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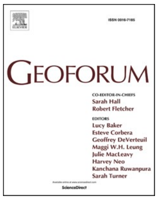

“They were chasing me down the streets”: Austerity, resourcefulness, and the tenacity of migrant women’s care-full labour

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the role of migrant women in civil society in Wales in a triply-hostile environment created by UK government policy since 2010. Drawing on interviews carried out with EU migrants between 2016 and 2017, we outline the active support and care work provided by these women to migrants and others and the way in which they navigated austere and hostile conditions (contrasting the popular construction of migrants passively requiring support and care). Contributing to the literature on resourcefulness, we introduce the notion of tenacity to highlight the exhausting care-full labour of these migrants, who continue despite challenging circumstances and impact on their own wellbeing. We conclude that the care work provided by these women plays an important civil society role in tackling ongoing austerity and hostility but that precarious conditions bring a lack of sustainability which can heighten the socio-spatial inequalities seen across the UK.

1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the active roles of women in migrant civil society – “organized groups that represent the interests of migrants and operate between markets, households, and the state” (Theodore and Martin 2007: 271) – in austere times. Civil society groups play important roles in providing this support, following cuts to public funding in these fields in the UK and elsewhere which have emphasized individual responsibility and sought political capital (in the form of winning votes and elections) in legitimizing austerity agendas against “undeserving” groups (Bassel and Emejulu 2018a; Collet 2011; Harrison 2012; Lonergan 2015). We contribute to the literature on care and migrant civil society by examining the tenacious resourcefulness of care work largely undertaken by migrant women for other migrants. Drawing on frameworks of resourcefulness developed by MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) as alternatives to neoliberal organisation, we note how migrant women make tenacious use of the limited resources available in downscaled settings and austere times, set against unsustainable expectations (Bassel and Emejulu 2018a). In recounting these experiences, we emphasize migrant women’s caregiving roles, and their agency and activism in civil society, contrasting the oft-constructed image of migrant women passively and *only* requiring care and support (Humphris, 2019). These activities, which include providing advice or signposting other support and services, teaching languages, listening to others’ (often traumatic) migratory experiences, translating, and connecting with local populations, are often invisibilized. We argue that these are important services that aid navigation of entitlements in a hostile state system to ensure entitled resources are accessed (Guma 2020). We outline the tenacity of resourcefulness: caregiving often leads to exhaustion (Emejulu and Bassel 2020), yet many women continue to provide care with limited resources as best they can, often to the detriment to their own wellbeing.

These resourceful activities take place against the backdrop of a triply-hostile environment driven by the UK’s Conservative-led governments in the 2010s. Firstly, an austerity agenda that saw substantial reductions in public spending (Hall 2016). Justified as a necessary response to the 2008 global financial crisis, the policy continued approaches that saw the “hollowing-out” of the state that took place under previous Conservative and New Labour governments. Secondly, community-led approaches of the “Big Society” that were envisaged as a substitute for state intervention in this hollowing-out, building on approaches of “governing through communities” that had characterised “third way” approaches to social democracy in the 1990s in the UK and elsewhere, but incorporating conservative values of volunteerism

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(MacKinnon and Derrickson 2012: 262). Finally, there has been the maintenance of a "hostile environment" towards immigrants in the UK (Burrell and Schweyher 2019), restricting immigrants' access to settlement, reproduction, and welfare in the UK, bringing boundaries into everyday life (Yuval-Davis et al 2018). These restrictions build on a long history of racist post-war anti-immigrant policies in the UK by both Labour and Conservative governments (Lonergan 2015; McDowell 2003; 2009), cumulating in a radical restriction in immigrants' entitlements in the UK. These three aspects interconnect. As Lonergan (2015: 141) notes, the demonisation of immigrants serves as a "divide-and-rule" strategy to disrupt solidarity from the shared experiences of austerity on migrants and working-class and less affluent UK citizens. As others have noted (Catney et al 2014; Levitas 2012; Lowndes and Pratchett 2012), there is an uneven patchwork of where voluntary groups exist to function as a "shadow state" (Wolch 1989), creating unequal spatialities of austerity. Austerity, too, has unequal effects on society, having particular impacts on migrants, especially migrant women.

Recent work has examined the care of migrant women in response to austerity and the hostile environment (Bassel and Emejulu 2018a; 2018b; Emejulu and Bassel 2015; 2020; Vacchelli et al 2015; Vacchelli and Peyerfitte 2018). Caregiving – or care-full labour (see Power and Hall 2018: 306; Williams 2017: 827), which acknowledges both the often-precarious care-giving contexts and the attention to details needed – requires mental, corporeal, and emotional toil (Batnitsky and McDowell 2011; Hall 2020; Lonergan 2015). By its very nature, it is interpersonal and relational (Williams 2017). Drawing on constructions of caregiving as a feminine attribute (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Henry 2018), it is work "undertaken by women, often minority women, women of color, and women who are recent migrants" (McDowell 2015: 2). However, these are precisely the people who are constructed as requiring support passively or a "burden" on welfare systems, and thus not identified as potential responsible citizens (Erel 2018; Humphris 2019; Lonergan 2015) and civil society actors.

Throughout this paper, we deploy both "migrant" and "women" in their broadest senses. Most respondents were international immigrants to the UK and included those who had migrated directly to the UK or followed more "fluid" paths typical of "liquid migration" (Lulle et al 2017). Some had taken British citizenship; others had not: we do not seek to reduce this category to immigration status or reflect on questions around "when one ceases to be a migrant"; rather, we mobilise the category as a marker referring to individuals with both local and transnational[1] experiences and connections. Similarly, we mobilise "women" as an expansive and inclusive category, following Emejulu and Bassel (2020: 401), to include "cis and trans women as well as non-binary femmes". Our use of the term "migrant women" throughout alludes to the intersectionality of these experiences. This does not mean that men or other genders (whether migrant or not) or non-migrant women are absent from the organisations and activities discussed in this paper: they are not. However, most people undertaking care work with immigrants we encountered were migrant women. The groups discussed included both formal and informal organizations, which focussed on language and cultural reproduction, cohesion and language acquisition, and locality and nationality-based groups which sought to provide support, guidance, and promote cohesion.

We locate our study in Wales, a minority nation where legislative competence over some fields is devolved to the Welsh Parliament. Immigration and the welfare state are not devolved issues, but other aspects affecting immigrants (e.g., housing, health, education) are devolved. Policies in these fields relating to migration have included a programme for refugees to train as medics and providing free access to secondary care for unsuccessful asylum seekers and have their foundation in the Welsh Parliament's constitution which has a statutory requirement to promote "equality of opportunity for all people" (Chaney and Williams 2003: 206). Like Scotland (Bassel and Emejulu 2018a, Emejulu and Bassel 2020), Welsh administrations have followed less draconian policies than those in England, seeking to place "clear red water", as former first minister Rhodri Morgan put it, between Welsh Labour administrations in Cardiff and New Labour and Conservative-led governments in Whitehall. The most prominent example here is the Welsh Government's intention (published in January 2019) for Wales to become the world's first "nation of sanctuary", further emphasizing its intent to distance itself from UK government policies (Bernhardt 2022). However, there is scope to argue that subsequent Welsh governments[2] could have done more to improve the lives of immigrants in Wales. This is particularly the case given the popular construction of Wales as a tolerant nation (Williams 2003) that overlooks the commonplace hostility towards migrants and minority groups in Wales (Guma et al 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Robinson 2003; Robinson and Gardener 2004).

We begin by discussing the doubly hostile environment fostered by recent UK governments: austerity politics which reduced public funding and immigration policies which demonized and further marginalised migrants. We then outline the concept of resourcefulness advanced by MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) as a progressive alternative to resilience, which we adopt to frame our discussions on migrant women's care-full labour in migrant civil society. Some brief methodological reflections and an outline of the case study follow briefly. Discussion then moves to two empirical sections. We discuss, firstly, the motivations behind migrant women's care-full labour, outlining the resourceful and altruistic approaches undertaken. We then discuss the precarious nature of this care-full labour, and the consequences for health and well-being driven by the austere context. Conclusions are offered in the final section.

2. Hostile Environments: Austerity and Migration Policies in the UK

Austerity has been a defining feature of the 2010s for many states, and it is of little surprise that it has generated many geographical studies of austerity (Hall 2016; 2019; 2020; Jupp 2017; McDowell 2015; Power and Hall 2018). While austerity has framed both state and supranational governance since the 2008 financial crisis, its impacts are not limited to the public sphere. As Hall has noted, it has impacted "the ordinary, everyday lives of people, families and communities" (2015: 148). Paying attention to these quotidian experiences of austerity, then, allows "invisible" dimensions of austerity to be made "visible" (Jupp 2017).

A significant and growing body of work has demonstrated that austerity is a "distinctly gendered ideology, process and condition" (Hall 2020: 242; see also Erel, 2018; Jupp, 2017; MacLeavy, 2011). Austerity is encountered in spaces and situations and in forms that are intimately entwined with, and can have a profound effect on, individual lives. It also has relational dimensions (Hall 2019) and can lead to more interactions with others through sharing resources or developing skills and hobbies (Hall and Jayne 2016). However, it also places more emphasis on individual responsibility for care, as the reduction of public spending leads to the roll-back and removal of various schemes, such as the closure of Sure Start centres (Jupp 2013), creating more vulnerability.

Austerity also places further challenges for civil society. The reliance on civil society, and the voluntary sector specifically, following the decline in public expenditure over the past forty years is well-established (Wolch 1989). However, the last decade has seen intensified competition for fewer resources, leading to more "enterprising" social activity (Bassel and Emejulu 2018a; 2018b. As Vacchelli et al (2015) note, this has made women's organisations vulnerable through competition, and those doing intersectional work particularly so. Consequently, organisations prioritise continuation of service provision over advocacy and campaigning. More broadly in an austere context, minority women (which can include migrant women) are often in more precarious and marginalised positions in civil society. They may be judged by volunteers as to their deservingness to benefits that they are entitled (Humphris, 2019), and their concerns are often not taken seriously, with Emejulu and Bassel (2015: 94) noting that departing from the scripts of victimhood and neoliberalism brings "potential to challenge dominant representations of the crisis and austerity measures, enabling new political imaginations and solidarities for social justice". Exploring migrant civil society austerity experiences allow for understanding how migrants are affected by austerity and the hostile environment, including through sustained attempts to provide care with depleted resources.

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[1] The question as to whether respondents self-identified as a migrant is more complex, as Brexit and the 2016 referendum campaign led to a disruption, with some reporting of "feeling like a migrant again" (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019).

[2] Wales has had left-of-centre Welsh Labour-led governments since the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999. These have been either coalitions with the centrist Welsh Liberal Democrats (2000–2003; 2016–2021) or left-leaning nationalist Plaid Cymru (2007–2011), or minority governments (1999–2000; 2003–2007; 2011–16).

Studies of the impact of austerity on migrants are largely focussed on the policy level, such as the impact of austerity agenda – introduced in the wake of the 2008 recession in many jurisdictions – on cohesion. Collet (2011), for example, outlines the impact of austerity on immigrants' incorporation and cohesion strategies in several European countries. In Denmark, the Netherlands, and the UK, funding cuts meant a reduction in support services, with increasingly xenophobic climates providing support for such cuts:

> the politics of austerity are increasingly disconnected from the practice, with a shift in philosophy towards immigrant 'self-help'. While the idea that immigrants should pay their own way may be politically attractive, it may not make any strides towards resolving social divisions.
>
> (Collet 2011: 14).

The proliferation of austerity politics also coincided with extensive policies which marginalized immigrants in many states. The UK, for example, saw a wholesale coordination of policies to create a "hostile environment" for its informal immigrants (Burrell and Schweyher 2019). While the origins of these policies can be seen in New Labour legislation and policies as far back as the late 1990s (Erel 2018; Hubbard 2005; McDowell 2009), subsequent Conservative policies since Theresa May's tenure as Home Secretary saw a further restriction on migrants' rights in the UK. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010–2015) saw a tightening up on criteria for indefinite leave to remain in the UK, with spouses joining migrant partners in the UK having to pass *both* the *Life in the UK* test *and* demonstrate proficiency in English, where *one* was previously sufficient. Spouses joining partners in the UK, also had to earn over £18,500 pa – a figure judged to be the minimum to avoid incurring additional benefits. As Lonergan (2015) illustrates, this often had an impact of couples postponing having (additional) children. The Immigration Act of 2014 placed severe restrictions on immigrants' rights to access benefits and care from the NHS. This served to place anxiety on many immigrants resident in the UK, as Lonergan recounts, even when leave to remain had been granted and free access to the NHS confirmed. The Act also emphasized an internal border, with employers and private landlords required to verify employees and tenants' immigration status: a responsibility they were untrained and unpaid for (Yuval-Davis et al 2018). The Immigration Act of 2016 also extended this principle requiring banks to conduct similar checks on account holders and to report those potentially breaching immigration rules (Waite 2017). As Lonergan (2015: 126) notes, such policies attempt to encourage "economic independence" and being able to "integrate" with minimal government support, but are "ultimately self-defeating, as they prevent migrant women from exhibiting the very characteristics of neo-liberal citizenship that they are ostensibly are trying to encourage". Support for cohesion and inclusion programmes were thus cut when "immigrant populations are most vulnerable" (Collett 2011: 19). As well as placing more individual responsibility on migrant people, the hostile environment also brought a need for more bureaucratic care and labour to help navigate these bureaucratic complexities, such as advice on entitlements and changing visa conditions. The Leave victory in the 2016 EU membership referendum brought uncertainty around the UK's future relationship with the EU, and the rights and responsibilities of EU citizens to remain in the UK bringing anxiety for many people and emphasizing the significance of advice and support in navigating a hostile state (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019).

3. Resourcefulness, care, and migrant civil society

The "Big Society" envisaged by David Cameron's governments sought to draw on Tory norms of individual responsibility, volunteering, and charitable activities (Darby 2016; MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). As highlighted in the fuller slogan ("Big society, not big government") it also further hollowed out the husk of the state through delegating its roles to the voluntary sector, which have acted as a "shadow state" for some time now. While Cameron's governments (2010–2016) enacted policies of austerity that saw substantial cuts to public services (continuing under his successor, Theresa May 2016–2019), the ability of local communities to "fill" the gap left by such cuts demonstrates an uneven picture, reflecting broader spatial inequalities (Darby 2016; MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). In highlighting the severity of the potential impact of this approach, MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) provide a wholesale critique of the concept of resilience, that had gained traction in both policy circles and academic literature.

Resilience is derived conceptually from ecology and (often uncritically) transposed into social settings. In this context MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) critique its inherent conservativism on several fronts. Firstly, the concept privileges the status quo. The suitability of the system or its underpinning components are not questioned, and the role of the state and neoliberal capitalism in creating vulnerability are rarely considered. Secondly, resilience is externally defined by centralised actors employing "top-down" strategies which emphasize the need for communities to be more adaptable and resilient, reproducing systemic socio-spatial inequalities (Harrison 2012). Thirdly, resilience focusses on local communities responding to broader, often global, challenges. Broader, systemic change is not considered, with communities expected to "bounce back" to specific trajectories through established approaches regardless of the resources or desire to do so (Harrison 2012). Consequently, inequalities are entrenched and reproduced through a docile concept that fails to examine the underlying systemic processes critically.

To address these limitations, MacKinnon and Derickson formulate an alternative concept: resourcefulness. Resourcefulness responds to the limitations of resilience through a central aim to "problematize both the uneven distribution and material resources and the associated inability of disadvantaged groups and communities to access the levers of social change" (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012: 263), and a commitment to engage communities in alternatives which can challenge established power relations. While resilience gives tokenistic acknowledgement to localism (largely through local elites), it encourages local residents and activists to learn and mobilise around priorities and needs that they themselves have identified, rather than those identified externally. Resourcefulness involves a more relational approach which places it in context with other communities and addressing systemic challenges. It involves a commitment to creativity and attentivity through involvement (Hankins 2017: 505) and care (Griffin 2021).

Resourcefulness, for MacKinnon and Derickson, has four elements: resources; skill sets and technical knowledge; indigenous and "folk" knowledge; and recognition. Resources are understood from a position which acknowledges and seeks to address inequalities and maldistribution. These are broadly conceived and include inequalities in third-sector investments and capacities, alongside communities' organising capacities and social capital. Skill sets and technological knowledge are also factors in reproducing inequalities through unequal access, and resourcefulness is focussed on some capacity building, both in access to technical knowledge and its communication. Indigenous and "folk" knowledges allow for alternative ways of knowing, shaped by experience, to be mobilised. Finally, recognition brings a sense of self-worth and community which can be used to mobilise around resources and the pursuit of new resources. Resourcefulness, therefore, is a concept and praxis of "democratic self-determination" (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012: 264) that acknowledges structural challenges and allows bottom-up identification of the tools available for the changes that communities wish to see.

While resourcefulness was developed 10 years ago in community development, it is helpful to understand the experiences of women in migrant civil society. Firstly, a focus on resources allows for the aims and motivations to be understood, as well as the precarities experienced. In many instances, migrant-led civil society embodies ideas of reciprocity and solidarity, led by volunteers who have previously benefitted from such support (Vaccheli and Peyerfitte 2018). Secondly, skill sets and technical knowledge can include advice on negotiating state welfare and immigration systems, including ensuring appropriate access to benefits, which allow survival and avoid destitution or deportation. Thirdly, indigenous and "folk" knowledge can include situated knowledge and lived experiences mobilised through "bottom-up" forms of activism. This can include approaches to broaden consultation beyond "white bourgeois ideas of citizenship designed around 'nine-to-five' working hours" (Nayak 2012: 461), as well as organising around specific issues or intersectionality that may otherwise be considered "too niche" (Vacchelli et al 2015). Finally, the bonding and bridging value of such organisations is noted for migrant and refugee women: participation allows "visibility, voice, and access to city resources" (Vacchelli and Peyerfitte 2018: 15), a springboard to the paid labour market, and a respite from the isolation of domestic space.

More broadly, resourcefulness allows an understanding of the care work undertaken by women in migrant civil society. Theodore and Martin (2007) note that "[m]igrant civil society actors remain distinctive in that many of their care activities are framed in terms of the well-being of migrant populations". Care is defined by Puig de la Bellacasa (2011: 90) as "an affective state, a material vital doing, and an ethico-political obligation … to hold together the thing", which is echoed by Williams as "at work alongside justice on the ground in holding and repairing our world" (2017: 825). It requires embodied and emotional labour (Batnitzky and McDowell 2011; Hall 2020), involving work both with and to the body, and often affective responses to the cared-for and the situation (Williams 2017: 829). Its often-repetitive nature mean that it is tiring, even if done with and for love. It is also relational, involving a direct, personal, frequently negotiated contact with others, their bodies, personal space, and emotions (Hall 2020; Jupp 2017; Power and Mee 2020. Moreover, care is political and "can be a citizenship practice and a way to challenge the dichotomy between public citizenship and private caring" (Bassel and Emejulu 2018b: 37). It is fundamentally concerned with democratic questions regarding "the allocation of public resources as well as agonistic relations wherein equality, justice, obligation and rights are lived" (Brown 2003: 835), akin to Tronto's (2015) fifth phase of caring ("caring with"). As resourcefulness is concerned with resources, skills, knowledge, and recognition, it also aligns with the first four phases of care: identifying care needs, assuming responsibility for care, giving care, and receiving care.

Migrant civil society is also precarious. Austerity policies of the 2010s have created more competition for reduced funding, often delivered through local government, where cuts have meant the replacement of experienced officers with less experienced colleagues responsible for distributing funds (Clayton et al 2016; Vacchelli et al 2015). Organisations that focus on specific groups, such as migrants or people of colour, or undertake intersectional work are particularly vulnerable, often considered "too niche" (Vacchelli et al 2015: 182). Similarly, smaller organisations (which organisation focussing on specific issues tend to be) are further vulnerable in tendering processes through having fewer dedicated fundraising personnel. Consequently, when bids are lost – often to cheaper competitors, disrupting the services and relationships built (Clayton et al 2016) – there is often less focus on intersectional issues or moving away from "white middle-class" practices that may not engage with all groups (Nayak 2012). Precarity brings a dependence on "making the most" of available resources to continue care.

As a response to these austere conditions, civil society organisations are encouraged to be develop more "professional" and "enterprising" practices. Clayton et al (2016) advance "limited resourcefulness" to understand the pressures to monetise further resources – such as the hiring of rooms – to supplement income. Similarly, Vacchelli et al. (2015: 184) note that austerity and enterprising expectations lead to "prioritis[ing] service provision over campaigning and advocacy work, in a context where solidarity is already under threat". Thus, the capacity to effect systemic change is limited by the system. Clayton et al (2016) argue that met with such conditions of limited resourcefulness, the emphasis is refocussed on survival of the organisation, which is often undertaken by staff and volunteers continuing to contribute in the face of challenges. Such altruistic practices can be damaging. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 93) writes, "too much caring can asphyxiate the carer and the cared-for". This can take the form of exhaustion, which is conceptualized by Emejulu and Bassel as an "emotional and psychological state of being with activists fighting burnout and demoralisation" (2020: 401) that is "generated in an unlikely way: when survival has to come first" (2020: 403). While the result of caring in an uncaring system, exhaustion brings about the possibility of change, serving as an "endpoint and gateway to withdrawal, but also a moment of reflection and rebirth activism in different configurations" (Emejulu and Bassel 2020: 406).

Resourcefulness is a useful conceptual lens through which to examine migrant civil society. It allows a recognition of mobilising (limited) resources, drawing on lived and situated knowledge as well as expert and technical knowledge, and a recognition of the limitations of the system within which it operates and an aim to address such inequalities. However, a limitation of this concept is that it does not consider the positionality of civil society actors. Migrants often start from a position of disadvantage in the field of civil society since as newcomers they often lack (local or 'folk') knowledge but also resources and more broadly recognition. We introduce here the notion of 'tenacious resourcefulness' to highlight the way in which our participants negotiate this disadvantage. We show how many migrant women in civil society organisations demonstrated tenacity in their resourceful action, persisting in their work and continuing to care in a situation that has far exceeded the austere context at the start of the 2010s: state xenoracism, the curtailing of migrant rights, a toxic populist public discourse, and more recently Covid-19 and a cost of living crisis means that tenacity is required to survive multiple waves of uncertainty and hostility over several years. In highlighting these situations where tenacity was required to cope with austere and hostile condition, our findings also show the human costs of these extra efforts and ongoing determination: i.e., exhausted and tired bodies. In this sense, we note another conceptual limitation regarding resourcefulness: it does not adequately frame the fatigue that is encountered in systems that expect resilience when resources become depleted, which Emejulu and Bassel's work (2020) clearly articulates. Understanding fatigue in resourcefulness helps understand the continued care-full labour, and its impact on caregivers who continue despite the detriment to their own wellbeing.

4. Methodology

This paper draws on 42 semi-structured interviews with representatives of civil society organisations. The research was conducted as part of a work package which examined EU migrants' place in civil society in

Wales, as part of a broader research centre on civil society. We focused our research specifically on migrant-led groups and organisations, adopting a broader conceptualisation of civil society to include these groups as part of it, rather than "outside" ("national") civil society. We included a diverse range of organisations and initiatives in the sample: i.e., small and large, new and established, online and offline groups. Some of the participants, especially those involved in "smaller" or less formal groups, expressed their appreciation that we took their views and participation seriously and showed an interest in their work and activities. Care was not an explicit focus of the research design, but emerged as a clear analytical theme, which we adopt as a lens to understand the impacts of austerity on migrant civil society. The research engaged with European migrants to Wales, with most coming from the post-2004 "A8" member states; however, a sizeable minority were Portuguese nationals (including women of colour born in former Portuguese colonies): fieldwork identified many similarities and connections between Portuguese and "A8" migrants. The interviewees represented or were involved with 25 different civil society groups from across Wales, although most were based in and around Cardiff. Most of these groups dealt explicitly with issues surrounding migration but were not limited to migrants in terms of focus or membership. Some were focussed on national or linguistic groups, either in cultural reproduction (such as language classes for children), or in supporting and advocating on behalf of these groups. Others were centred around specific territorial communities and supporting migrants in general with British state bureaucracy. Following a mapping exercise of various groups and organisations identified through online searches, interviewees were recruited through the contact details publicised. Some respondents were also identified through snowballing, or from contact made at various community events attended.

Participants were interviewed between February 2016 and October 2017. Most were migrants to Wales (three were not but worked closely with the groups encountered), with their time in Wales ranging from just a few months to over 45 years. 23 were women (whose experiences we focus on here), and 19 were men. Within the sample of 23 women discussed here, 10 came from Poland, while others were from Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Portugal. They were aged between 22 and 68. The resulting research sample thus consisted of a diverse group in terms of ethnicity and nationality as well as regarding age.

The interviews were conducted in English; they were open-ended, allowing participants to talk freely and openly about the organisations/groups/initiatives that they were involved in as well as more broadly about their experiences of living in Wales. Participants were asked questions about the aim and purpose of these groups, their activities and membership, their use of social media, as well as questions around personal motivation and experiences of participating in these groups and organisations. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim; data were entered into *NVivo* and analysed through coding and repeated reading of the data, drawing out relevant themes and their interconnections.

5. Migrant women and care

The austere politics of the UK state have seen many cuts to local services. As Hall (2017) notes, these, in England,[3] have included cuts to local government by 27 per cent. In Wales, where the (minority Labour) Welsh government had tried to mitigate the extent of cuts, the Barnet formula, which determines public funding in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales based on public expenditure in England, there was a reduction in budgets which lead to cuts, as it had no revenue-generating or borrowing powers.

The cuts to their budgets in the early 2010s meant that local authorities often lost expertise in particular fields:

> The cutbacks in local authority have been such that there are less people doing more work within the local authority. So people can't have time to go to meetings or to do things they normally would do. Also I think there's a real issue with people taking on responsibility for things that they're not really qualified in … I'll give an example, but you've got somebody who might have worked in environmental services being given equalities as a post and knows nothing about equalities. So those two branches are being brought together and that's the person who's driving the equalities issue forward. No experience whatsoever and not really understanding the issues, and sometimes in meetings it's quite obvious through sometimes just through the language that they're using. They don't really understand the issues. So I think that's a real problem area where people are not skilled in that area and maybe don't have time to get skilled.

(Jennifer,[4] representative, Polish and Portuguese organisation, southern valleys).

As Clayton et al (2016: 725) note, more experienced officers were replaced with less experienced personnel due to the cuts to local authority budgets. In the absence of expertise in and knowledge of issues relating to immigrants' lives in Wales, civil society organisations fill-in the gap left. While the role of civil society and community groups functioning as a "shadow state" is well established, it is useful here to expand on the roles that they play in providing support and care and how this constitutes resourceful practice.

As Jana, a project coordinator working for a major Newport-based charity organisation, which engages with broad issues of social justice in the region, notes, much of the work undertaken is signposting and support in dealing with bureaucracy:

> Advocacy work is still here and the people need basic help with their paperwork. With their benefits. With their CVs. With the letters to employers. If it wasn't here lots of people wouldn't get the benefits they're having. They wouldn't be able to survive. Lots of people would end up at social services. It's vital that something like this is here.

(Jana, project worker, EU migrants project, Newport).

Both the bureaucracy of the British state (and particularly its complexities in delineating what benefits are available to migrants, which differ between EU or EEA citizens and citizens of other states – see Burrell and Schweyher 2019; Guma 2020; McDowell 2009; Yuval-Davis et al 2018; Williams 2017) and conventions and requirements when applying for jobs may be unfamiliar for international immigrants. In supporting this navigation of unfamiliar and complex systems, organisations provide bureaucratic care. While this differs from many accounts of care-full labour, which emphasize corporeal dimensions (Batnitzky and McDowell 2011; Power and Hall 2018), it has evident of dimensions, relating to both social reproduction and wellbeing of others, ensuring that recipients of care are not in a position of disadvantage (Griffin 2021). As we discuss in the next section, this care-full labour has both emotional and corporeal effects on caregivers. Nonetheless, in providing this bureaucratic care, many organisations, and the individuals who are often key nodes in their operations, display the resourceful attributes of both resources, although these are also frequently challenged by austerity politics, and technical skills and knowledges (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012: 265). These actions correspond with the first three phases of care as conceptualised by

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[3] England is effectively the jurisdiction of many UK-scale government departments as devolution in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales mean that these national governments have responsibility for areas such as health, education, and the environment, but not welfare.

[4] Pseudonyms are used to refer to individuals (but not all organisations) who contributed to the study. Organisations are anonymised where this could lead to identifying an individual.

Tronto (2015): caring about – being *attentive* to needs; caring for – being *responsible* for care; and caregiving – being *competent* in care-full labour. The last involves "learning to cope with caring in less-than-ideal circumstances" (Tronto 2015: 6), corresponding very closely with the tenacious resourcefulness displayed by these women.

Many respondents found that their involvement in civil society arose from their own experiences as international migrants. Many reflected on the difficulties that they had experienced, such as lack of language knowledge:

> I faced the same challenges as Polish people who arrived in Swansea who could not speak English well. My motivation was to help them. (Agata, creator, Poles in Swansea online group, Swansea).

Like Agata, Jana wanted to give others the benefits of her own experiences and knowledge she had gained of dealing with bureaucratic state systems:

> We should help the others. That was the initiative to help the others so they don't have these hard beginnings like I had, but not everybody shared it at the beginning but now they understand and they're more willing to help others. So that was the main initiative.
> (Jana, project worker, EU migrants project, Newport).

For both Agata and Jana, the desire to help comes from empathy with others experiencing similar difficulties to their own experiences (Vacchelli and Peyerfitte 2015). Care is provided through mobilising the skills and knowledge that they had developed to negotiate these for the benefit of others. While this does not constitute "indigenous and folk knowledge" (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012: 265) *per se*, it nonetheless demonstrates lived and situated knowledge based on common experiences of bureaucracy, contributing to both a resourceful practice of care and a politics of survival (Bassel and Emejulu 2018a).

In one locality in southern Wales, a group was established and run mainly by Polish women to help all the newcomers to the area. They identified a need through a lack of established services, and decided to form the group:

> It was very important to create such an initiative for one major reason – there was no group like this running in the area. We are still the only one service user lead drop-in in [local authority area] providing support specifically for people speaking other languages. The demand for support is massive in our area and we actually needed a solution to find a support for an individual … we decided to address this on the bigger scale, we realized there were more people struggling and isolating in our community.
> (Joana, member, community help group, southern Wales).

Often, individuals involved in these groups worked in full-time, demanding jobs elsewhere (factory work, social care, hospitality) with little time for other activities. This was, for example, one of the reasons why this group and others met on a Saturday, as their members were at work during the week. As one respondent put it, it required "sacrifices" to keep the organization's services and activities going. This was, for instance, the case of a Portuguese-speaking organization based in northern Wales, which had managed to run for fifteen years largely based on a small core group of dedicated volunteers. A senior representative who helped set up the organization explained their frugal approach and tenacity. For example, when talking about how they run one of their activities, Portuguese language classes, they made use of volunteers who had teaching experience back in Portugal. As 41-year-old Branca explained:

> So that's why I keep saying, okay, we don't need money for many things because all of us have a quality. All of us were born with something. I know Amanda – she used to be a teacher in Portugal. She was 'dying' there, working somewhere unconnected with what she wanted to do. Amanda would like to do two hours a week for free as a teacher, because she is all qualified, you see. She said, 'Yes'. So, we have Portuguese lessons … What she said, 'It's only £10 a week for the train [to get to where the organization is located]. It's not going to affect my family budget or anything. Branca, let's do it. (Branca, representative of a Portuguese speaking organisation, northern Wales.).

Such action illustrates Hall's (2020: 3) account of care as "recognising a need, assuming responsibility for a need, meeting a need, and recipients in need responding", corresponding to Tronto's first four phases of care. However, the groups above are not limited to supporting migrants, demonstrating migrant women's role in supporting communities more broadly. They also promote a sense of community and self-worth. Having outlined the care-full and resourceful nature of migrants' and migrant-facing civil society in austerity, we turn now to the factors that challenge these organisations, and the precarious situations in which they work.

6. Precarity and self-care

Literature on civil society as "shadow state" has emphasized the roles of community organisations and charities in filling in "gaps" left by the "hollowing out" of the state. However, there has been an assumption that these organisations are confined to office hours. Exploring the role of civil society through the lens of care brings into focus the ways in which care-full labour, particularly those undertaken by migrant women, are not confined to the time-spaces of "regular" and scheduled hours. As Dyer et al. (2011) note, women's social reproductive labour is often undertaken beyond – and in addition to usual working hours – in what is constructed as a "natural duty" (Lonergan 2015: 130). Thus, the expectation that care is provided when it is required places women involved in such organisations under additional strain (Harrison 2012). Yet, many continue due to feeling needed (and needing to do something) and unable to leave people behind.

While many charities and organisations operate from an office space, care-full labour is undertaken beyond these spaces. In one medium-sized town (population ~ 40,000) in western Wales with a large Polish population, representatives of a leading migrants' support and advice group spoke of being approached by people outside of the organisation's work hours in places and at times where she (and other colleagues) would be doing other things:

> Larry: But they wouldn't let you stand by, Irena. They were chasing you down the streets.
> Irena: I know. I can't go to… even now I can't go to Asda. I can't to go to Tesco.
> Larry: Opening handbags and pulling papers out on the street.
> Irena: 'Just one question. Can I ask you one question'… and then everything comes out. Out of the pockets. Out of the handbags. You know, letters and…
> Interviewer: When you're walking around in the town?
> Irena: Yeah, but they know me. Everybody knows me here. The same with my staff. The same with those girls who work here. They can't go to Asda at certain times. You know, they go when they're in work.

For Irena and her colleagues, her everyday life and reproductive labour was marked by clients approaching her with queries and requesting support with paperwork. While Nayak (2012) notes the need to extend civil society activities beyond "nine-to-five" office time-spaces to be more inclusive of marginalised groups, the extension of activities beyond work or set volunteering hours can create challenges for schedules to allow completion of other tasks.

Bureaucratic care and support for migrants is not limited to charities, advocacy groups, and community organisations. Another key provider of support identified were visible markers of immigrant status (Rzepnikowska 2019), such as Polish grocery shops and Portuguese cafés. These businesses occupy commercial premises, yet often functioned as unofficial sources of support, either in serving as community hubs where information could be found, or through proprietors providing support on an informal basis. These premises are often easy to find in towns, and in areas where there are fewer organisations to be found or they are not as visible or locally accessible, they function as key points where information and support could be sought. In a small town in mid Wales, Monika's grocery shop fulfilled an important role in supporting migrants:

> I need to help them because they need help because they don't speak English, but they started to use the system more and more and more. They started to come to my house, knocking at the door. Phoning as well. We had a big garden and from the kitchen you could see those people, so I was scared to enter the kitchen because I saw the people… So, I went to the doctor and I ended up with depression.
> (Monika, owner, Polish shop, mid Wales).

Like Irena, Monika had people seek help beyond the usual business hours and confines of her shop. However, the disruption to her routine took place in her own private space, her home, rather than in public space, as Irena had encountered. This example demonstrates the appropriation of more transient care spaces and ambiguous visibility (Power and Williams 2020: 2; Vacchelli and Peyerfitte 2018: 14). Like many, Monika felt that she wanted to help those that needed support, but this altruistic approach had a detrimental effect on her health and wellbeing. This example highlights the desperation that many people face, feeling that they need support and that it can only be obtained through these key individuals. It also highlights the ways in which a system that combines austerity and voluntarism as approaches to service delivery is dependent on altruism and the benevolence of service providers. However, this approach demonstrates the severe shortcomings of an approach where there is unevenness in the provision (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Not only are there informal "stop-gaps" where more established groups with more extensive resources can't be accessed locally, but there is a dependency on such arrangements and demand places severe pressure on people who try and help those perceived to be without alternatives.

In response to this precarious situation, some had placed limits on the time and spaces they were able and willing to provide support:

> I had to put boundaries. I had to say, 'don't phone me at 2 o'clock in the morning no matter how urgent it is, because I'm also a mother and I don't want you to wake up my daughter because of whatever problems you're having'. I know I shouldn't say that, but at 2 o'clock in the morning I can't do anything. I can't leave my daughter sleeping to go and meet you at the Police Station because you've been drunk, and you've beat your wife. Things like that. I had to put my… even though I would reply straightaway because I know them, but I need to put what's urgencies, what's priority, what's not. I know these people they're constantly phoning for everything.
> (Branca, representative, Portuguese organisation, northern Wales).

Branca made very clear that she would not be willing to take calls to aid with translation or to provide other forms of support at set times, such as during the night. For her, there was a need to ensure that she could devote time to different, and sometimes competing care needs, such as childcare for her daughter. Such acts constitute self-care. While Mountz et al (2015) have emphasized the need to care for others, self-care is a pre-requirement for care of others to be undertaken effectively. Otherwise, as Monika's evidence illustrates, individuals' health and wellbeing may suffer. Even when placing limitations on when she was able to support, the representative use of "I know I shouldn't say that" implies a sense of reluctance in doing so, as if she is somehow not fulfilling expectations. We argue that ensuring self-care is a central part of resourcefulness, in indemnifying self-worth and helping safeguard resources (such as energy, wellness) for future use.

Alongside these accounts, other factors, which demonstrate a precarious context in which civil society's care-full endeavours operate (and challenge its long-term sustainability), can be noted. Echoing the points made by Monika earlier about her wellness, Jana spoke about her frustrations with the system:

> This is draining because you see all these people and you know you can't do any more and there should be more for them….
> I'm here fifth year and I'm coming to the end of my passion because I see it every day and I see the frustration that nothing else is happening. We're coming to all these meetings and trying for all this funding, my bosses, and I feel like it's not going anywhere and it's getting only worse, the situation, but I somehow feel old. The problem is getting solved these problems. So, I feel like, okay I should stop. So maybe a new life. You see what I mean?
> (Jana project worker, EU migrants project, Newport).

The frustrations were spoken about in ways that impacted on the body, such as feeling old and drained. Similarly, the emotional aspects were also introduced, such as frustration and the loss of passion. These serve as reminders that caring labour is both bodily (McDowell 2015: 2) and emotional (Power and Hall 2018; Hall 2020) due to its interpersonal nature. Yet, the resources that sustain these aspects, such as energy and compassion, need to be replenished so that such work can be sustained.

An important aspect in the context of frustration and self-care, is knowing what more can be done and when to stop. In 2017, the organisation for which Irena worked for decided that it would not renew its application for funding to continue with its work:

> We will close it because I've had enough of hassle. Once they miss it maybe something will happen, but I said to [then First Minister] Carwyn Jones I'm not going to jump through any hoops for you because he was offering new grant, new money and whatever. I said, 'I want a service contract and nothing else', because that's the only way that you can guarantee some stability. …. No funding and that's it. … We've moved heaven and earth. [we've asked] Every politician. Every MP. We've had a meeting with the Minister responsible for it, and all we got, 'no money. No money. No money.' Everybody else is in the same position. You know, austerity, cuts and whatever. We're not going to beg any more.
> (Irena, migrants' association, western Wales).

In the context of civil society in austerity, groups felt they had to compete with each other for decreasing pots of money, while trying to do more for less to demonstrate value for money. However, there came a point in which Irena felt that she was unable to sustain her work through the organisation due to both the decreasing funds available and the need to apply for funding every few years, both of which challenged the sustainability of the work and its ability to respond to developing circumstances. Irena felt that she had given a lot of energy – as well as contributing her own money – to the organisation, but without structural changes to the way in which it operated, she didn't feel that she could continue in a system which sustained these problems. These accounts demonstrate a struggle with Tronto's fourth and fifth phases of care (2015): care-receiving – being responsive and assessing the effectiveness of care; and reciprocating the care given to and received from fellow citizens. While "paying back" was a motivation for many respondents, there are broader challenges in resourcing care adequately. Giving care brings reflection that it is never enough, and that there is more to be done. While this returns to "phase one" of the cycle, it can perpetuate the gap between identifying and meeting a need. As Jones and Heley (2016) note, the success of volunteer-led programmes is dependent on having enough people to contribute in a fashion that sustains the meeting of needs; where there aren't enough people to contribute – or those who give their time and energy do not feel able to continue to do so – the sustainability of programmes is challenged. Similarly, Bassel and Emejulu (2018a) identify third sector activities during austerity being increasingly characterised by neoliberal practices, including developing "enterprise culture", leading to competition and overwork and under-analysis among third sector organisations. Thus, funding structures further heighten the inequalities of voluntary activity during austerity. Yet, migrant women continue to mobilise resources when faced with exhaustion, showing a tenacious outlook, often driven by a sense of not wanting (or feeling able) to let people down.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have recounted migrant women's caregiving roles in civil society during austere times. Much of the care is bureaucratic in nature, involving translating, signposting, and supporting processes; however, this does not detract from its emotional, relational, and embodied aspects. Many respondents spoke about being motivated to make a difference, drawing on their own experiences of difficulties, and to give a positive account of a migrant or a particular nationality. This bureaucratic care, as well as other dimensions related to supporting incorporation and even providing accommodation on occasion, is important in fostering a sense of wellbeing for migrants when statutory and public services have faced cuts and shortcomings in provision. As we have demonstrated in this paper, the care-full labour of migrants – and migrant women in particular – needs to be acknowledged to counter the common perception of migrants only and passively requiring care, which is used to generate political capital around restricting accesses to services and benefits. We have demonstrated the tenacity of this care, making continued use of depleted resources and in exhausting circumstances. Care is provided outside of the usual time-spaces, feeling unable to decline support those who need it while having an impact on people's health and wellbeing. This is not to virtue signal, but to illustrate the precarity inherent in this situation where there is a reliance on migrant civil society, often to the detriment of participants' wellbeing.

The broader contribution of this paper is to conceptualize the tenacious resourcefulness of women in migrant civil society, who continue to provide care-full labour despite their fatigue and often to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing. This contribution helps understand migrant women's agency in providing care (rather than only receiving it passively), as well as theorizing the limits of resourcefulness, where fatigue but also lack of recognition limit the mobilisation of resources, skills, and knowledge, yet recognising needs remain. The tenacity displayed also helps understand the challenges many activists have in stepping back and adopting a politics of exhaustion (Emejulu and Bassel 2020). Overall, it helps understand civil society as a precarious, vital, under-resourced structure.

The experiences recounted in this paper reveal the precarious situation of support provision and caregiving in civil society. Austere politics and public service cuts mean that there is a reliance on civil society organisations and voluntary groups to provide support and services. If civil society is "the shadow state" (Wolch 1989), then migrant civil society is its shadow: acting with more limited access to funds and in a hostile state. However, the reliance on such voluntary participation is unsustainable, as altruistic capital can not be sustained indefinitely, particularly when disillusionment with the situation, pressure to help, and the need to balance this caregiving labour with other commitments can limit or undermine participants' contribution through ill-health or challenging their well-being. While the data collected in this paper is drawn from the late 2010 s, the subsequent challenges of the UK's eventual withdrawal from the EU, Covid-19 and its impact, and a "cost-of-living" crisis among high inflation in 2022 and beyond outlines that there are additional challenges that are likely to bring further precarity. However, the increasing mainstreaming of hard-right political discourse and further reductions to the state means that the kind of care given by these migrant women and their allies is more necessary than ever, but likely to take place in more exhausting circumstances. These points highlight the imperative for policy-makers to recognize the exhausted, tenacious contributions of migrant civil society, and consider alternative funding models that sustain tailored care attuned to intersectional needs.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Taulant Guma: Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Stephen Drinkwater:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Rhys Dafydd Jones:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data are archived here: https://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/854043/

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