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Precarious irregular migrants and their sharing economies: A spectrum of transactional labouring experiences.

Louise Waite

School of Geography, University of Leeds, UK

l.waite@leeds.ac.uk (corresponding author)

Hannah Lewis

Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, UK

h.j.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

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Author biographies

Louise Waite is Associate Professor in Human Geography at the University of Leeds. Her research interests span migration, citizenship and belonging; with a particular focus on discourses of 'modern slavery', intersections of faith and anti-trafficking initiatives, unfree labour and exploitative work among asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Web www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/l.waite

Hannah Lewis is a Vice-Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Sheffield. Her research centres on how policies shape the daily lives of people who migrate; she has explored the destitution of refused asylum seekers, 'race' and multicultural strategies, and how immigration status shapes community, family and transnational relationships among migrants and people seeking asylum. Web http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/socstudies/staff/staff-profiles/hannah-lewis

Key words

Sharing economy

Migrants

Transactional labour

Unfreedom

Abstract

There is growing interest in the 'sharing economy' as a different way of living in neoliberal capitalist societies, but this discussion is frequently heavily classed and the ethos generally rests on *excess* capacity (of goods and services). This article intervenes in this emerging body of writing to argue that it is equally important to explore the types of sharing and exchange that are survival-compelled among those with *precarious* livelihoods. Precarious migrants are a group facing significant livelihood pressures, and we are concerned here with a particular category of insecure migrants: *irregular migrants including refused asylum seekers in the UK*. Such migrants are especially shaped by their socio-legal status, and without rights to work or welfare they are susceptible to exploitation in their survival-oriented labouring. Existing literature from labour geographies and the sub-disciplinary area of unfree/ forced labour has not generally focused on the experiences of these migrants as *house guests* in domestic realms nor has it thoroughly explored their *transactional labour*. As such, this article argues that the moral economies of gifting and sharing within such labour create and reproduce particular social structures, cultural norms and relationships which position people along a spectrum of freedom and exploitation.

I. Introduction

The much vaunted contemporary *sharing economy* refers to a way of 'doing economies' that rests on the sharing of human and physical assets; "a different way of living that is based on connectedness and sharing rather than ownership and conspicuous consumption" (Parsons 2014). This is lauded as a response to individualist and materialist assumptions of neoliberal capitalism and is said to be a more caring and 'moral' way of doing economies to encourage the sharing and re-use of excess capacity

in goods and services, often facilitated through new technology (Schor et al. 2015). So we hear many discussions about new economic activities including the sharing of cars, bicycles, housing, workplaces, food, household items, and even time or expertise[1]. Some of these endeavours are for-profit, whilst others are organised around not-for-profit, barter or co-operative structures. Much discussion of these practices is perhaps un-surprisingly emerging as heavily classed where the ethos rests on *excess* capacity. The pioneers and vanguards of sharing activities are often portrayed as today's younger, tech-savvy generation known as Generation Y or the Millennials[2]. They are seen to be participating in elective sharing practices in response to damaging capitalism and in the pursuit of an alternative counter-cultural movement to disrupt hyper-individualism and materialism (Agyeman, McLaren, and Schaefer-Borrego 2013).

In this paper we focus on the liminal labour-scapes of global north economies to illuminate the prosaic and everyday-survival oriented types of sharing that appear in such places. These types of sharing are rather different from those of the oft-trumpeted Millennials. The recent work of Richardson (2016 forthcoming) shines a welcome light on new forms of inequality that can emerge in the tech-savvy Millennials' sharing economy. Our paper brings a similar critique of the contemporary celebratory

[1] The sharing economy has even made it into Time Magazine's top 10 list of 'ideas that will change the world', see http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,2059521,00.html, plus is the focus in the UK of a specially commissioned Department of Business, Innovation and Skills report entitled 'Unlocking the sharing economy', see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378291/bis-14-1227-unlocking-the-sharing-economy-an-independent-review.pdf

[2] This is not to present 'tech' Millennials as homogenous however; Ross (2008) suggests, for example, that there may be some common experiences of precarity between workers in low-end sectors and those in the 'creative class' temping in high-end knowledge sectors. Thus experiences of the sharing economy for members of the latter group may also, at particular times for certain individuals, be driven less by excess and more by necessity.

interpretation of sharing activities by focusing on precarious migrants during times of crisis and austerity (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter 2011, Crawley, Hemmings, and Price 2011). The paradigm of sharing is hardly new of course - it is an age-old principle that allowed our ancestors to band together to hunt, farm and create shelter. Sharing has formed a topic of interest for at least three related literature fields: first *gift exchange and power*; second *exploitation, transactional labour and alternative economic practices*; and third *moral economies*. This section will introduce each area as a foundation for our later empirical contributions.

In terms of the **first** area, anthropologists interested in indigenous societies dependent on sharing and cooperation studied systems of gift exchange and reciprocity as a logical use of social relations – albeit imbued with power relations - to further both individual and community well-being (Malinowski 1922, 1935, Sahlins 1972, Mauss 1925). More recently, sharing has been recognised as central to the informal sector in particularly global south countries. Roberts (1994) argued more than two decades ago that the poor often pooled incomes or shared shelter as a means of 'getting by'; see also Escobar (2001). Notions of sharing have been also invoked in 'Western' countries in the context of broader processes of informality or 'informalisation'; Sassen (1998), within 'shadow economies' (Schneider and Enste 2000).

Hence, this work on gifting/sharing and power relations has an enduring relevance for contemporary discussions of the sharing economy in global north countries, and links to the **second** more recent literature area around *exploitation, transactional labour and alternative economic practices*. Our focus on precarious labourscapes makes it important to note why *migrants* in particular are implicated in these arenas. A growing body of work now details the clear connections between migrants and exploitation in its

various- and sometimes extreme – forms in rich countries (Anderson and Rogaly 2005; Waite et al 2015); against a backdrop of an arguable link between increases in immigration (especially undocumented) and informal employment (e.g. Reyneri 2001). Samers (2005) suggests that it is within these contexts that there is a likely increase in 'sharing activities as coping mechanisms' in affluent neoliberal countries in response to "welfare retrenchment, dramatic and deleterious changes in working practices, and more broadly, the unjust nature of corporate capitalism" (p.875). Within experiences of vulnerability and exploitation, this article is concerned with *irregular migrants including refused asylum seekers* in the UK as a particular category of insecure migrants.

A number of recent studies have highlighted the poverty and exclusion of irregular migrants and refused asylum seekers in the UK (e.g. (Dwyer and Brown 2005, Blitz and Otero-Iglesias 2011, Sigona 2012). The terms of the exchange that underpins the survival-support they access is less researched; typically food and shelter (see notable exception of Crawley, Hemmings, and Price 2011 and their discussion of 'social resources'). Yet unpicking where voluntary and reasonable exchange ends and involuntary and coercive 'compulsion' begins is complex and highly contingent. We are therefore interested in a broad range of survival-oriented livelihood activities that are not the oft-described for-cash labouring of migrant workers in low-paid sectors (Sargeant and Ori 2013). These include labour that is *transactionally exchanged* and associated activities that facilitate working, such as the sharing of bank accounts and National Insurance Numbers (NINo). We understand transactional labour as an individual undertaking work – domestic labour, garden chores, sexual favours, etc. - in the belief that they are engaging in an exchange for a good or service, for example food,

accommodation or clothing. The exchange may be cash-less, but may also involve some element of cash payment, but any element of payment would most typically be below a deemed acceptable market rate.

Transactional labour spaces are of most obvious interest to labour geographies, yet have not been explored by mainstream labour geographers much thus far. Feminist economic geographers have valuably redressed decades of attention on labour in productive spheres through their attempts to 'feminise the economy' (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003) and focus particularly on unpaid domestic work in reproductive spheres (Domosh and Seager 2001). More recently, there has been much literature on paid domestic labourers within households; work often done by migrants (Anderson 2007, Stasiulis and Bakan 2003, Lutz 2010). A significant area of the academy that *has* however explored cooperatives and other economic 'geographies of regard' (Lee 2000, Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003) are those geographers espousing an 'alternative/ proliferative/ diverse economies' approach to understanding economic practice. Authors such as Gibson-Graham (1996, 2014), Leyshon et al (2004), Smith and Stenning (2006) and more broadly the Community Economies Collective[3] advocate investigation into a range of often hidden alternative economic activities. This perspective usefully highlights the social relations and ethical interdependencies that are brought to bear on economic practices in order to enable people to make a living; for example, trust, caring, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, coercion, guilt, self-exploitation and solidarity.

[3] See http://www.communityeconomies.org

These social relations within transactional labour can lead to a continuum of experiences from mutually beneficial ones for guest/host to multiply exploitative ones for the guest. The experiences we uncover in this article are tainted by exploitative relations. The article is therefore also of relevance to scholars documenting highly exploitative, unfree and forced labour. Despite a growth of studies highlighting extreme exploitation and forced labour in the UK (e.g. Craig et al. 2007, Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010, Skřivánková 2010, Kagan et al. 2011, Dwyer et al. 2011, Scott, Craig, and Geddes 2012, Geddes et al. 2013), we find that transactional work –and the extent to which it is coercive - is not adequately considered in forced labour debates. Our effort to deepen conceptual understanding of transactional labour and related sharing practices is therefore also intended to fill this gap.

This body of literature around exploitation, transactional labour and alternative economic practices provides part of the springboard for our emerging findings. We argue that the contours of the relationships of sharing for irregular migrants are shaped by norms and structures associated with livelihoods scored by precarity (Waite 2009; Standing 2014), and as such, the character and outcomes of sharing relations for vulnerable migrants frequently differs to those of Generation Y. A significant difference is that precarious migrants' norms and structures may become laced with relations of dependency and coercion that can entrench themselves within precarious lives and serve to reproduce power-laden and exploitative relations of sharing.

Our efforts to understand such transactional labour and sharing practices necessitate an interaction with a **third** area of reviewed literature on *moral economies*. Writers have used the term 'moral economy' when attempting to capture the complex cultural and symbolic forms of exchange that occur in certain spaces (e.g. Silverstone, Hirsch, and

Morley 1992). The idea of the moral economy has been extensively discussed in the disciplines of both anthropology (Cheal 1988) and economics (Polanyi 1957, Sayer 2005) and is broadly taken to mean a system of economic transactions that invoke social relationships and moral norms of society. The term is thought particularly applicable to domestic labouring spheres where exchanges are not based purely on contractual rationales but embedded in cultural and moral values (Anderson 2000).

We will show that the moral economy of irregular migrants is a useful framework within which to understand sharing and exchange activities (see section VI). Our research, and that of others (Crawley, Hemmings, and Price 2011, Bloch 2014), finds that it is very common for refused asylum seekers with no right to work and no recourse to public funds to turn to informal support from friends, family and acquaintances, as well as community organisations, faith groups or charities (Goldring, Berinstein, and K. 2009, Sigona 2012). Such support is frequently, although not exclusively, ethno-cultural or faith-based (Gupta 2007). With regard to ethno-cultural support, it is often argued that sharing practices are facilitated through a process of identification with the needs of others that generates a philanthropic sense of responsibility (Schervish, O'Herlihy, and Havens 2002) and possible 'economies of generosity' (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). *Responsibility* for others and associated moral/ ethical action and care-giving are topics widely discussed in feminist studies and geography (Robinson 1999, Massey 2004, Noxolo, Raghuram, and Madge 2011) - the scope of this work is too broad to review in this article as we focus primarily on the receivers not the givers. However, in exploring the slide within transactional exchanges towards exploitation and uneven relationships, it is of note here to mention Derrida's concern that responsibility is not universally benevolent, and can merely be

an automated mechanical transactional relationship devoid of care and passion (Derrida 1995). Others similarly reflect on the ambiguities of hospitality (Dikec 2002, Honig 2009), and Ehrkamp and Nagel (2014) note that this can lead to tensions as "different constituents – guest and host – lay claim to the same space(s)", which we turn to later in the article.

A moral economies framework also helps us understand the sorts of relationships that underpin the *exchanges* within sharing activities. Several writers in this area (e.g. Polanyi, Sahlins, Gudeman) note that when exchange is delayed, it may create an ongoing relationship, and more importantly it creates an obligation for a return; i.e. a debt. If the debt is not repaid, this relationship gets coloured by the existence of a debt and a relationship hierarchy may be established. The precise way this plays out will depend on the social distance of the parties (Sahlins 1972); the obligation to reciprocate could be vague and not qualified in quantity or quality with the failure to reciprocate not resulting in the giver ceasing to give. Yet the exchange could be dominated by material exchange and individual interests. Graeber (2001) similarly suggests it is useful to think of 'open' and 'closed' reciprocity whereby the former keeps no accounts as it implies a relation of permanent mutual commitment, but the latter is more like market exchange in its individualistic orientation and barter-like character. Social relations are therefore created and shaped through exchange and an associated spectrum of inter-personal dynamics and emotions are invoked. Mauss (1925) argues that to give is to show one's superiority and the receiver must invariably behave in an acceptable manner, if only by expressing gratitude and humility. As such, gift exchanges are replete with power relations. Indeed, Bourdieu (1997) suggested that caring acts "set up in conditions of lasting asymmetry [which] exclude the possibility of equivalent

return or reciprocity [are] likely to create lasting relations of dependence" (p.238). We argue in this paper that sharing activities for precarious migrants are too often rooted in, or develop into, asymmetric social relations that serve to diminish desirable outcomes for individual migrants. Sharing is often in a 'strings-attached' format that has an expectation of some kind of reciprocal return over time.

The overall contribution of this paper is to show how the moral economies of gifting and sharing create and reproduce particular social structures, cultural norms and relationships which position people along a spectrum of relative freedom and mutual benefits to servility, unfreedom and entrapment. Further, exploitation should be seen as co-produced within moral economies by both cultural and structural forces; the latter being particularly constructed by the state's restrictive immigration policies that render the UK government complicit in the creation of a vulnerable workforce. From this, we make three critical interventions to further the field of labour geographies and related studies of unfree and forced labour. First, we suggest that transactional labour and sharing activities should be seen within a *spectrum* of labouring experiences: not as situations gravitating towards one or other binary pole of benevolent hospitality/ 'true gifts' or unfreedom. Second, we critique the contemporary celebratory interpretation of transactional support and sharing activities for destitute individuals, highlighting instead how sharing is always contingent and the importance of understanding *coercive* sharing within relations of dependency. Third, we suggest that discussions to date on the experiences of the unpaid domestic worker (often wife) or paid domestic worker (often female migrant) have overlooked the *house guest* and the transactional activities that sustain their position in the household. The article is structured as follows. Section II outlines the study from which empirical material is

drawn, together with a description of the UK's immigration and asylum policy context. Sections III to VI explore our study's findings with regard to a range of transactional exchanges and sharing activities for irregular migrants in order to build our argument. We offer some concluding thoughts in Section VII.

II. Study detail and enforced destitution

The empirical basis of this article is drawn from an Economic and Social Research Council project[4] carried out between 2010-2012 looking at the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in England who experience highly exploitative labour relations (Lewis et al. 2014). Fieldwork was conducted in the Yorkshire and Humber region of the UK. We undertook in-depth interviews with 30 asylum seeking and refugee participants comprising 12 women and 18 men, aged between 21 and 58 years who came from 17 countries in Africa, the Middle East, Central Europe and South and Central Asia. Interviews took place in a location of the participant's choosing and typically lasted between 2 and 3 hours; covering biographical accounts of migrating to the UK, entering the asylum system and experiences of work. Research participants had the study explained on at least one occasion prior to interview, were given time to ask questions, and the approach to anonymity—use of pseudonyms, separating narratives from participant data on nationality and other identifying factors in research outputs—was discussed. Throughout the article, interviewees are referred to by a pseudonym of their

[4] RES-062-23-2895, with collaborators Dr Stuart Hodkinson, University of Leeds and Professor Peter Dwyer, University of York.

choice (for a fuller reflexive account of ethical issues see Lewis et al, 2014 and Lewis, 2015). Further interviews were also conducted with 23 key informants (practitioners).

In order to understand the intersection between asylum and labour exploitation we categorized our participants via their mode of arrival in the UK. Although their journeys varied considerably, there were three distinct modes of entry: asylum seekers on entry, irregular migrants or trafficked migrants. Seventeen interviewees (4 female, 13 male) were *asylum seekers on entry* who lodged an initial claim soon after entering the UK. Seven interviewees (3 female, 4 male) were *irregular migrants* (or 'undocumented'), who entered or remained without legal permission from the state. Lacking any rights to legal residence, work or welfare, these irregular migrants claimed asylum at varying points to attempt to regularise their status and due to fear of persecution if returned to their country of origin. Finally, six interviewees (5 female, 1 male) entered the UK as *trafficked migrants* meaning they had been brought to the UK by means of threat or deception specifically for the purpose of sexual, criminal or forced labour exploitation as defined by Article 3 of the UN Trafficking Protocol (United Nations General Assembly 2000). All females claimed asylum weeks to years after escaping sustained periods of work in domestic settings including domestic work, care and sexual exploitation. The single male was trafficked 'through' the asylum system and subsequently forced into criminal activity.

The material for this article derives from a subset of 21 individuals across all these categories who told us of their experiences of transactional exchange *before* or *during* an asylum claim, or *after* a claim had been refused. It is pertinent to note here that immigration categories and socio-legal statuses are not fixed for any one individual – there is a slipperiness and complexity to people's immigration trajectories through time

as they move between statuses, either agentically or as a consequence of structural barriers (Düvell and Jordan 2002, Koser 2010, Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter 2011). As we highlight in this article, in these fluid times transactional exchanges can be potentially valuable for smoothing over abrupt changes in rights and entitlements in moments of crisis, for example when an asylum claim is refused and destitution is triggered. Processes of destitution are often a significant feature of interaction with the UK's asylum system; so the policy context is important to sketch.

Although the UK's vast policy edifice of civic stratification (Kofman 2002) shapes the lives of all migrants; it is our contention that irregular migrants, asylum seekers on entry and formerly trafficked persons who later enter the asylum system are a group who are *particularly* shaped by their socio-legal status. This is because of the development of a highly restrictive and pernicious immigration and asylum policy environment in the UK. Feeding on uninformed moral panics about asylum seeker numbers (Schuster 2003, Lynn and Lea 2003) successive governments have systematically undermined the basic rights of asylum seekers through removing permission to work in 2002 and providing below-poverty levels of welfare assistance (The Children's Society 2013). Support for refused asylum seekers if they are temporarily unable to leave the UK is provided under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This is through a cashless system designed to be deliberately punitive to deter continuing residence in the UK. Most refused asylum seekers do not access section 4 support and live outside the system, as they do not meet the narrow criteria, particularly if they are unwilling to take the stipulated 'reasonable steps' to leave the UK due to fear of persecution in countries of origin (Lewis 2007).

The high incidence of destitution amongst refused asylum seekers due to the intentional restriction of their rights (Refugee Action 2006, Smart 2009) is described by the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2007) as a practice of state-enforced destitution. Refused asylum seekers become part of the larger irregular migrant population. This is a group the government believes should leave the UK and thus is subject to draconian enforcement policies, a purposely created 'hostile environment' (as evidenced in the 2014 Immigration Act), and multiple 'crackdowns' (such as new legislation in the 2016 Immigration Act to allow police to seize the wages of 'illegal' immigrants). Irregular migrants have no rights to work or welfare and therefore experience acute levels of poverty and destitution (Nash 2009, Bloch 2014). The absence of basic citizenship rights of refused asylum seekers and other irregular migrants creates and sustains a situation of dependency on the support/ charity of others. This support may be vital to survival, yet may also render individuals vulnerable to exploitation; even if the motives underpinning that exploitation may in the first instance be well intentioned. It is to these experiences that we now turn.

III. The provision of lodgings and food: 'true gifts'?

At the onset of destitution, support (in the absence of rights to welfare or state provision) is often related to the fundamentals of survival – food and shelter. Residing in others' homes, rather than on the street, has the advantage for irregular migrants and refused asylum seekers of being less visible and potentially less liable to detection from the authorities. Happy is an example from our research of a destitute individual receiving seemingly strings-free support from a couple from the same country of origin

that she met through a local church. Happy was one of the trafficked persons in our research, and had been deceived into domestic servitude in her trafficker's UK household for 1.5 years. Although being wholly confined behind a locked door during this time, Happy was able to escape when unexpectedly sent on an errand to the local shop. Having no networks or knowledge of the UK, she encountered someone on the street who took her to an African church in a different city, and it was here that she met the above mentioned couple. They not only provided her with accommodation, but also helped with her education and clothing needs:

> I stayed with them for seven months. So they was ok. They teach me how to spell little bit how to write because I haven't got any education. So the woman was giving me lessons she would go to the shop, buy me notes, notebook, tell me how to spell things, how to read me novel, story. She was really good and I was really really happy, and she buy me clothes as well. [Happy]

Many individuals, however, have to accept the relatively short-term and fractured nature of housing assistance; the story of Hussein is typical in that he first requested a bed from his asylum seeking friends who felt too fearful that discovery of a house guest could jeopardise their asylum case[5], so he had to find help elsewhere:

> About say five, six months I have nowhere to go I be sleeping in the streets. I call some friends, they got the same situation, NASS support, stay with you, just for two nights? […] they say no, sorry we can't do that. But that's when I met [name]

[5] It is not permitted for those in receipt of asylum housing to have guests to stay, or for them to stay away from their accommodation. If found by housing workers with a house guest an accusation of sub-letting can lead to withdrawal of asylum support.

> - I knew him but just like, from far. I have nowhere to stay, so I came in his house and I lived with him until now. [Hussein]

Mohamed echoes an even more rapidly changing patchwork of support when he says, "*so many people, so many friends, one night here two nights here*". Such precarity reflects the stretched livelihoods of those offering support. Upon becoming destitute, Frank received the support of a friend who had also become homeless but had recently moved in to a room in a hostel:

> [H]e got a place at [place name], one room. So when I was going to [place name], I met him and he told me, man, I've been also evicted but luckily I got a place here and I told him I'm still struggling to get a place to stay. But he told me, no worries, you can come and stay with me in this little room, but make sure you come late. And make sure you leave early. [Frank]

That such an offer for Frank came from a homeless friend was unusual in our sample, but it was relatively common to see accommodation offers from friends who themselves were only just eking by, such as Gallant who opened his section 4 provided flat to support destitute friends:

> When I got my indefinite leave to remain I had to leave the section 4 flat […]. When I was leaving there, I helped some people to come and sleep in mine because they were in need as well, they didn't have any benefit, they didn't have passport they didn't have anything. So, I helped them as well. [Gallant]

Whether the sharing of accommodation is relatively fleeting or longer term, many individuals in our study mentioned being cautious of intruding on their hosts' privacy through overstaying their welcome and abusing their generosity:

> [Y]ou can't live with friends all the time. They have a girlfriend, they want to have private times, you can't be there all the time, and that's the problem. [Alex]

Feelings of intrusion were especially the case when accommodation was perceived to be offered in a 'true gift' sense (Sahlins 1972); where no return was expected in an immediate or future time period (the feminst writer Genevieve Vaughan 1997:30 refers to this gift paradigm as "need-oriented rather than profit-oriented"). But actually these true gifts were rare in the narratives of our interviewees; much more common was a form of gift exchange based on *reciprocity*. Malinowski (1922) said the sense of calculated 'give and take' is the central principle underpinning all social life, and there are many cases of writers describing such reciprocal exchange in different cultural contexts, for example *blat* in Russia (Ledeneva 1998), *guanxi* in China (Huang 2008) or practices within semi-feudalism in India (Lerche, Shah, and Harriss-White 2013). The issue of food sharing embodies such reciprocity in our research. Although a roof over a refused asylum seeker's head wasn't always offered by friends/ acquaintances (due to fear of compromising their asylum cases, stretched and vulnerable livelihoods of their own etc), the sharing of food was more commonplace, even in constrained situations. Food-sharing is seen in many cultures as socially desirable and even morally expected behaviour as food would be returned if ever the tables were turned (Slocum and Saldanha 2013). Angel describes her experience of this exchange:

> My friend she live in [road name] I just eat I go her house, if she give I eat, if she don't give I go home and sleep. [Angel]

Despite these examples of possibly 'true' altruistic gifts that prevent homelessness and hunger and share 'excess' resources (e.g. an unslept in bed, sofa or floorspace), our

study exploring coercive work found many instances of such exchange moving swiftly, or in time, into relationships underpinned by expectations of transactional return (shelter assured only in exchange for domestic labour, informal work, sexual favours, etc.). The next section proceeds to explore the shift from a 'true gift' of survival-oriented support to a situation where domestic labour is offered in return for the debt incurred.

IV. Exchange involving domestic labour

Participants in our study most usually told us that lodgings were provided as a part of some kind of transactional exchange. This could be variously instigated; sometimes the guests themselves felt materially and morally obliged to contribute to the (often struggling) hosting household; sometimes the hosts were clearer in articulating an expectation that something will be exchanged in return for lodgings. The undertaking of domestic labour was the most common way our participants exchanged services for food/ lodgings:

> I didn't have a choice but just to get the shelter yes, because she said I can accommodate you but my sort of being there that's when I've noticed that – ok, there is a cup which needs washing and then I started washing because I just felt like helping out. And we didn't come to a point of making some arrangements for her to pay me. [Gojo]

> Anything that needed doing in the house, housework, they had a child, sometimes to take the child to school, sometimes to do some cleaning in the house, really any housework that needed doing. […] They were feeding me, they were housing me, so I was doing what I could. [Rose]

These sentiments of guests feeling like they wanted to contribute to the domestic sphere in return for the 'gift' of food/lodgings/clothing were quite common, together with comments that social reproduction contributions are culturally expected in countries of origin: "*because in Africa when you go to a family you are supposed to be doing stuff like cleaning the house doing little jobs around the house, taking care of the kids*" [Lydia]. Here, John explains his desire to engage in transactional labour through domestic work in lieu of his hosts' support, alongside a mixture of pride in performing these tasks to a high standard yet feelings of being a burden:

> I do feel if somebody is doing good to me, if I am able to return something nice to them I will do it. […] I help around, you know like these guys were going to colleges, working, you know I had to make sure the house is tidy, cookings, shopping […] It helped me a lot because I was finding myself having something else to do rather than just stay there. […] And I could do it to the best standards […]. Not that they forced me to do the shopping, but me myself I say, I do the shopping and I'll put the money on the table, so that people could see you are also feeling the pains they are going through, because I was a little bit of a burden there. [John]

The transactional arrangements described so far have been of a relatively straightforward nature; cleaning/ cooking in exchange for lodging and so on. There are a number of other sharing activities however that underpin or facilitate survival within poverty-livelihoods, and it is to these that the next section now turns.

V. Sharing livelihoods: Sharing work, documents and bank accounts

As outlined earlier, there is currently much celebratory commentary regarding the benefits for individuals of becoming involved in the 'sharing economy'. An interesting aspect of our research is that sharing activities certainly *do* facilitate transactional survival for irregular migrants and refused asylum seekers (e.g. multiple occupancy arrangements to share rent prices), but the benefits of such sharing do not universally accrue to the migrants themselves.

Work is sometimes shared by a friend/ acquaintance of an irregular migrant or refused asylum seeker to give a destitute individual a chance to earn some money, however meagre. Assanne here describes how his friend passed on some of his work for a portion of his wage:

> A: Basically when there was a job he'd say we'll share this and if it was a smaller job he'd say, look that's what I need doing I'll give you that.
>
> I: And if you can think about the hours you worked, was it minimum wage? Was it less?
>
> A: No, less than minimum wage. [Assanne]

Some of these working arrangements were enabled through our participants masquerading as legitimate workers in the work place (signing a false name), whereas other situations involved the borrowing of identity documents/ work papers. Irregular migrants, including refused asylum seekers, routinely lack both a NINo and the identity papers such as passports that are required for them to legally access paid work. Subsequently, many will turn to those who can supply such papers through 'sharing'

their identity documents. In many ways, current policy encourages the criminalisation of refused asylum seekers and stimulates an environment in which fraudulent papers, fake identities and shared NINos are used by some in order to access paid work to survive. It also creates fertile ground for ostensible solidarity to slide into exploitation and unfreedom for the recipient of a sharing arrangement, as illustrated through Frank's case.

Although he accessed work as a refused asylum seeker, Frank was receiving section 4 (cashless) support. His decision to seek work was sparked by an urgent need for cash to remit to his family in Africa for emergency medical treatment. A friend took pity on Frank and allowed him to use his own passport, NINo and bank account details so Frank could get an agency job in a clothes distribution warehouse to send money home:

> So, at this moment, this friend of mine who gave me his genuine papers, so he said man, I've seen how much you have struggled […]the only way I can help you is to give you my papers, go and find work. [Frank]

The job itself, while physically demanding, was paid at the National Minimum Wage for a 40 hour week with appropriate breaks, amounting to £200 a week. When Frank entered into this relationship, he did so in the expectation that his friend would pass on the wages he earned. After a few months, however, the friend told Frank he would be keeping half of his wages as he was no longer receiving Jobseekers Allowance as a result of supposedly 'working'. At the time, Frank felt deceived as he could not freely consent to subsequently imposed conditions that transformed his friend's apparent act of solidarity into a financially dependent relationship; moreover, this unfreedom was buttressed by Frank having no choice but to accept these conditions due to his

extremely vulnerable situation that his friend was intimately aware of and abused. Instead of an employer being a direct perpetrator, Frank's exploitation experience was at the hands of his friend as a third party labour intermediary:

> I was like the instrument for him to get money. So he couldn't go to work but he knows that there is someone out there, who is working for him and he gets money at the end of the week. And I used to do that because I have a family to support, I cannot stop because otherwise… he must have thought that this is the prey that I can use to, you know, to generate some bit of income.

Having accepted this new arrangement of effectively renting his friend's identity in return for 50% of his wages, Frank very quickly began to experience a further degradation in the relationship as his friend periodically and without warning withheld even more money. Their relationship became more acrimonious and the friend would threaten to withdraw the papers or "*go to the company and say that I stole his documents and that I used them to find work*". Frank commented that "*you know when it comes to money; money is a spirit, friendship it becomes shaky*".

Other sharing arrangements of NINos take a seemingly more straightforward route, such as Gojo who purchased a NINo from a friend for £50. Refused asylum seekers without leave to remain cannot open a bank account; yet employers or agencies will typically only pay workers through a bank transaction, leading to the need to use another person's bank account. Although a sharing activity that can enable access to earnt money, the co-use of a bank account is also a risky activity for irregular migrants and refused asylum seekers as it can make them vulnerable to losing control over their wages (Burnett and Whyte 2010).

In extreme situations, such as with Lydia who was trafficked into the UK, the bank account of a relative was used to siphon off all wages and Lydia was led to believe the money is being saved up for a big pay-out on leaving the work situation in order to finance her future education:

> Because I didn't have an account my cousin suggested that the money would be paid into his account because that's what all the people who come here do. […] Then they told me this family is paying £1,600 for me, by then I was getting a little bit mad. And then they told me well, they are paying that money but an insurance number costs you a lot of money because you are using their insurance number and then, their bank account also costs me. But now when I realise they over worked me a lot. [Lydia]

So, while some examples of lodgings or food support may approximate a 'true gift' in the initial phase, for many in our research there was the fairly swift shift to a transactional exchange within sharing arrangements, and the creeping slide into more exploitative relationships as 'guests' enter a 'tunnel of entrapment' (Morgan and Olsen 2009). The next section explores some of the ethical and moral values underpinning such situations.

VI. Moral spheres: 'Family-like' relationships and faith

Family-like relationships are often depicted or yearned for by domestic labourers and care workers in particular. This is related to the space of labouring for domestic workers being infused with complex cultural and symbolic forms of exchange; as invoked through the phrase 'moral economy' (see Introduction). Given the difficulty in defining 'morality' some authors have suggested focusing on *trust* as the critical

medium for all exchanges; trust and moral norms therefore often pair together (Hollingsworth 2006).

Rose clearly depicts trust emerging from a family-like situation after being taken in by an elderly woman following a period of homelessness. Rose repeatedly uses the word 'relative' and seems to exhibit gratitude for the transactional labouring situation she finds herself in:

> I was like a relative really. I was like a relative in the house. Whenever needed to buy anything she was giving me money but not like wages or anything. She was giving me money can buy... can buy clothes she want this, do this, things like that but not a job. [Rose]

Gratitude is one of the emotions frequently aligned to the moral economy, alongside notions of duty, deference and familial responsibility. Rose appears to justify the lack of pay by understanding her arrangement as like a family set up with concomitant notions of 'family duty', but also her cultural construction of it being common for a younger relative to be somewhat deferent and care full time for an older relative. In her discussion of the moral economy, Näre (2008) notes that household owners typically attempt to transform what might otherwise be a contractual employment relationship into a "moral and gift relationship, where it is out of gratitude, familial duty and affection that workers should perform their jobs and not for economic benefit" (p.121).

The expectations of support from blood family members were sometimes mentioned by participants in our study – family duty expected to flow both ways - but if these relationships proved not to offer hoped-for support, people readily spoke of broader networks of co-ethnic and co-language groups who represent 'fictive kin' (Karner 1998)

support. Ada describes her network of asylum acquaintances as "*my best friends, people I am very close to, they family*". Yet 'fictive kin' relations for migrants shouldn't only be seen to reside among co-ethnic and co-language networks. One of the striking features of the survival tactics of destitute irregular migrants is that they may become recipients of 'gifted' support from civil society organisations (e.g. short-term housing support offered by predominantly white British volunteers) who may be motivated to act within a similar notion of 'responsibility for another', but one not determined by shared ethnicity. The case of Rose above being taken in by an elderly white British woman that she met through a Women's Institute group is a less-organised and more overtly transactional version of this.

It is also important to note that different-ethnicity support might be more attractive to individuals due to the omnipresent fear of disclosure for an irregular migrant that erodes social relationships among co-ethnic communities (Sigona 2012). Although co-ethnic individuals may share a common precariousness; isolation and a pressing need to protect personal security dominates irregular migrants' lives. It is in such contexts that fictive-kin relationships for irregular migrants can involve different ethnicity individuals, often facilitated by civil society projects[6] or faith-based initiatives (see below). We contend there is a complex ethics of virtue operating when seemingly distant individuals (e.g. short-stop white British volunteer hosts) offer some kind of sharing-support to destitute individuals. This may begin as a more functional 'humanitarian caring' (Slote 2000) for 'the other' driven by compassion for strangers,

[6] It is sad to note that this already fairly limited support that vulnerable migrants access through voluntary sector organisations is further becoming more insecure as the UK public expenditure cuts bite. Agencies providing temporary shelter and basic necessities for destitute migrants are being forced to reduce their services as local authority funding is cut or withdrawn.

but can then morph into something more akin to 'intimate caring' despite no history of proximate personal relations between the parties.

Yet not all stories of fictive-kin relationships are positive in the moral economy of households. Both the historian E.P. Thompson (1971) and the political scientist James Scott (1976) understood the moral economy to relate to economic injustice and exploitation; on occasions related to the powerful obligation to share in 'peasant economies'[7]. Jay's story illustrates the slide from a personal relationship within a family setting to extreme exploitation and unfreedom. Jay was a refused asylum seeker when he started a romantic relationship with a British woman. After several months, when she questioned his continuing lack of money, he revealed to her that he was a refused asylum seeker barred from working and was staying with a friend at which point she invited him to live with her. But when he moved in he found she had two children with physical disabilities and was immediately expected to take on a role as carer, cleaner and cook, and be on call for sex in return for food and accommodation. When Jay tried to negotiate an improvement in his conditions, he was coerced to work without pay through the threat of denunciation:

> At first I had a good relationship but she ended up mistreating me, working for her, looking after the kids, she never paid me, she used to tell me sometimes – 'oh you fucking African if you do anything I will call the immigration office and they will send you back to your country'. […] I told her I thought we were in a relationship, you and me, but you end up using me like your carer for the kids, I'm here to be with you as family together. [Jay]

[7] And more recently Didier Fassin (2005) has used these ideas of injustice to analyse contemporary French immigration policies from a moral economy perspective.

Jay's articulation of his desire to be 'as a family' comes through clearly, yet he is confronted over time with the woman's negative ethical response; that of racism. Jay's case is a clear example of how moral economies not only invoke pre-existing norms and relationships (involving power, ideas of fictive kinship etc); they also reproduce systems of survival and exploitation that are often only surface deep in precarious households. Sometimes participants in our research justified such exploitation as a 'best of the worst' situation; so for example Ada understood her severe underpayment of £10 a day for childcare as the 'going rate' for informal childcare and better than nothing. The notion of temporality is important to note here and to see labouring processes over time rather than static events. In this sense, several participants in our study discussed 'serving' time in exploitative transactional situations in the hope that they will enable them to remit money, fund legal expenses, assist in the pursuit of intergenerational security and to potentially act as springboards for better labour relations in the future. Bastia and McGrath (2011) frame this idea as the 'migrant project' - movement across time, not just space – in understanding engagement in unfree labour as a means to achieve a better future. Similarly in our research, despite knowing they were being exploited through transactional labour, in many cases workers are weighing up much longer, lifelong goals and ambitions. Some seem to make the 'rational' decision to accept an exploitative sharing arrangement as part of 'Faustian bargain' (Wood, 2003) of survival in the present and an orientation of 'better to be with the devil you know'. We finally now move on to discussing another significant dynamic in the negotiation of support for destitute migrants; that of faith.

Many writers have commented on 'norms of trust and reciprocity' between people that can affect exchange practices (e.g. Hart 2008). Faith and religion provided an important

framework for some of our participants when discussing an initial period of 'no-strings attached' food and housing gifted support. Gallant and Rose here both invoke the faith of their benefactors as important to the generation of trust:

> He was a really good Muslim, *really* good Muslim and I really appreciate his help. He says you have to come and live with me. I will give you job, I will take you to work and you have to come with me. He knew I am homeless jobless, paperless, friendless, I have nothing. […] He helped me, in the sake of god. He wasn't expecting anything from me back. And he did the best for me. He taught me the religion. [Gallant]

> They were just Christians, they were just Christians helping a fellow Christian. [Rose]

Faith appears to be central to ideas of trust and reciprocity for these individuals, similar to what Cloke (2011) has called 'theo-ethics'. This discourse around positive theo-ethics through enactment of the 'love of the poor' is not, however, without its critics. Lancione (2014) suggests postsecular scholarship uncritically engages with the love narrative which acts to conceal the conditional and sometimes demeaning nature of assistance experienced by recipients of faith based support; recipients being cast as 'souls to be redeemed'. Tino hints at this more critical stance when discussing the fallout from his experience of not being paid wages by a man he'd met at church who arranged construction work for him. He here raises the issue of unscrupulous employers being able to shroud themselves in a theo-ethically rich environment (a church in this instance) to take advantage of people at highly vulnerable points in their lives:

> So like the churches they are scattered all over so they know that people, at a time of need, that's when you are more spiritual, so they know people who are going to church are vulnerable. [Tino]

This section has revealed both the social embeddedness of sharing activities and the exploitative inter-personal relationships within irregular migrants' lives, but these shouldn't shield us from also acknowledging the structural production of susceptibility to imbalanced labour relations. The restrictive immigration and asylum policies outlined in section II play an important role in creating a complex socio-legal differentiation of migrants' rights, and thus make the UK government complicit in the creation of a vulnerable workforce (see also De Genova 2002, Castles 2013). As we have argued elsewhere (Lewis et al, 2014) the concept of hyper-precarity, encompassing multi-layered, transnational pressures through time and across different spaces, should be linked to the role of the state in pushing hyper-precarious migrants into transactional relations to avoid the paid labour market where they risk detection and deportation.

VII. Concluding thoughts

We began this article by suggesting that writing on the contemporary highly acclaimed 'sharing economy' trumpets the tech-savvy practices of the Millennial generation yet is relatively silent on the more mundane sharing experiences of the labouring precariat, and would do well to be cognisant of a relatively long lineage of attention within anthropological and informal sector literature which highlights the importance of

sharing, reciprocity and gift-exchange for coping strategies of marginalised groups. This article demonstrates the survival practices of a highly vulnerable sub-sector of migrants in the UK – irregular migrants including refused asylum seekers. The lives of irregular migrants and asylum seekers following visa-overstaying or asylum refusal swiftly become survival-oriented. In the absence of the right to work, or state provision, individuals in our research accessed vital support through informal networks, frequently of a sharing and 'transactional' type where food and housing is provided in exchange for either an explicit or implicit expectation of return. Proximate care for refused asylum seekers is seen to come from co-ethnic/ co-language networks but also voluntary sector, community of interest and faith-based actors. Multiple moral economies operate among irregular migrants and refused asylum seekers offering higher levels of care than that provided by a state that intentionally removes means for achieving a legal livelihood. This forms a hyper-exploitable pool of 'illegalised' and unprotected labour (Lewis and Waite 2015). Giving asylum seekers the right to work would provide an important starting point for reducing their susceptibility to forced labour.

Yet individuals offering support either in co-ethnic/ co-language networks or within the shadow state 'Big Society' are themselves often part of the labouring precariat with stretched means. Their 'relations of proximity' or (theo-)ethical desire to support destitute individuals don't automatically provide a 'natural scene of moral virtue' (Barnett and Land 2007) nor unquestionable spaces of 'moral citizenship' (Schervish, O'Herlihy, and Havens 2002). An inseparability of giving and receiving in moral economies of constrained households and networks therefore gives rise to transactional labour and relationships. Although sometimes portrayed as positive, we also

encountered many grey areas of so-called 'mutuality' wherein these relations are always spatio-temporally contingent and can slide into coerciveness and abuse. Transactional support is therefore double-edged for irregular migrants; vital to keep state-produced starvation and homelessness at bay, but also laced with relations of dependency that can develop into feelings of restricted choice or entrapment. The overall argument emerging from this paper is to assert that the moral economies of gifting and sharing create and reproduce particular social structures, cultural norms and relationships which position people along a spectrum of relative freedom and mutual benefits to servility, unfreedom and entrapment. From this key finding, we close by making a number of interventions that will further the field of labour geographies and related studies of unfree and forced labour.

First, transactional labour and sharing activities should be seen within a *spectrum* of labouring experiences; not as situations gravitating towards one or other binary pole of benevolent hospitality/ 'true gifts' or ubiquitous unfreedom. As with recent observations of a 'continuum of exploitation' (see Skřivánková 2010), transactional labour and associated sharing practices can also be understood as positioned along a broad spectrum in response to multiple structural and inter-personal dynamics. Structural affects such as immigration regimes creating 'illegality', deportability and enforced destitution are likely to act in combination with a set of more inter-personal shapers such as hosts acting purely altruistically or with a creeping desire to extract 'value' from the guest. Outcomes of transactional exchanges and sharing activities for irregular migrants are consequently contingent and changeable; there is no clear line between hospitality and unfreedom in these contexts.

Second, similar to Samer's (2005) point that some informal economic relations are not as progressive as often imagined in terms of disrupting damaging hegemonic capitalism; we critique the celebratory and higher moral plane interpretation of transactional support and sharing activities for destitute individuals, whether it emanates from within ethnic enclaves or from outside these spaces. The notion that social and material resources are benevolently pooled and shared amidst the 'lumpen have-nots' assumes these groups are able to patch over the structural inequalities resulting from the UK's prevailing neoliberal economy and restrictive immigration and asylum policies. As our article's cataloguing of coercion and exploitation within transactional and sharing relationships has shown, this is quite patently not the case. We have demonstrated that there is something very particular, and insidious, about how UK governments have shaped the lives of asylum seekers. This has led to unique structural and socio-spatial processes and created the need for the kind of exchange, solidarity, exploitation and counter-power documented in this paper. However, the reality of the hyper-precarity of irregular migrants is that although legally many of their exploitative transactional experiences would fall within one or more of the ILO's 11 indicators of forced labour (ILO 2012, e.g. the abuse of vulnerability of compromised socio-legal status, or the withholding of wages), such situations – *even if* coercively experienced - offered vital survival mechanisms to cope with 'volatility and vulnerability' (Berner, Mercedes Gomez, and Knorringa 2012) in the absence of any other legal or socio-cultural protection.

Third, we suggest the distinction between *house guest* and paid or unpaid domestic worker is a useful one that should be drawn out more in the literature. Although overlapping experiences, there are often subtle differences between, for example, a

destitute refused asylum seeker who becomes a house guest and a migrant worker who is a paid domestic labourer. These differences might be related to aspects of socio-legal status and migration context that compound to create multi-dimensional insecurities and contribute to the refused asylum seeker's compulsion to engage in transactional labour. These sorts of emerging and contingent experiences within household moral economies are therefore more likely to be tainted by feelings of coercion, entrapment and servility for irregular migrants than paid domestic workers.

Our argument to complicate labour geographies and understandings of unfreedom through explorations of transactional labour relations also springs from a political commitment to 'count-in' (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003) diverse types of economic practice into existing framings of labour. Precarious transactional labour is rooted in sharing relationships that are spatially and temporally transient; and the contours of these social relations and ethical interdependencies should be seen as co-produced by both cultural and structural forces within moral economies.

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