the restraint/stunning/slaughter phase

'One of the heifers...got out in the brickyard...turned round and it was, literally knocked us out... we're talking about something that was half a tone, hitting you head on and knocked you flying, you're unconscious on the floor' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'I saw someone broke a leg when a cow got out cause it weren't shot properly cause you [flip it?] over on its back...obviously, whoever had done it hadn't shot it right and dropped on its back and stood on its feet and started chasing...I don't think they hit him I think they slipped and broke their leg, getting away from the cow' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

Like other injuries, attacks from animals have been reported elsewhere (Eisnitz, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 2005). As participants described, the stunning/slaughter stage if not done correctly can run the risk of animals escaping and impeding worker safety (BMPA, 2014). However, being injured by an animal can occur at the post-mortem stage

'If you've ever been kicked by a cow, you'll definitely agree with me there, it hurts a lot... because its nerves are still there if you were to get a knife and poke it...on a joint or something it'll feel it straight away, it'll kick out cause the nerves are still active it's just the brain isn't there' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

The first phase of a stunned animal is the tonic phase, where the animal becomes rigid and insensible to pain (Miller, 2002). This is followed by the clonic phase where involuntary kicking and other movements may occur although the animal is still unconscious (ibid). It is at this stage that kicks can become a safety risk (BMPA, 2014).

### **5.5.2. COVID-19**

The other most regularly cited health and safety issue at the BIMPS was COVID-19. High rates of the virus within meat facilities were widely reported both in the UK and abroad (Connolly, 2020; Lakhani, 2020; Laughland and Holpuch, 2020; Levitt, 2020; McSweeney, 2020; Waldman et al., 2020). Participants discussed COVID-19 in their workplaces and the effect it had on work

‘They had had very few cases on-site at all and it was only in October time that we started to notice an incline at the site, and I was working in the beef boning halls at the time and a few more cases of COVID started to appear and as soon as we got a couple, it just seemed to be a lot of people we were sending home to isolate’ (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

‘We had a COVID outbreak in the factory and they didn't help anyone, I found out by going home and the person I was living with said ‘have you seen this article about where you work? There's a COVID outbreak at the plant’ (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

‘Now we're all off because about eight people got COVID or something, so we all had to go for a test and then we went in yesterday just to clear out what was in the back and closed down I think for a week’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Conditions within meat facilities were favourable for transmission of COVID-19, such as cold temperatures, metallic surfaces, close proximity of workers and difficulties with social distancing (Middleton et al., 2020). Workers were aware of these conditions and how their workplace was at a higher risk of an outbreak of COVID-19

‘It's the cold, which probably doesn't help, it's confined, it's cold, and you can do your best to socially distance people, but it is exceptionally hard’ (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

‘Working in a close environment with no windows when COVID was around, and we were exposing ourselves’ (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

Compounding this issue was the fact that many jobs required to run BIMPS facilities could not be carried out remotely. As one participant succinctly summarised

‘You cannot inspect meat from home’ (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

Ironically, the presence of COVID-19 increased the demand for meat, meaning workers may have needed to be at work more than usual

‘At the start of the lockdown, when everyone was panic buying, that was like, that was worse than Christmas, but the reason for that was because it was so unexpected, at Christmas we have the stock, but people started panic buying’ (Gordon, British, Boner)

Due to the necessity of having workers on-site, facilities had no choice but to implement preventative measures. However, these created new issues for workers to deal with. The first of these measures was the use of facemasks/shields. At Highland Sheep, all workers and visitors were required to always wear masks. As the Chickensmiths visit was prior to COVID-19, masks were not required. Whilst masks were one of the most widely utilised and effective measures both inside the BIMPS and in society at large (Schünemann et al., 2020), these created new issues for workers

‘[The] plastic shields in front of the face [made] work really awkward, it was very difficult to work with that, we're working with meat so you can imagine blood was getting splattered onto the shields a lot causing problems with the vision, it didn't protect the eyes, so it was very difficult to work. Then the

introduction of face masks, working twelve-hour shifts with a mask on doing a job that requires quite a lot of physical effort was pretty much impossible, people were pretty much suffocating in those masks' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

The second preventative method was social distancing, that is, maintaining physical distance between persons whilst enabling the ability to communicate (Massey, 2022). Again, this produced new issues in terms of practicality and work efficiency

'An average of every thirty minutes you swap to prevent repetitive strain injury, that then became a huge issue because how do you move people when you're trying to prevent them from mixing with as many people as possible? Ideally, you want people to work in their bubble and never move, so it was just a lot to manage but I think we did quite a good job of it to say how quickly everything happened' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'At the workstation, we would still be distanced where being distanced was a big obstacle to working efficiently, however, when we went to cloakrooms, we were all crammed in together although at that point there was room to introduce rotation of breaks so there could be less people at a time, but it wasn't done so there was a bit of a paradox' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

'Keep it social distance if possible, it shouldn't be like possible it should be anyway, just piling people in, the canteen they've taken like half of the table and chairs out because of COVID and they've got, like in the canteen where the coffee machine is and they've got like a cabin outside, like a portacabin, if there's that many people on one break you have to stand up, or you have to sit outside on the step' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

Generally, participants reported that their co-workers complied with the regulations as best they could. Nonetheless, one of the largest barriers to promoting social distancing and face masks was a lack of willingness from some employees

'No one ever stuck to the rules, ever, we weren't wearing face masks in the factory...I don't think people cared and then you get a load of people who don't care and you sort of feel alienated if you start doing it as well if you go by the rules and you wear a mask and you do social distancing you feel alienated from everyone else because they're not doing it' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'We fighting about using mask because we have an official email from a manager that is 'Come on guys, don't panic is only flu', that is a stupid sentence...they send email 'Don't using mask because you make a panic from the other staff' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

To ensure people did adhere to the regulations, some facilities introduced marshals/wardens to monitor fellow employees

'We've also got Marshalls all around the site and their only job is to tell people not to stand next to each other and to put their mask up and they're everywhere' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'They are still having the COVID wardens that are making sure that everybody is distancing on-site...the COVID wardens are very pain on the ass [laughs] rather than dealing with them you just stick to the rules' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

This system is indicative of an 'authoritarian relationship' where an individual/group obey the commands/wishes of an authority figure (Passini and Morselli, 2010). This particular relationship is Foucauldian in nature in that 'disciplinary power' is being enforced via surveillance (Foucault, 2020). In this sense, the wardens are acting as the metaphorical guards whilst the workers are the prisoners within a panoptical relationship (ibid).

## **5.6. Summary**

There were numerous aspects of working in the BIMPS which, in combination, created a highly unique workplace. In terms of working times, shifts often began at irregular

intervals such as during the early hours of the morning or later in the day. It was not uncommon for participants to work through the night or weekends. Many workers also noted the amount of time worked in total, which was reported to be as high as 62 hours per week. This did not account for the extra time it took to get to work, with workers regularly having to travel long distances to reach their workplaces. Workers were generally dissatisfied with both work times and travel times to work. As well as being in a rural location, the workplaces were unique. This highly industrial environment posed a vast number of affordances for workers such as loud noise, strong smells and large quantities of mess. These affordances were generated through the tasks which workers carried out. Highly physical and strikingly speedy, at first glance this work might be assumed to be the same as other production lines (Garson, 1994), not so. The mess produced in the form of blood, organs, offal etc. is idiosyncratic to the BIMPS, no other production line affords such things. The presence of health and safety was one of the single largest influences on the working experience of the BIMPS. Whilst procedures were in place to protect workers such as regular swapping of jobs and protective clothing, workers regularly told of accidents in the workplace, especially regarding cuts, corporeal issues (bad back, skin issues etc.) and attacks from animals. More unique to this project, COVID-19 had a huge amount of influence on BIMPS. As meat work could rarely be done remotely, workers had little choice but to come to work and follow the range of safety measures brought in.

## **Chapter 6: Worker Relationships**

‘It is like a madhouse, it's too many people, too many different nationalities closed in one place, in one room’ (Anna, Polish, Senior, Technical Administrator)

### **6.1. Introduction**

One of the most discussed aspects of the BIMPS by participants was their relationships, both with outsiders and among their colleagues. To clarify, an outsider is someone who does not belong to, or abide by, the social norms of a specific group (Becker, 1997). In this study, this was generally anyone who was not employed by the BIMPS. This included both customers (those who purchase meat) and non-customers. As Turner (1996) notes, meat as a product is both rejected and desired; whilst demand for meat is high, outsiders rarely want to be familiar with the process of meat production. For this and other reasons, workers reported having little contact with outsiders. On the rare occasions that contact was made, it was often the case that workers faced the consequences of occupational stigma (Shantz and Booth, 2014). In contrast, workers often reported having a strong occupational community (Salaman, 1974), which offered a sense of belonging and helped shield workers from this outside stigma and some of the challenges faced whilst at work. However, the workplace community was not simply a group that welcomed workers and provided sanctuary from all the social tolls which workers faced. Social norms and conditions needed to be met for workers to be accepted and many workers reported bullying in the workplace. Thus, it was not the case that just because individuals worked at the same place, they were accepted unconditionally.

### **6.2. Relationship with Outsiders**

From the data and in line with what others have found (Simpson et al., 2014), workers seemed to have two main types of relationships with outsiders. The first was defined by little to no contact with outsiders (not including workers' family/friends etc.). In this relationship, interaction between outsiders and workers is rare and is made so for several reasons. As discussed in Chapter 4, BIMPS facilities are almost always located in rural areas, far out of public sight (Vialles, 1994). As a result, BIMPS workers

become 'spatially invisible' (Hatton, 2017). High meat consumption coupled with geographical and psychological distance between customers and the production of meat is typical of a 'post-domestic society' (Bulliet, 2005). Out-of-sight and out-of-mind, the production of animals need seldom enter the mind of the modern customer (Smith, 2002; Williams, 2008). Many participants discussed this gap between themselves and the outside world

'A lot of us will get our food from the supermarket or the shop, it'll be in a package of you know, chicken breast or whatever, your steak, but we have no concept and no idea of where it truly actually comes from' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'We weirdly fetishize food in this country, don't we? Everybody watches celebrity MasterChef and that and programs about cooking and we don't really know where our food comes' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

'An ox cheek and my wife had never tried it before she met me and she said, 'What's that?' 'An ox cheek' 'Where does that come?' 'Well, where do you think it comes from?! It's its cheek!' You know there's children who don't know what ox tongue is, cooked ox tongue, 'where does that come from?' 'Well take a wild guess!' (Barry, British, MHI)

Participants had different theories as to why this was the case. Some felt the blame for this divide, at least in part, rested on the shoulders of the customers themselves due to a lack of interest or care

'They don't really care on how I get this on the table, they just go to the market and just buy them, if you talk about that they'll be really surprised on the things you have to actually do in order to get that bacon on your plate' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'They don't *know* where it comes from, if they actually had an interest' (Barry, British, MHI)



As Joy (2010) notes, witnessing meat production may make the consumer face uncomfortable realities (violence, death etc.). It may also evoke what Festinger (1957) calls 'cognitive dissonance' where polarising beliefs are held which cause mental discomfort. Customers may want to continue eating meat but not at the expense of animal slaughter. Therefore, as alluded to by participants, the easiest decision for consumers may be to simply not think about it (Smith, 2002; Williams, 2008). Other participants felt that the supermarkets and/or meat companies themselves were responsible for the producer/consumer divide

'I think supermarkets have been very very clever with their marketing of disassociating the whole process of meat as a product and what it actually involves so, they don't want to bring up the side that this is a slaughtered animal, they don't want to bring up the side that this is cheap labour that has brought it to you at that cost' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'Companies have to actually step up and show people on what they do, not just presenting them the final product and just work them a little bit on how they do that' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

Within supermarkets, efforts are made to maintain a psychological distance between consumers and producers (Blythman, 2007). Packaging and advertising can be used in such a way as to mask exactly where goods come from and emphasize the benefits of buying these products, such as their nutritional value (Nestle, 2021). Image 2 provides an example



**Image 2: The Jolly Hog ‘Pigs in Blankets’ (Ocado, 2023)**

Several aspects of this packaging are noteworthy. First, the product is established as British by the use of the term ‘British Pork’ and a small image of the Union Jack (Adams 1995; Ichijo and Ranta, 2016). Second, customers are assured it is ethical by emphasising that the pigs were ‘outdoor bred’ and with an ‘RSPCA assured’ stamp (Dillard, 2004). Thirdly, the health benefit of being gluten-free. And finally, and perhaps most significantly, the use of language such as ‘pigs in blankets’ and the brand name ‘The Jolly Hog’ helps create the pseudo-ideal, anthropomorphised image of happy pigs being wrapped up warm; perhaps the polar opposite of being slaughtered (Boorstin, 2012). Because consumers often want to buy ethical products there is an incentive for companies to hide any potential unethical aspects of the process of production (Newholm and Shaw, 2007). As a result, here and on most, if not all, other meat products, there is no mention of abattoirs, cutting plants, slaughter, stunning or any other morally contentious aspect of meat production.

A final theory was that the education system was to blame. One participant aligned himself with Dewey's (1990) position which emphasises that children should become familiar with the world via lived experience

'I don't think there's the education in primary and secondary schools where their food comes from...[kids should be] having the education, visiting farms, you don't want to take them into a slaughterhouse, that's too much, but visiting a farm and then go back to the classroom, 'ah well that's where this comes from' you make your own mind up what you want to do' (Barry, British, MHI)

Whilst rare in the UK, other countries such as Denmark include agricultural education in their school curriculums (Bergmann, 1985; Piggot, 2005). Research indicates that the promotion of agricultural education in schools does promote engagement and interest from children (ibid, 2005). However, in the UK, 'academic' subjects have in more recent years been largely favoured over vocational subjects, with vocational topics being 'the route for those who have fallen off the academic ladder' (Smithers, 2002: 136). At present, agricultural education is not part of the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2023). Whilst teachers may see the value in teaching agriculture, such as connectedness to and appreciation for rural areas/farming, they may not have the knowledge, resources or even the option to do so (Knobloch et al., 2007).

### **6.2.1. Lack of Appreciation**

Due to the absence of a meaningful relationship with outsiders, many workers felt that both themselves and their work were underappreciated. This was evidenced in two ways. Firstly, via a lack of social recognition

'I listen to the radio there and to the radio back [about] key workers, agricultural workers, I don't know, factory workers, but you'll never hear abattoir or the word slaughterhouse or anything, I guess it's one of those things people just don't like to hear' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I'd certainly agree with the underappreciated part of it, because, if you have a drive for cheap meat in particular then something has to give, doesn't it? It's either the animal or the people that are dealing with them or the place that they are dealing with them' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

'You're not going into a field and picking flowers, you're cold, you're working hard, and I would say very arguably, especially in the UK, we're very underpaid and undervalued' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

A lack of appreciation and recognition for people's work can affect one's sense of status in the world (Tracy and Scott, 2006). Ashforth and Kreiner (2014) note that customers or clients may feel ashamed of using a particular service (or in this case product) and therefore withhold their appreciation. If workers indeed do evaluate their identities based on how society sees them (Jost and Banaji, 1994) this may, in turn, make it harder for workers to sustain their sense of identity. However, the lack of appreciation may be due to workers being 'spatially invisible' (Hatton, 2017). Some participants highlighted this when discussing the differences between the BIMPS and high-street butcher shops<sup>7</sup>

'Being a butcher and being able to create things and you know greet the customers...and then they come back Monday morning and they say 'hey the roast we had on Saturday night was really really good, thank you very much' that's something I really enjoy...and people getting really happy and appreciate what you do, you don't see so much of that in slaughterhouses at all, you don't have that connection with anybody' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

'In a meat processing plant [the idea] is to get the most out of the carcass i.e., figure wise, whereas in the butchers shop the idea is to give your customer the best produce, the best experience and use everything...it becomes much more community driven and more about high welfare,

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<sup>7</sup> This finding also lends support to the differentiation between industrial meat processing facilities and vendors as outlined in Chapter 3

feeding a community, using your skills for something other than making twenty P a kilo on what is effectively a pile of meat but looks like nothing at the end of it...they really are just two different worlds' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

The second consequence, as mentioned by Marcus already, was low pay. Many workers, especially those without higher qualifications, felt that their pay did not reflect the amount of effort and skill needed, as well as the importance of, meat work

'In this country, we're apparently classed as like a semi-skilled trade, but if you went to France or Denmark or even Australia and New Zealand, butchers are classed as highly skilled, as you would be for brickies or joiners here, they're classed as skilled, we're classed as semi-skilled, and the wages reflect that' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'I used to be a slaughterman and I wouldn't put my belt back on for less than five, six hundred a week, take home which is a hundred and fifty a day, you could be labouring on a building site and get a hundred and fifty a day' (Barry, British, MHI)

'I would say pay in the meat industry is when you get to the bigger teams so like the processing plants, the wholesale teams, very undervalued, very very undervalued...I don't think that they deserve minimum wage or close to minimum wage I think they deserve the same rate of pay as your builder down the road or your plumber cause it's a skilled job' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'The wages are not very good... could be a bit more for what you do, for what I do anyway, cause I like, if a machine's broke I'll try and fix it meself rather than try and get the engineers down' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

Several workers mentioned the skill it takes to carry out the more manual side of meat work and how these skills were not valued. In 'knowledge economies' where there is

an economic premium attached to more cognitively demanding roles, manual skills and work are often seen as less valuable and garner less social recognition (O'Donovan, 2020). Economic sociology generally posits that 'worth' is determined by monetary value; the higher the monetary value the higher the worth (Stark, 2009). This type of worth-measuring is the basis of what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 197-202) call 'The Market World' where 'money is the measure of all things' and thus that with low monetary value must be of low worth. However, not all workers felt that the pay was low. Some felt that, relative to how qualified some workers were, the pay was high

'Fifteen pounds an hour, which is a really good wage and a lot of people kind of, if you don't have the English or the Maths GCSEs, that's a really good wage to be on, especially for a young person' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'I mean the money is not absolutely fantastic, but a lot of them aren't highly educated so, yeah it's an enjoyable job and they're getting paid a decent whack without having higher education' (Barry, British, MHI)

'Some of the guys I know they can do most jobs if not all of the jobs and you can get paid eighteen, twenty, well, near enough twenty pound an hour, I mean it is good pay, yeah I mean fair enough some days it might be a quiet day where we were only working about five hours killing but they'll be doing an hour or two loading in the morning and then an hour or two in the evening cleaning up so obviously they're getting paid for that as well' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

However, there were occasional accounts of workers describing how others received low pay because of the type of work they do and their lack of willingness to improve their situation

'[They complain] it's not enough being paid but most of them people are not doing anything to make their life any better, like most of them they don't even speak English so what do they expect to be paid millions for like basic

job that anyone can do it? So, most of them they are bitching about it, but they don't do anything about it at all' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

It was noteworthy that most these of comments were made by participants who did have a higher education and were referring to their less qualified colleagues. Workers without high educational attainment were seen to have done well in the context of the 'life chances' afforded to them (Weber, 2019) which went against what many of the less qualified workers asserted. In their view, they deserved more recognition through the attainment of manual expertise or doing more than was required of them, such as Dave being able to carry out some engineering work despite it not being in his job role.

### **6.2.2. The Stigmatised Relationship**

The second type of relationship with outsiders was the 'stigmatised relationship', that is, when outsiders interacted with workers in a disapproving or hostile way due to their working in the meat sector. Goffman (1990a: 4) calls this type of stigma a 'blemish of character', where a trait or behaviour of an individual unfavourably reflects onto themselves in the eyes of others. The morally contentious nature of meat work generates this stigmatised view of BIMPS workers; as Ashforth and Kreiner note (2014) moral taint may be the biggest threat of stigma to workers. Indeed, one of the main external tolls of dirty work is the stigmatization of workers when outside of the workplace (Bergman and Chalkey, 2007; Baran et al., 2012; Simpson et al., 2016). Participants gave examples of this, demonstrating a high 'occupational stigma consciousness' (Shantz and Booth, 2014)

'I mean a lot of people here couldn't go into a pub, meet a girl 'Oh what do you do?' 'Oh, I work in a slaughterhouse' you know it's not the biggest chat-up line going' (Barry, British, MHI)

'I'm in one of these food groups on Facebook... I posted a deer... it had been skinned out [and] cut up [and] made into a dish... some people okay were like 'Oh wow this is something different' and the other people were like 'Oh I don't want to see this, I've come for the food I don't want to be looking at this sort of stuff' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Once exposed, the meat worker potentially shifts from 'discreditable' to 'discredited' (Goffman, 1990a) and may suffer the subsequent social consequences (Simpson et al., 2014). Work has been consistently shown to be an integral part of an individual's identity (Tracy and Scott, 2006; Baran et al., 2012; Hughes, 2015) and therefore the questioning of one's work may pose a significant 'identity threat' (Dick, 2005).

### *Taint Management*

Working-class men may see their morality as a key marker of worth, often being used as a substitution for economic status (Lamont, 2000). A questioning of their 'moral career' may then prove especially difficult for such workers (Goffman, 1990a). Literature has suggested that workers may actively avoid outsiders and/or discussing their work to avoid these social repercussions (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Victor and Barnard, 2016). However, in this study, workers often did the opposite of this and actively sought out interactions with the public and reported positive results

'I'm more than happy for people to ask a question and I'll answer it to the best of my capability whether it be with slaughtering or with halal meat, whatever else, I mean the thing is not everyone is educated with regards to these sorts of topics so people will always have questions to ask...the thing is the more you inform a person of the issue the more interested they are, the more you can educate a person about it' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I think the mission, especially for myself now as a high street butcher and running my own small business is more educational than it is actually pushing out quantity. Because I'd rather lose a bit of money and sell what I believe to be a better product as long as I get to educate my customer at the same time' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Ashforth et al. (2007) describe a taint management technique of 'confronting clients and the public'. However, the technique described here was more educational rather than confrontational, therefore, 'educating clients and the public' is a more accurate description of what workers were doing. Whilst well-intentioned, engaging with outsiders raised the possibility of turning people away from buying meat products.



Indeed, this is one of the primary motivators in keeping meat production away from public view due to disgust or moral objections (Vialles, 1994; Smith, 2002; Bulliet, 2005; Ackroyd, 2007). This was, on occasion, recognised as such by participants

'I say to many people 'you walk into a slaughterhouse the chances are you might walk out a vegetarian' because it's not nice, but it is a reality' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

However, participants also felt that public exposure to the process of meat production would be unlikely to dissuade customers

'I don't think people will eat less meat because if you want to eat meat, you eat meat, it doesn't matter the way it kills the animal, it could be to a gas machine, it could be stunning, electricity wise, or I think we had where they shoot them with [the bolt gun]...I think the customers can say 'oh we get this meat from this and this is the way they are doing it and actually how they kill, they take care of the animals before they are killed' because sometimes people are saying 'oh they kill the animal and just, we take the meat' but most of times that animal is treated better than most of us' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'I guess it would put a lot of pressure on the meat industry itself but the thing is the more clued-up people are about a certain thing the better quality they'll expect of that product, now if they end up peeping and go 'Oh this is a good sheep or a bad sheep or this is a good cow or a bad cow' you know they'll be able to tell what meat is good and what isn't' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Regardless of the impact of meat consumption, for most participants, the reality of how meat is produced, and the truthful dissemination of this knowledge, was more important than profit. Indeed, the ability to face and accept reality is often seen as a masculine ideal (Lamont, 2000). Furthermore, participants believed that having an

educated customer base would improve the BIMPS sector in several ways. Firstly, it would lead to the production of better-quality meat. Indeed, several workers claimed that customers only purchase meat based on price and there was a lack of regard for quality

'People don't know about quality, they just go off price' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

'It comes down to the sad reality of people will save, fifty pence or a pound on a kilo of meat just because it's cheaper in Morrison's, not looking at the quality, the sad thing is quality seems to mean nothing these days' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Participants were universally in favour of good quality meat over cheap meat, as has been found elsewhere (Meara, 1974). By potentially eating less meat and being willing to pay more for it, this then means better quality will be in demand

'We're fighting on more of an educational standpoint of what is sustainable not only for the industry but for the planet and for the people working in the industry... I say it to all my customers as well, and I'm in the business of selling meat, 'eat less meat, eat better quality and less of it' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Through time, effort, hard work and skill, high-quality meat represented distinction for workers (Sennet, 2009). The lack of knowledge, interest, or willingness to learn was regarded as a lack of cultural capital on the part of consumers (Bourdieu, 2015). Second, workers believed that having a customer base that was more aware of their products would make them more appreciative and have a better understanding of where their food comes from

'I don't think [British people] appreciate where the food comes from, I don't think there's the education in primary and secondary schools where their food comes from' (Barry, British, MHI)

'I think as more people learn how we process our food, our meat, not just our meat but our food in general, it's better for everyone because they will understand how the work is actually put into getting one ingredient or one product to our table' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'It's definitely a thing people should become more aware of especially those people who eat meat, and the reason is, I believe... any item of food a person eats the person should become more aware of what they're taking into their body. I mean you can eat anything, but do you have any idea where it's coming from? How it's coming to you? How it's being made?' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

A lack of knowledge or awareness of how a product is made is unlikely to produce the due level of recognition (Bourdieu, 2015; Poulain and Dorr, 2017). A more educated customer base was seen to promote the appreciation, recognition, and respect that workers universally agreed was owed them for their skills and commitment to providing meat. Closely linked to a greater understanding was that educating people helped halter the spread of misinformation. Some aspects of BIMPS work were undeniable, such as slaughter, and the best way to address this in the workers' view, was to simply accept it for what it is. Indeed, Ashforth et al. (2007) describe 'accepting' as a defence tactic against taint. However, workers were not willing to accept false ideas about their work such as misinformation about halal slaughter

'I'd rather people ask questions and be well informed than being misinformed and well, spread lies or be misinformed at the end of the day, whether it be with slaughtering or with halal meat, whatever else' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Whilst there are widespread discourses on how halal slaughter is carried out on un-stunned animals, the reality is that around 80% of animals are stunned (Lever, 2018). In the UK, despite an often widespread yet poor understanding of the matter, religious slaughter often raises moral concern and has blown up to the level of 'moral panic' in the past (Grummett, 2015). For Abdul, opportunities for dialogue with outsiders afforded the correction of this misinformation.

As well as trying to create dialogues, workers were able to reflect some of the responsibility for animals' deaths onto the consumer in a 'condemning the condemners' (Maruna and Copes, 2005) like fashion

"Snowflake generation, it's the aw factor, 'aw it's a baby lamb', 'aw look at them eyes" (Barry, British, MHI)

'You get all sorts of reactions some people are like 'What's the need for this? This is disgusting' well, the thing is this, the reality of where your meat comes from, if you want to eat meat, but you don't want to accept the fact of where it's come from, you have to be aware of it and the sad thing is people have lost their awareness' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

If at least partial responsibility for the production of meat falls onto the shoulders of the consumer, it then reduces the weight of their criticism. Projecting condemnations onto customers can help empower workers by creating a sense of being above those same customers (Grandy, 2008). With the participants, customers were seen to be weak or hypocritical by not facing up to the reality of meat. Several workers were vocal about the realities of meat production, and that to deny them was a failure on the customer's part. Indeed, some workers felt that customers were morally obliged to be more aware of how the meat sector works

'I'd say from a moral perspective, I definitely think it's something a lot of people should be more on board with' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Indeed, who is morally responsible for the death of animals is a point of contention and workers were not satisfied to take on the entirety of the responsibility. By having nothing to do with the process except the purchasing of the final product, customers can 'role distance' themselves and detach from responsibility, a difficult (but not impossible) technique for BIMPS workers to use (Goffman, 1990b; Pachirat, 2011). Thus, rather than attempt to distance themselves, they preferred to deflect some of the responsibility onto the consumers rather than absolving them (Smith, 2002).

## *Vegans*

Finally, there was one specific group of outsiders that the participants found to be an especially significant source of stigma, vegans. It could be argued that vegans and meat workers are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to meat consumption. Veganism involves the abstinence 'as far as is possible and practicable' of all animal products (The Vegan Society, 2022) whereas 'carnism' is the ideology that is ethically justifiable to kill animals for food (Joy, 2010). Meat workers not only subscribe to carnism but actively produce the very products vegans try to avoid and often denounce. As a result, it is perhaps not too surprising that interactions between meat workers and vegans were characterised by inter-group conflict (Sherif, 2015)

'Recently we posted something of our piglets that were born on our farm and it was shared with a vegan group online where people were just absolutely hammering us with 'this is despicable, how dare you, I've just thrown up' ... the whole reason for posting that picture was not to lessen the life of that pig but it's to explain [where] it came from and try and educate people...I'm assuming it's the same thrill that an online bully would get' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'It's veganism, I think it's one of the biggest cults going, cause they try to indoctrinate anybody, I know what meat is, I know where it comes from, I know what has to happen for it to become meat' (Barry, British, MHI)

'This results in the side of veganism where vegans will, they jump at the chance to say, 'Look at your factories, you're working people [like dogs?] and your work environment is like crap and you know the quality of the animals are so poor"' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Realistic conflict theory posits that intergroup conflict occurs when resources are scarce (ibid). However, this conflict, between meat workers and veganism, was generated due to opposing moral ideologies, creating an 'ideological conflict' (Brandt et al. 2014). In this sense, the two groups represented opposing 'moral communities' (Regan, 1991) with differing values, norms and practices concerning the treatment of animals, particularly farm animals. Meat workers used two main methods to neutralise

the stigma from vegans. First, like with the customers, a 'condemning the condemners' (Maruna and Copes, 2005) approach to veganism

'Don't try to tell me that I need to go vegan, and eat loads of palm oil, which is going to cut down rainforests, I mean I can tell them 'Don't piss on my shoulders and tell me it's raining'' (Barry, British, MHI)

'The picking a narrative thing is very very very strong in that community so, it'll change week to week which videos get sent to me ...my biggest upset with that is they're kind of missing the point, they want to fight this battle but they're fighting it with the wrong people, so they are attacking the people in the industry but what they should be attacking is the mass production of it, if they feel that strongly that eating meat is wrong well first let's battle the food wastage and get that down to zero' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

This was not always the case though. The second method was a more tolerant approach (Füredi, 2011)

'Other people might look at it and think 'this is inhumane' and hence where you get the vegans etc. from but it's up to them at the end of the day, everyone has their own point of view on it and you've got to respect each other's opinion' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'The classic thing is I have a lot of people who talk to us very openly about wanting to be a vegan and you know, you get your old mate next to you who trained you and he says, 'don't talk to them, send them away, get rid of them' whereas I'd rather have an open conversation about everything' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

As Verkuyten et al. (2023) note, tolerance for minority groups is generally done for two reasons; first, through respect for the equality and rights of that group and second, to promote social harmony. For Marcus, it also created opportunities for 'intercultural dialogue', that is the creation of spaces for the exchange of different ideas with a potential for finding common ground (Broome and Collier, 2012).

The final and most surprising finding from the vegan/meat worker divide was that a small number of workers incorporated vegan meals into their diets or at least reduced their meat intake. This was for two reasons. The first was from an ethical standpoint

‘I have vegan days now actually, after ten years of working in the industry I have one or two days a week where I just don't eat meat, I don't eat fish, especially after watching Seaspiracy I've lessened my fish intake and... I think the whole world needs to start commercializing food because it's not good for the planet, it's not good for our ecosystems’ (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

‘No dairy, I won't eat dairy, and I'll only eat meat from the farm, so I have a vegan diet apart from meat from the farm which isn't very much, I probably eat meat, every couple of days...I just hate the thought of what happens to other meat’ (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

‘After [the chicken factory] I stopped eating meat, I was like ‘that's it I'm not eating meat ever again’ [because] they were dropping bits of meat on the floor and then putting them back in the crates and stuff [but then] I found undercover footage of things they were doing to the animals, the chicks and I was just disgusted by it so I was like ‘okay, definitely not going to eat meat now’ and then I watched Dominion...that just set it in stone for me, yeah vegan, veganism all the way and I've never looked back’ (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

A combination of environmental factors and a lack of trust in the industry to produce meat in an ethical way drive these workers to turn away from meat. One MHI also voiced her lack of trust in her fellow inspectors doing their jobs properly and producing untainted meat

‘Sometimes I don't eat meat trust me...why? [laughs] Okay, I work in many plants, I see sometimes too many abscesses, too many bruising, too many pathologies...I understand my role yeah, I am carefully thinking about the contamination and others but when you looking day per day and you see a

lot of contamination yeah, a lot of pathology that you start thinking 'Do I trust other inspectors in other plants? Because maybe I eat this" (Iza, Polish, MHI)

Thus, a combination of ethics and/or concern over the safety of meat consumption sometimes promoted a reduction in meat consumption from workers.

### **6.3. The Occupational Community**

Because of the difficulties encountered in the relationship(s) with outsiders, it is perhaps not too surprising that often workers reported a strong occupational community. Salaman (1974: 19) defines an occupational community as one where members' lives are affected in such a way that 'their non-work lives are permeated by their work relationships, interests, and values'. Ashforth et al. (2007) note how being part of the in-group helps create a social buffer from any outsider taint but also lends social support to those in the group. Indeed, many employees, regardless of ethnicity or job role, often used terms like 'team' and family' to highlight the sense of unity they had with their colleagues

'When they kind of walk into the canteen 'oh you alright Jess, you alright Bill blah blah blah' there is quite a nice atmosphere... you can sit down on the table and have crack with somebody' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'When I first started there, we had a lovely guy who was the boss [name], who was an ex-marine, very much like a father figure to my career...the whole team there...it was great, felt like family' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'The workers were really supportive and friendly, it's like a kind of community' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'I am feeling like 'wow from my first day everyone accept me and I was like part of the team like a big family' so it's really good, every morning someone brings the chocolates or something like that on the canteen and everyone drink coffee' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)



This sense of community was not only horizontal but also vertical. Many workers spoke of having good relationships with their managers

‘We had one lad who was the top manager called [name], got on great, he used to pick me up in the morning in his car with two workers... the lad that was under him, got on with him smashing’ (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

‘Sound, funnily enough, I used to play golf with one of them, with the slaughterhouse manager... Yeah, the other guy who was in charge was sound as a pound, yeah nice people’ (John, British, ex-Cutter)

‘My plant is very good because I don't feel I am from agency, my manager have behaviour for me the same like people from government’ (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

Whilst occupational communities are not unique to dirty work or the BIMPS, research has shown they are especially aiding for workers in such positions and offer several benefits to dealing with the tolls of such work (Rosso et al., 2010; Deery et al., 2019). Interestingly, workers spoke less of how this group reflected taint (Ashforth et al., 2007) but offered more immediate benefits in the workplace. One of these was to help break the monotony of the work

‘Seven hours, eight hours a day just standing there doing your job by yourself it's a bit, it's a bit much to ask from a person, when you've got someone next to you to talk to or something it changes it up completely’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

‘It's very much a clinical process there which sounds horrible, but it wasn't the worst in the world when you had a team of blokes around you’ (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Certainly, boredom and monotony are not unique to the BIMPS, with other sectors often reporting similar findings (Roy, 1959; Garson, 1994; Mars, 2001). In turn, like other sectors, socialising with other workers provided relief from the repetitive nature

of the work, the psychological 'activation' that individuals need to function well (Scott, 1966; Ashforth and Fried, 1998). Another closely related theme was the sense of shared endeavour amongst the workers, what Gibbons and Gerrard (1991) refer to as an 'in the same boat' consciousness.

'None of us actually wanted the job that we were doing, so it was kind of like a support group of like 'we can do this, it's not that hard' sort of thing, so that's why it felt like a kind of community' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'Every staff in [company name] is sitting in one shit [laughs] that's connected people... everybody we meet in [company name], we are one shit' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'These kind people sort of went 'here' and gathered me up and was sweet to me and yeah, I'm really, so whilst I didn't enjoy the job, I enjoyed that community' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

Thompson (1983: 223) made similar observations in his abattoir, describing a mutual feeling of 'we're all in this together'. Migrants further reported a unique sense of shared endeavour with their fellow migrant colleagues

'When I started as a meat inspector my manager was Spanish, so it was very good...he had been through the same as I was, living in the UK, studying as a meat inspector so he helped me quite a lot' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

'It doesn't matter their nationality but obviously, I feel a bit closer to people from other countries because we share, we share our experiences and usually most of us we feel the same about some things, the food for example [laughs]' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

A collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1995) appeared present as some migrants were able to bond by having been through similar experiences of relocating to the UK and finding employment in the BIMPS sector, creating a 'migrant solidarity' (Birey et

al., 2019). This 'bonding' process, where 'people who are like me in some important way' are found, can then provide the basis for the creation of a network, in this case, a potential migrant network (Putnam, 2000: 23).

### **6.3.1. Terms of Acceptance**

Whilst the occupational community was of benefit to BIMPS workers, there was no guarantee that individuals would be accepted simply because they worked at the same place. Individuals had to adhere to the social and cultural norms of the workplace if they were to gain acceptance in, and reap the benefits of, the occupational community (Collinson, 1992). One key skill that workers needed was the ability to engage in banter. Indeed, participants sometimes felt banter was a necessity in the workplace

'You should have a few good characters in your team, you know who'll keep the banter going like all day, that's what you need' (Gordon, British, Boner)

Banter is generally defined as a form of interactional bonding in a jocular fashion; often the aim is to insult or degrade an individual for amusement whilst simultaneously putting oneself at risk from a counter-insult (Dyner, 2008). Thus, the jibes may go back and forth in a ping-pong manner. As is typical in the 'joking relationship', individuals are 'required' not to take offence (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). The successful receiving of these banterers will enable assimilation into the occupational community, but failure to receive them generally means being marked as an 'outsider' (Collinson, 1988; Plester and Sayers, 2007). The ability to give and take jokes whilst not taking offence is a marker of the ideal masculine image in such shopfloor banter (Collinson, 1992; Plester, 2016). One of the first banterous encounters described by workers was the 'initiation process'

'There's a sense of if there's a new guy in you need to break him down before you can accept him as a member of a team which is horrific as far as I'm concerned...first day [they] hung [him] up on the hooks on the rail and just left [him] there... then [they] put [him] in the freezer... I can see what he meant, [he was] getting bullied a little bit' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Ceremonies such as these act as tests to see if new workers are 'worthy of participating fully in the shop-floor culture and banter' (Collinson, 1988: 189). They are transitioning through a rite of passage, with the 'breaking down' representing the liminal stage where an individual is not yet a member of the group but has also been separated from their previous social status. Turner (1995: 95) describes this process as individuals being ground down and then fashioned anew with 'additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life'. The additional power here is the ability to partake in the cultural banter of the meat facility. However, this was not necessarily a 'one-off' occurrence. Participants mentioned these tests and how to pass them correctly

'I seen you have to earn that respect, it's different...like if you're not tough enough, people try to test you all the time, test your tolerance and how patient you are with others and some of them being very disrespectful or rude is to have the power to tell other people what to do kind of thing or the more rude you are the more respect you have from others... it's a lot of psychological work' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'That's part of the game enit? You don't lose your cool, they've won if you lose your cool' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

Once workers have these banterous abilities, they can then move more into the 'giving' as well as the 'receiving' of banter (Dyrel, 2008). Amongst participants, this most commonly took the form of 'racist banter'

'You have your casual racism...it works back and forth... but it has its limits as well, but that only works when you can get on well with the people you work with...I'll get called the average Paki and that, I'm not Paki in any way [laughs] I'm not even Pakistani, I'm Indian but for me, it's normal I'm used to it, and then the Welsh you'll call them sheep shaggers and [laughs] you know you'll pass it around however it comes to you' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

“Marek you Polish bastard get your arse over here' you know I could say the same to them 'Eh you English cunt come here give us a hand with that' there were an old bloke, [name], the guy who got me the job he used to take the piss out us 'you old cunt, you old cunt'... give as good as you get, this is it with this racism nonsense, amongst friends it's alright cause you wouldn't go and say something like that, if a stranger came up 'you Polish cunt' I'd be like 'you what?' but if he's your mate, he's earned the right, he's your mate you know what I mean?' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

Personal characteristics such as ethnicity are often key sources of banter (Plester and Sayers, 2007). Burawoy (1985) suggests that racist banter permits two social phenomena. First, the coexistence of racial prejudices and everyday cooperation, and second, the convergence of interests inside the workplace and the divergence outside. As Marek points out, a strong friendship bestows ‘the right’ to insult one another in a jocular manner, confirming their sense of social solidarity by engaging in banter (Brown and Levinson, 1987). There is, of course, always the risk of a ‘misfire’ or of ‘going too far’. As a result, a ‘humour boundary’ may be erected by employees to assert what is acceptable to joke about and what is not (Plester, 2016)

‘I guess for me the boundary would be, I wouldn't like it to go into religion, race is one thing, I wouldn't like to cross into the boundary of religions and the rest of it, but I don't think it has ever gone that far for me either, I think people know where to draw the line’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

It may be surmised that BIMPS workers need to be cognizant of these boundaries and avoid breaking them. Conversely, banter can be used as a method of policing or disciplining others when boundaries are broken. This helps keep social norms and compliance in check (Fine and Sourcey, 2005). This might not necessarily be when a humour boundary is broken, but when general etiquette and norms are not upheld

‘You know we make [joke]; it's disgusting what I tell you but sometimes we make... [The OV] know anything but he was too smart, 'I am the OV, I am the important person now, I am like a boss' Okay, that we find a one sheep with septicaemia... we go to OV 'Look we have a problem, we find a sheep

we don't know what is this' and he come, looking, looking, check, check we see that he thinking [and he said] 'I think is okay' Okay I am disgusting but it's really good joke!...but after this situation, he never be too smart [laughs]' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

This joke played on an OV fits in with Ackroyd and Crowdy's (1990) definition of a 'degradation', where a group collects together to humiliate or embarrass an individual. Here, 'disciplinary humour' was used to deflate the ego of the OV (Billig, 2005). In this case, the humour is bottom-up in that the MHIs have humiliated the OV (their superior), an example of 'contested humour' where the subordinates question the authority of those above (Holmes and Marra, 2000). Interestingly, contested humour was not always done to enforce discipline, but at times was done behind the backs of superiors

'The only one we didn't get on with was [name] who was the buyer. He was just a pain in the arse, neebody [nobody] liked him, and he used to come in and 'look this is the way I want the sheep and the cattle done' and he couldn't do it and we used to stand and laugh at him, we used to go, '[name] want a cup of tea?' 'aye' [spit noise] spit in his cup of tea and give him his cup of tea, he just wasn't liked' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

Thompson (1983) noted similar behaviour in his beef plant where workers would act cordially towards superiors only to give rude gesticulations towards them once their backs were turned. This sort of behaviour may be interpreted as an act of 'sabotage', its main function being the temporary assertion of control (Mars, 2001). Making the tea is, however minutely, Derrick's task and therefore can be manipulated to his ends (ibid). It may be summarised then that whilst banter can be used for fun and social solidarity, the 'dark side of humour' may reveal itself to discipline others and to sabotage work (Plester, 2016).

### **6.3.2. Hindrances to Assimilation**

Another key aspect of creating an occupational community is the synthesis of a heterogeneous group of individuals. Again, simply working at the same place was not enough to guarantee the successful establishment of a workplace community.

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to establishing a workplace community was an inability to communicate due to no common language

'The communication is very difficult for us with other nationalities that I work with. Romanians do not speak English, my English is quite weak so it's difficult to communicate with them' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

'At some extreme situations really there is only sign language cause you can't really communicate at all which is problematic, I think for me not that much because I can speak two languages so I can always jump in but for the English guys who don't speak either of the foreign languages, for example, the ones that we are speaking in that might become very problematic' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

'Their English isn't always the best and what that tends to lead to, it creates sort of a border, so you'll have all the Pakistani Asians all in one canteen, they'll be speaking their own languages and whatever and the white people will be in the other canteen and the thing is it leads to them not mixing' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Whilst lack of communication prevented almost any kind of communication except the most basic, sometimes, workers reported intra-group conflicts between cultures (Hofstede, 2001)

'He wanted to come to my house to drink a coffee with me through the window to see me whilst I was working out and that if I could have a room to rent him and if I didn't have another room to rent maybe we can share my bed... when it got too explicit I said 'okay this is it, now I'm sure' I thought it was the language, of course, I thought it was the culture, well, one of the things my manager told me when I told her about this is 'well that is a typical thing in Romania, men are like that' and then I said 'well wait, that doesn't mean it's right' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

'I was doing induction, factory asked me to explain them how to use the toilet, which I say 'I'm sorry but I can't say something like that on induction' but yeah because people were complaining that some of the Romanian people were going to toilet and they don't know how to flush the toilet so this is the thing that we doesn't like with the gipsies, they are just dirty' (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

'These foreigners and they've been ripping the padlocks off, so there's been something said about that, they've been going in the fridge and pinching people bait [lunch] ... I think they think they can just do what they want' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team leader)

'We had a Muslim, two Muslim people working with us, so they were like on the line because halal meat, they were exporting to somewhere and it was hard to deal with them because of the culture, like cultural shock, they don't want me or any other person to tell them what to do or how to do the job or check them' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Specifically, the conflicts described above are socio-affective, in that they are centred around cultural incompatibilities with those around them (Jehn, 1995). The 'psychic distance' between different nationalities can cause issues in a multicultural workplace. Psychically-close cultures will likely have a shared idea of particular norms and beliefs etc., whilst those that are psychically distant may have difficulties in shared cultural understanding (Håkansson and Ambos, 2010). The lack of knowledge of how to use the toilet was not only an example of psychic distance to an extreme degree but so much so that Anna was unwilling to try to close that gap. Sofia expanded on her difficulties asserting that being a woman in the meat sector brought challenges where cultural incompatibility was concerned

'It was kind of hard to take from me and the other lady who was a woman too to take orders, like not orders but say 'Okay this is what I need to do to you, I need to inspect your knife, I need to check you I need to do this' and he didn't like it and he didn't have much respect for woman' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)



Others sometimes reported favouritism from team leaders/managers towards their own ethnic group

'When you do talk about team leaders yes, they will tend to look more after their own nationality per se, it can be Polish, English, Romanians... you call in sick, not going for a few days and then after a few days you call in say 'oh put me on holidays for that period I've been sick' they do that for him, as being British and let's say I did it, I was too for a couple of days and they did not put me on holiday' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'I was seeing like a huge difference between, like people who was from Chile, people who was local and who was from [inaudible] some people got more permission to do things than others, like there was 'I'm not going to show up today because I'm drunk' [laughs] 'okay it doesn't matter, we'll still pay you the day' and then if you miss a day and you're from Chile 'oh you get [discount?] and then one more time you go back home' kind of thing, like the tolerance was different, treatment was different too' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Furthermore, some migrant workers reported that they were on the receiving end of racial abuse from some of their UK colleagues

'I have been called let's say 'fucking Spaniard' [pause] easily done you know, just because you have to do your work and say 'okay you have to do this, you have to do that' and they insult you sometimes so that's the worst thing I guess I have been gone through, in terms of you know, being rejected just because I'm Spanish because I'm immigrant... it was rare, but it was quite possible' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

'There are a few which are racist I mean in all of the slaughterhouse, before there were a lot of Spanish vets, in one of the slaughterhouse, is writted [written] on the FSA door, by the FBO 'Food Standards Spain' something

like that [laughs] and that FBO is quite racist, very racist' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'I be a witness to a situation when one inspector, Welsh, tell to Italian girl, [she] has a problem with English that 'you are bitch', [she] don't understand this...but nothing happened, what was crazy, the reason [she] change her plant but this boy working, still and nothing' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

Workers generally reacted badly to being on the receiving end of racism. However, for some, it was not an issue. Either they were not bothered or had not encountered racism at all

'If they are racist to me [gesture of not being bothered]' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'I must say my experience in Scotland has been great, I've never been suffering any racism towards me or any weird comments, so I've always been quite happy' (Alexandra, Romanian, Head Vet)

Whilst there was intercultural conflict, some workers mentioned difficulties working alongside people of the same nationality as themselves, including UK workers

'Polish people are, like, if someone came twenty years ago, started working in the meat factory and now is a manager, it's thinking that it's a pussy, so they are not nice for the other Polish people...this is Polish culture, why my neighbour is better? He can't be better so I will put a shit on [him]' (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

'Some of the Romanians they are very hard to deal with [pause], for example, it happened to me, they saw that I am Romanian so basically, I am one of them they started to ask me a lot of questions and ask me to help them, they were like a bit annoying, so I said 'look, no, please' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

'I liked the Polish guys I worked with...there was a sense of shared endeavour with them I suppose that I didn't feel with the English teams...I probably didn't even pass the time of day with the English guys at all cause they were all about dogfighting and [things] that were beyond my understanding and there was a lot of machismo and all that kind of nonsense which I think is a bit sad really' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

Whilst generally seen as a benefit to members, ethnic-specific networks are not necessarily positive, such as cutting off members from wider society (Ryan, 2011). Some members may wish to distance themselves from their compatriots, indeed, dissatisfaction with the social/cultural norms of the home nation may act as a push factor to migrate in the first place (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė, 2021).

Finally, migrant workers sometimes criticised other migrants as a whole when not taking up opportunities given to them

'Most of them they are bitching about it, but they don't do anything about it at all, they are complaining that they want it better but then they are surprised that they haven't...they used to organise even the English lessons for the foreign people, but the attendance was very very crappy cause everybody was like 'why would I do it? I already have the job so why would I?' and then the same people are coming in and [complaining]' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

Conflict also arose between occupational groups. Namely, this was between MHIs/OVs and other members of staff. Several participants from both groups described difficulties working with one another. In regard to non-veterinary/inspector staff, the main source of problems was disagreements in the correct procedures

'I wouldn't say the vets help all the time as well in the killing side, I mean they come up with the most silliest rules as well, for example, we had to shoot a cow outside in the alleyway, they shot it from one side I was standing on the other side...the cow dropped to the floor and the alleyway

is kind of narrow, so I just sort of jumped over...in between its legs and then I killed it and I got told off for going over the cow, he said to me 'oh you should have gone all the way round' so I'm thinking 'you're telling me I have to kill it in a minute and then you're telling me I have to run around the whole shed [laughs] come round and then kill it'...they come up with their own health and safety, well, hygiene rules...they say 'don't spread water on the floor near the dead carcasses because you're going to cause contamination' whereas, I mean when a cow has got its skin on its covered in poo and wee all the rest of it, blood, and you're telling me 'if I'm going to spray water on the floor it's going to contaminate it?' Nah, they come up with the most silliest rules sometimes' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'We've had it before where you have an FSA officer come in and even something as simple as offloading carcasses out of a food lorry, we're standing in the back of the truck to lift it off the hook to lift it onto another hook and their first thing was 'well you need to inspect that before it touches your hook', 'well how am I going to inspect the carcass if I can't move the carcass to move it onto my rail to be able to see it cause at the moment it's crammed into the back of a lorry?' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Hamilton and McCabe (2016) found similar findings, that inspectors were seen as somewhat of a liability in their factory. The comments above are indicative of what Pope et al. (2013) referred to as the 'resistant' mindset of FBOs. The resistant mindset in their study was characterised by, amongst other things, suspicion of the inspectors, who 'make work' by 'finding faults' where none exist (ibid: 56).

From the perspective of the MHI/OVs, the largest source of conflict was when contamination was found which impeded the FBO's ability to continue production. Indeed, this conflict sometimes escalated to the level of verbal abuse

'The FBO know that it is contractor and a civil servant, they knows that when contractors see something and I don't know, I tell something, they sometimes show me a 'fuck off' [gestures] really, because I am contractor

but if I was clever and I find something and I have a problem I going to collect from FSA and say look this is a problem with meat on the floor yeah and that will be [racked?] for me, it's a crazy, this is the problem that I thinking that private sector in meat industry is a, sorry but is a stupid idea, it's stupid and really really dangerous for the human consumption' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'[They] might drop something on the floor and they might try to put it back in for consumption, just pick it up quick, five-second rule, and I'll shout 'Oi, are you going to give that your mother?', 'no', 'well you might be giving it mine, in the bin' just simple things' (Barry, British, MHI)

'It's kind of not uncommon in the slaughterhouses to receive threats as Official Veterinarian depending on the level of enforcement which was quite high at that time in the north-west in the UK so in some slaughterhouses there was a quite difficult situation between the official authorities and the companies, as we act like kind of policemen something like that' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

As described in these comments, inspectors often take an 'enforcer' role (Pope et al., 2013) or as Antonio says, 'we act like a kind of policeman'. Thus, because the enforcer must work alongside those who must follow the rules being enforced, it is perhaps not surprising this could become a source of conflict.

There was also conflict between MHIs/OVs based on whether they were from the FSA or hired through a private firm. Indeed, many workers contracted through private firms complained about various instances of harassment/racism from their FSA colleagues

'People who works directly for the FSA, not as contractors as we are, there's a great, great difference...were all foreigners, young people so we are stepped over all the time, all the time, and there's people who have spoken up against people who work directly for the FSA and nothing happens

actually there's people from the FSA that have been accused of harassment more than one time, racism' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

'The racist is coming from FSA staff, MHIs which are saying that we came to take the job, classic Brexit' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

Because FSA staff are civil servants, it was felt by the privately hired staff they had a sense of superiority and could therefore treat their non-civil servant colleagues differently. This appeared to be compounded by the fact that FSA staff were often British whereas private staff were migrants, suggesting the possibility of abuse from both occupational and ethnic differences.

### *Gay Workers*

Another group which may have difficulty gaining acceptance in the BIMPS was gay workers. Although the participants themselves did not voice any homophobic sentiments, there were reports of both British and migrant workers being less willing to accept gay (or even suspected to be gay) workers. This may then be an additional toll for gay workers to have to contend with. Whilst it was only mentioned twice by participants, a small pattern did start to reveal itself which was worthy of discussion

'[There's] picking on your mannerisms, making fun of people if they're potentially gay...I do remember the first interview I ever had in the meat world it was with the owner of the shop...he asked me about six times in my job interview am I gay 'Oh you've got really soft hands you must be gay', 'what's that? You worked at a hairdresser's? You must be gay' I went 'No, I can reassure you I'm definitely not gay' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'He was very homophobic, he didn't agree with gay rights at all, one of the colleagues, he was actually a UK worker, he was gay, and this Polish guy used to bully him for it all the time' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

Masculine cultures often have a simple interpretation of gay men, that they lack masculinity; thus, if a man is attracted to other men, they must be feminine (Connell, 1995). By actively rejecting gayness through banter and/or bullying, it helps reinforce

the investment in the masculine sexual role found in 'shop-floor' workspaces (Collinson, 1992). Whilst no gay workers were spoken to, accounts from other participants suggested two ways that both gay workers were able to gain acceptance from fellow employees. The first was through hard work

'I know of one gay butcher who works solidly down at one of the wholesalers that I use at the moment, and he gets respected exactly the same as everyone else' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Certainly, a high work ethic was universally respected among the participants. This work effort on the part of workers appears to transcend any fixed personal quality they may have. Lamont (2000) found similar findings amongst working men in relation to migrants i.e., they were accepted by US workers providing that they worked hard. The second strategy was to take any homophobic comments as a joke

'The gay guy that worked there he just kind of took it as a big joke and he wasn't really bothered by it, he just sort of laughed it off' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

Ultimately, what is interpreted as banter or bullying is dependent on the viewpoint of the receiver (Kruger, et al., 2006; Buglass et al., 2021). The worker's ability here to reframe what Andrew considers to be bullying into a joke as a defence tactic offers him psychological protection (Ashforth et al., 2007).

### *Religious Conflict*

There was one last signifier of a potential conflict, religious conflict. One participant made comments on the authenticity of both halal and kosher Slaughterers

'The only difference is there is somebody from the Muslim community whose licensed, and cuts their throat, and says a prayer, allegedly...when I'm in a halal plant, we do three hundred an hour, sheep [pause] one man cutting their throats, that's very fast prayer...and I've never seen their lips move yet...you can't say anything against Jews, cause it's anti-Semitic but you can against Muslims because of the wars, but that's the only animal,

they are never ever stunned, anything for kosher is not stunned... because that's their religion...its people's interpretation of old hygiene laws...they say 'our book says, we will not eat dead animals' and they class stunning as dead' (Barry, British, MHI)

Another participant told how following an accident at work, a religious/cultural conflict ensued

'This guy was playing around with the knife and then he turned around and then he did like a [motion] the other guy I think got like ten stitches, ten stitches in the arm...after that happened we had another argument because he say 'oh Allah make me to do this, to him because we can became friends' and there was a lot of things like that, I was like 'no man, you hurt someone because you weren't responsible...and he was like 'no you're wrong, you're wrong this is what Allah made me to do' and in the end... he was just almost try to approach to me very close and then we, I stop him and say 'no you're not coming closer to me, you're not going to do anything to me, you're not touching me' and it was like 'you do what I say because in my culture, woman doesn't have an opinion' or something like that he say to me and I said 'well, I'm not Muslim and we're not in your country so, there's nothing to do with that'' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

That said, participants did give examples of not only religious tolerance but that differences in religion enhanced workers' experiences

'I'm the only Asian and the only Muslim there so you could say it's something a bit different for them... so it's just nice to talk to someone and when you talk to someone you realise there's a lot of similarities between yourself and then, well with him he's a very practising Catholic so he goes to church regularly and all the rest of it, so you know when you talk to each other you realise there are some similarities between you and them' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)



Thus, whilst religious differences did sometimes produce conflict in cooperation, this was not always the case. Certainly, for Abdul not only tolerance but activate interest in the religions of others helped foster social harmony and highlight the similarities between workers.

### **6.3.3. Leisure Activities**

As well as navigating the occupational community whilst on the job, participants often discussed their activities outside of the workplace. Traditionally, Western society has been split into two time/activity periods: work and leisure (regarding employed individuals). Leisure is defined as time which is not occupied by paid/non-paid work, chores, or obligations and instead is used to pursue other activities or interests (Haworth and Veal, 2004). Generally, but not always, leisure activities promote well-being (ibid). Dumazedier (1967, cited by Veal, 2018) asserts there are three functions of leisure; relaxation, entertainment, and personal development, which can act interdependently. Moreover, different occupational groups often pursue different leisure activities (Parker, 1983). Leisure pursuits can be both social (e.g., the pub) and individual (e.g., reading). In terms of meat workers, a pattern of leisure activities appeared present. Generally, workers did have preferred activity choices and often these were closely linked with their occupation in the form of spillover activities, that is, activities somehow related to work (Wilkensey, 1960; Sthapit and Bjork, 2017). In Ackroyd and Crowdy's (1990) review, the single most common leisurely event amongst abattoir workers was hunting. Not only that, but workers hunted with those from their workplace as opposed to outsiders, signs of a strong 'occupational community' (Salaman, 1974). Whilst not hunting per se, activities somehow linked to the killing of animals for food such as shooting, out-of-work slaughter, and cooking meat appeared common outside of work

'I'm going on the weekend to kill some sheep over there as well and bring some back for myself, I mean when you've got a good relationship with your co-workers, they'll help you and you'll help them' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'Where we live there's a lot of shooting going on and we do family shoots and everything else and there's shoots on the farms we go to and if you end

up shooting twenty birds, it's a happy day, everyone gets fed, everyone's had a nice day out' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'I do a lot of venison with a lot of my family and friends and that, we all do a lot of shooting and home kills' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'[Last night] we had goose for dinner, somebody shot it, dropped it off to me and I made a crown roast and my Mrs. loved it' (Barry, British, MHI)

As Parker (1983) suggests, skills developed at work may be transferable to leisure time. Certainly, this appeared to be the case here such as when Abdul uses his slaughtering skills to kill some sheep for a friend. Additionally, workers may have personality traits which lend themselves to similar activities outside of work (ibid). The ability to detach emotionally from the killing of animals is a necessary trait for successful BIMPS workers, especially Slaughterers (McLoughlin, 2018) who may be transferred over to these spillover activities. Additionally, although not industrial meat workers, Kellert (1984) found both farmers and hunters were likely to have dominionistic attitudes towards animals. i.e., that animals are primarily to be used for human gains. Furthermore, whilst not a personality trait as such, workers create rationales to justify killing animals for food (McLoughlin, 2018). The same appears to be true where hunting/shoots are concerned. Thus, pigeon shooting can be framed as a 'tradition' or deer hunting can be for 'conservation purposes' (Bronner, 2008). Finally, the self-image of individuals may be greatly shaped by their occupation. They may see themselves as having specialised abilities, skills, knowledge etc. and pride themselves as such (Salaman, 1974), which may then affect leisure choices. With one participant, a sense of pride was present when he elaborated on his knowledge of long-forgotten recipes such as badger hams

'In Finland, I even taught them how to make hams out of badger, illegal in this country...I taught them an old trick from the 1700s how to make a badger ham...it's a passion because I can go back in history and use the old recipes' (Barry, British, MHI)

Similar notions of pride affecting leisure choices for meat workers have been found elsewhere (Meara, 1974; Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). For Barry, his extensive knowledge and cooking skills charge his leisurely activities with passion. His use of these skills and knowledge fits into Dumadezier's (Veal, 2018) third function of leisure, personal development. Indeed, all these spillover activities fit in this category, that is the willing, voluntary use of one's skills and knowledge outside of the workplace.

### *Drinking*

Another common social event participants discussed was drinking alcohol. This sort of socialising did not fit neatly into a typology. It had elements of both the extension hypothesis (where work and leisure are similar) but also of the compensatory hypothesis where the effects of work are counterbalanced with leisure activities (Sthapit and Bjork, 2017). Certainly, it is not a neutral pastime where there is no link between work and leisure (Parker, 1983). There appeared to be several reasons why workers go drinking following work. One was to compensate for the effort spent working

'People tend to drink a lot, *a lot*, after work, a lot because they work very hard so after work most people get together and they just drink drink drink'  
(Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Indeed, many societies culturally prescribe drinking to cope with the demands of working life, such as stress, or to counteract the emotions of working in dangerous environments (Sonnenstuhl, 1996). In addition, workers may use drinking sessions as opportunities to discuss matters at work

'You have a couple of drinks some people start to bring issues from work to the party and then they start to argue...that's something that I found, they just talk about what are their issue at work every time' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

Whilst for Sofia, discussing matters outside of work crossed her social boundary (Barth, 1998) for many, discussing work over a few drinks was a common leisurely pursuit. Out of sight of the managers, the 'team' can convene and no longer must keep

up the performance expected in the workplace (Goffman, 1990b). However, above all else, going drinking, especially in a pub, served Dumazedier's (Veal, 2018) first function of leisure, relaxation

'When we were younger obviously, we'd go out Friday nights together for a drink, two or three of us meet up regular, friends more than work colleagues' (Barry, British, MHI)

'Sometimes we'll go out drinking and that or we'll all go out at Christmas time and have a drink' (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

'We used to meet up there on a Wednesday night, have a good few pints, back to work on a Thursday [laughs]' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'We go to Christmas parties and sometimes, once, twice a month go for a little drink in the town' (Agnieszka, Polish, Handpicker)

'Going to the pub was a normal thing, the pubs were packed, them were the days' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

The pub is a common meeting place for many groups, offering feelings of security, community, and a place to relax (Davis, 1981; Cooke, 2015). Perhaps most importantly, the pub is a place for workers where their behaviour and thoughts are not arranged for them by audiences, authority figures, shows and so on, allowing them to take the role of participants rather than spectators (Mass Observation, 2009). Drinking alcohol, particularly beer, can evoke connotations of celebration (Fincham, 2016), thus drinking on Friday nights or around Christmas time may signify a celebration that work has temporarily finished. Whilst the general functions of drinking appeared to be for compensation and relaxation, it can be the case that the purpose of drinking is to become disinhibited (ibid). As one participant elaborates, the pay he received facilitated this pursuit as well as opening the possibility of other endeavours

'I used to spend most of me money on drink and drugs...first time in me life I couldn't drink me money away, got into drugs [laughs] cause I couldn't spend it all' (Marek, Polish, ex-Slaughter)

Finally, there was one participant who did not join in with the drinking culture at the BIMPS for religious reasons

'I wouldn't say like I'd go out with them to, I don't know, the pub, I'm not allowed to drink anyway but not that sort of socialising' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Religious membership often adheres to following religious doctrine, with the forbidding of alcohol being one of the most common religious rules (Heath, 2000). Thus, this membership appeared, in this case, to take precedence over the occupational community membership, thus a social boundary was made (Barth, 1998). Whilst not dichotomous in the sense that Abdul and his colleagues are strangers (as they work together and share spillover activities), in terms of alcohol they are not 'playing the same game' due to a marked difference in behaviour (ibid: 15). If individuals are unable or unwilling to inculcate themselves into the workplace culture, this can result in exclusion from the occupational group (Plester and Sayers, 2007). However, participants often seemed to not socialise out of preference rather than exclusion

'I'm usually having my friend circle very very tight, I'm not really that much of a socialising person to go out for a pint with strangers and stuff so, with some but not many and not often' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

'We planned to, we never actually got round to doing it, but we wanted to, that might just be me not being a very sociable person though' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'Not really outside of work, I'd say social media, Facebook, Instagram, that's about it really' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

‘Not much, very limited... I try to keep my distance to avoid any misunderstandings at work because that usually happens or the other way is when you actually throw a party with people who work in the same plant and then you have a couple of drinks some people start to bring issues from work to the party and then they start to argue and that's when things stumble out of control and that was like 'no I don't want to be in that situation' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

These individuals then had little interest in maintaining an occupational community outside of work for differing reasons. This may have been down to personality type or to avoid work-related issues. As Abdul suggests, due to the presence of social media, it may be easier to maintain contact digitally rather than in person.

#### **6.3.4. Workplace Aggression**

Whilst the workplace culture afforded workers several benefits to deal with the tolls of meat work, the culture can become a toll in and of itself. One toll which was mentioned by numerous participants was the presence of differing kinds of workplace aggression, that is, efforts by individuals in the workplace to cause harm to others (Neuman and Baron, 1998). Workplace aggression can come in an enormous variety of forms from spreading rumours to physical attacks (Baron, 1993). Participants often used the term ‘bullying’ to describe this, which, whilst difficult to define, is generally characterised by long-term aggressive targeting by an individual or group towards another individual or group coupled with an inability by the receiver(s) to defend themselves (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). In reality, there were several different aggressive behaviours shown which will be differentiated where appropriate. Workplace aggression is, of course, not unique to the meat sector. However, as Salin (2003) and Baillen et al. (2009) note, certain workplaces may be characterised by aspects which encourage such behaviours. Meat work, being masculine, physical, and competitive may be one such environment. Branch et al. (2013) note further that the influence of wider society and how organisations respond to workplace aggression/bullying affect how present it becomes in workplaces. Interestingly, workers often believed higher levels of workplace aggression were due to low levels of education

'Aggressions, threatens, I mean to be threatened as an official veterinarian it was, I found it yes...I mean the level of education in this environment is quite low' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

'You are working with people who are not highly educated, or they don't respect you or they just want to make your life really hard while you're on the job that's mentally too, it's hard work' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'It's really just nasty colleagues I guess, it's not really the nicest place to be, people are kind of low-educated and when you are low-educated you're not very polite either and there tends to be a lot of bullying' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

Several participants were outspoken about aggression in their workplaces, with one participant openly declaring his own aggressive behaviour. This affected participants across the job spectrum

'There were a lot of cases of bullying, bullying because you are pointing out the problems, the contamination, for example, bullying because sometimes the MHIs are, they don't want to stamp something in their acceptance it shouldn't be meant to be stamped, bullying because maybe they don't want to stay on for overtime...I haven't seen it, but I've heard from one OV in the same plant I am talking with this overtime, when the FBO is actually slapping the MHI' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'There tends to be a lot of bullying and stuff like that around and I don't really like that, I don't agree with it in some places there can be people who are just making fun and getting bored for example, and they start to throw things at you like small pieces of fat or glands or something else like that' (Magnus, Danish, Butcher)

Slapping is specifically a form of 'workplace violence' (Neuman and Baron, 1998). As described above, in Cristofor's case this was another example of conflict between

occupational groups. The throwing of fat and glands is arguably 'organization-motivated' rather than outside the organisation's control in that because the work may be boring (ibid), other sources of mental stimulation may come through in aggressive ways. This was between workers doing the same task and bounded by the line. All these acts are signifiers of social dominance from the aggressors (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). One participant told how he was not the receiver but the giver of workplace aggression

'He was standing behind us being cheeky, being two-lippy, thinking he was big and as I turned round with the knife, he had turned his back on us, so I just stabbed him in the back, literally, oh he accepted it, that he had been too cheeky, and I went to his wedding a couple of weeks later' (Derrick, British, Slaughterer)

'I had a crash in my car on the way one night and he [colleague] was a big fat lad and he got seatbelt burn [laughs] he got a really bad seatbelt burn and he just turns around and says, 'I wouldn't care about fucking you' and I threatened him and he never said a dicky bird after that [laughs]' (Derrick, British, Slaughterer)

Derrick appeared to fulfil some kind of informal 'enforcer' role by punishing bad behaviour from colleagues, such as getting 'cheeky' (Huey et al., 2015). Furthermore, workplace aggression often came in a 'downwards' fashion i.e., from those in more senior positions in the workplace hierarchy

'[The manager would] talk to you like shite, literally, 'ah I want that now, do fucking this' that's the way it went on, just shouting at you all the time' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'They can get a bit aggressive or a bit cocky if you want, you could say and they can just nitpick at the littlest things for no reason, it's happened with me before and I have ended up in arguments' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)  
'If not daily I would say every week...somebody is forced to do something they are not expected to do or persuaded, kind of pushed into doing things



that are on the border of the law and instructions, by use of kind of offensive language towards them' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

These examples may be classed as different kinds of 'verbal abuse' which can range from shouting, unjustified criticism, threats, and offensive language (Stark, 2009). It has often been speculated that certain groups may be at higher risk of workplace aggression than others such as ethnic minorities, although this is dependent on the circumstances (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). Migrant workers, in particular, are often seen to be a vulnerable group with less power than their British counterparts and some participants alluded to as much

'I felt intimidated all the time because he was trying to put himself at a level and always trying to make us, not just me, usually, the immigrants, putting us on a lower level or making us feel like shitty' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

One of the main reasons for this is that migrant meat workers are far more likely to be hired via work agencies (Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017) which adds additional structural power imbalances. Migrants may be easier targets due to a lack of understanding of their rights, poorer language abilities and being afraid to make a complaint in case of repercussions. In addition, it may be the case that poor treatment is not recognised as bullying by migrant workers

'Foreigners at the beginning they don't know how to do it and they don't know where is bullying, because in Poland, in Romania, in other countries they are used to it bullying' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'Because we're not British, we don't know our rights, first of all, we don't know how things work here, we don't know what we can and what we cannot accept' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

The dual frame of reference may mean workers are more likely to put up with poor treatment at work, as it still may be an improvement on the kind of treatment received

in the home nation (Reese, 2001). However, at the same time, migrants were reported as the aggressors themselves. To reiterate Andrew's quote

'He was very homophobic, he didn't agree with gay rights at all, one of the colleagues, he was actually a UK worker, he was gay, and this Polish guy used to bully him for it all the time' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

Although minority groups are generally seen to be the receivers of aggression, it is possible that because migrants are the numeric majority within the BIMPS (BIMPS, 2020b), it provides a temporary power shift in their favour which may foster bullying (Seyranian et al., 2008). In this sense, the abattoir may become somewhat of an 'ethnic enclave' (Demireva and Zwysen, 2022). As Poland is arguably one of the least LGBT-tolerant countries in the EU (Korolczuk, 2020), this Polish worker was possibly applying his own culturally influenced habitus in the workplace which was permitted by being within a space accepting of such a view.

#### **6.4. Summary**

In this chapter, workers described their relationships both with the outside world and with each other. In regard to the former, two major categories revealed themselves. The first was characterized by little to no contact with outsiders, with the exceptions of their own personal social network such as friends, family etc. Participants felt this was due to a lack of interest from outsiders because BIMPS businesses encouraged distance between themselves and customers specifically and due to a lack of agricultural education at school. Workers believed this relationship was reflected in the lack of appreciation and recognition of their work, which was also demonstrated in the wages they received. The second category was the 'stigmatized' relationship characterized by disapproval or hostility from outsiders. This was especially present when it came to interactions with vegans. Workers used a range of methods to deal with this such as 'condemning the condemners', what was termed 'educating clients and the public', 'accepting' and simply tolerating opposing views (Skyes and Matza, 1957; Ashforth et al., 2007). What was especially surprising was that, contrary to what might be assumed, meat workers were not closed to the idea of reducing meat consumption or eating vegan food, indeed, this was sometimes seen as preferable to consuming industrially produced meat.

Regarding the relationship with one another, workers often described a strong 'occupational community' (Salaman, 1974). This aided workers in several ways such as combatting monotony, offering social support, and creating social networks. Workers often described having a fairly rich social life with colleagues by engaging in various out-of-work activities. To gain a place in the occupational community workers had to demonstrate their ability to follow social norms such as the ability to engage in banter. Banter had other functions than simply having fun though and could be used to discipline those who did not follow the norms of the group and as a sign of acceptance within this group. Issues around cultural differences between migrant and UK workers were found as well as issues amongst individuals of the same ethnicity. Thus, it may be surmised that simply working in the same place was not sufficient to create a strong occupational community. Finally, workplace aggression was regularly reported by workers in both physical and verbal ways.

## Chapter 7: Emotions and Coping Strategies

‘Did I feel sorry for them? Yes, you do, but you got on with your job’ (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

### 7.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, there are numerous physical and social tolls of working in the BIMPS. This chapter analyses the psychological difficulties of working in the BIMPS and the coping strategies used to deal with these challenges. Of course, physical, and social difficulties can themselves be sources of psychological difficulty, thus these consequences will be included where appropriate. As Rivera (2015) notes, certain jobs may be ‘emotionally tainted’ in that they require exposure to tasks which have the potential to be psychologically difficult. She used immigration border control agents in the US as an example, who often had to make the tough decision to deny entry to Mexican migrants trying to cross the southern US border. In the BIMPS, close regular interaction with/exposure to death acted, for some workers, as a strong source of emotional taint. Work that includes the giving of death has been regularly shown to be especially emotionally distressing (Sanders, 1995; 2010; MacNair, 2002; Talberg and Jordan, 2022). To counteract this, workers often engaged in ‘emotion work’, that is, efforts to change in degree or quality given emotions (Hochschild, 1979). This work involved several ‘coping strategies’ to bear the ‘silent burden’ of dirty work (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Baran et al., 2012). As one worker summed up

‘You’re basically putting your body on the line physically, and I would argue mentally, for near minimum wage and the only other people who are doing that are the people in the cutting room and the only way you can cope with that is either you have thick skin or a great sense of humour or you look after each other’ (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Whilst these strategies were effective, they were not infallible. Some workers discussed an inability to cope with certain aspects of their jobs, to the point of outright leaving the job or developing mental illnesses.

## 7.2. Emotions

Meat work can be emotionally taxing and may evoke 'ugly feelings' of disgust, shame, shock, and guilt (Ngai, 2005; Victor and Barnard, 2016). Morally contested work (Rivera, 2015, Jensen and Rodgers, 2021) such as work which deals with death (Thompson, 1991; Sanders, 1995; 2010) can be particularly emotion-evoking. Some participants told of these difficulties

'I was feeling very very bad in slaughterhouse when I was doing for example killing, when they were killing calves,' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'I felt like really bad, I felt like I cannot see this because someone from the QC team has to be around when all the killing happens and I was like 'I cannot do this'' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'Maybe in the like meat inspection for the first weeks was like a 'oh my god what I do here?' I never wanted to work, I don't approve the killing, I don't like people who are killing the animals' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

In addition to these emotional difficulties, the lack of appreciation and recognition/stigmatization from outsiders means workers have little to no external validation for their work to fall on for mental support (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Tracy and Scott, 2006). Because of this, the proper regulation of emotion was seen as a necessity for workers. Indeed, many participants discussed the mental resilience needed to work in the abattoir and how this work would not suit everyone

'You've got to have literally a mindset to work in them places' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'I know there are people who couldn't be able to work in a slaughterhouse and I understand too, it depends on how sensitive you are' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

‘It’s livestock, you can’t get emotional about livestock... if you’re the sort of person that’s got a conscience about ‘poor little animals’ and stuff like that maybe it’s not the job for you’ (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

To assist with occupational tolls, dirty workers deploy a variety of coping strategies to enable them to operate successfully and there were numerous strategies used by meat workers. As discussed in Chapter 6, membership in an occupational community is itself a coping strategy (Deery et al., 2019), however, the strategies discussed here are used on a more individual rather than a group basis. Coping strategies are behavioural or cognitive techniques used to manage the taxing nature of demands in different scenarios, such as the workplace (Thoits, 1995). They can be of a problem-solving nature or emotionally orientated (Bosmans et al., 2016). McLoughlin (2018) asserts one of the key aspects of the ideal meat worker is ‘emotional detachment’. More specifically, workers used ‘professional detachment’, that is, where employees psychologically distance themselves from particular parts (usually unpleasant) of their jobs (Oakley and Cocking, 2009). One way to achieve this was to diminish the act itself i.e., to make it less meaningful than what might be first thought. Hamilton and McCabe (2016) found this in their study of a chicken factory, where abattoir work was described as ‘just a job’. Likewise, Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990: 6) assert that, from the perspective of the slaughterers, killing is ‘just something that had to be done’. Similar sentiments were recorded from participants in this study, both from those who did the killing and those who did not

‘I don’t like killing you know, but it were just a job you had to do’ (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

‘I don’t know, looking back at it you think ‘ah I was cruel’ but then again it was just a job to me’ (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

‘It’s just work that has to be done’ (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

Interestingly, this devaluation of what is happening is essentially the opposite of ‘infusing’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Rather than charge the work with meaning, the

contrary is seemingly true; killing is like any other regular task. Grandin (1988: 210) describes this as the 'mechanical approach' to slaughter, whereby the slaughterer behaves 'as if he was stapling boxes moving along a conveyor belt. He has no emotion about his act'. This psychological state was generally not present straight away. For many workers, attaining this level of professional detachment was a process which took time to manifest

'Once you got there and you see it every single day it becomes like habit for you, the animals just become numbers' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

'S: [At first] it was kind of shocking to me... when they were killing cows, I felt like really bad...I was like 'I cannot do this' but at the end I realised that it is what it is'

J: So, did you find that over time you adjusted?

S: Yeah, I did, I did'

(Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'I guess the more you're in it the more, what could you say? The more used to it you become' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

This emotional numbing to the process of killing animals was present across both different occupations and nationalities. The shock factor that Sofia describes is in line with Victor and Barnard's (2016) four-stage process of adjusting to slaughter, with the first stage being characterised by shock/trauma. This continued process then normalised the work via habituation, that is, repeated exposure to the same stimulus which leads to a reduction in cognitive shock (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2002). For others, this shock factor may be absent due to previous experiences. As was discussed in Chapter 4, several participants talked about being involved in animal slaughter in some way from an early age, especially if they grew up in a rural area. This applied to all types of workers

'In Spain my old relatives they used to live in small villages, so they used to do the killing of the pigs themselves, so I'm used to see it, I was used to

see that, the killing of the birds in the farm' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

'The abattoir was no issue at all, because I watched my grandfather kill animals since I was a kid on his farm, so that was no issue' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

'Me father he were a country bloke...what did assist me were watching things back home [in Poland] where they used to do it in yard, killing a pig, I'd seen it, they usually did kill a pig when we came over' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

Here, cultural transmission of using and killing animals from one generation to the next has been successful. Indeed, vertical cultural transmission, from one generation to the next, is especially powerful during childhood (Reyes-Garcia et al., 2013). Regarding meat work/slaughter, this transition was perhaps best summarised by the following remark

'Luckily being brought up in the countryside we learned earlier to kill things' (Barry, British, MHI)

Other participants, whilst not necessarily from a rural background, still had experience with slaughter/death in some way. This cultural transmission was more (but not entirely) in a horizontal form (ibid), i.e., between generations

'When I was abroad, I had already witnessed animals being killed...in third world countries it's the norm for them to, for example, kill an animal in their back garden...so I did have some sort of expectation of what I was about to see' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'It wasn't the first time when I went into a slaughterhouse because when I was a student I went with my colleagues and my teachers to different slaughterhouses, so I knew the process, I knew how it is, so for me it wasn't



something new really, so I knew what to expect, it wasn't a big shock'  
(Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

'During the degree, we also went to a slaughterhouse as training so for me it's not that I came to the UK, and I saw that for the first time in my life'  
(Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

'It's probably a lot about what they saw in the war, a lot of them were airmen and I remember talking to a lot of them about the detachment...when we're talking about flying in [a bomber] and seeing the bombs falling, and he said he couldn't think about them falling on the ground and what happened... it's probably too horrible to contemplate really' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

Experiences drawn from childhood, previous work experiences, trips abroad, university and even warfare then assisted in workers being able to professionally detach from slaughtering. These experiences acted as cultural transmissions at the micro-level, where specific individuals inculcate specific aspects of culture not readily needed or available to everyone (Ellen and Fischer, 2013). The workers have thus been 'primed' to deal with the stimuli they are likely to face in the abattoirs (Wagner, 1979). This priming of watching/carrying out slaughter in other settings was then transferred over to the abattoirs allowing some workers to 'skip' the shock factor faced by their unaccustomed peers.

### **7.2.1. Moral Obligations**

As was discussed in Chapter 6, there were signifiers of a 'moral community' in the BIMPS, whereby an agreed-upon code of ethical conduct is collectively prescribed to its members (Regan, 1991). Generally, animals are excluded from moral communities, with exceptions sometimes being made for pets and certain other species (whales, dolphins etc.) (Singer, 2015). Yet, farm animals occupy a peculiar middle position where they are not absolutely excluded in that they do receive moral concern, but not to the same degree as human members or pets. As Dickens (1996: 62) notes, these animals have become 'specialised' in that their existence is centred around one of production. Thus, cows are for beef or milk and chickens are for 'chicken' or eggs. Despite this 'mechanisation, rationalisation and automation' of these animals, workers

still afforded them moral concern (ibid). It was collectively recognised by workers that animals' lives were sacrificed so that they could be processed and sold for meat and, as such, workers felt there were moral obligations to the animals which needed to be fulfilled (Zimmerman, 2010). Indeed, moral obligations towards hunted or farmed animals are found universally; the 'killer with a conscience' is found worldwide (Serpell, 1996: 136). As several workers noted

'If you're going to eat meat then you treat it with dignity and you think about it and you're mindful of the sacrifice of that animal' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

'It doesn't matter if they would be wild animals, pets, livestock, they all deserve to be treated respectfully and humanely' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

'My job is to make sure that that animal is respected to the most that it can be otherwise its death was completely pointless' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

These obligations came in two forms, *antemortem* obligations and *post-mortem* obligations. Indeed, whilst workers were often emotionally detached from death in and of itself, they were heavily emotionally invested in fulfilling these obligations. When performing 'necessary evils', workers have been found to both psychologically disengage (emotional detachment), but also to psychologically engage in their tasks (Margolis and Molinsky, 2008). This process involves a connection with one's emotions and a recognition of the experiences of those who receive the harm, in this case, the animals.

### *Antemortem Obligations*

Regarding the antemortem obligations, workers almost universally invested much concern and effort in ensuring that the suffering of the animals prior to slaughter was kept to a minimum

'As vets, we obviously care about animals, so I think controlling the welfare is quite important, cause I know they are in a slaughterhouse to die, but if

we can make that the animals in their last moments, that they have a 'nice time', they don't suffer, they don't fear, so I think it's quite good' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

'There is death, but if it's done to the most humane way possible, to the highest animal welfare then I think that's all we can do really, as long as it's had a good life up to that point and it's not in any pain when it does die, I think everyone has done their job to the best they can' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'If you're going to kill an animal, you do it as quickly as possible and swiftly as possible, you make sure you've sharpened your knife to the best of your ability that you are going to slaughter that animal as quick as you can...if you're going to do it, you do it properly or don't do it' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'There was something about a quick death, that was very important to [the workers], and it was a clean kill and those kind of 'quick/clean' words we used a lot, so I've picked that up as my own language and I always think that a quick and dignified death, it should almost not know it's coming' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

For one MHI, the welfare side of his role was central to the mission of working within the abattoir

'For me, that wasn't a problem for a very simple reason, the impact you can have as a vet improving animal welfare in slaughterhouses is huge, it's much higher than if you work in a clinic or if you work with horses...the number of animals it implies, animals that are killed every day and you have to check that are killed in a humane way so I don't have a problem' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

This concern fits within what Hochschild (1979) refers to as 'feeling rules', an often-unspoken set of social guidelines as to which emotions are appropriate at a given time

and/or place. In a modern BIMPS facility, concern for welfare was seen as a desirable aspect, as has been found elsewhere (Grandin, 1988; Hamilton and McCabe, 2016; McLoughlin, 2018). Indeed, emphasis on a lack of pain regarding dealing with death is often used as a form of emotional padding (Sanders, 1995). Not everyone gave such empathy toward animals though, there were occasions where the experiences of animals were denied by participants, such as the potential severity of their illnesses

'I've seen some of the old cows [with] pneumonia, pericarditis, or some of the old sheep and you think 'how the *hell* is that still walking round?' If that were a human, but it would be walking around quite normal' (Barry, British, MHI)

This type of care may be regarded as 'detached concern' (Zimbardo, 2007), characterised by a dehumanizing of the subject when carrying out work on them, in this case, slaughter. 'Denial of injury' (Maruna and Copes, 2005) was used as a neutralization technique; whilst harm has been done, animals can (according to Barry) withstand more/feel no pain and therefore the harm is not as bad as it may first appear.

It was also noteworthy that only one participant claimed to enjoy the killing side.

J: Was there anything that you especially liked about it? Anything that stood out?

D: [pause] Mainly the killing [laughs]

(Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

However, this was not the social norm. Indeed, whilst not necessarily an obligation, it appeared to be an expectation that workers should not enjoy killing animals

'If someone to say they like working as a job killing animals, I mean they'd sound like a bit of sicko [laughs]' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer).

### *Postmortem Obligations*

Following the death of the animal, the post-mortem obligation became apparent, which was to use as much of the animal as possible

'When I'm in the slaughterhouses you know a lot of the slaughtermen they see them as numbers 'Oh we're doing two hundred today, oh we're doing one fifty' I says, 'That's not a number, that's an animal that's been alive, you have to treat it with respect, make sure you get everything off it you can use' (Barry, British, MHI)

'You kind of celebrate that animal and its death because it's your duty to eat every bit of it' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

Indeed, using as much of the animal as possible was seen to be a form of atonement (Serpell, 1996); as Sophie notes, to eat every bit was to celebrate the life of the animal. This kind of behaviour following the death of an animal is not unique to the BIMPS and has been documented in many different cultures worldwide (Grandin, 1988). If the animal and its obligations towards it are seen as sacred (Durkheim, 1995), there was no doubt as to what was regarded as profane: waste. Universally, participants were opposed to wasting any part of the animal that was of use

'Make sure nothing goes to waste because you've took a life and it's having that respect, it's not a number, it's an animal' (Barry, British, MHI)

'Like two or three hundred cattle that you kill in a day how much of it actually gets eaten or used for something? I mean in the lamb slaughterhouses I work, half of it gets thrown in the bin, probably more' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'That's the ultimate betrayal really, isn't it? ...you've brought tonnes of it because it's cheap and then you've ended up throwing it all away, so you're worse *then* than someone that eats meat; you're someone that buys meat and then you don't even bother eating it because you've got a fifty-p deal' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Marcus, frames this as the 'ultimate betrayal'; by throwing away the produce following the sacrifice of the animal, the post-mortem obligation has been broken. Indeed, generally throwing away 'good food' can evoke senses of shame, anxiety, and guilt (Evans, 2012) but for Marcus, having that closer contact with the process intensifies this moral bind and thus the feeling of guilt, and remorse that go with it (Zimmerman, 2010).

### **7.2.2. Coping Strategies and Sustaining a Positive Identity**

Occupational ideologies are another way of coping with the emotional tolls of meat work. These are defined as 'systems of beliefs that provide a means for interpreting and understanding what the occupation does and why it matters' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 421). From the data, two occupational ideologies seemed especially present, 'reframing' and 'recalibrating', with some 'refocusing' being used (ibid). Framing allows individuals to make sense of the world. Essentially, this process involves answering the question 'What is going on here?' when faced with a particular occurrence (Goffman, 1986: 8). The answer (which can be different depending on who is asked) will then provide 'schemata of interpretation' for the respondent (ibid: 21). Dirty jobs are often smeared by interpretations bestowed on them by wider society. In terms of meat work, the answer may be a job that is cruel, violent and, at least by some, unnecessary (Joy, 2010; Singer, 2015). One way in which to tackle these answers is to reframe them, in other words, to focus on how the job is valuable (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Participants were often found to reframe by 'infusing' the work with specific meanings (ibid). For instance, rather than seeing their work as unnecessary as may be argued by some (Joy, 2010), meat work was framed as a highly necessary method of providing food

'I would love a world with no abattoirs where you don't need to eat animals, yeah why not? But it's not possible at least not in the short term, the people need to get food and they need to get healthy food' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

'It's basically what the meat industry is about, taking live animals and making them into food' (Alexandra, Romanian, Head Vet)

'They are animals that are being raised to provide for us like, meat, so I was like 'okay this is kind of different' I feel like it's the same like a fish, when you are farming fish, because a lot of people are against that but it's kind of the same, I think' (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

If the animal's socially determined purpose is to provide food, the killing of animals for meat is necessary to fulfil this purpose. This type of reframing was common, as has been found elsewhere (Lesy, 1987; Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; McCabe and Hamilton, 2015). Kellert (1984) identifies this attitude towards animals as 'utilitarian', that is, when an individual's primary interest in animals is centred around their practical and material value. For Sofia, this type of violence is 'kind of different', presumably from other forms of violence towards animals, in that the potential benefit to humanity provides the moral justification for animal slaughter (ibid). Some workers went a step further by differentiating between industrial meat production and their own preparation of meat by hand

'There's an artistry to it, doing it good, it is actually artistry...I even make me own sausage skins, I can take the intestines of a sheep or pig and make them into sausage skins and clean them, now they use machines and chemicals, I can do it by hand, it's just a, it's the artistry, you're taking a dead animal and you're making it look beautiful' (Barry, British, MHI)

'In the meat world there are what I would consider two types of butchers. There are people that I would call cutters and they are more factory driven, from point A to point B and then get your paycheck, and then there's people like myself...it's more of a passion, you want to display that animal in the best way possible' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

'The difference is as a butcher, is that you take a carcass and you cut it into different parts...they're called primal cuts right...and then you'd sell it to a restaurant or Mrs Jones walking to the shop...but these food processing plants, it all comes out in a bag, you know if you go to Tesco and you look at the meat range, that's not...it's not done in the shop or out the back, it's

not done in a butchery environment, it's done, they kill it, they pack it and it comes out in a box, in Clingfilm to go on a shelf' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

Here the animal is symbolically redefined by being transformed, in Barry's case from being a 'dead animal' to 'look beautiful'. Referring to this process as 'artistry' allows for a new meaning to be bestowed on the process giving connotations of craftsmanship and skill (Sennett, 2009).

There were numerous terms used by participants to help normalise the process of transformation from live animal to meat product. 'Process' was used to describe the killing/butchering. At Highland Sheep, signs using the word 'factory' were used to refer to the abattoir (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2002). Some participants referred to working in the meat sector as a 'trade'

'I was a fourteen-year-old just learning me trade' (Barry, British, MHI)

'In my time you were classed as a back shop butcher, learnt my trade doing that, used to go onto the slaughter floor and watch the lads there because it was all in one, and learnt me trade being a slaughterman' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

Wacquant (1995: 495) found boxers would use terms such as 'trade' and 'craft' to legitimate the pursuit the boxing by framing it as an authentic practice rather than a 'miniature realization of Hobbes's state of nature'. These euphemisms help to 'displace' the negative connotations that go with negative topics (Jing-Schmidt, 2019). Certainly, MHIs and OV's were regularly found to symbolically redefine their job roles

'My role is to make the food safe for the people, that is fucking important job, without me, plant no working, I am like a god [laughs] or like an angel, god is OV' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'The food animals they are eating, we are the one making them awesome for them, if the food animal they are diseased and infectious to them they



will become sick...so directly or indirectly we are human doctor too'  
(Kamaru, Nigerian, MHI)

'Everything that every single one does in very single abattoir across the UK actually keeps us healthy and fed and meat in the supermarkets so it's one of those 'hidden heroes' type of things' (Alexandra, Romanian, Head Vet)

Thus, rather than an inspector, the MHI becomes an 'angel', 'doctor' or 'hero' and, in the case of the OV, a 'god'. Tracy and Scott (2006) found firefighters worked hard to maintain a similar idea of the heroism of the job. However, in their study, the status of 'America's heroes' was bestowed on them by others, whereas the MHIs and OVs must strive to maintain this image themselves. Another form of reframing was by viewing slaughter through a religious lens. As one participant went on to say

'[It's] a religious duty indirectly ... because the thing is, yeah a lot of people eat meat and yeah because I'm providing halal meat it's a duty which I'm providing to my people' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Grandin (1988) identified this method of slaughter as the 'sacred ritual approach'; as a religious duty/demand from God, the act of slaughter is seen as forgivable; the term 'Halal' can be translated as 'permissible' (Grummett, 2015). Similar findings have been found in Kosher abattoirs. Subscribing to the religious order of things allows workers to justify slaughtering animals, 'God created the Earth, humans have to worship Him, and all the rest of the creation should serve them. Thus, animal killing is authorized and approved' (Ben-Yonatan, 2022: 359). The overarching belief here, whether secular or religious, is that killing animals is interpreted as providing for society. Working-class men have been found to embrace the 'provider role' (Wimer and Levant, 2013). Whilst this is often in relation to family (Brown, 2016), here it is seen to be providing for society at large. This evokes connotations of what McCaughey (2010) refers to as 'caveman masculinity', where men may resort to viewing their behaviours as more evolutionarily determined. She also notes how this allows men to feel morally exonerated, as ethically questionable behaviour may be framed as 'natural' (ibid) which is also one of Joy's (2010) three Ns of Justification for eating, and by proxy

producing, meat. The separation of men as providing for the community, in this case in the form of food, may fit in with this type of masculine framing.

Closely related to reframing is the 'necessity shield' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014). As established, workers often saw meat production as a necessity. Therefore, by extension, somebody must carry out the work, however unpleasant it may be. This thinking is exemplified by phrases such as

'Someone has to do it' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'Well, we got to eat don't we so [laughs]' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

This attitude helps reduce moral taint through a, at least partial, 'denial of responsibility' (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Maruna and Copes, 2005). From this point of view, it is society which is responsible for such work by creating a demand for meat, the workers are simply fulfilling the roles of suppliers (Lesy, 1987; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). A similar train of thought was that, whether they did it or not, the animals were going to be killed in any case

'If I don't do it someone else is still going to go and kill that animal, isn't it?  
So, I'd rather be there' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

This deterministic attitude frames slaughter as something which is out of the hands of the workers, regardless of whether they are present or not. This emotion management technique may be described as a 'norm of rationality', that is, the use of rationalization to help neutralize any potential unwanted emotions (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). In this way, workers may frame themselves as replaceable cogs in the machine (Ritzer, 2019), with an 'if I don't do it (it would be rational to assume that) someone else will' attitude.

However, workers believed there were aspects they could take direct responsibility for, and attention was often drawn to these. Participants were outspoken on how they tried to make the process of slaughter as painless as possible to fulfil the 'antemortem

obligation'. To especially highlight their good practice, workers often reframed the BIMPS by comparing it to meat production to poorer practices elsewhere. This was a form of social comparison (Ashforth et al. 2007), more particularly comparisons with other organisations and the past

'You see horror story video clips of bad quality butchers from like different parts of the world and in unsanitary killing environments and like diseased meat and all that getting into the food chain, there's absolutely *none* of that [here]' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'I wouldn't necessarily like to go to some of the other countries and eat something I know has had a poor standard of life and it hasn't been killed hygienically and there hasn't been that full food safety process' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'Animal welfare is at a high point, it's the highest it's ever been, everything is about animal welfare...I can remember seeing people twisting tails to get cattle in the slaughter box, they'll be none of that now' (Barry, British, MHI)

'We have quite a high level of practice in the UK, which is great, I have seen a lot of horror videos from abroad and many moons ago when our practices weren't quite as good, but I would say generally today the practices are good' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Another worker made a similar comparison to dog/cat shelters which she had worked in

'I working like a volunteer in a dog rescue, that's the worst, it's a worst trust me, I see many sick dogs, many sick cats, the smell, the shit but the slaughterhouse is really clean area' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

This comparison of different abattoirs (or workplaces) is in line with Tversky's (1977) contrast model, whereby similar situations are given and then features which distinguish one from the other are found. Both the BIMPS and foreign/past abattoirs

contain death, but the modern BIMPS was seen to have higher welfare and hygiene standards than facilities from abroad/the past. Smith (2002) argues that discourses around welfare and hygiene offer 'diminished responsibility' to the consumer, and yet here the same appears true to the workers. By maintaining high welfare standards, workers saw themselves as doing all they could to provide meat ethically (Grandin, 1988). However, despite this, no amount of (re)framing could deny that animals had to die for meat to be produced, and this is arguably the main ethical issue and point of external criticism aimed at meat workers (Simpson, et al., 2014). When all other strategies fell short, the only way for workers to manage this was to simply accept it and/or to 'just deal with it' (Ashforth et al. 2007)

'It's just a job to do, get it done and let's get to the pub' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

'A lot of people would get quite phased because you've got animals being killed all the time, so you've got this sort of rain of organs coming down the chutes at you, and I wouldn't get sort of too worried about it and I would, just calmly get on with it' (Sophie, British, ex-Packer)

'It's an animal, it's a building which is used to kill an animal, it's as simple as that' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I just look at it and decide that is where we get our meat from and never really thought about it' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

Another ideology used was 'recalibration', that is, to adjust the internal standards of how dirty a job is (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). In the imagination of the outsider, an entire occupational sector and all who operate within it may be tarnished with dirt. However, those who regularly operate within a given workplace can reject this worldview to create their own standards of distinction and self-worth. Workers may distinguish themselves from outsiders, as well as each other, by their abilities to do work others cannot carry out (Lamont, 2000). Meat work was generally regarded as

work which required a certain type of individual, who required several qualities to be able to keep up with the demands of meat work

'You've got to have, like I say, a mindset for doing it, to go in and literally shoot something, slice its throat to bleed it off, then open it up, you've got to have a strong stomach and there's not many people that can do it' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'It's not glamorous at all, no nail polish, no earrings, no makeup, no jewellery, nothing fancy, full whites, hairnet, so if you're a glamorous person it isn't going to suit you, if you like having your nails done no chance' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'You've got to be reliable, you've got to show up on time in the morning... in the shop and that they've got to be trustworthy, you know so we're always handling money... if you're working in a factory sort of sense you've got to be able to get along with everyone, you don't have to like everyone but as long as you get along' (Gordon, British, Boner)

In addition to saying what others needed, workers sometimes avowed their own characteristics which made them suitable for the roles. This was not just concerning slaughter or production but also characteristics needed to get along with colleagues

'I think it's my personality, I am a strong person' (Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

'But I like this job, come on, I try be hard' (Iza, Polish, MHI)

'I'm the cheerful guy [laughs] and I get along with everyone' (Ciprian, Romanian, Compliance Auditor)

'I have this bubbly personality that I get along with everybody, so I don't have any problems with anything' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

This helped create a sense of superiority for workers as a whole. Indeed, differentiating oneself from those seen as less able to do work is a common recalibration technique in dirty jobs (Tracy and Scott, 2006; Deery et al., 2019). Workers sometimes made the more specific comparison between themselves and other roles in the meat sector, specifically supermarket butchers

'Me lad works at Morrisons, on butchery, they didn't teach him butchery it all comes pre-packaged, he might have to cut it in half, there no butchers to be done' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

'I went in Morrison's yesterday, okay and the butcher behind the counter didn't have a fucking clue what he was talking about, he's not a butcher, he's just a kid, or a man, who can sort of cut a piece of meat, put it in a bag, that's not butchery' (John, British, ex-Cutter)

These findings were similar to sentiments given by Simpson et al.'s (2014: 765) participants, who felt that supermarket butchers were 'not real butchers', which authenticated their own status as true, legitimate meat workers. For participants, after creating the distinction between themselves and outsiders, distinctions were then made between workers, and the ability to be emotionally strong enough to kill animals was held in the highest regard. However, some participants admitted that whilst they worked in the BIMPS, they could not carry out the task of slaughter themselves, acknowledging their own limitations

'I've witnessed the slaughter process I've never been personally involved other than going out shooting deer and pheasant shooting...personally, I couldn't do it as my job, I don't think I could deal with that on a day-to-day basis (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)'

'I am there, and they kill animals, I only check, I only do inspection, I don't kill animals I don't see the process but yes if manager told me that I go for a lairage or like a killing [?] work I think that few weeks and I will be left [would leave]' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

There did not appear to be any particular pattern in which participants did not want to be involved in the slaughter process. Both differing nationalities and job roles attested to their reluctance for such involvement.

At Highland Sheep, the Slaughterer was covered in blood from the first kill until the last. It is near, if not completely, impossible for the slaughterer to 'role distance' (Goffman, 1990b). Being the one who carries out the final, fatal cut to the sheep, there can be little doubt of the wide and deep presence of both physical and moral taint attached to this role (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ackroyd, 2007). However, internal accounts from BIMPS facilities have found that the Slaughterer often holds the highest status in the informal workplace hierarchy (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). One participant heartily agreed with this sentiment

'They're the most important part of the chain' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

As in Johnston and Hodge's (2014), study of security guards, recognition was given to those willing to sacrifice their own physical/mental wellbeing in service of the job. Slaughter was seen to be the task which caused the most risk for workers mentally whilst at the same time being the most important job in the workplace. If nobody is willing to kill the animals in the first place, the entire process stops.

Distinction was not only created through mental attributes such as toughness but by identifying skills and abilities that were unique to the BIMPS workforce, and which most outsiders did not possess. A skill is a manual or mental technique which is learnt through schooling or training and is honed by practice (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Skill types and aptitude levels vary substantially, and certain skill sets may require several years of development to master (Sennet, 2009). The main skill that participants regularly cited was the use of knife skills. Participants were aware of the distinguished position they internally held as a result of these

'A lot of the people in boning halls are highly skilled people who need to know what they're doing, they need to know how to use a knife well' (Laura, British, Graduate Scheme Worker)

'Not anyone can skin a sheep or a lamb, you got to know what you're doing, you've got to know how to use a knife and if you just come looking for a job, you're not going to be able to do it straight away' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I consider it a skilled job, I don't know many people off the street who could come and 'here you go, here's a whole beef carcass, go cut that up' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

The knife is probably the single most utilised tool in the abattoir (Thompson, 1983). In the BIMPS, the knife holds a totemic significance (Durkheim, 1995) due to its wide usage in slaughtering, gutting, boning, skinning, the removal of certain body parts and extracting potentially infected meat. Thus, the knife fulfils a dual status of both tool and weapon. Indeed, one participant, who sent over his work portfolio prior to his interview had coined the motto 'One Knife, one life', which he had placed at the bottom of this document. When questioned about this phrase, he noted his preference for using just one knife for all his work, rather than a set of specialist knives. This personalised knife clearly held special significance as has been found elsewhere (Meara, 1974). The front page was also made up of an assortment of knives suitable for meat work (see Image 3).



# PORTFOLIO



Image 3: Courtesy of Magnus (Danish, Butcher)<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, an ability is the power to perform a physical or mental task (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Thus, an individual may know and have the skillset needed for a task but be unable to carry it out for some reason, such as a lack of motivation/energy, a disability, not having the necessary equipment to do so etc. Combined with the knife skills, the ability to do it quickly was seen as essential. Production lines of any sort, from cars to cosmetics, run at a set pace (Garson, 1994) and the modern meat facility is no different (Lloyd and James, 2008). Several of the participants noted the speed of the work and the importance of being able to keep up

‘You’ve got to be able to keep up with the line, so you’re doing a hundred and fifty, a hundred and eighty, two hundred an hour, so if you can’t keep up there’s no point keeping you on the line’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

‘If you’re on a line and you need to be fast, *you need to be fast*, you know what I mean?’ (Dave, British, Hygiene Team Leader)

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<sup>8</sup> Real name blacked out to ensure anonymity.

‘There wasn't no messing about it was non-stop work... there'd be a pig fall on [the table], I'd cut up one side of the pig, you'd cut up the other, and then the next minute there's another pig fall on the table, so you know, you'd have a little bit of banter but you'd just be working you know, full time, it's very very busy’ (John, British, ex-Cutter)

Competency at a given task, in this case, speedy knifework, offers what Sennet and Cobb (1993: 53) refer to as ‘A Badge of Ability’. This is achieved through committing oneself to hard work and offers a sense of individualism by distinguishing oneself from those who have not attained this ability (ibid). This recognition was reflected by participants in the assertion that not simply anyone ‘off the street’ could do knifework. Competency in one’s work both acts as a source of pride and garners the respect of those around them, especially in environments where work is likely to be witnessed by others (Lamont, 2000). Participants' views were aligned with this, with several noting how internal respect is earned through good, able work

‘[My colleague] got more respect than most people because he was bloody good at his job and at the end of the day if he was good at his job, he was good enough to have around’ (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

J: And how can you make yourself respected in that kind of environment?

Z: Well, doing your job properly’

(Zabrina, Romanian, MHI)

Respect was not only gained via certain skills and abilities; internal distinction was generated through longevity. Longevity on the job demonstrated commitment, proved workers’ ability to endure and gave workers ample time to gather the necessary skills needed for work (Simpson et al., 2014). As a result, these workers were often afforded special privileges

‘They've been doing the job for so long that nobody can tell them to actually leave the job or [laughs] or fire them’ (Sofia, Chilean, ex-Quality Controller)

'If somebody has a good name for themselves and they've been working in the industry for thirty, forty years, and they're known to be a really good worker someone might go 'oh we need a line manager' or something, then yeah that sort of person might come up for the job' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

Commitment to work and job satisfaction are mutually influential, in other words, an increase/decrease in one can produce an increase/decrease in the other (Vandenberg and Lance, 1992). Certainly, longevity can act as a marker of worth and is often recognised by other workers which then helps boost one's status in the informal workplace hierarchy (McLoughlin, 2018).

The final occupational ideology used was 'refocusing', which is when attention is drawn away from the negative and towards the positive aspects of a job (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). To the outsider, these aspects may not be readily apparent but to the experienced employee, these were highly valued. For example, workers often mentioned the skills and knowledge they had developed while on the job

'I'm, for the moment, I'm [having] few courses from the FDQ, I'm having the wild game course, the inspection for wild game, inspection for horses, so I really enjoyed doing that' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'I am still learning, improving, discovering so I can make a positive improvement to the speed of production, there is still always something new I am discovering each day so that's interesting' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

Another similar tactic was to compare the current situation with previous/other roles/experiences. Bosmans et al. (2016) refer to this type of 'social weighting' as 'social selective comparisons', involving the comparison of the self to another individual, group or, in this case, past occupation etc. This was mostly done in a 'downward' fashion to highlight the more positive aspects of the current situation (Ashforth et al., 2007).

'I enjoyed the fact that I was not in the worst place in the meat industry, which is not saying very good words about it, but you know I was being in cutting plants which as a job is better or less tough than slaughterhouses' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

'I am working in the retail section where I am chopping up bits of meat into smaller pieces ready to be delivered to shops and of course, I do prefer work at a station that's clean and tidy and not wet where I don't even have to touch raw meat... a lot of people would prefer that to pulling out big chunks of meat dripping in blood out of sacks' (Zosia, Polish, Machine Operator)

This type of comparison might be termed an 'it could always be worse' approach. Whilst not necessarily making the current situation better, workers could draw comfort from the fact that their circumstances were still preferable to other alternatives.

### **7.3. Threats to Emotional Stability**

An essential aspect of maintaining emotional stability whilst at the BIMPS was consistency; each workday needed to be similar to the last in almost all respects. Like the machine which works within its limitations, the 'mechanised' worker must operate under the same instrumental conditions (Grandin, 1988; Hamilton and McCabe, 2016), eventually adapting via habituation (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2002). Different slaughtering scenarios appeared to be the most common threats to this stability. Of course, it could be argued that slaughter is in and of itself a threat to emotional stability but there were three occasions in particular where this especially stood out. These types of killing appeared symptomatic of 'secondary trauma/compassion fatigue', which Figley (1995: 7) defines as the 'natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatising event experienced by a significant other'.

#### **7.3.1. Time of the Year**

The first of these was time. For some, there were certain times of the year when slaughtering animals appeared to be undesirable. One participant gave an example

'There were a bull, a prize bull, little one. Christmas, 'well I'm not killing that cause it's Christmas'...they all decided they weren't going to shoot [it], but the guy who owned it.... he wanted it slaughtered...so he slipped me a fiver and said 'you're not going to fuck around, are you? You'll do it'. 'Fiver? Done mate'. Killing pen, bang, 'Oh you shot it, fucking murderer!' Soft bastards, but yeah that was the only time, all I can remember about people having a conscience about it cause it were Christmas' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

Christmas then, at least at this abattoir, was a time for slaughtering to come to an end, where workers developed 'a conscience'. Indeed, religious periods often function in a way to create 'social solidarity' (Durkheim, 1995). Whilst animals are often seen as 'nonpersons' and are thus excluded from human domains (DeMello, 2012), in this example, the bull in question was seen to be included, at least insofar as it should not be killed. Additionally, because the bull was a 'prize bull', rather than typical fungible livestock, this may have given some special significance which temporarily transcended its status as a 'sentient commodity' (Wilkie, 2010) and partly included it in the moral community (Regan, 1991).

### **7.3.2. Mothers and Infants**

Certainly, when animals stood out in some way, problems seemed to occur for the workers. This was demonstrated more frequently during the second identified threat, when young animals and/or mothers were involved. Three examples were given

'I would say 99% of slaughtermen would not shoot a calf... [the buyer] brought a cow in with a calf, and all of the lads, 'I'm not touching it, I'm not touching it'. Now, you imagine this calf, 4-foot high, big brown eyes, looking at ya, BANG! [Afterwards] the lads wouldn't talk to us, but somebody had to do it' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'You are imagine that, you are going to see the animals...and the calves were like three, four-week-old and they were still eating milk and they were coming to my coat and they were pinching my coat and then you are seeing them killed [sigh] bad' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'[He] said it had little emotional effect on him, although the exception would be when they had to slaughter a pregnant sheep...Rob told me he didn't like this because when the sheep would eventually be gutted, the baby lambs would fall out along with the milk sack the sheep would have used for feeding. These lambs, he elaborated 'never had a chance' (Highland Sheep, Fieldnotes)

Normally, animals being slaughtered are likely to be fully grown and without offspring. Those who are still in infancy or mothers-to-be clearly deviate from this regularity. Mothers and infant animals appeared to have special symbolic significance (Blumer, 1969), representing the same or similar connotations as given to human mothers and infants; innocent, needing protection etc. This may be particularly strong in a masculine workgroup which prides itself on traditional ideas of masculinity such as offering protection (Lamont, 2000). By not only failing to uphold that principle but by actively breaking it themselves, a serious degree of emotional taint threatens to psychologically affect workers (Rivera, 2015). Furthermore, those who break it without remorse, such as Derrick, risk absorbing what may be referred to as 'internal moral taint' by becoming shunned by not just the outside world, but their co-workers.

### **7.3.3. Religious Slaughter**

The third potential threat was witnessing religious slaughter. Under UK law, religious slaughter practices do not require the use of stunning to slaughter animals (Defra, 2023). However, because something is legal does not, of course, mean it will be morally accepted by all and for some workers, this legality did little to protect them emotionally from witnessing non-stunned slaughter

'The religious slaughter, the animal needs to be restricted...so there is a machinery to take the head like this to not move it at all and then they are doing the cut, some of them are hitting, stunning them after the cut immediately for the animals to lose, to not feel anything at that moment which is still good, it's better than not really at all but I saw those which are not stunning them at all and I saw how the dry, how the knife was draining from the body I was seeing the eye how it's moving, looking for the light you know and it creeped me out a bit and we, especially as a vet, especially

when you are Official Veterinarian you need to do this welfare check...it's not easy, I can tell you this, it's not easy...when it's losing consciousness, it's creepy' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'There is something that is psychologically, is worse is that obviously for Muslim people they have their own religious rites, and they kill the animals with no stunning...the Muslims people halal is call the rite, they just cut with a knife the throat with the animal fully conscious most of the time so that can be quite psychologically difficult to see' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

When an animal is killed whilst unstunned, this breaks the ante-mortem obligation of making the animal suffer as little as possible in the eyes of some workers. However, it was not always the case that non-religious workers found religious slaughter to be emotionally taxing. Like with illnesses, one worker used a 'denial of injury' argument (Maruna and Copes, 2005) to negate any extra pain that animals may have felt whilst being slaughtered without stunning

'Even with kosher, the animal wouldn't know no pain, it'd be distressed because they'd be turned upside down, in a casting pen...'Oh why am I on my back?' but when that shittah, [the knife], goes across, the blood pressure drop is so fast they don't feel no pain...their central system is different to ours, as in, so their blood loss and the rapid blood drop pressure, they're just dead straight...they wouldn't even feel no pain' (Barry, British, MHI)

Thus, as with many other things in the BIMPS, it was not simply a case of religious slaughter being accepted by religious workers and not by non-religious workers.

#### **7.3.4. Waste**

The fourth and final threat was not concerned with slaughter but what happened following the slaughter, when animals were wasted. As described earlier, workers often would emphasise the post-mortem obligation of using as much of the animal as possible, which would, in turn, atone them (Serpell, 1996). There was an occasion

however where a worker described the mass waste of several animals due to his colleagues not following proper procedure

‘One Christmas we had five Aberdeen Angus go in when we were working at our big plant and the vet decided they weren't going to be on time, so the boys said they were going to slaughter those five animals and then have the vet stamp it afterwards. Well, immediately the vet just threw them away because they weren't there to witness the slaughter and I remember that being one of my big turning points in how I wanted to practice in the industry but also a pretty rough day for myself, cause we've just murdered four animals, if I'm going to put it as bluntly as you could possibly put it, to put it in a skip... It really upset me, really didn't make me feel happy about where I was, didn't make me feel happy about the processes we were doing (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Intriguingly, when the post-mortem obligation was not complete, Marcus, framed the animals as being ‘murdered’ rather than ‘slaughtered’. Whilst perhaps not exactly a euphemism, the word ‘slaughter’ is the de facto term for killing animals, thus, to use it suggests that all is as it should be i.e., it becomes normalized (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2002). To use the term ‘murder’ emphasises the negative, out-of-the-ordinary nature of what Marcus, experienced (Jing-Schmidt, 2021). It is also noteworthy that this, unlike in Marek’s abattoir, was done at Christmas time, suggesting Christmas is not a time for non-slaughter in all abattoirs.

#### **7.4. Difficulties in Coping**

It must be acknowledged that, as Ashforth and Kreiner (2002: 228) point out, there is a limit as to how effective processes of normalizing are ‘if the stimulus or circumstances are extreme in their emotional charge’. Baran et al. (2012) suggest that the higher the physical or psychological saliency of the tolls, the more likely that there will be difficulties in coping. The difficulty in these tolls was perhaps best indicated by workers regularly citing how new employees would arrive on their first day only to quit some hours later



'I had a lot of lads used to come in from the careers centre, used to bring them in and they would be there half a day, never come back' (Derrick, British, ex-slaughterer)

'There's just a lot of people who just can't do the work and people turn up and last a day or a couple of days and they get sore backs or they don't like the early mornings or they don't like the wages and that's all they're looking for, the wages aren't the best... and working in the cold, so it's the cold and the heavy lifting you know, it's a very sort of, it's a very demanding job' (Gordon, British, Boner)

'Every time when I had a British person and I would like to give him a job, so I spent one day from doing induction and everything and they just walked to this factory and they don't like, we were showing them before, so before we start showing any interview we were taking them to the production, showing them how that look but when they start after a few hours they just walked outside and its constant thing...the job is too hard' (Anna, Polish, Senior Technical Administrator)

'[At my second BIMPS job] I had an eight-hour shift and then they were like 'you can go on your lunch now' after an hour of being there and I think the lunch was half an hour but I ended up just leaving and the reason why I left was because it was just so dirty and so unhygienic, the workers around me were dropping pieces of chicken on the floor and picking it up and putting it in the crate to shipped off to supermarkets and McDonald's and stuff like that, so I don't want to be a part of this I'm done so I left' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

These kinds of voluntary turnover behaviours are in line with Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding theory which explains how and why people decide to leave their jobs. In 'Path 1' of the 'unfolding', a 'shock' is stimulated, and employees quit automatically, with little time or mental deliberation needed to make the decision. These may be in line with previous, similar decisions made which makes the choice an easy one. Workers also spoke of their intentions to leave the BIMPS for differing reasons. Like

with those who lasted a matter of hours, a mixture of both the physical and moral tolls of working in the BIMPS were given (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) which acted as the reasons to leave. One participant, Andrew, was in the unique position of lasting a grand total of one hour in one role (see above) but also being employed for a longer period (a month) by a different company

'[At my first BIMPS role] my reason for leaving was just because of lack of communication and getting yelled at and stuff like that and also, we had a COVID outbreak in the factory and they didn't help anyone, I found out by going home and the person I was living with said 'have you seen this article about where you work? There's a COVID outbreak at the plant', so that's why I quit because there was a huge COVID outbreak and they didn't tell us and about a week later I ended up getting COVID' (Andrew, British, ex-Palletiser)

'I've been dreaming about the day that I'm going to quit [laughs] I think it's because of many things, it's hard waking up half past four...or half past five, every day, five days a week to go be in this slaughterhouse where...it's a physical job' (Maya, Chilean, MHI)

These decisions were more 'controlled' in that they took time to make, rather than an automatic response to quit the job immediately (Lee and Mitchell, 1994). Andrew's decision is more in line with 'Path 2' of the unfolding theory. With no experience of how COVID-19 would be handled in the BIMPS (or at least in this plant), Andrew has no prior image of what to expect from the 'shock' thus it may take some time to decide on the correct course of action. Maya's decision aligns more with 'Path 3' in that, as a qualified veterinarian, she does have other viable job paths which can act as potential alternatives (ibid). A notable difference though between these two examples was that as Andrew was employed by an agency, he had the ability to leave the role at any point without repercussions. Maya, however, was employed through a firm and would have to pay a £950 fee to reimburse the company for their investment in her training, visa etc. thus placing her in what Thompson (1983) refers to as a 'financial trap'.

It was uncovered that many workers who left the BIMPS then pursued a new career and or life change which aligned more with their values, which the BIMPS was not in alignment with. Marcus, for example, told how he had gone on to open his own butcher shop following his exit from the BIMPS

'The inherent job of a butcher shop is to ensure you are using all of the carcasses whereas you know in a meat processing plant that's not necessarily the idea, the idea is to get the most of the carcass i.e. figure wise...they don't see their customers, I see my customers day in day out they are my new family if you see what I mean so I see my customers all the time' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Here then, meaning is generated from Marcus, by pursuing the values that were either not afforded or even broken whilst in the BIMPS (Frankl, 2004). This is indicative of sublimation, that is where the unpleasant feelings, emotions etc. are channelled into healthy endeavours (Colman, 2009).

#### **7.4.1. Mental Illness**

Of course, not all workers simply left their roles when struggling to cope. Some did stay in the BIMPS but had to endure the mental difficulties related to the work. Indeed, a recent systematic literature review was undertaken on the psychological impact of slaughterhouse work. Whilst the evidence was limited, it demonstrated a relationship between slaughterhouse employment and 'negative psychological and behavioural outcomes' (Slade and Alleyne, 2021: 10). Depression has been reported cross-culturally amongst abattoir workers (Emhan et al., 2012; Hutz et al., 2013; Lander et al., 2015) with those having close contact with the animals being particularly prone (Dillard, 2007; Victor and Barnard, 2016). Whilst not discussed at great length in this study, participants occasionally mentioned problems around mental health issues

'He cut [his wrist] by himself, his last search on Google was ['how to live better?'] so he tried to kill himself in the worst possible way to suffer as much as more' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'I started therapy like two months ago because... I've discussed this question with the therapist if I really like working in the slaughterhouse, I don't think I like it... at the end of the day it's, I know that it's providing food and everything but it's surrounded by death you know, those animals are killed there and the only way to manage to do this is to detach yourself or to be a bit psychopathic' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

'No one likes being on a line killing animals for twelve hours a day so psychologically it cannot be the best, also for them it's quite psychologically harmful to do that' (Paco, Spanish, Senior Veterinary Officer)

In BIMPS work, it may be argued that for many roles there is a high demand and low control, which leads to high levels of 'job strain' (Karasek et al., 1998). High job strain has been linked to the development or exacerbation of mental health issues in the workplace (OECD, 2012). Low job control has been previously linked to poorer mental health in the meat sector (Caroli et al., 2010). The slaughter of animals might be considered an aspect that is uncontrollable, in the sense that whilst efforts can be made to make it as 'humane' as it can be (painless, quick etc.), it must happen for the meat sector to exist. Thus being 'surrounded by death' is inescapable. Conterminously, environmental aspects such as low access to light, coldness, and a lack of social interaction (Penckofer et al., 2010; Clair and Baker, 2022; Evans and Fisher, 2022) have all been linked to poorer mental health. Furthermore, it was speculated that some workers may have developed PTSD whilst working in the BIMPS

'I reckon there were quite a lot of [slaughterers] that went to have issues around PTSD in particular just because of the sheer amount of animals that they had to slaughter' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

MacNair (2002) suggests a subcategory of PTSD may be present in workers whose occupation involves killing, 'Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress' (PITS). This shares similar symptomology to PTSD such as acute stress, with MacNair (ibid) noting slaughterhouse workers as an example of a group potentially prone to

PITS. Additionally, workers, on occasion, mentioned both alcohol and drug misuse among their colleagues

‘Everyone has their own means of getting through that work as well, where they've fallen back on drink and drugs as well, each to their own at the end of the day’ (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

‘He started to consume substances like cannabis, I've heard mushrooms as well things... he was getting friends with slaughtermen which were addicted by heroin I know for sure some of them’ (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

Studies have demonstrated that meat workers may consume higher than average amounts of alcohol (Eisnitz, 1997) and engage in drug misuse (Schlosser, 2002). Baran et al. (2016) suggest that alcohol may be a coping mechanism to deal with ‘empathetic suffering’, that is, suffering through witnessing the suffering of others. However, Hendrix and Dollar (2017) note that workers may use drugs to circumvent biological and psychological needs, enabling them to work longer. Broadway (2000) proposes alcohol use may be linked to the stress of the fast, physical nature of the work itself. This suggests that exposure to/partaking in violence against animals is not the only risk factor for mental illness but that the physical tolls can also contribute. The environment itself may also be a contributing factor

‘I was working alone for all of that year, so I'm in a room that's cold, damp, no lights, spending ninety per cent of my waking day there, so I have a small family, I've got a wife and kids that I barely see, it drove me to the point of, driving into work at three in the morning I was, I had thoughts of 'well actually if the van crashed and I didn't make it to work it wouldn't be the end of the world, I wouldn't have to work today'...I did have a talk with my GP, in fact, my wife forced me to because I did have a small breakdown over it, she would probably say a big breakdown over it, and I raised the point to my boss and my GP said 'you basically have workplace depression’ (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

In terms of mental illness, the most recent BMPA (2014) H&S guidelines do not include any specific regulations or preventions regarding the psychological well-being of workers except a general statement on fair and reasonable adjustments made for disabled workers. Despite this, one participant spoke of how he would check in with his workers regarding their emotional wellbeing

'I'm talking all the time with my Meat Hygiene Inspectors just to see what's their state of mind how they are feeling and everything... I've advised them 'Look if you're not feeling happy anymore in this company [then leave]', I don't care about what the company is saying, I would prefer to work with people which are okay, at least with what they are doing not depressed' (Cristofor, Romanian, MHI Area Resource Manager)

This strategy appeared effective, as another worker testified that being more open with colleagues was beneficial

'I prefer to work with a team...first of all, because you can share problems and find solutions in common, also because you have sort of a psychotherapy of when something happens if when something happens to another person the same you can talk to each other and have a kind of therapy here' (Antonio, Spanish, ex-OV)

Fostering a workplace culture where workers are encouraged to create a more open dialogue around mental illness is an effective method to reduce mental health issues in the workplace (Un and Pickering, 2019). However, given the competitive and masculine nature of meat work, this may hinder workers' forthcomingness to protect the self-image of toughness and competency present in the workforce (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; McLoughlin, 2018). One participant described this as a hindrance to being able to be more open with his colleagues

'It's a men's club thing, don't want to be seen as being hurt or vulnerable at any stage, it's the same with the beasting, you got beasted by them or you beast someone else, if they can't deal with it then they're not a bloke, that's why all this 'are you gay?' stuff pops up all the time, 'oh are you gay? that's

not very bloke-like you have to be a bloke and go to the pub every night and get shitfaced and like football and play darts and yeah it's a bloke working environment that's exactly what it is you know they don't want to see you vulnerable at any stage of time' (Marcus, British, ex-Cutter)

Finally, it was recognised by participants that different jobs had the potential for different emotional impacts. Generally, the closer to slaughter and the 'gory work' the job was, the more potential for emotional difficulty, as was also found by Hutz et al. (2013)

'You could go into the boning hall and process meat, carcasses which have already, I wouldn't say that's as much emotionally, it wouldn't take you as emotionally as if you were doing the killing, I mean when you're working in the boning hall all you're looking at is a frozen carcass, come into the room, break it apart and cut it into steaks or whatever else and boxing it up that's about as far as it goes, I mean when you come into the actual killing area you've got from your killing, your skinning, I guess you could say emotionally draining, most part is probably the killing area cause you're taking something from life and putting it into death' (Abdul, British, Slaughterer)

'I work on the inspection point where I don't see the killing, so I check the meat and it's like in the shop... it's only like meat and on a different side is like a blood and guts so I don't see the blood, I don't hear the time where the animals are killing I don't see that...I know the whole process but if you don't see that but only think, it's better than you see every day' (Piotr, Polish, PIA)

'We are processing the cooked meats that goes to the multiple customers so I'm not seeing the pigs slaughtered per se, they are just coming to us already slaughtered so we are just cooking them [laughs] yeah, so probably if I was working on the other side in the slaughter and actually killing it so my view probably would have been different' (Sebastian, Polish, Quality Assurance Technician)

As Pachirat (2011: 236) notes, the spatial division of workers creates 'phenomenological walls', i.e., the experiences of those who work in abattoirs are not necessarily all the same. At Highland Sheep the space where the slaughter took place was shielded behind some plastic hanging dividers where the majority of people could not see, with most workers occupying positions away from this area. Some facilities are separated from the slaughter task entirely. At Chickensmiths, the birds would arrive pre-killed and already partly processed, ready for the workers to turn them into sandwich fillers, pizza toppings, soups etc.

## **7.5. Summary**

There can be little doubt that meat work can be highly emotionally taxing. Along with the physical and moral taints of such work, emotional taint is a regular component of daily work life and requires regular management (Rivera, 2015). It was widely agreed that meat work was 'not for everyone', and the primary reason for that was because meat work was inherently linked to death. For those who did have the character to work in these environments, the ability to professionally detach was essential. This feeling was captured by the use of phrases paraphrasing 'it's just a job'. By devaluing the work in this way, workers could utilise the 'mechanical approach' to slaughter, where slaughter and related activities were treated like any other task. This state of mind was not necessarily present immediately. Whilst those with prior experience with slaughter were at least partially primed to deal with death, others with little to no experience needed time to habituate themselves to regular exposure to death (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2002).

Because animals' lives had to be sacrificed to produce meat, workers felt moral obligations towards them. The antemortem obligation was to make the process as quick and painless as possible, to quote one participant 'It should almost not know it's coming'. The post-mortem obligation was to use as much of the animal as possible and to produce minimal waste. The fulfilment of these obligations granted atonement for the workers (Serpell, 1996). Other ways to cope with the tolls of meat work were to use occupational ideologies such as reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing. Meat work could be framed as a necessary way of producing food, whilst recalibrating created distinction by emphasising the unique traits, skills and abilities workers possessed such as knife skill and speed. Workers also compared their own standards



of work to those from abroad/the past, with current UK standards being universally seen as superior. Attention was also 'refocused' towards the positive aspects of work.

There were occasions which seriously threatened the emotional stability of workers. Christmas time was given as a potential difficulty and the use of certain language threatened at least some workers' sense of what they were doing. Perhaps the two biggest threats however were the wasting of edible meat (thus leaving the post-mortem obligation unfulfilled) and the killing of mothers and/or calves. Witnessing religious slaughter was emotionally taxing for some when the animals were unstunned at the time of death. Workers who caused these emotional threats (such as killing at Christmas or calves) risked generating 'internal taint' from their colleagues. More generally, being constantly surrounded by death could mentally wear on workers as well as the working conditions involving physicality, industrial workplaces and times of work creating extra difficulties. These factors led to a high staff turnover with some workers leaving within hours of their first shift. Overall, it may be surmised that meat work is highly unique in the emotional challenges it affords workers.

## **Chapter 8: Findings and Conclusions**

### **8.1. Introduction**

Following inspiration from *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1985), this research set out to explore the position of migrants in the British Industrial Meat Processing Sector. Using qualitative methods, data was gathered to understand the lived experiences of migrants who have worked in the industry. Prior research indicates that migrants occupy a precarious position in the meat sector both in the UK and the US (cf. Chapter 2). Whilst the literature on the US is fairly well developed, the UK literature was much less so and therefore warranted further investigation. However, it soon became apparent that it would be impossible to not include the experiences of UK workers. UK workers encountered their own sets of challenges and unique experiences at all stages of working in the BIMPS. Furthermore, many of these experiences were similar to (if not the same as) their non-UK colleagues. What also became apparent through the research was that many of these issues and experiences spanned the job spectrum. Therefore, it was established that a binary distinction between migrant workers and UK workers was not sufficient to provide an accurate representation of worker experiences in the BIMPS.

Following the research process, several key findings were made. Some of these were sufficient to draw concrete conclusions. By doing so, it is hoped that rich and original insights can be made into the BIMPS, which in turn will contribute to the 'sociology of the slaughterhouse' (York, 2004). A key concept which was useful in surmising many of these conclusions was the 'breadth/depth' spectrum proposed by Kreiner et al. (2006) in that whilst many workers had similar experiences, how often and how intensely they had them did vary. These findings will now be elaborated on in depth.

### **8.2. The Recruitment Relationship**

What was defined as the 'recruitment relationship' between employers and potential workers is strained. Where UK workers are concerned, discourses around them being lazy and not wanting to work in the sector are common (Tyler, 2013; 2020). However, contrary to previous findings (Tannock, 2015), most participants did not assert that local workers were lazy necessarily, but that the conditions of work were enough to

deter local workers from wanting to work in the BIMPS. Many participants gave anecdotes of local workers coming to work and leaving after less than one day, including one of the participants. This was mainly put down to a reluctance from these workers to accept the conditions of work afforded to them, such as the early starts, the physical labour and, perhaps most importantly, the violent nature of meat work. However, this was not an absolute norm, as there were plenty of UK participants who had worked in the sector for many years, enjoyed doing so for many reasons and generated fulfilment from their career choices. Therefore, and perhaps not too surprisingly, the narrative that UK workers are simply 'lazy' was found to be untrue in the context of the BIMPS.

Despite this, it was often incumbent on UK workers themselves to seek out work in the BIMPS, rather than employers taking more active roles in employing them. Several strategies were found to be used by UK workers to secure employment. Those who had some background in meat production, such as growing up on a farm or early work experiences took one, or a combination of, several potential job routes. These routes were identified as the 'Saturday Lad' route, the 'apprenticeship' route and the 'graduate scheme' route. Those without any prior experience either used an agency or applied through word of mouth. This demonstrated that UK workers were nothing if not resourceful in finding ways to enter the BIMPS despite rarely being targeted by employers. Thus, whilst harder for UK workers, it is possible for them to enter the sector if that were their intention.

Despite this evidence, it has been often asserted there is a 'need' to hire migrant workers (Anderson and Rhus, 2010). However, from the data, there were several reasons given as to why employers might be inclined to hire migrants over UK workers. Almost universally, research participants agreed that migrants have a higher work ethic. This was attributed to the 'migrant mentality', where, because of the risk taken to pursue work abroad, they felt the need to 'prove' their worth to employers and to be kept on. It was regularly voiced by participants that migrants could be paid less than their UK colleagues, which goes directly against the BMPA's (2020: np) claim that 'migrant labour is neither cheap, nor cheaper than UK nationals'. There were several reasons given to justify this such as a differentiation in skill levels between UK and migrant workers or that because migrants were given accommodation on arrival/had their flights paid for, which was therefore taken out of their wages. However, workers

were often willing to accept these lower pay rates because they were still higher than what they would receive in their countries for similar, or sometimes higher-skilled, work. Because migrants were attractive employees for employers, a multitude of techniques were used to recruit them, which were largely absent for the recruitment of UK workers. These techniques included strategic online advertising, sending recruitment teams to universities abroad (particularly to recruit vets) and disseminating job adverts within migrant networks. It was voiced by participants that the image given of life in the UK and the work they undertook did not match reality. Participants sometimes voiced their disappointment at working in the BIMPS and how, contrary to their ideas of it being good work, it could be hard and not of an especially high status.

Migrants did voice several reasons to pursue work in the UK. Oftentimes this was due to their situations at home. A lack of jobs or low salaries often acted as 'push factors' to seek work elsewhere. Some migrants told how they had given up skilled jobs, such as managerial work in their own countries to pursue work in the BIMPS which enabled them to move. For some, taking work in the BIMPS was due to a lack of UK labour market power and this was found to be true across the job spectrum. Often migrants whose English proficiency was low found themselves in a position where industrial manual work was some of the only work available to them. BIMPS work does not require a high standard of English even in the MHI roles where Latin is used to identify pathologies. Jobs on the line often require no prior training/experience or even the use of English whatsoever to be carried out successfully; all that is required is the correct physical abilities to carry out specialised tasks. Namely, these abilities centred around repetitive jobs that needed to be completed fast. In this sense, this research resonates with Ritzer's (2019) and the metaphor of workers in the meat sector being 'reduced to fast-moving cogs' both in the sense of the repetitive, monotonous nature of line work but also that line workers, like cogs, often require no training or English skills. However, for qualified veterinarians who did not work on the line and whose English comprehension was often high, sometimes a lack of foreign qualification recognition or what was termed 'foreign experience recognition' blocked entry into their desired clinical-based roles. UK veterinary practices often require UK-based experience, immediately excluding the majority of migrant veterinarians. For these workers then, the BIMPS was a viable option to continue practicing veterinary work when all other avenues were unavailable to them. This strategy also doubled up as UK experience

as for at least one participant, Maya, this allowed her to leave the BIMPS and take a job at a veterinary clinic.

### **8.3. Breadth and Depth**

Another noteworthy finding was the differentiation of the breadth and depth of taint for different workers, especially between job types. Breadth concerns how often interaction with dirt is made, the more frequent the interaction the higher the breadth. Depth is concerned with how intense the interaction with the dirt is, the more intense the interaction, the higher the depth. For example, a telemarketing salesperson may have to make regular tedious/boring calls for long periods of time (high breadth), but the intensity is low (low depth). A soldier meanwhile may occasionally have to kill someone (high depth) but on rare occasions (low breadth) (Kreiner et al., 2006). A job which has high breadth and depth is classified as 'pure dirty work' (ibid). A sewage worker who has regular contact (high breadth) with anything making its way to the sewers (high depth) would qualify as such work (Reid, 1991). Where the BIMPS was concerned, the breadth and depth of taint varied substantially among workers. Simply because participants worked in the same environments did not mean they had the same experiences where breadth and depth were concerned. In agreement with Pachirat (2011), different departments and job roles provided 'phenomenological walls' for participants, particularly where taint was concerned. Slaughtering, and the according breadths and depths of taint generated by it, provides possibly the best example of this. It is argued here that the slaughterer has the 'dirtiest' job of all in that it is triple-tainted (physically, morally and emotionally) with both high breadth and depth. Firstly, they must deal with the physical taint of blood/gore etc., secondly, the moral taint of killing animals for food and thirdly, the emotional taint of carrying out regular killing. Coupled with the regularity of the tasks (possibly hundreds of animals per day), this might qualify as the purist dirty work in existence. There is no effective way the slaughterer can role distance. In comparison, an OV may have to witness slaughter sometimes, which might not necessarily involve getting physically dirty and is arguably less morally tainted in that it is done for, amongst other things, animal welfare. Witnessing slaughter may be less emotionally tainting than slaughtering although this

is subjective; 'secondary trauma/compassion fatigue' is certainly possible (Figley, 1995).

It has been argued elsewhere that migrants are more likely to receive the 'dirty jobs' in a workplace than non-migrant workers (Briggs, 1993; Lee-Treweek, 2012). However, in this study, the spectrum of breadth and depth of taint appeared evenly distributed between UK and migrant workers. Indeed, the participants who had arguably the least tainted jobs as Head Veterinarian and MHI Area Resource Manager, Alexandria and Cristofor respectively, were both from Romania. All but one of the participants who were an OV or MHI, which required higher education and arguably higher job prestige, were migrants. Numerous participants told of managers or other colleagues in positions of power who were migrants and thus did not have to deal with the dirtiest parts of the jobs. Meanwhile, most workers who did have experience in the 'dirtiest' job, slaughtering, were British. Cleaning work has often been seen as an especially dirty job in terms of regular, close contact with physical dirt, the servile nature of the role and the low status it generates (Perry, 1998; Hughes et al., 2016; Vlijmen, 2019). Whilst the thesis does not necessarily argue this is the case, it is noteworthy that the only cleaner interviewed, Dave, was British. There did not seem to be any UK/migrant divide where breadth and depth of taint are concerned, rather it appeared more dependent on job type than ethnicity. Precisely why this was the case was not clear. It may have been UK workers in less dirty positions were not spoken to or that because of the high percentage of migrant workers it was inevitable they would occupy some of the 'cleaner' roles. This finding could be further investigated. One thing was for sure though, that workers within a workspace were not tainted equally with many variations in breadth and depth.

#### **8.4. Physical Taint**

A miasma of factors operates in combination to ensure that BIMPS work is physically draining for workers. This was true across the job spectrum and for both UK and migrant workers but did have some variation in terms of breadth and depth (Kreiner, et al. 2006). Early starts and long commutes are common. Timewise this was perhaps not too surprising as facilities require everyone to be at their post in order for the line to operate, meaning, therefore, that everyone must start at the same time. Where

commuting was concerned, this appeared to affect OV and MHs more, who often did not get to choose which plant they worked at. This was likely because they did not work for the plant itself, but usually, an outside contractor would send them to their designated facility. This appeared to be an issue which migrants faced more than their UK colleagues. The number of hours worked in total per week can be enormous, with the highest cited being sixty-two hours. More migrants mentioned especially long days than UK workers, but this warrants further investigation.

Besides times and commutes, physical taint was especially present within the workplace which affords workers several difficult environmental aspects to contend with. The first of these was the smell, which workers often complained about. Considering slaughterhouses deal with all the inner parts of animals (blood, flesh, faces, urine etc.), not to mention the sheer quantity of innards that are processed, this was perhaps not too surprising. However, contrary to what was expected, workers did not become accustomed to the smell even after long periods of working in it. Another finding was the huge quantities of mess, which again was not too surprising. The physical matters described earlier (blood, faeces etc.) mixed with the fast pace of work made the creation of mess an inevitability in the BIMPS. Like the smell, workers often found the mess to be a problem and a strong source of dissatisfaction. This was surprising, as previous studies suggest workers often engage in these physically tainting aspects, using them as demonstrators of strength, durability, and toughness (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Perry, 1998). This could be an indicator of shifting social norms where traditional masculine job roles are concerned, suggesting once again that working in the BIMPS is not only subjective but dynamic.

Additionally, workers often pointed out how physically demanding the tasks were. Meat work, regardless of whether it is in a factory or a small butcher's shop is, by its nature, physical. Cutting, skinning, de-boning, gutting and other butchery skills are all carried out by hand and require considerable bodily exertion. However, in the BIMPS, the addition of carrying out the work on a mechanical line increased this physicality by adding speed and repetition to the equation. This created several issues for workers such as exhaustion and stress. Because the line requires every stage to be functioning adequately for the whole process to work, it adds pressure onto workers to not only work quickly but also to not make mistakes. Some participants were found to adapt to this way of work fairly easily, with one participant claiming to 'breeze through it' after

enough practice. However, this was a minority, with the majority of participants finding it to be 'tough', 'tiring', 'stressful' and 'brutal'.

There were numerous concerns voiced by participants around health and safety. These were almost always related to the physically tainting aspects of meat work. Some employees who had experience working in the BIMPS in the 1970s recalled how, back then, health and safety regulations were in place but were not followed to the same degree as today's standards. Whilst large regulatory changes have been made since then, especially following the Recipe for Safety initiative being introduced, the Food and Drink sector still records some of the highest injury rates in the UK, and the data from the participants reflects this. Cuts, self-sustained stabbings, chopping through fingers, back problems, skin problems, repetitive strain injury and attacks from animals were all recorded. Uniquely to this study, data was gathered on how COVID-19 affected workers. BIMPS facilities were hotspots for COVID-19 due to the nature of BIMPS work (close working conditions in a cold sterile environment) but also because of a lack of regard towards the social distancing regulations from workers.

For these reasons and in line with previous findings (Ackroyd, 2007) it can be concluded that BIMPS work is highly physically tainted (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) through the handling of socially determined disgusting matters and due to its dangerous nature. Whilst this did vary somewhat between job types, especially between line workers and non-line workers, these physical aspects were impossible to avoid in their entirety.

## **8.5. Emotional Taint**

There can be no doubt that BIMPS work poses unique psychological challenges for workers, therefore generating emotional taint (Rivera, 2015). Like the physically tainting aspects, the emotional taint differed in both breadth and depth for workers depending on their job role. The first challenge reported was boredom, but this was more so the case for workers on the line, especially for those doing inspection work. 'Chickenwork' was regularly cited as the most boring type of work as there was less chance of finding any kind of defect in the meat, unlike with red meat. To perhaps little surprise, workers universally preferred variation in their tasks which alleviated the boredom significantly. Because of the nature of the work and the environment, workers



also voiced difficulties with motivation. Passion for work was difficult to generate for some due to the monotonous and often tiresome nature of the work.

Whilst boredom and demotivation were challenges, the main source of psychological difficulty was unquestionably the slaughter of animals. Slaughtering generates large amounts of moral taint for workers to deal with (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999), which, in turn, creates these emotional difficulties. However, workers differentiated substantially in how much this affected them. Those who had experience of killing animals prior to working in the BIMPS found the transition to slaughterhouse work easier, as they had often been 'primed' for what to expect (Wagner, 1979). Workers drew from a wide range of experiences including childhood upbringing, experiences whilst travelling, visits to abattoirs whilst at universities and even warfare. For those without experience, this took some time to adapt to, and there was no guarantee that they would ever adjust.

#### **8.5.1. Types of Killing**

Whilst killing was always emotionally tainting, some types were more psychologically difficult than others. In this, sense, methods of killing varied in the depth of taint created, i.e., killing varied in how dirty it was depending on several factors (Kreiner et al. 2006). Three types of killing which stood out were identified. The first was the time of year, with one participant claiming Christmas made it more difficult. The second, and more common type, was the killing of younger animals and/or mothers, which participants found much harder to do/witness in comparison to typical adult, non-pregnant animals. The third type was religious slaughter, which, when done without stunning, proved to be especially hard for workers who did not share the same religious background as the religious slaughterers.

#### **8.5.2. Coping Strategies**

Workers used a large range of techniques to deal with the emotional tolls of the killing. For some, simply not seeing the killing was sufficient. If workers were operating in a different room or the killing was done at a different facility, this was enough to 'role distance' (Goffman, 1990) themselves. Thus, like outsiders, to some extent, workers used an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach to coping. However, not all workers were

afforded such walls. Slaughterers, by the very nature of their role, had to engage with the task itself. Often inspectors had to watch slaughter take place, such as religious slaughter, to ensure it was done to the correct standards. When this was the case, mental strategies were required to cope, and many were used. Participants regularly voiced their moral obligations towards the animals, which were split into two types. First, was the 'antemortem obligation', which involved reducing suffering as much as possible for animals. Second, the 'postmortem obligation' was to ensure that as much of the animal was used as possible which kept waste to a minimum. When these obligations were fulfilled, they offered atonement for workers (Serpell, 1986) but if they were not fulfilled, they could produce much emotional distress for workers. To help emphasise how good BIMPS practices were in fulfilling these obligations, especially regarding the antemortem obligation, workers would often compare the BIMPS with meat facilities abroad or from the past. Those seen to be worse than the standards of the BIMPS helped boost the position of the BIMPS in terms of welfare and hygiene practices.

Workers often voiced the purpose of their work to offer justification for killing animals. Usually, this was in relation to providing food for the public, or in the case of religious slaughter, providing food suitable for religious groups, which offered workers a 'necessity shield' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014). Sometimes workers made the argument that 'if I don't do it, someone else will', which absolved them of true responsibility in contributing to animal killing. In the case of MHIs and OVs, they often affirmed that their role of keeping the public safe from harm was essential when working in the abattoir. Finally, workers were found to detach from their work. As Hamilton and McCabe (2016) found, workers often described the work as 'just a job', indicative of a 'mechanical approach' to slaughter (Grandin, 1988). For workers who had not been 'primed' from previous experiences, this process, perhaps not surprisingly, often took time, in line with findings from elsewhere (Victor and Barnard, 2016).

Whilst these strategies did offer workers some mental protection for workers, these were not infallible. Regular exposure to killing could wear on workers, especially when it was one of the 'deeper' kinds of killing. As found in other studies (Alleyne and Slade, 2021), workers sometimes reported symptoms of mental illness including depression

and PTSD. Furthermore, alcohol and/or drug use was occasionally recorded as a '(mal)adjusting technique' (Victor and Barnard, 2016).

Thus, the thesis argues that working in the meat sector can never be truly emotionless or 'mechanical' for workers (Grandin, 1988). If this was the case, workers would not need to use moral justifications for their work. Additionally, the different types of killing named above were able to discomfort even the most seasoned of workers. The fact that some workers reported mental difficulties and unhealthy coping strategies further supports this stance. Therefore, the thesis asserts that emotions can be reduced and controlled to a level where it allows workers to function and maintain the 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) but does not support the claim it can ever be truly emotionless.

## **8.6. Relations with Outsiders**

Workers regularly voiced frustrations with the relationship between themselves/the BIMPS and outsiders. They felt that consumers had a poor knowledge of the efforts that go into producing meat. This was put down to a combination of a lack of interest from consumers, efforts to maintain psychological distance by companies and an absence of agricultural education whilst at school. These factors are typical of a 'post-domestic' society (Bulliet, 2005) where little contact is made between consumers and the production methods of meat. Because of this lack of any meaningful relationship with outsiders, workers felt they were largely underappreciated, which was also reflected in their pay. It was universally agreed upon by participants that a greater awareness of how meat was produced by wider society would benefit both workers and customers. Workers would receive greater appreciation and customers would be able to demand higher quality products. Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, participants did not feel a knowledge of the meat sector would put consumers off eating meat.

As well as this lack of a relationship, workers also felt they had to deal with 'occupational stigma' (Shantz and Booth, 2014). Whilst workers felt they received occupational stigma from most outsiders, it was especially present when dealing with vegans, a group morally opposed to the production of meat. Workers used many techniques to deal with stigma. Some repelled the stigma back onto the public/vegans using a 'condemning the condemners' (Maruna and Copes, 2005) approach. Others,

however, preferred to use what was termed the 'educating clients and the public' approach, by actively creating conversations to provide accurate descriptions of how the sector worked. This also helped dispel any myths around the meat sector such as erroneous assumptions about halal slaughter. A surprising finding was that meat workers were not opposed to abstinence from meat consumption and believed that it was a personal choice. What they were opposed to was the targeting and attacking of the meat sector by those who were morally opposed to it. Thus, meat workers favoured tolerance over conflict with other groups (Füredi, 2011).

### **8.7. The Occupational Community**

The occupational community (Salaman, 1974) created a sense of belonging for workers through a united purpose. It also helped to deal with the emotionally tainting aspect of boredom and helped generate a sense of shared endeavour when dealing with the more unpleasant aspects of meat work. Migrants often found they had an especially close connection with their non-British colleagues. Many migrants had shared experiences such as the process of moving abroad, communication difficulties due to low English proficiency and a shared dislike for their jobs. However, having different ethnicities working in the same workspace did create opportunities for favouritism. This was especially noticeable when managers would favour their own ethnic group over others. For example, one participant reported differences in those who were granted days off sick between ethnic groups based on the ethnicity of the manager. The occupational community also offered workers many opportunities for socialising outside of the workplace. Participants often reported going drinking together or helping one another with out-of-work or 'spillover' activities (Parker, 1983), such as butchering animals at home. There did not seem to be a hard split where UK and migrant workers were concerned outside of work. Whilst they did sometimes report doing things with their own ethnic group, many also told how they would mix with other groups including UK workers. In one case, UK worker Sophie told how she actively avoided British workers outside of work, preferring the companionship of her Polish colleagues. However, workers were not accepted into the community simply because they worked together. Workers often needed to demonstrate certain abilities to gain acceptance and respect. These included engagement in banter, displaying competency in their role and passing 'tests' such as any initiation ceremonies or

resisting attempts from others to get a reaction out of them. To reiterate one worker's comment

'That's part of the game enit? You don't lose your cool, they've won if you lose your cool' (Marek, Polish, ex-slaughterer)

These aspects appeared present for both migrant and UK workers, there were no 'passes' given to anyone where joining the occupational community was concerned.

Not surprisingly in such a complicated environment, there were aspects which hindered assimilation of the occupational community. Difficulties in communication due to differing language proficiencies were the most obvious. At its most extreme, workers had to rely on body language and gesticulations to communicate when there was no common language, which made any meaningful relationship all but impossible. Cultural and/or religious incompatibilities had the potential to hinder assimilation and create conflict between workers. This was perhaps best displayed when workers came from backgrounds where gender roles were different to those in the UK or from the countries of their migrant colleagues. Indeed, female workers often reported difficulties in gaining respect from colleagues from such backgrounds, who may have been reluctant to work alongside or be managed by a female worker. As already discussed, religious slaughter had the potential to cause moral disagreements between workers. Halal and kosher slaughter were said to be more brutal methods of slaughter by some. In this regard, whilst the whole of the BIMPS is morally tainted, there appeared to be what was termed 'internal taint' between workers. Thus, it became apparent that meat workers and not only at risk of being tainted by the outside world but also amongst themselves.

Several participants discussed problems of racism within the workplace, particularly towards migrants from UK workers. This ranged from verbal abuse to messages being written on walls. Direct racism between migrant groups was not documented but a reluctance to work with certain other nationalities was present. Anna refusing to show newly employed Roma how to operate the toilet is arguably the best example of this. Whilst migrants were not directly racist towards one another (at least not in this study), there were reports of homophobic behaviour from migrants and UK workers towards gay (or potentially gay) employees. This was put down to culturally differentiating views

on gay people from migrants and the perceived incompatibility of gay people within such a masculine working environment. Somewhat surprisingly, workers often reported having difficulties working with their own ethnic group, including UK workers. This was often through not sharing the same cultural values from their home nations which new workers would try and apply to the workplace in the UK. Migrant workers reported being pestered by people from their own ethnic group, expecting them to help them on the basis of their shared nationality, which was a source of annoyance. This suggests that like a shared workplace, simply sharing an ethnicity with a colleague was not enough to guarantee a bond and could even work against this in some cases.

There was also conflict between job roles. FBOs and MHI/OVs sometimes came into conflict when having to work together. Differences of opinion on correct health and safety measures seemed frequent as has been recorded elsewhere (Ipso Mori, 2013). Another finding was the conflict specifically between MHIs/OVs dependent on whether they were hired by the FSA or through private contractors. This was specifically a problem in England, Wales, and the North of Ireland where meat inspection is shared between these two organisations, unlike in Scotland where all inspection is carried out by FSS. Based on what participants said, FSA staff seemed to have a sense of superiority over their contracted colleagues and were openly both physically and verbally abusive. However, this was not isolated to FSA staff, indeed, many workers found workplace aggression to be a regular occurrence from various members of staff including both managerial and non-managerial staff.

Whilst there were many findings on the occupational community, it was apparent that the BIMPS does not, in fact, have a stable and robust occupational community. There is no sociologically agreed definition of what a community is, however, emphasis is often placed on aspects such as solidarity, shared belonging, and shared purpose (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Whilst this was present to some degree, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that this was regularly not the case and often these existed in sub-groups of the workforce. FSA and privately contracted workers rarely shared solidarity despite doing the same job. Workers reported both feeling close to other migrants whilst at the same time finding cultural incompatibilities. This is perhaps not surprising given that the BIMPS is far from homogenous.

## **8.8. UK and Migrant Workers**

Perhaps the biggest conclusion to be drawn from this research is that UK and migrant workers cannot be simply split into two categories. This binary distinction is too simplistic and gives the impression that UK workers and migrants are distinct groups who experience working in the BIMPS in their own way, which was not the case. As shown throughout the previous findings, there were many different types of UK workers and migrant workers. Migrants came from, not just different countries, but often different continents and were often psychically distant from one another. They often had no common language and cultural incompatibilities between not just different migrant ethnic groups but sometimes between members of the same ethnic group were common. Indeed, sometimes their only shared quality was that they had migrated to work in the BIMPS.

At the same time, ethnic groups, including UK workers, were found to assimilate and exist harmoniously in the workplace. They also shared many of the same experiences such as the various taints afforded to workers, the complexities of the workplace community, the underappreciation of their work and the various coping strategies. Whilst there were some general differences between migrants and UK workers, perhaps most notably in the recruitment routes, these were not sufficient to merit a clear-cut distinction between the groups in their entirety. In other studies, distinct differences have been found between local workers and migrant workers and/or ethnic minorities. However, the thesis argues that it is more accurate to think of the BIMPS workforce as a whole and then to make smaller sub-distinctions as and when required such as more specific ethnic distinctions and differences between job types. Indeed, job type over ethnicity appeared to be the factor most influential in determining a worker's experience in the BIMPS.

## **8.9. Reflections and Limitations**

This project originally set out to uncover the experiences of migrant workers in the BIMPS. Whilst the original inspiration came from reading *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1985 [1906]), further recent literature indicated that migrants may be subject to a range of poor management practices and problematic recruitment strategies from employers (EHRC, 2010; Tannock, 2015; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). The expectation was that

this would still be the case. As the project progressed, however, it became obvious that the situation was far from a binary of 'migrants are treated poorly/UK workers are treated fairly'. UK workers faced a range of challenges that correlated with the experiences of migrants including gaining employment, the affordances of the workplace, the relationship with the outside world and workplace aggression. Project aims were redeveloped. Rather than comparing one group with another, the research aimed to decipher what the difficulties were for each group and if there was any overlap between the two. Following the analysis, it became obvious that the distinction between UK workers and migrants was not as binary as first thought and that more nuanced distinctions needed to be made. It was surprising that, in fact, many of the challenges and experiences workers faced were present throughout both different ethnic groups but also throughout the job spectrum, a reflection that would be useful for any future research.

There was another expectation that working in the BIMPS would not be a pleasant experience. The fact that animals are killed in abattoirs essentially all day, every day was enough to produce this expectation but other literature reporting other problems such as bullying, discrimination etc. (Dillard, 2007; Fitzgerald et al, 2009) augmented this idea. Whilst this expectation proved to be partially true because of the difficulties detailed above with mental health and coping strategies, it was also proved incorrect in that workers did regularly report enjoyable and meaningful aspects of their work. Workers often spoke of the satisfaction of doing their jobs well, the skills and knowledge gained through their work and fulfilling the ultimate aim of producing food, especially when it was of a high quality. Thus, even in an environment as seemingly extreme and unpleasant as an abattoir and despite the difficulties mentioned, pleasant experiences could still be generated amongst workers.

The third expectation was that, as detailed in the methodology chapter, workers in the BIMPS would have little tolerance for veganism. Veganism and meat abstinence are not just a refusal to buy the products produced by the BIMPS but are often a moral stance taken which goes directly against the practices of the BIMPS. This expectation was found to be surprisingly untrue. Whilst workers did not take criticism and/or hostility from vegans well and would reciprocate as and when needed, they generally took a respectful stance of veganism and meat abstinence provided the same position



was taken in return. One of the most surprising findings was that a minority of participants claimed that they would voluntarily eat vegan food several times a week due to hygiene, welfare, and environmental concerns over industrial meat production.

There are some limitations to this research. The first is that, whilst the majority of the data was gathered through interviews, focus groups and diary exercises, the study would have benefited from more time spent at BIMPS facilities. Meat facilities are unusual environments and to fully comprehend them would entail substantial time spent within them to observe the intricate details and social interactions which may be lost from the memory of/not considered important by participants. Meat facilities are difficult places to gain access to under any circumstances, but the addition of large COVID-19-related disruptions made this even more difficult. That said, two visits were undertaken and did produce especially useful data for the project. The second limitation was that the majority of participants were of mid to lower levels in the workplace hierarchy. Whilst there were a small number of more senior employees spoken to, the study would have benefitted from more data gathered from those in positions of power such as recruiters and managers. No FSA staff were spoken to at all which would have provided opportunities to contrast their views with those of the privately contracted MHIs and OVs. On reflection, it would have been beneficial to approach work agencies that regularly supply workers to the BIMPS. Whilst not working for the BIMPS, their input may have shed light on the practices of recruiting meat workers.

### **8.10. Future Research**

Following this project, there are several suggestions for future research on the BIMPS. Perhaps the largest is more investigation into what is tentatively termed the 'occupational community'. There were plenty of examples of workers coming into conflict with one another for several reasons. In particular, there was conflict between FSA staff and their contracted counterparts, although data was only gathered from the contracted staff. Therefore, data from FSA staff would help rectify this imbalance and get their take on the situation. As the UK/migrant worker divide was found to be too

restrictive, more research into the dynamics of UK and migrant assimilation and/or the non-assimilation of workers for various reasons also merits future research.

Further investigation into the relationship between BIMPS work and the mental health of workers is needed. Whilst participants in this study did discuss mental health issues within the BIMPS to an extent, it was not at great length and was not enough to draw any concrete conclusions. A recent systematic review of the current available literature (Slade and Alleyne, 2021) concluded that there is a scarcity of research on this topic worldwide, but that slaughterhouse work was linked to negative psychological and behavioural outcomes. At present, as far as I am aware, there is no substantial data on the mental health of BIMPS workers available except for anecdotal evidence (Nagesh, 2020). Future research would do well to investigate BIMPS work and mental health and focus on what factors contribute towards poor mental health, to what extent these factors contribute, which job roles are most at risk, whether there are any factors unique to the BIMPS and policies which may be brought in to help prevent the development of mental health issues. Differences between jobs and poorer mental health outcomes have been found in Brazil (Hutz et al., 2013) and there appears to be no reason to assume it would be different in the UK.

Another recommendation is that similar research to this could be carried out on stages 1 and 4 of meat production as detailed in Chapter 3. There are now over 1,000 'mega farms' in the UK, with the largest holding some 1.4 million chickens (Lymbery, 2022). These workplaces are large-scale, industrial, and like most of the meat sector, operate to produce cheap meat for mass consumption. Whilst there is little research on these facilities at all (O'Brien, 1997), as far as I am aware, there is currently no sociological literature on this workforce at all. Similarly, there is little data on the workforce of stage 4, the vendors, despite a drastic reduction in the number of high street butcher shops (Blythman, 2007; Simpson et al, 2014; 2016) and more recently, supermarket meat counters (Wilkenson et al., 2020). The closings of these counters suggest that it may one day be the case specialised meat vendors may become a thing of the past entirely with meat only being purchased from the supermarket shelf. The impact of these changes on stage 4 may well be worth investigating. Finally, considering some of the difficult experiences for workers in the BIMPS, research would do well to investigate whether these are present in other stages of the meat sector and, if so, to what extent.

Another finding which could be researched further is the relationship between LGBT workers and the meat sector. A minority of participants suggested that gay workers may be subjected to homophobia but there was no primary data gathered from gay workers at all. Apart from a passing comment in Ackroyd and Crowdy's (1990) study of meat workers, this topic has never been studied in a UK context.

The final suggestion for future research would be meat workers' relationship with veganism. The study did not specifically aim to research this, and yet several participants brought veganism up without being prompted, suggesting it is a salient topic in the minds of workers. Workers took many stances from intolerance to actively consuming vegan food. Considering veganism has steadily been on the rise in the UK in recent years, meat workers coming into contact with veganism whether in person, via the internet or through vegan products is likely to increase. At present, as far as I am aware, there is no academic research on how meat workers interpret veganism and or interact with vegans/vegan products.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1



School of Geography, Politics and Sociology

#### **Information Sheet for Participants**

Name of Study: Meat and Migrants: An investigation of migrant lives in industrial meat processing

Thank you for taking an interest in participating in this study. This project is part of a PhD program being carried out at Newcastle University. It will aim to speak with workers or ex-workers within the industrial meat processing sector to understand migrants' experience working in this area.

1. The researcher is seeking volunteers to take part in the project and this sheet will provide more detailed information.
2. The study is looking to speak to anyone who has experience working within the industrial meat processing sector and would be willing to share their experiences in this area. This includes both British and migrant workers.
3. One-to-one interviews and focus groups will be used to gather data. The interviews and focus groups will be around one hour. These will take place virtually, for example, via Skype or Zoom, in order to abide by current COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, diary-keeping will be used to gather data. The diary-keeping will be for one working week and will involve a follow-up interview (please see Appendix A for more information on the diary-keeping). Participants can volunteer to take part in one, two or all of these activities if they wish.
4. The interviews and focus groups will involve discussion of various aspects of the working lives of participants. The questions will seek to explore participants' experiences working in this sector. These questions and discussions may be centred around recruitment, managerial strategies, socializing at work and

other work-related issues. It is possible sensitive topics may come up during the discussion such as race, ethnicity, animal cruelty etc. which may cause distress for participants.

5. Confidentiality will be maintained as appropriate and as agreed. Participants may use their own names in the study if they wish by providing consent on the consent form. If participants do not wish to use their own names, then pseudonyms will be provided. As the focus group will be a group discussion confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, however, participants will all be requested to honour the confidentiality of other members of the group.
6. Before the study begins participants will need to provide consent. This will require the reading and signing of a consent form to ensure participants are aware of everything the study entails. Alternatively, verbal consent may be given which will be recorded.
7. Participants are not obliged to take part in the study and can withdraw at any time and any data already provided will be destroyed. There will be no negative consequences from this.
8. The data from the interviews and focus groups will be recorded using an audio device and written up at a later time. The data will be kept for up to five years and then destroyed. Participants have the right to a copy of their transcripts.
9. All data will be kept secure. Three copies of the data will be held. The first will be on Jake's university OneDrive account, the second on his iCloud account and the third on the hard drive of his personal home computer. The two online accounts are cryptically protected. Likewise, Jake's personal computer is cryptically protected and kept in his locked flat. External data (paper copies) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. Only Jake and his supervisors, Ruth McAreavey, Tracy Shildrick and Sally Shortall will have access to this data.
10. Data will be used for analysis and use in the final thesis of the project. It may also be used in the writing of other academic papers and for teaching purposes. The rights and dignity of the participants will be maintained at all times by the researcher. The legal and ethical obligations of the GDPR and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity will be upheld throughout the study.
11. It is possible sensitive and distressing topics may arise during the discussion. As a result, a list of third-party organisations has been created. This list can be provided on request. Participants can then contact these organisations which

may be able to offer support regarding any issues that may arise during the discussions.

12. The disadvantage of this study for participants is mainly through the loss of time.
13. Whilst there is no direct advantage for participants, it is hoped a better understanding of migrants in the industrial meat processing sector can be gained. This will assist in filling the gap in the academic literature on migrants' experiences in the industrial meat sector.
14. An unconditional thank you in the form of Love2Shop vouchers (£20 worth for interviews focus groups and diary keeping) will be offered as a token of appreciation for the participant's contribution.
15. This project has been approved by the Newcastle University Research Ethics Committee.
16. If the participant has any questions at all then they are free to contact Jake, the project researcher at any time. Please find his contact details below. Alternatively, they can contact the Head of School, Professor Kyle Grayson who is independent of this study at [kyle.grayson@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:kyle.grayson@newcastle.ac.uk)
17. If you are interested in taking part in the study, please fill in the form on the 'Contact Us' page of the website found at <https://meatandmigrants.wixsite.com/study>. Alternatively, please contact Jake at his email address or phone number found below or via post using the address provided.

Researcher: Jake Pointer

Email address: [J.Pointer2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:J.Pointer2@newcastle.ac.uk)

Phone Number: 07445601005

Department of Sociology, Room 1.11. 20 Windsor Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4HE

#### Appendix 1: The Diary Keeping

1. Alongside interviews and focus groups, this study is aiming for a small number of volunteers to keep a one-week diary detailing certain areas of their working week. This will enable an employee's perspective on the activity inside these facilities as events occur.

2. A small booklet will be provided, and the participant will be required to fill this in each day. A set of prompts/questions will be provided inside the booklet to assist the participant. These questions will focus on several aspects of the participant's working day.
3. The booklet will be in English but can be transcribed into the native language of the participant if required. Additionally, the participant may wish to record their entries verbally. This can be done in English or the participant's native language. This may be done on any recording device, such as a mobile phone.
4. It is advisable for the participant to fill out the booklet at the end of each working day at home. This will enable the participant to fill in the diary undisturbed and in private.
5. Following the completion of the diary, a follow-up interview will be arranged with the researcher. This will be to discuss in further depth the recordings in the diary. This interview will be done virtually (e.g., via Skype/Zoom) to abide by current COVID-19 restrictions.
6. Before the study can commence the participant will need to have a meeting with the researcher (Jake) in order to ensure they have understood everything and have an opportunity to ask any questions they may have. This will be done via Skype/Zoom or telephone
7. The participant will be required to read a consent form before the study can commence. This will detail important information such as the right to withdraw, data usage, the benefits, and risks of the study and so forth. The participant will then need to provide written or verbal consent agreeing to the study.
8. The participant has the right to withdraw at any time, including after the study. There will be no negative ramifications from this. If the participant wishes to withdraw then any data already provided will be destroyed.
9. The participant is free to ask questions or voice any concerns by contacting Jake anytime (contact details above).
10. Data will be held by the researcher to be used later in the project. Quotations may be used in the final thesis and for teaching purposes. All data will be protected by being kept on a password-protected device. Any paper copies of data will be kept securely locked in a cabinet.

## Appendix 2

### **Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

### **School of Geography, Politics and Sociology**

### **Project Information and Consent Form**

Name of the Project: Meat and Migrants: An investigation of migrant lives in industrial meat processing

Funding Source: The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Name of Student: Jake Pointer

E-mail address: [j.pointer2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:j.pointer2@newcastle.ac.uk)

Phone number: 07445601005

Research Supervisors: Ruth McAreavey, Tracy Shildrick, Sally Shortall

Research

Supervisors

email: [Ruth.McAreavey@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:Ruth.McAreavey@newcastle.ac.uk) [Tracy.Shildrick@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:Tracy.Shildrick@newcastle.ac.uk) [Sally.Shortall@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:Sally.Shortall@newcastle.ac.uk)

Participants can take part in all three of these methods if they wish. Please indicate below which methods you would like to participate in by ticking the appropriate boxes:

- ☐ Interview
- ☐ Focus Group
- ☐ Diary Keeping

### **Terms for Withdrawal**

The participant may withdraw at any time and does not have to disclose the reason. There will be no negative consequences from this and any data already provided will be destroyed. This can be done by contacting Jake at the email address or phone number above.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick the box as appropriate):

1. I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the information sheet and consent form, dated \_\_\_\_\_. ☐
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation ☐
3. I voluntarily agree to participate in the project. ☐
4. I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn. ☐
5. The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained to me (e.g., use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.). ☐
6. I agree with having the discussion recorded and the data from the discussion transcribed. ☐
7. The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me. ☐
8. I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form. ☐
9. I consent to have my name used in the study but understand I can change this to a pseudonym at any time. ☐

**Participant Signature and date:**

**Researcher Signature and date:**

*J. Pointer*

13/01/2021





# Meat Workers Required

## PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR STUDY

A study is being conducted at Newcastle University which is looking to speak to employees in the British meat industry to hear views on their work. If this is something that may interest you, please contact Jake Pointer (details below)

**You will be paid for your participation**

Contact details: [jake.pointer@icloud.com](mailto:jake.pointer@icloud.com)

## Appendix 4

### Migrant/Current Worker

1. Tell me a little about yourself, when did you come to the UK? What did you do for work before then?
2. Were there any specific things which influenced your decision to come to the UK?
3. Take me through the process of coming to the UK. How did you find work?
4. How did you start working at the meat facility/abattoir?
5. How long have you worked there?
6. Why did you choose to work there?
7. Do you like working there?
8. What is it you especially like/dislike?
9. How do you get along with your colleagues? Do you socialise outside of work at all?
10. How about the managers? What sort of relationship do you have with them?
11. Is there much rotation of jobs? (If yes) which ones do you prefer? (If no) which job do you usually do?
12. What two words would you use to describe working in this industry?
13. What advice would you give to people thinking of entering the meat industry?

### Migrant/Ex-Worker

1. Tell me a little about yourself, when did you come to the UK? What did you do for work before then?
2. Were there any specific things which influenced your decision to come to the UK?
3. Take me through the process of coming to the UK. How did you find work?
4. How did you start working at the meat facility/abattoir?
5. How long did you work there?
6. Why did you choose to work there?
7. Did you like working there?
8. What was it you especially liked/disliked?
9. How did you get along with your colleagues? Did you socialise outside of work at all?
10. How about the managers? What sort of relationship did you have with them?
11. Was there much rotation of jobs? (If yes) which ones did you prefer? (If no) which job did you usually do?
12. What two words would you use to describe working in this industry?
13. What advice would you give to people thinking of entering the meat industry?

### Non-Migrant/Current Worker

1. Tell me a little about yourself, have you always lived in X (e.g., Newcastle)?  
What did you do before working in the meat sector?
2. How did you start working at the meat facility/abattoir?
3. How long have you worked there?
4. Why did you choose to work there?
5. Do you like working there?
6. What it is you especially like/dislike?
7. How do you get along with your colleagues? Do you socialise outside of work at all?
8. How about the managers? What sort of relationship do you have with them?
9. Is there much rotation of jobs? (If yes) which ones do you prefer? (If no) which job do you usually do?
10. What two words would you use to describe working in this industry?
11. What advice would you give to people thinking of entering the industrial meat sector?

### Non-Migrant/Ex-worker

1. Have you always lived in X (e.g., Newcastle)? What did you do before working in the meat sector?
2. How did you start working at the meat facility/abattoir?
3. How long did you work there?
4. Why did you choose to work there?
5. Did you like working there?
6. What it is you especially liked/disliked?
7. How did you get along with your colleagues? Did you socialise outside of work at all?
8. How about the managers? What sort of relationship did you have with them?
9. Was there much rotation of jobs? (If yes) which ones did you prefer? (If no) which job did you usually do?
10. What two words would you use to describe working in this industry?
11. What advice would you give to people thinking of entering the meat industry?

## Appendix 5

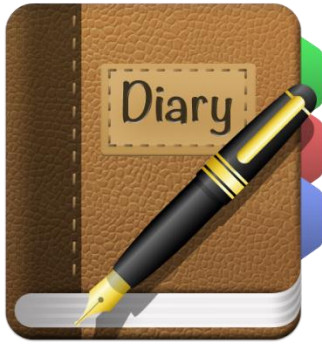
Log Study

Name:

Log start date:

If you have any questions about the diary or need help at all, please contact Jake on 07445601005 or via email at [J.Pointer2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:J.Pointer2@newcastle.ac.uk)





### A Brief Guide to your Log

This log is part of the Meat and Migrants study being carried out at Newcastle University. This brief guide is to help understand how to use this log. For more information about the study please read the *Information Sheet* that will have been provided.

- The purpose of this log is to record your everyday experiences at work to help gain important data for the study. As a participant you will be assisting in the development of new knowledge and are playing a fundamental role in this process, so thank you!
- Please fill in the log each day at your own convenience. This can either be throughout the day or all at once.
- Please be as honest as possible.
- We are very interested in understanding your experiences at work. Please be as detailed as possible when recording anything in the log and write as much as you need.
- Include anything you feel is relevant; if it is relevant to you, it is relevant to us!
- Do not put yourself at any risk while taking part in the study; your safety is more important than the study.
- If you did not go to work on any of the days, please write 'No Work' at the top of the page and give the reason why. For example, 'No Work: holiday' or 'No Work: sick day'.
- If there was nothing to report for any of the questions below, then leave that space blank.

- If there is not enough room to fill in a question, please use the back of the page.
- After this log is completed, an interview will be arranged by Jake to discuss in more detail your findings.

Thank you once again for taking part in the study, your time and efforts are greatly appreciated!

Jake Pointer

*J. Pointer*



## Your Role

Before filling in the diary we would like to know more about your position in the workplace. Please answer the following questions:

1. What is the name of the company you work for?
2. How long have you worked at this company?
3. What is your job title?
4. What work activities are you involved in?
5. How much autonomy do you have at work? Do you have a say in what type of work you do?
6. In general, how would you describe your workplace?
7. Do you generally enjoy your work? What are the reasons for your answer?

Day 1

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?

E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 1 of the diary. Please continue for day 2...

Day 2

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?

E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 2 of the diary. Please continue for day 3...

Day 3

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?

E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 3 of the diary. Please continue for day 4...

Day 4

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?



E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 4 of the diary. Please continue for day 5...

Day 5

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?

E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 5 of the diary. Please continue for day 6...

Day 6

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?

E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 6 of the diary. Please continue for day 7...

Day 7

Date:

A. Would you say today was a normal working day? Why?

B. Was there anything particularly good or bad about today?

C. How was your lunch break? What did you do?

D. Did you have any conversations today? Who were they with and what did you discuss?

E. Did you see or experience any negative behaviour today? If so, what happened?

F. Please use two words to describe how you felt at the end of the working day.

Word 1:

Word 2:

Thank you for filling in day 7 of the diary. The diary is now completed. Please contact Jake when you are ready, and a follow-up interview will be arranged. Thank you.