

# Wage theft and the Contours of Accumulation

**Jon Burnett**

University of Hull

**Fidelis Chebe**

Migrant Action

## **Abstract:**

This article examines the theft of migrant workers' wages in England by their employers, drawing from original accounts and testimonies of a sample of workers employed between 2018 and 2023. It builds on and establishes new conceptual understandings of wage theft by examining it as a violent form of accumulation, with a range of logics and functions including those which are connected to labour processes and the management of labour forces. In making this argument, this article situates the theft of migrant workers' wages – in this context at least – at the apex of at least three convergent dynamics: namely, the contours of immigration control and attacks on migrants' rights, a reworking and undermining of regulatory structures relating to labour protections, and ongoing forms of labour market restructuring'. As such, it suggests that these dynamics are structural; and furthermore, at a point where each of these policy trajectories are being aggressively pursued, they are intensifying. In dominant narratives wage theft is frequently depicted as something carried out by 'rogue' employers, at the margins of labour markets. But in contrast, this article suggests it must be understood as a structurally-situated component of contemporary political economy. Indeed, it is a core contention of the analysis that follows that movements to resist and tackle wage theft must acknowledge these broader connections and the broader political economy of which they are a part.

## **Key words:**

Wage theft, immigration, regulation, accumulation, violence, political economy

This is a post-peer-review, pre-copy edited version of an article published in *Justice, Power and Resistance*. The definitive publisher-authenticated version Burnett, J., and Chebe, F. (2024). Wage theft and the contours of accumulation. *Justice, Power and Resistance* (published online ahead of print 2024) is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/26352338Y2024D000000009>

## Introduction

This article examines the theft of migrant workers' wages by their employers in England, drawing from original accounts and testimonies of a sample of workers employed between 2018 and 2023. Seeking to explore the forces underpinning wage theft in these contexts, as well as its parameters and consequences, it further builds on and takes forward conceptual understandings of wage theft by examining its logics and functions.

In making this argument, what follows situates the theft of migrant workers' wages – in this context at least – at the apex of at least three convergent dynamics: namely, the contours of immigration control and attacks on migrants' rights (Cowen, 2021), an ongoing reworking and undermining of regulatory structures relating to labour protections (Moretta et al, 2022), and 'regressive forms of labour market restructuring' (Cockbain et al, 2019). As such, it suggests that these dynamics are structural; and furthermore, at a point where each of these policy trajectories are being aggressively pursued, they are intensifying. Indeed, it is a core contention of this analysis that movements to resist and tackle wage theft acknowledge these broader connections and the broader political economy of which they are a part.

What follows, then, is split into five parts, each connected to the overarching aims set out above. First, it examines conceptual understandings of wage theft and, in the context here, broad policy trajectories and underlying forces creating the conditions for it to flourish. Second, it builds on this discussion by exploring immigration control as a factor in shaping *particular parameters* of wage theft. Third, it discusses the methods utilised to obtain the data informing this article's analyses: a methodological approach that is linked directly to the work of a small migrants' rights organisation based in West Yorkshire which fights for and in conjunction with those who have experienced wage theft. Fourth, it sets out its findings, providing original, empirical evidence of wage theft in England. And finally, it brings these together by developing an analysis of wage theft as a form of violent accumulation. As this final section discusses, in dominant political narratives wage theft is frequently depicted as something carried out by 'rogue' employers, at the margins of labour markets. But in contrast, this article suggests it must be understood as a structurally-situated component of contemporary political economy.

## Situating contemporary wage theft in Britain

While wage theft is certainly not a new phenomenon, labour rights activists have ensured that it has been subjected to increased attention over recent years (see for example Bobo, 2009; Chen, 2015), providing evidence of employers systematically stealing from employees. As is well-established, wage theft takes many forms, including (but by no means restricted to): the reclassification of workers in order to circumvent paying wages or the minimum wage (Hallet, 2018); unauthorised deductions from people's pay (Lee and Smith, 2019: 165); and workers being compelled to work before/after shifts formally start and finish, or through all/parts

of their breaks (Su, 2016: 147). Wage theft can be mediated through egregious charges such as requiring people to pay substantial sums for equipment necessary to carry out their work; for training; or for accommodation or travel tied to their labour. What is more, theft of *wages* is diametrically connected to the theft of *time* (Bittle and Snider, 2018). For wage theft involves the expropriation of labour power – working unpaid overtime, and so on – without recompense.

Indeed, this takes on specific meanings and resonance in capitalist economies, where labour-power is bought and sold by units of time. For the wage form, as Marx set out over 150 years ago, is already predicated on the extraction of surplus value from the worker. Having to sell their labour power to capital, Marx (1867/2013: 150) explained, ‘We have seen that the worker during one part of the labour-process produces only the value of his labour-power, that is, the value of his means of subsistence’. As such, ‘That portion of the working day, during which this reproduction takes place, I call necessary labour time. The labour expended during this period I call ‘*necessary*’ labour-time, and the labour power expended during that time I call ‘*necessary*’ labour.’ The ‘second period of the labour-process’, he continued, ‘that in which his labour is no longer necessary labour ... expends labour-power; but his labour, being no longer necessary labour, he creates no value for himself. He creates surplus value which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of creation out of nothing’ (Marx, 1867/2013: 150). Consequently, Marx explained, the appropriation of time and surplus value is endemic to the capitalist mode of production. So, it follows that wage theft refers to the *extra*-appropriation of value above-and-beyond the wage form’s ‘normal’ form of exploitation. It refers to the appropriation of value *beyond* that which is normally sanctioned and protected by law, and which further appropriates that which they are legally entitled as workers.

As such, wage theft straddles a line between legal and extra-legal appropriation, and it is for this reason that Cole et al (2022: 15-16), in their excellent panoramic analysis of wage theft in the hospitality sector in England, suggest that strict legal definitions are problematic, as they fail to incorporate the ‘legal, quasi-legal and illegal practices adopted by employers to secure unpaid labour time ... incentivised by the imperatives of capitalism itself’. However, while these imperatives, therefore, are *structural*, as the reminder of this section argues, in the contemporary conjuncture multiple dynamics mean that the propensity for wage theft is intensifying.

First, as Bittle and Snider (2018: 130) make clear, the widespread changes in employment relationships over the last half century, including the outsourcing of jobs, are fundamentally connected to vast increases in corporate power and overall inequality. For example, in the UK, some 3.6 million workers were classed as being in insecure work in 2022, according to the Trades Union Congress (TUC, 2022), compared to 3.2 million people six years earlier: or around one-in-nine of the workforce. And it is within such workplace segments that concentrations of power over employees and explicit workplace abuses are frequently concentrated

(Eisenberg-Guyot et al, 2022). For instance, while often heralded as providing greater flexibility, insecure work is in many cases characterised by contractual and financial insecurity such as variations of temporary contracts, on-call work, infrequent hours and low pay (Florrison, 2022: 9). What is more, such features can in turn lead to extra costs like last-minute childcare or travel (Ibid: 10) coinciding with greater costs borne by workers and forms of exploitation. Or put another way, insecure work can both reproduce existing patterns of inequality, as well as fostering new patterns of inequality.

Second, this takes on particular significance when set against a systemic undermining and reworking of workplace protections and regulations (Florrison, 2022) which has almost uniformly accelerated over the same time period. For example, in 2009, Tombs and Whyte (2009: 47) warned of an 'assault upon the regulatory structure governing worker safety in the United Kingdom' which could be traced back (at least) until the latter years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Underpinned (among other things) by a desire to ensure that regulatory structures did or do not burden business or interfere with profit-maximisation, enforcement was to be culled or weakened in favour of 'consensus' approaches: characterised by collaborative working with employers, and 'light-touch' activities relating to worker safety and well-being. This was in many ways intensified in the decade that followed, with an explicit attack on 'red-tape' after 2010 (referring to the structures depicted as potentially hindering routine business activities) combined with an austerity politics implemented against the backdrop of the 2008/09 financial crisis. The British government were zealous in their implementation of austerity measures seeking ideologically to rework the state and reduce spending *on*, and the power *of* certain regulatory bodies, departments and agencies (see Cooper and Whyte, 2017). And the results, manifested in things like a 69 per cent reduction in inspections by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) between 2004/5 and 2014/15, constituted something of a regulatory collapse, with prosecutions of employers by the agency falling by 60 per cent over the same period (Tombs, 2015).

Meanwhile in the face of upturns in industrial action nationally, the government is waging what has been described as 'a full-frontal attack on working people and the trade unions they organise within' in Britain (Unison, 2023), including renewed attempts to introduce strike-breaking tools and mechanisms. And the point, here, is that these broad trajectories are fundamental to and in many ways systematic aspects of the neoliberal policy frameworks inculcated over the last half-century which have – in turn – heightened the conditions for wage theft take place. Of course, there is a substantial body of literature on *varieties* of neoliberalism (Birch and Mykhnenko, 2009), the *extent* to which neoliberal 'reforms' have taken hold in real terms when compared to their underpinning rhetoric (Peck, 2010) and whether or not it is possible to speak of a post-neoliberalism (Davies and Gane, 2021). At the same time, while British governments are among those which have by-and-largely enthusiastically championed neoliberal shifts, there are of course discontinuities as

well as continuities (Mathieu, 2022). But as a body of work has demonstrated, neoliberal reforms including those signified above heighten the propensity for wage theft in multiple ways (see for example Kim and Allmang, 2021; Zwick, 2017). Explicit attempts to increase employers' power over employees leaves weakened labour forces less able to combat wage theft collectively. Fissured employment relations geared towards intensifying the extraction of surplus creates the conditions for wage theft to take place. Indeed, as Kim and Allmang (2020) argue, the structural imperatives of neoliberalism not only create conditions for wage theft to proliferate. They in many ways incentivise employers to perpetrate it.

As such, as Bittle and Snider (2018) have argued, while wage theft can be particularly pronounced in particular sectors and labour market segments, it is imperative that analyses of wage theft *and* efforts to combat it do not divorce it from its structural conditions. For this runs the risk of normalising a perception of wage theft confined to specific labour market areas, as opposed to being normalised within capitalist labour markets more broadly. 'Despite the partial and contingent nature of its "success"', Snider (2018: 566) argues, among its 'most dramatic, wide-spread and long-lasting' legacies are its discourses altering expectations of employers and employees. 'The very definition of "normal" employment relationships and of what constitutes 'reasonable' demands from employers has shifted', he continues, with many accepting that surveillance, heightened control, insecurity, stress and increased availability are 'unavoidable' components of contemporary work. What follows in the following section examines this in relation to wage theft experienced by a core component of workers in contemporary labour markets: migrant workers.

### **Wage theft, neoliberalism and migrant labour**

That migrant labour and neoliberalism as conceptual categories are bound together is well established. In the neoliberal era, Delgado Wise (2015) suggests, a form of global monopoly capitalism has been unleashed, enabling the increased capture of resources and surplus value. An 'unprecedented' mercantilisation of technological advancements is taking place, he continues (2015: 28), which exists hand-in-hand with land-grabbing and environmental destruction, not least in the global south. With some 184 million people living outside of the country of their nationality, scholars frequently talk of an 'age of migration' (see de Hass, Castles and Miller, 2020). And while, of course, the history of humanity *is* a history of migration, its contours and 'management' have been and are being shaped in particular ways under neoliberal orders. According to Robinson (2020: 45), capitalist globalisation since the late 20th century has been the vehicle for new rounds of primitive accumulation displacing hundreds of millions of people through a 'violent restructuring and integration of countries into the new global economy'. In short, the underlying processes of neoliberal capital accumulation which have fostered a concerted attack on labour standards, working conditions and have intensified

inequalities on the one hand, have created the conditions for migration and a structurally marginalised global surplus population on the other.

It is against this backdrop that Britain, since the 1990s and early 2000s, has been among the core proponents of the managed migration systems that have been developed primarily by countries in the global North to link migration to (their) market needs or demands (Consterdine, 2015). Under the New Labour government (1997-2009) this took shape through the development of systems attempting to ensure that the number of those entering the UK in particular labour market segments could be changed and altered at different points, with those in the upper economic strata afforded greatest rights and protections, and those at the lowest afforded least. At its sharpest points, this resulted in migrant workers in the lowest-paid segments in effect being tied to employers, with their right to remain linked to their employment itself (Kundnani, 2007). While simultaneously, state power against those whose status was irregularised was amassed at rapid pace. This included the build-up of an immigration detention estate which went from incarcerating just over 10,000 people in 1995 to more than 32,000 people twenty years later (Burnett, 2022). It included an unprecedented surge of immigration offences, with the New Labour government creating more offences (84) in its thirteen years in power than the 113 years previously (Aliverti, 2016). It further involved the expansion of a 'deportation machine' which by the mid-2000s was removing over 1,000 people per month (Fekete, 2005).

As such, these were two sides of the same coin: an interventionist immigration policy framework seeking to align migratory movements with market needs while fundamentally asserting punishing, authoritarian control over those whose movement was ad-hoc such as asylum seekers, or those whose status existed outside these boundaries. While certainly not driven *solely* by economic imperatives, where these did coalesce with economic imperatives part of the aim was to create the temporal workforces demanded by neoliberal labour markets, while further rendering migrant communities disposable themselves (Kundnani, 2021). Indeed, in this context immigration control is bound explicitly with other policy domains such as labour employment relations, welfare and criminal justice. And while there have been substantial shifts in immigration policy throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there have also been continuities, with the close collaboration between distinct policy areas among them.

For example, fundamental drives to crack down on the presence of low-paid migrant workers in particular have been matched by drives to utilise welfare and criminal-legal policies to provide labour markets with differing forms of contingent labour forces (Burnett, 2022). Fundamental drives to control 'irregular' migration, meanwhile, have seen new forms of incarceration, the expansion of surveillance and saw attempts to create a two-tier asylum system through effectively eradicating what limited rights and protections thousands of people can access in their entirety

(Burnett, 2023). As has been noted persistently, the flagship hostile environment policy framework announced in 2012 (but with much longer roots) has provided one framework through which immigration control has not only spread among a range of institutions and agencies, but encompassed an increasing scope of those subject to immigration control (Webber, 2018). And it is in such contexts that migrant workers can face particular risks of wage theft.

A body of research, for instance, has explored how immigration control's 'fashioning' of precarity (Anderson, 2010), the power held by labour market intermediaries (LMIs) (Davies, 2019), the threat of immigration enforcement (Burnett and Whyte, 2010), racialised assumptions about workers (McCollum and Findlay, 2015), the opacity of labour regimes and the complexity or pressures embedded in supply chains are among the factors shaping the parameters of labour exploitation (including wage theft) of migrant workers in the UK (Scott, 2017). This coalesces with literature demonstrating migrant workers' experiences of wage theft internationally (see for example, Bélanger and Saraçoğlu, 2022; Clibborn and Wright, 2018; and Ollus, 2016). Indeed, that migrant workers are among those highly exploited in labour markets is well established; and this was part of the *stated* reasons that the UK's Immigration Act 2016 created a Director of Labour Market Enforcement (DLME), the remit of which includes harnessing 'the three main enforcement bodies [relating to combating labour market exploitation]: HM Revenue and Customs National Minimum Wage (HMRC NMW) enforcement, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), and the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) Inspectorate' (Taylor, 2021). Yet, compare the *combined* funding of £35.2 million for these agencies (in 2021/22, see Beels, 2023: 27) to the £392 million budget (in 2019/20) for the Home Office's Immigration Enforcement Directorate (IED) (National Audit Office, 2021). That is, the government spends around 11 times more on a punitive architecture regulating the *presence* of those subject to immigration control than it does on the primary infrastructure enforcing the workplace protections of not just migrant workers, but *all* workers. The total volume of wage theft is estimated to stand at a minimum of £35 billion per year (Trades Union Congress, 2020).

## Methods

It is against this backdrop that this article is situated: drawing on the accounts of ten migrant workers in West Yorkshire who have had parts of their wages stolen by employers while working in various positions between 2018 and 2023. Access to this sample was negotiated through the work of a migrant's rights organisation based in this region – of which one of the authors is the Director and the other is a Steering Group member. Founded in 2017, this organisation provides advice and advocacy for those subject to immigration control, supports access to and campaigns for justice. Its advice and 'case work' is multi-faceted, including (among other things) supporting those facing eviction and experiencing housing concerns and/or

homelessness, issues arising from contact with criminal justice agencies, working with those facing deportation/removal, working with those with irregular immigration statuses and experiencing immigration precarity, and challenging discrimination and combating work-placed problems. This includes wage theft.

The accounts were drawn from interviews carried out in September 2023. The interviews each lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and took place in the above organisation's premises. Interviews were semi-structured, and exploring themes around experiences of and combating wage theft sought to create space for 'data deeply grounded in [participants'] experience and angle of vision' (Galletta, 2013: 48). As such, the interviews aimed to elicit both specificity and contextual meaning so as to interpret wage theft inductively. Interviews were coded (Rovas, 2012), and analysis and synthesis of thematic patterns was iterative and cumulative (Galletta, 2013: 150).

In doing so, ethical concerns were foregrounded throughout this process, cognisant of the specific context within which the research took place. Each of the participants were informed about the research after approaching this organisation for support. As such it was imperative that in the process of obtaining informed consent, all information provided made clear that engaging or not in the research would have no bearing on the 'case work' support that the organisation offers. At the same time, while it was made clear that the research intended to explore the parameters of wage theft and support the organisation's broader aims of engaging in struggles for justice, it was equally set out that one-to-one support offered by the organisation through its 'case work' was not linked to the research specifically. This was deemed essential, in order to ensure clarity that participants had autonomy in interviews over what to discuss (or not). Further, interviewees were informed if there was any issue which discussed which they would like to take forward with the organisation in terms of 'case work', they were welcome to do so.

In this regard, a reflection on what Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) describe as 'micro-ethics' was paramount throughout the research process: working to ensure that participants' interests were foregrounded. As detailed below, interviewees were in some cases speaking about their present employers in interviews, and requested anonymity. All interviewees are referred to through pseudonyms in what follows; with participants providing their own pseudonyms (for discussion on 'naming', see Lahman et al, 2015). Further, in order to ensure that participants' perspectives and views were at the forefront of the research process, after interviews were transcribed and coded, follow up meetings were arranged with participants (in the same premises as the original interviews) to check the accuracy of people's own interview transcripts and also to discuss the general themes and whether they accurately reflected the discussion in their own interviews specifically. Following Hofseth's (2018) discussion of 'ethical rigor', and rigor as an 'ethical imperative', doing so provided a mechanism to check for accuracy, from participants' perspectives:



something which is often done by checking quotes or transcripts with participants and can further underpin participant confidence in research (Rowlands, 2021). But at the same time, it sought to expand on this by ensuring that data itself were explored collaboratively (Lindheim, 2022) and in doing so undergird validity. In these meetings, the themes brought out by the researchers were discussed with interviewees, including whether these were valid (from their perspective), whether they needed developing further or whether other themes might be missing.

In this regard, attempts were made to go some way to disrupting the power-laden process of interviews. There is a substantial literature on the potential power dynamics in interviews including (among other factors) the framing of the general research questions and their direction, to the positionality of researchers, and to the interpretation of discussions and to the production of the research itself (Anyan, 2013; Bourke, 2014; Kaaristo, 2022; Nunkoosing, 2005). Here, this was potentially compounded by the particular relation emphasised above in that participants in the research had come to the organisation for support. As such, as well as explicitly making clear the research and the organisation's case work were not connected, interview questions were framed interpretively, moving between understandings and interpretations of wage theft, experiences of wage theft, its consequences, its functions (within workplaces and more broadly), its contexts, its regulation and strategies of resistance. In this way, initial questions were starting points only, and springboards for broader discussion which participants could lead (see Knapic, 2006). What is more, discussions and involvement in data analysis took the form of conversations which, it was envisaged, would enable more 'naturalistic' exchanges of ideas, thoughts and reflections. As Swain and King (2022) suggest, discussions can operate as important complements to other methods in such contexts.

This does not mean, of course, that this methodological approach was without limitations. It could be argued, for instance, that while this approach went some way to ensuring validity, the *initial* coding by researchers still led this process and discussions that followed. At the same time, it could be argued that a specific sample and small sample size limits the broader conclusions that can be made. Nonetheless despite these limitations this process potentially strengthened what Malterd et al (2016) call 'information power': a concept which expands beyond that of 'saturation' – frequently utilised in qualitative research – which indicates that the point where data replicates itself is the point where no further information is useful/necessary. For, in practice, authors often 'just claim that saturation was achieved', they argue, 'without specifying their understanding of how saturation has been assessed' (Malterd et al, 2016: 1753). In contrast, information power – underpinned by research aims, sample specificity, quality of dialogue, role and use of theory, and the forms of analysis utilised – underpins validity, and influences the potential of empirical information to provide access to new knowledge and foreground its theoretical and practical implications. By foregrounding And this is relevant here, in an organisation where participation is a core dynamic, and which foregrounds the voices of those it

works with in terms of its priorities and activism geared towards effecting transformative change.

### **Exploring wage theft**

Each of the ten people interviewed here had engaged in at least one form of wage labour between 2018 and 2023, with eight people employed at the time of interview. Over this time period, workers recalled having experienced wage theft in a total of 47 different jobs, across multiple industries, the most prevalent of which was warehousing and packing. Many of these jobs had been secured through employment agencies in the north of England which, since the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century have become adept at fashioning 'strategies for reaching deep into under- employed, inner-urban labour pools' and marketing such labour supplies to employers (see Peck and Theodore, 2010: 96). In large part, such agencies are concentrated in low-wage sectors, providing labour by the hour; and by focusing on particular labour pools, they provide a steady supply of workers meeting the 'apparently insatiable demand for low-cost flexibility' among the hallmarks of post-Fordist capitalism (Peck and Theodore, 2010: 96). As we shall see below, interviewees were very clear about what this meant, and means, in real terms.

While the interviews took place in the north of England, and all respondents resided in the north of England at the time of interview, these forms of work had been in multiple regions (See Figure 1). Immigration status, as is well established, is not static, with those subject to immigration control frequently experiencing a form of temporality which can include moving between different forms of immigration status itself (Hughes, 2022). As such, interviewees discussed experiences of wage theft while working under a range of conditions and restrictions relating to their immigration status, including: as international students, on post-study visas, on work visas and on family and spouse visas. Five of the respondents were female, and five respondents male. All were born in Africa, and all were aged between 25 and 54 at the time of interview. All interviewees had been in the UK between four and sixteen years.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

### ***Forms of wage theft***

All respondents reported experiencing wage theft on multiple occasions while working in England, which in many ways corresponded with established patterns of stealing from employees. For example, Sarah explained that while packing in a warehouse:

Many times, I am asked to work through part of my break or for a little bit longer after my shift so we can keep on schedule, so the production schedule can be met and everything is on track.

Similarly, Michelle, working in a baking factory, explained:

The people they are working, working, working, working. You start at 10pm, and sometimes you are going until around 5am for a break as there is a schedule to meet. There are productions targets and deadlines.

Under the Working Time Regulations 1998 (implementing the European Working Time Directive in to law in Britain), workers over 18 are entitled to an uninterrupted break of 20 minutes when working more than six hours, which should take place in working time and should not be taken at the start or the end of a working day (Health and Safety Executive, 2023). The law permits employers to decide whether this break is paid or unpaid. But interviewees frequently stated this sometimes appears to make little difference in practical terms, with break times routinely shortened in any case or working extra after shifts routine. Or as Richard put it: 'There's always a reason why you need to do a few more minutes here, or a bit more time there'.

Forms of wage theft, however, expanded beyond working through breaks or after shifts had finished. For example, Eva described 'extra charges' in her role working in a food production factory, including clothing and travel, which were nebulous, unexplained and expensive. 'Say you are working the morning shift 6-2', she said:

There are no buses to work at that time in the morning so if you don't drive like many workers you use the pick-up bus they arrange. But you are being charged for that pick-up bus. It comes out of your wages and it costs a lot.

While in turn, Ajani recounted a job 'painting walls and doors where I used to work (from 8am] until 7pm, but there was so much to do that I worked eight days to finish when it was meant to be seven; so they said they don't pay this extra day. It happens'. Indeed, respondents consistently emphasised that wage theft in their experience has been an occasional event, but something more normalised. Anjani continued to discuss having worked for more than one employer who 'went out of business before me and other workers got paid. The company went broke, so we could not have our wages'. Meanwhile, Mariam explained how in multiple jobs she had had:

If you take holiday they are cutting your money. Sometimes I have just not been paid when I expected to be. Other times, I have worked with an agency and they have disputed hours I worked, so they said I did not have enough hours to be entitled to holiday pay. Either way, this does not just happen to me. It is not isolated'.

### ***Profit, punishment and control***

This understanding of wage theft – as something routine and in many ways mundane – coincided with reflections on wage theft as one strategy *among others* to profit and extract as much surplus value as possible from workers. 'Stealing wages, skimming wages, sacking people so they don't have things they are entitled to',

Omar explained, 'cutting corners, cutting costs, these are all ways of getting as much profit as possible, everything they can get away with, in any way they can'. And 'this adds up very quickly', Chapman suggested, as:

If one employer has a hundred workers and they each, or even some of them, work twenty minutes unpaid a day, even just over a few days a week, this adds up very quickly. This is a lot of stolen wages.

Indeed, providing specific examples, Mabel explained that, in her experience, working unpaid through breaks had coincided with the denial of other breaks – especially comfort breaks which would remove a person from their work, such that:

The toilet, you really have to wait. Sometimes someone is coming, like when another line manager or someone can cover. Or like when a supervisor who is able to do the job and can do the work. Or maybe when something is broken, then they can then go to the toilet. But other than that you cannot go to the toilet; they think that if you are going to the toilet you are going to rest and you are not allowed to rest. But sometimes you need it.

While similarly, Firash said: 'When you have to go to the toilet you have to have someone to cover you. But when there is no cover you cannot leave your place, because you have your duty and the factory will not close the line. It needs to keep time'. As such, this equated to 'companies thieving worker time', he continued, 'so that they can keep to their own time'.

Against this backdrop, what Firash – and other interviewees also – pointed to was fundamental power dynamics in workplaces, where the theft of wages in some contexts takes place to ensure that employer goals can be met, or where these might not be met. Eva, for example, reflected on explicitly punitive forms of wage theft where:

There was work to do not long ago but we had not finished, so they made us stay until we had finished all of the work to complete the target. I cannot remember how long extra we worked. An hour maybe. Maybe 90 minutes. We did not get [paid] overtime.

While Mariam discussed how:

I recently worked where it was meant to be production line work but some of us were instead told we were going to be loading and moving pallets – heavy pallets. I was with a girl who was strong. We were doing pallets and she said to me 'don't worry, you do the easy parts, I will do all the heavy parts'. We were a team of four, and she helped me so much but eventually she got hurt loading them. So, I said 'no its not fair, we were not even meant to be doing this'. So, one day I went to my supervisor and told her that, and I could see on her face she was not happy, and as a result, she told me to go do jobs that were not really related to anything. She would give me pointless, degrading

tasks all day. And then sometimes I would say 'I have finished'; so she would find other things, but things you are not supposed to do: stupid things just to show me who was the boss. And when I got my wage that month there was some missing.

Indeed, for her this was not just about profit but – at least potentially – punishment and control, and elaborating on the same theme, Omar explained: 'There was one decorating job I had recently which was meant to take ten days but I did it in eight, working really long days, so I could have two days rest.' However, assuming control over his working hours, he continued, had significant consequences, as:

I waited for the payment and I didn't get it. I phoned [the employer], and they said I wouldn't be paid for days I was not there. I challenged it and challenged it, and in the end I got some pay but didn't get everything I was owed, but by that point I felt like I should almost be grateful for anything.

As is well established control of the working day and the labour process is a central feature of wage labour (Thompson, 1967). Wage theft here appears to be a way of exerting it

### *Experiencing wage theft*

Such forms of theft were and are particularly keenly felt – respondents pointed out – in a context of high living costs, variable wages and precarity. For example, as Michelle explained:

When you are having money taken – unpaid overtime, deductions from wages and you don't know why, that's a lot of money. It's nothing for them [employers], but for us it's a lot. If they take six hours from me, six hours from him, from her, it's a lot of money.

Continuing, she said: 'I have responsibilities. I cook, I clean and have children and so these things add up. Time taken from me is time taken from being with them. Money taken from me is money taken from them'.

As such, as she made clear, wage theft can and does have very real material consequences; and this was a point reiterated repeatedly elsewhere, with Chapman stating that 'it can make the difference between paying rent or not', for example, or Taye explaining that 'getting wages or not ultimately impacts whether you are eating'. Indeed, every interviewee emphasised the fact that wage theft has very real implications. So, it is unsurprising that the emotional costs of this were also foregrounded consistently. For instance, Sarah recalled:

There was this one girl and she was decorating her apartment and she wanted this, she wanted that, she wanted to make it nice and she was so happy at the thought of having things and making it nice. So, she was coming and saying 'come on, today we do twelve hours' – morning, afternoon, night. She was

strong. But then oh my word, not seeing the money at the end of it. We were getting £600 but we would have been getting more if they were honest people. And we didn't understand if they were paying the tax for us. We didn't understand nothing about it, about what they were doing.

Meanwhile, Mabel recalled feeling 'devastated' when finding out that there were wages missing for the second time in several months in one warehouse position, saying how she 'had plans':

I was going to pay back a friend who had been helping me, lending me money and putting herself in trouble. But then I was hoping to save something and be able to think ahead. I had ideas about treating my family; that's what I wanted to do ultimately – so something nice, and that's why I had chosen to work extra hours. But because of this, these plans had to be put to one side. They still are.

At the same time, the emotional costs of wage theft were bound together with an awareness of the way it could operate as a form of control, highlighted above. And reflecting on being over-charged for travel to and from work, for example, Eva noted how 'when you work for them, you open yourself up to using the services put on by them and becoming reliant on them as you have no other choice if you are going to do the job – even though you know they are over-charging you'. Or, in another context, Richard pointed out how 'struggling financially means you need the job even more, so it becomes a cycle. You become vulnerable to particular forms of treatment'. Wage theft, he continued, is 'not just about the theft of money. It is about more than that.'

### **Discussion: wage theft, violence and accumulation**

Indeed, it is the contention of this article that understanding wage theft as 'more than that' – that it is not 'just about the money' – is integral to efforts to both understand and resist it. As the above discussion has indicated, wage theft can and in many cases does have significant impacts on those victimised. Time is stolen from workers (Snider, 2001), in many cases quite literally away from being able to be with friends, families, loved ones. Workers are impacted materially, the consequences of which can affect people's ability to afford food, house themselves and ultimately live. Among the most startling forms of wage theft that interviewees here emphasised was someone not being paid three month's wages by an employment agency, having worked through them as a cleaner: wages which the worker has now resigned herself to having 'lost forever'. But such events should not be divorced from the myriad forms of wage theft which – although not as flagrant – occur alongside them: the grinding incidences of stealing which, while smaller in isolation, cumulatively add up. And it is against this backdrop, that in at least certain instances, wage theft is experienced as a form of *violence*: a form of theft precipitating multiple intersecting harms. As Cooper and Whyte (2017: 23-4) have argued, while

violence is frequently thought of in interpersonal terms, drawing on a long list of thinkers who have sought to analyse violence in broader, conceptual terms forges understandings of violence in 'mundane' forms, but which 'routinely and over time deteriorate ... mental and physical health'. Examining the austerity measures in the UK implemented following the 2008/09 financial crisis, they conceptualise these measures as *institutional violence*: that is, a form of violence administered through the process of 'delivering key political objectives'. Delivered by 'smartly dressed people sitting behind desks', they continue, the *institutional* violence of austerity is what makes up 'the lived experience of feeling humiliated, anxious and humiliated'. It is a form of violence which in many cases 'unfolds over time, at a deteriorative pace' (Cooper and Whyte, 2017: 24); and while such forms of violence might not always feature in media discourses which frequently focus on the spectacular and that which is considered 'news-worthy' (Jewkes, 2015), this should not detract from them being recognised as such.

Drawing on this understanding of institutional violence, the violence of wage theft, it is suggested here, shares certain characteristics and features. But administered through the employment relation across a range of sectors and entities, it might further be understood as a form of *state-corporate* violence. For state-corporate *crime* Michalowski and Kramer (2006: 15) argue, refers to the 'injurious actions' and illegal acts located within the 'horizontal relationships between economic and social institutions'. It refers to crimes and violence which are situated at the intersections of 'organisational outcomes [which] are not discrete acts, but rather the outcome of relationships between different social institutions' (Tombs, 2020: 122). Indeed, this permeates with an analytic of wage theft, for its violence must be understood in terms of the structural forces and institutional relationships and goals which create the conditions for wage theft to flourish. It's violence must be understood in terms of the broader political economy, and the regulation of this political economy, of which it is a part.

Such an understanding runs contrary to government discourses which (where they do explore wage theft) are invariably individualised: sometimes (but not always) acknowledging that the propensity for wage theft is heightened in particular circumstances, but nonetheless seeing it as down to the actions of particular entities operating deviantly and out of the ordinary. For example, in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' (2015) 'naming and shaming' scheme for employers failing to pay the minimum wage (in operation since January 2011) it is 'rogue employers' which are identified: 'rogue employers' which should be 'deeply ashamed of their performance' compared to the 'vast majority' of employers which 'follow the law' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2020). But this article has examined forms of wage theft which take place against the backdrop of policy frameworks and institutional relationships which operate *within* the terms of law and are normalised and politically enabled through neoliberal capitalist accumulation. As Bernat and Whyte (2020: 134) have argued, state-corporate crimes

cannot be understood as moments of ‘rupture’ in otherwise benevolent systems; but exist ‘as a distillation of a range of social relationships, institutions, and practices’. And it is in within such conceptual frameworks that the violence of wage theft as a form of accumulation can be understood as structurally-situated.

As such, it is against such backdrops that the specific contours of wage theft experienced by migrant workers interviewed here can be read. For they provide indicative evidence of the ways that immigration control, its regulation and the regulation of migrant labour itself intersect with these dynamics and shape the conditions for specific forms of wage theft as part of a broader political economy. For ‘three months I am taking the bus going to work’, explained Eva, for example, ‘sometimes Monday to Sunday’:

But then they say your work was rubbish so you get no pay. That’s what they say. But where do you go to complain? I did that and he [her employer] threatened to sack me. He said there’s many more people ‘like me’ [subject to immigration control] who need the job, and am I going to risk losing it? He said he could pick the phone up and call immigration to investigate all his workers any time he wanted.

Similarly, Taye recounted the withdrawal of wages related to a workplace injury where:

This guy was working beside me and using the product for cleaning and it went in my eye. So I took my glasses and I don’t know what happened but my glasses got crushed and my eyes turned red and were really hurt. But because I couldn’t perform anymore they wouldn’t pay me – not even to the end of the shift I was working – and when I said I would complain he threatened my job. He said I needed to keep my head down. He said ‘what are you going to do? Think about how hard it was to get this job. Think about what you have to lose’.

Indeed, as interviewees repeatedly pointed out, it was ambiguity about immigration status and precarity on the one hand, and the regulation of working conditions on the other, that was frequently utilised by employers as leverage for wage theft. And at a point where immigration enforcement is given far greater priority than labour rights enforcement (Kenway, 2021) this is hardly surprising. For it is this regulatory framework which has a core role in fostering conditions for the stealing of wages. Some 696 penalties totalling £13.2 million were issued by HMRC to employers not paying workers the minimum wage in 2021/22, for example (Department for Business & Trade, 2023: 6). But across 2022, 1,105 penalties were issued to employers employing undocumented workers, totalling £16 million (Home Office, 2023). Or put another way, the penalties for enforcement activity targeting migrant workers seen as ‘immigration offenders’ outstripped those from regulatory activities ostensibly protecting *all* workers against wage theft. Certainly, this is a crude measure. But



what it does indicate is that enforcement targeting the presence and immigration status of migrant workers is afforded far greater priority, in real terms, than enforcement ostensibly ensuring legal rights of not just migrant workers, but *all* workers.

And this matters. Set against the analysis developed here, wage theft frequently operates as a way of extracting *extra* surplus value from the labour process, and simultaneously one strategy among others for managing workforces and as a form of labour control. It can operate as a mechanism for effecting control of employees and a form of labour discipline utilised to lock employees into dependence. As a body of work has attested, 'deportability', the potential threat of deportability and the fear of deportability are powerful factors shaping explicit workplace abuses (De Genova, 2002; Öberg, 2015), and this is something interviewees here certainly reiterated. For instance, Mariam noted that when she was working close to the maximum hours she was legally allowed to (20 hours) as an international student, her employer warned her that she 'might get reported' if going over this limit, but by stealing her wages left her needing to work extra hours to make up for this shortfall: a situation which left her especially wary of attempting to recover what had been taken. Meanwhile, interviewees frequently emphasised that the financial precarity imposed by being subject to immigration control itself simultaneously had the capacity to force migrant workers into potentially greater reliance on employers, and reinforced the financial costs of wage theft, indicated above. For example, Taye drew attention to the extortionate fees imposed on those subject to immigration control (for discussion, see Burnett and Chebe, 2020) – including the combined costs of the annual health surcharge, visa renewals and saving up to potentially secure leave to remain – stating that these charges cost his family thousands of pounds per year, and left him 'needing every penny I can get'.

Indeed, this, in many ways, is the point. While wage theft is certainly not confined to particular segments of labour markets, or to particular workers, the parameters of immigration control and its regulation foster the conditions for wage theft in specific ways. Among these, it is the temporality of migrant workers and the precarity embedded within this which is leveraged, and ensures that the logics of wage do not just stop at expropriation, but operate on multiple levels at once. This is keenly understood by workers, who recognise its functions and the specific political and economic relations fostering the conditions for it to take place largely unchecked. For example, Michelle recalled:

This one day when I didn't even go to the toilet. Instead of employing two people they employ just you, so there so much to do. They don't tell you what you are entitled to. They don't say 'you can have this break, this break, this break', not even to eat. I remember starting at 10 at night and finishing at 1 the next afternoon, and by that point I knew I would have to eat before I started but then not after. And I remember getting home one day and having

a shower, and I was so tired that even the water from the top was hurting my feet.

However, she went back later that day, she said, as:

It is simple. If you don't work you don't get money. When you are on shift, if there is work to do you have to do it, and you cannot leave before you do it. But sometimes if you can't work because you are hurting because of the work you have been doing, the lifting or something like that, what do you think happens then? You are just a number, and they will take from you what they can. I never got paid all of my wages for those shifts. There was some missing. Why do they do that? They do that because they can.

## Conclusion

Ultimately then, this article suggests the need for an analytic of wage theft which sees it as *structurally-situated*; a violent form of accumulation, leveraged in different ways and at different points, with multiple logics and functions. In doing so, it has drawn on the experiences of migrant workers based in the north of England, examining the parameters of wage theft in a particular set of often precarious labour market segments and in a particular set of contexts. However, while frequently concentrated in labour markets characterised by contingent work, to reiterate points made earlier, wage theft is not restricted to them. For, 'conventionalizing it in ... a narrow subset of employment relationships positions it as an anomalous rupture within an otherwise fair system of governance', Bittle and Snider (2018: 121) argue. Indeed, it is a core contention of this article that experiences and forms of wage theft need to be comprehended within the broader political economy and regulatory environments in which they are rooted.

In this context, specifically, this includes a political economy predicated on expropriation and the imperatives of valorisation (Cole et al, 2018: 16) and a policy context of eroded regulation, the parameters of immigration control and mechanisms which have facilitated increased labour market precarity (manifested in real terms as measures enabling employers to pass on risks to employees). And in doing so, at a point where (particularly low-paid) migrant workers are held up by particular political leaders as responsible for eroding labour protections, this article suggests the opposite. It explores one context where migrant labour is situated at the apex of attacks on labour protections, and how migrant workers are among those who routinely experience the violence of this.

This does not mean that the discussion here is exhaustive, of course. As indicated earlier, the analysis here speaks to a particular context; and based on a limited number of accounts and experiences it neither claims to fully comprehend wage theft in all of its broader forms, or indeed all of the ways that immigration control shapes the conditions for wage theft and the intersectional experiences of it. But what it does do is provide indicative evidence of wage theft as a violent form of

accumulation, and in so doing points to way to both interpret and challenge it. Wage theft, it is suggested here, provides one indicator of the extent to which labour movements must foreground anti-racist struggles. It provides one indicator of the ways that struggles for justice must have at their forefront the experiences and perspectives of those experiencing injustice. Efforts to resist wage theft, this article argues, need to work dialectically: intervening to combat specific incidences of wage theft, while organising simultaneously to challenge the legal and political frameworks and broader political economy which enable it to flourish. This article aims to contribute to this challenge.

**Funding:** Jon Burnett would like to acknowledge the support of the ISRF, and the Political Economy Fellowship of which this article is a part.

**Conflict of interest statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers of this manuscript.

## Bibliography

Aliverti, A. (2016) *Immigration Offences: Trends in Legislation and Criminal and Civil Enforcement*, Oxford, University of Oxford.

Anderson B (2010) 'Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers'. *Work, Employment and Society* 24(2): 300–317.

Anyan, 'F. (2013) 'The Influence of Power Shifts in Data Collection and Analysis Stages: A Focus on Qualitative Research Interview'. *The Qualitative Report*. 18(36), pp. 1-9.

Beels, M. (2023) *United Kingdom Labour Market Enforcement Strategy 2022/23*. London. HM Government.

Bélanger, D., and Saraçoğlu, C. (2022) 'Processes of Wage Theft: the neoliberal labor market and Syrian refugees in Turkey'. In E, Balkan., and Z, K, Tonak. (eds) *Refugees on the Move: Crises and Response in Turkey and Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 262-280.

Bernat, I., and Whyte, D. (2020) 'State-Corporate Crimes'. In M, Rorie (ed) *The Handbook of White-Collar Crime*. New York. John Wiley & Sons, pp.127-138.

Birch, K., and Mykhnenko, V. (2009) 'Varieties of neoliberalism? Restructuring in large industrially dependent regions across Western and Eastern Europe'. *Journal of Economic Geography*. 9(3), pp. 355-380.

Bittle, S., and Snider, L. (2018) 'How Employers Steal from Employees'. *Social Justice*, 2/3 (152/153), pp. 119-146.

Bobo, K. (2009) *Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans are not Getting Paid – and what we can do about it*. New York. The New Press.

Bonefield, N. (1995) 'The Politics of Debt: Social Discipline and Control'. *Common Sense*, 17, <https://www.wildcat-www.de/en/material/cs17bone.htm>

Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(33), 1-9.

Brinkmann, S., and Kvale, S. (2005) 'Confronting the Ethics of Qualitative Research'. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18, pp. 157–181.

Burnett, J. (2022) *Work and the Carceral State*, London, Pluto Press.

Burnett, J. (2023) 'Detention and the Carceral Continuum'. in Scott, D. and Sim, J. *Demystifying Power, Crime and Social Harm: the work and legacy of Steven Box*. (pp. 273-298). London. Routledge.

Burnett, J. and Chebe, F. (2020) 'Towards a Political Economy of Charging Regimes: fines, fees and force in UK immigration control'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 60(3), pp. 579-599.

Burnett, J., and Whyte, D. (2010) *The wages of fear: risk, safety and undocumented work*, Leeds and Liverpool: PAFRAS and the University of Liverpool.

Chen, M. (2015) 'The Other side of Black Friday Price Tags'. *China Labor Watch*. New York. China Labor Watch.

Clibborn, S., & Wright, C. F. (2018). Employer theft of temporary migrant workers' wages in Australia: Why has the state failed to act? *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 29(2), pp. 207-227.

Cockbain, E., Scott, S., Pósch, K., and Bradford, B. (2019) *How can the scale and nature of labour market non-compliance in the UK best be assessed? Final report of a scoping study for the Director of Labour Market Enforcement*. London and Gloucestershire: University College London, University of Gloucestershire and the London School of Economics.

Cole, M., Stuart, M., Hardy, K., and Spencer, D. (2022) 'Wage Theft and the Struggle over the Working Day in Hospitality Work: a Typology of Unpaid Labour Time'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 00(0), pp. 1-19.

Consterdine, E. (2015) 'Managed Migration under Labour: Organised Public, Party Ideology and Policy Change'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 41(9), pp. 1433-1452.

Cooper, V., and Whyte, D. (2017) (eds), 'Introduction: the violence of austerity', in *The Violence of Austerity*, London, Pluto Press.

Cowen, L. (2021) *Border Nation: a story of migration*. London: Pluto Press.

Davies, W., and Gane, N. (2021). 'Post-Neoliberalism? An Introduction'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 38(6), pp. 3-28.

De Genova, N. (200) 'Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 31, pp. 419-447

De Haas, H., Castles, S., and Miller, M. (2020) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Sixth Edition), New York, Guilford Press.

Delgado Wise, R. (2015) 'Migration and Labour under Neoliberal Globalization: key issues and challenges'. In C-U. Schierup., R. Munck., B. Likic-Brboric., and A. Neergaard. (eds) *Migration, Precarity, and Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for Labour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 25-45.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2015) 'New National Minimum Wage offenders names and shamed October 2015'. *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* (23 October), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-minimum-wage-offenders-named-and-shamed-october-2015>

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2020) 'Rogue employers named and shamed for failing to pay minimum wage'. *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills*. (31 December), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rogue-employers-named-and-shamed-for-failing-to-pay-minimum-wage>

Department for Business & Trade. (2023) *National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage: Government evidence on enforcement and compliance 2021/22*. London: Department for Business & Trade

Eisenberg-Guyot, J., Keyes, K., Prins, S., McKetta, S., Mooney, S., Bates, L., Wall, M., and Platt, J. (2022) 'Wage theft and life expectancy inequities in the United States: A simulation study'. *Preventive Medicine*, 159.

Erdem, E., and Safri, M. (2017) 'International Migration'. In D. M. Brennan., D. Kristjanson-Gural., C. P. Mulder., and E. K. Olsen. *Routledge Handbook of Marxian Economics*. London: Rotledge.

Fekete, L. (2005) *The Deportation Machine: Europe, Asylum and Human Rights*. London: Institute of Race Relations.

Florisson, R. (2022). *The Insecure Work Index: Two decades of insecurity*. Lancaster: Work Foundation, Lancaster University.

Galletta, A. (2013) *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*. New York: NYU Press.

Hallet, N. (2018) 'The Problem of Wage Theft'. *Yale Law & Policy Review*. 37(1), pp. 91-152.

Health and Safety Executive. (2023) 'What breaks am I entitled to under the working time regulations?' *Health and Safety Executive*. (7 July 2023), <https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/faqs/workingtime.htm>

Hofseth, L. (2018) 'Getting rigorous with scientific rigor'. *Carcinogenesis*. 39(1), pp. 21-25.

Home Office. (2023) 'Immigration Enforcement data: Q1 2023'. *Home Office* (25 May 2023).

Hughes, V. (2022) 'Tense times for young migrants: temporality, life-course and immigration status'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(1), pp. 192-208.

Jewkes, Y. (2015) *Media and Crime*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). London: Sage Publications.

Kaaristo, M. (2022) 'Everyday power dynamics and hierarchies in qualitative research: The role of humour in the field'. *Qualitative Research*, 22(5), pp. 743-760.

Kenway, E. (2021) *The Truth about Modern Slavery*. London: Pluto Press.

- Kim, J., and Allmang, S. (2020) *Wage Theft in the United States: A Critical Review*. Piscataway: Center for Women and Work Rutgers, State University of New Jersey.
- Kim, J., and Allmang, S. (2021) 'Wage theft in the United States: Towards new research agendas'. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 32(4), pp. 534-551.
- Knapic, M. (2006) 'The Qualitative Research Interview: 'Participants' Responsive Participation in Knowledge Making'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), pp. 77-93.
- Kundnani, A. (2007) *The End of Tolerance: racism in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain*. London: Pluto Press.
- Kundnani, A. (2021) 'The racial constitution of neoliberalism'. *Race & Class*. 63(1), pp. 51-69.
- Lahman, M., Rodriguez, K., Moses, L., Griffin, K., Mendoza, B., and Yacoub, W. (2015) 'A Rose By Any Other Name is Still a Rose? Problematizing Pseudonyms in Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 21(5), pp. 445-453.
- Lee, J., and Smith, A. (2019) 'Regulating Wage Theft'. *Washington Law Review*. 94(2), pp. 759-822.
- Lindheim, T. (2022) 'Participant Validation: A Strategy to Strengthen the Trustworthiness of Your Study and Address Ethical Concerns'. In G, Espedal., B, Løvaas., S, Sirris., and A, Wæraas. (eds) *Researching Values: Methodological Approaches for Understanding Values Work in Organisations and Leadership*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 225-239.
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V., and Guassora, A. (2016) 'Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies: Guided by Information Power'. *Innovative Methods*. 26(13), pp. 1753-1760.
- Mathieu, C. (2022) 'From Thatcher to Johnson: 40 years of Neoliberalism in the UK, Continuities and Adaptions'. In N. Lévy., A. Chommeloux., N. Champroux., S. Porion., S. Josso., A. Damiens. (eds) *the Anglo-American Model of Neoliberalism of the 1980s: Construction, Development and Dissemination*. London: Palgrave, pp. 177-191.
- Marx, K. (1867/2013) *Capital: a critical analysis of capitalist production. Volume 1*. Translated by S, Moore., and E. Aveling. London: Wordsworth.
- McCollum D, Findlay A (2015) 'Flexible' workers for 'flexible' jobs? The labour market function of A8 migrant labour in the UK. *Work, Employment and Society* 29(3): 427-443.
- Michalowski, R. and Kramer, R. (eds.) (2006). *State-Corporate Crime: Wrongdoing at the Intersection of Business and Government*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Moretta, A., Tombs, S., and Whyte, D. (2022) 'The Escalating Crisis of Health and Safety Enforcement in Great Britain: what does Brexit mean?' *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 19(5), 3134.

National Audit Office. (2021) *Immigration Enforcement*. HC 110 SESSION 2019–2021 London: National Audit Office.

Nunkoosing K. (2005) 'The Problems With Interviews'. *Qualitative Health Research*. 15(5), pp. 698-706.

Öberg, K. (2015) 'The Production of Deportability'. In E, Righard., M, Johansson., and T, Salonen. (eds) *Social Transformations in Scandinavian Cities: Nordic Perspectives on Urban Marginalisation and Social Sustainability*. Oslo: Nordic Academic Press, pp. 161-180.

Ollus N. (2016). 'Forced flexibility and exploitation: experiences of migrant workers in the cleaning industry'. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* 6(1), pp. 25-45.

Peck, J. (2010) *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Peck, J., and Theodore, N. (2010) 'Labour markets from the bottom up', in S McGrath-Champ, A Herod and A Rainnie (eds), *Handbook of Employment and Society*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, pp. 87–105.

Rivas, C. (2012) 'Coding and Analysing Qualitative Data'. In C. Seale. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). London: Sage Publications, pp. 366-392.

Robinson, W. (2020) *The Global Police State*. London: Pluto Press.

Rowlands, J. (2021) 'Interviewee Transcript Review as a Tool to Improve Data Quality and Participant Confidence in Sensitive Research'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, pp. 1-11.

Scott, S. (2017) *Labour Exploitation and Work-Based Harm*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Snider, L. (2001) 'Crimes Against Capital: Discovering Theft of Time'. *Social Justice*, 28(3), pp. 105-120.

Snider, L. (2018) 'Enabling Exploitation: Law in the Gig Economy'. *Critical Criminology*. 26, pp. 566-577.

Su. J. (2016) 'Enforcing Labor Laws: Wage Theft, the Myth of Neutrality, and Agency Transformation'. *Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law*. 37(1), pp. 143-156.

Taylor, M. (2021) *Executive Summary: United Kingdom Labour Market Enforcement Strategy 2021/22*. London. HM Government.

Thompson, E. P. (1967) 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism'. *Past and Present*, 38, pp. 56-97.



- Tombs, S. (2015) *Social Protection after the Crisis: regulation without enforcement*. London: Routledge.
- Tombs, S. (2020) 'Home as a Site of State-Corporate Violence: Grenfell Tower, Aetiologies and Aftermaths'. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*. 59(2), pp. 120-142.
- Tombs, S., and Whyte, D. (2009) 'A Deadly Consensus: Worker Safety and Regulatory Degradation under New Labour'. *British Journal of Criminology*. 50(1), pp. 46-65.
- Tombs, S., and Whyte, D. (2020) 'The Shifting Imaginaries of Corporate Crime'. *Journal of White Collar and Corporate Crime*. 1(1), pp. 16-23.
- Trades Union Congress (2020) 'Workers in the UK put in more than £35 billion worth of unpaid overtime last year – TUC analysis'. *Trades Union Congress* (28 February), <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/workers-uk-put-more-ps35-billion-worth-unpaid-overtime-last-year-tuc-analysis>
- Trades Union Congress (2022) *Insecure Work: why employment rights need an overhaul*. London: Trades Union Congress.
- Unison. (2023) 'Three things they don't tell you about the anti-strike Bill'. *Unison* (16 January), <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2023/01/three-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-anti-strike-bill/>
- Webber, F. (2018) *The Embedding of State Hostility: A Background Paper on the Windrush Scandal*. London: Institute of Race Relations.
- Zwick, A. (2018) 'Welcome to the Gig Economy: neoliberal industrial relations and the case of Uber'. *GeoJournal*, 83, pp. 679-69.

**Figure 1: interview respondents and experiences of wage theft**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Industries employed where wage theft experienced (NB – some interviewees had worked multiple jobs in the same industry)</b>	<b>Regions where wage theft experienced</b>	<b>Working at time of interview</b>
Ajani	25-34	Construction	London Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
Chapman	35-44	Cleaning Retail Warehousing	North West Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
Eva	35-44	Cleaning Factory	East of England Midlands Yorkshire and the Humber	No
Firash	25-34	Warehousing Catering Construction	North West Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
Mabel	45-54	Factory Hospitality and Tourism Warehousing Retail	London Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
Mariam	25-34	Construction Warehousing Hospitality and Tourism	London North West Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
Michelle	35-44	Factory Warehousing Retail	London Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
Richard	25-34	Cleaning Construction Warehousing	East of England Yorkshire and the Humber	No
Sarah	35-44	Factory Warehouse Cleaning	South East South West Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes

Taye	45-54	Cleaning Factory Retail Warehousing	Midlands Yorkshire and the Humber	Yes
------	-------	--	--------------------------------------	-----