Article:
Guarneros-Meza, V. orcid.org/0000-0002-4147-147X (2025) Precarious work and local governance through the lens of informality and caring for place. Political Geography, 121. 103380. ISSN 0962-6298

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103380

PRECARIOUS WORK AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE THROUGH THE LENS OF INFORMALITY AND CARING FOR PLACE

Please cite:

Guarneros-Meza, V. (2025) Precarious work and local governance through the lens of informality and caring for place, *Political Geography*, Volume 121, 103380. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103380

Abstract

Against the backdrop of fiscal austerity and bordering discourses in the UK, precarious work has become increasingly important to understand local governance and provision of community services. This paper contends that precarity can be overcome through caring practices found in the social reproduction that communities develop in their everyday experience of place-making, but care is made invisible by the state's own contribution to informal governance arrangements. The paper aims to contribute to the study of precarity in England, by bringing into dialogue debates on work precarity, informality and popular economies. Through this framework the relationality between state and non-state actors can be studied through decentring the role of the state in the provision of community services. This framework recognises the hidden and ambiguous interfaces that co-exist, or are nested within each other, when local communities encounter marginality in social, organisational, political and economic ways. Through qualitative research carried out in Barnsley Metropolitan Borough in South Yorkshire, the paper unpacks how the visibility of material and social precarity are compounded with the invisibility of voluntary work in the initiatives organised by the local council and different community organisations when caring for others and place. Through the relations among individuals and community groups that stem from practices which render work invisible, networks of solidarity are formed, but they are not enough to develop more inclusive conditions for change.

Introduction

The UK has experienced a complex conjuncture of forces over the past 15 years: fiscal austerity, increasing nationalism and a continuation of neoliberal policies that have intensified the withdrawal of the state. This conjuncture has been important to study how everyday governance arrangements develop at the margins of mainstream economic and political discourses. Against this backdrop, this paper argues that in order to analyse the everyday living conditions of 'left behind' communities we need to understand precarity in both experiential and conceptual terms.

This paper builds upon existing discussions of precarity (Rogaly 2020; Skeggs, 2011; Tyler, 2020) and complements them with those on informality and popular economies. The latter are drawn primarily from authors working in Latin American and other global South contexts (Gago et a., 2023; Lazar and Sanchez, 2019; Robinson 2023), because they provide insights that can help advance more inclusive conditions for change. Through this conceptual framework, I build upon the dialectical relationship between production (work) and social reproduction in place-making[1] in post-industrial towns. This framework has been useful in addressing three key research questions: What are communities doing to address political abandonment and social harm? How are communities building networks of support in their attempt to overcome this situation? And how are all these experiences impacting community governance? I explore these questions through a qualitative case study based of Barnsley, South Yorkshire.

This paper contends that precarity can be overcome through caring practices found in the social reproduction that communities develop in their everyday experience of place-making. The emphasis on social reproduction and care has been considered as a valuable resource to overcome the social harm that austerity and nationalism have brought to many British post-industrial towns (Hitchen and Raynor, 2020; Kane, 2023). However, care, in the form of voluntary and unpaid work, remains obscured by the state's own contribution in shaping informal governance arrangements. As developed in the empirical sections of this paper, I flesh out this 'invisibilisation' in the daily arrangements of decentred local services provided by the state and a myriad of community and charity organisations.

Alongside this conceptual framework, the paper presents four narratives found in daily discourses in policy documents that help to contextualise how precarity has been experienced in the UK in general, and in South Yorkshire more specifically. It is the exposure to precarity in its multiple forms (economic, organisational and social) that invites hidden and informal arrangements to local governance. In this paper informality is not considered a category that differentiates what sits outside the state and its institutions. Instead, it is considered a mutually constituted form of the state's sphere in which different governance arrangements take place (Roy, 2005; Robinson, 2023:357).

[1] Place-making is understood at the neighbourhoods or ward level, where the built environment, community interactions and governance of service provision are factors shaping local identities over time.

Although in post-industrial towns in the UK, it is recognised that conditions for social change can stem from precarity itself (Skegs, 2011; Bright, 2016), there is little discussion of inclusive relationships in the governance of place to achieve social change. I draw on the literature on popular economies to complement these discussions on precarity and informality. First, because in building critically upon the concept of informality, the popular economies debates help to think of alternative ways in which inclusion can be developed within the transformations of un/paid work. Second, because it accounts for the blurred boundaries between home, community and work in the caring for others. This account is seen as a vehicle of resistance against capitalism, white supremacy and dominant masculinities embedded in colonialism, which prevents a more caring form of policy-making (Cielo, et al., 2023; Federici, 2012; Lazar and Sanchez, 2019, Tronto, 2013).

The paper first presents the four narratives that contextualise precarity: broken Britain, left behind places, take back control and hostile environment. These narratives pinpoint the insecure employment and living conditions that post-industrial towns face. This discussion unveils the instances in which precarity and informality interweave. In the next section, I explain how the concepts of precarity, informality and popular economies reveal conditions of social change as the common element to articulate these debates. The case study sections discuss how place-making develops through governance arrangements that assemble resources beyond the local state. These arrangements are identified through solidarities built in social reproductive activities promoted by the voluntary or charity sector to cope with or overcome precarity (e.g. caring practices towards others and employability and learning of new skills). The discussion unpacks how the area governance model followed by Barnsley Council relies on ambiguous arrangements that reveal a contrast between the invisibility of unpaid and voluntary work and the visibility of material and social precarity that the borough has experienced over years of austerity. Through voluntary work, networks of solidarity are formed; but they are not enough to develop more inclusive conditions for change. Inspired by popular economies, the last section of the paper suggests ways in which a more inclusive social change can be achieved.

Living Precarity in the UK

As a result of the 2008 great financial crisis (GFC), the UK has been impacted by over a decade of austerity fiscal policies that have significantly decreased national agencies' and local authorities' budgets, especially in the Midlands and north of England (Hastings et al., 2012; Johns, 2020; Stride and Woods, 2024). Austerity has negatively impacted public services that shape people's wellbeing around housing, transport, street maintenance, community services, and social care. Austerity has also impacted the overall welfare provision to vulnerable groups through a series of reforms culminating in the Universal Credit system, which streamlined and reduced the different benefits that claimants could address before 2015 (Dwyer, 2014). Increasingly, many local authorities have become dependent on charitable and emergency food provisions, which are accompanied by striking levels of poverty -accentuated by high costs of living resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis. According to the UN special rapporteur (UN-HRC, 2019), 14 million

people in the UK live under levels of poverty and marginalisation. This dire context has mobilised dozens of scholars to seek to understand the impacts and future implications of austerity in the UK, including the differentiation existing between class, gender, disability, age and race (i.e. Hall 2021; Hitchen and Raynor, 2020; Jupp, 2022; Pattison, 2022; Rogaly, 2020; Tyler, 2020). Finally and from 2016, austerity has been accompanied by the UK's withdrawal from the EU (Brexit), a process which has impacted people's everyday lives in economic, political and social terms (Pettifor, 2016).

The confluence of austerity and Brexit has created a series of public narratives that have overlapped and created different levels of 'social harm', displacement and 'inhumanity'. On the one hand, there is the 'broken Britain' narrative, which underlines those people in receipt of welfare as not deserving or being an illegitimate burden to society (Pattison, 2022; Tyler, 2020). This narrative has been developed through a system of stigmatisation on people who are highly dependent on welfare benefits. As Tyler argues, stigma is structural through the state's governmental technology, which produces a toxic climate of fear and hatred (2020:7). It is also, Tyler argues, a practice that is embodied ('felt under the skin') by people who claim benefits and who experience shame and feel responsible for their circumstance whilst being unable to overcome their situation. Others (Hincks and Powell 2020; Pattison 2022) add that stigma is territorialised by the type of locality in which communities live. It is not only a top-down categorisation, but stigma is also built from below by these same communities' behaviour towards particular groups, such as immigrants.

Alongside 'broken Britain', there is a second narrative used in regional development by politicians, popularly known as the 'left behind' places (Tomaney et al., 2023). This is a pejorative term in Britain to refer to post-industrial and coastal towns in the UK. These towns 'have not shared in the growth and accumulation of wealth that has occurred in big cities and have become marked by multiple forms of social deprivation and deep political resentments' over the last 30 years (2023:12). Up until 2024, the policy that tackled left behind places was framed under the UK government's White Paper *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* (2022). This aimed to reduce regional inequalities accentuated by the GFC and to compensate, albeit half-heartedly, for the budget cuts in local government funding, which have fallen between 30% and 50% over the last decade, especially in England. These cuts have had serious negative repercussions on the statutory and non-statutory services this tier of government provides, which are leading to a new local statecraft (Stride and Woods, 2024; Pike, 2023).

On the other hand, there are the narratives of 'take back control' and the 'hostile environment' (Gamble, 2018; Yuval et al., 2019). The first emerged during the Leave Campaign advocating for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. This narrative increased the sense of nationalism and discrimination towards the immigrant or the 'other'; and the second was introduced through a series of reforms in the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016. These reforms limited access for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to employment and public services such as health, education and housing. Authors (Hall, 2021; Yuval Davis et al., 2019) argue that the hostile environment has been built through a series

of castigating migration laws and racialised enforcement and bureaucratic procedures which inevitably impact people's daily life.

Although these four narratives target different subjects (welfare claimants, vulnerable immigrants, local governments), they have a similar approach in that they all create a more distant (national) state that can easily shift away from its social responsibilities while rationing scarce resources. The British neoliberal state has continued to diminish its role as provider by ensuring that its native and immigrant populations learn to depend less on the state until they stop becoming a burden to it. Furthermore, scholars (Hall, 2021; Tyler, 2021) have identified how these policies have more than structural and administrative impacts; they are also embodied (e.g. anxiety, depression) by stigmatised and often criminalised groups (e.g. welfare claimants and racialised migrants) through the psychological reach of government policies.

In the attempt of government to compartmentalise policy subjects through the four narratives, overlaps between subjects are overlooked. This compartmentalisation is mistaken if social harm and political abandonment in post-industrial towns are to be tackled. For example, the Immigration Act 2016 puts emphasis on precarious work by migrants to minimise modern slavery by rogue employers. However, precarious work is not only embodied by immigrants but also by native populations who, like the former, are experiencing in-work poverty. This compartmentalisation is commonly observed in manufacturing sectors such as food production, cleaning services, warehousing, crop and animal production and construction where agency work, insecure contracts, low pay and self-employment abound (ODLME, 2023; Rogaly 2020). Through its regulatory body, the Act aims to control migrant work, but in its attempts, it overlooks two aspects. The first is that native workers are equally subject to precarious work conditions, especially because this type of work is carried out by women, non-white people or old and young self-employed workers. There are dozens of local authorities, districts or neighbourhoods, especially in the Midlands and north of England, which have been impacted by the arrival of this type of manufacturing and services after the 1980s wave of deindustrialisation. In cities outside London, such as Peterborough (Rogaly, 2020), these economic changes have been historically accompanied by waves of migration; but in regions such as Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire, and I include here Yorkshire, native and mostly white populations have been subject to the same fate brought by post-industrial economies, while facing more recent waves of migration (Emery, 2018; Pattison, 2022).

The second aspect overlooked by the Immigration Act are the instances in which overlapping identities of natives and migrants are held – for example a naturalised citizen or 'legal' immigrant or refugee who has contributed greatly to their local street, neighbourhood or community (Jolly, 2023, Virdee, 2014). These overlaps render people active actors, not only capable of changing their personal circumstances, but also of impacting positively their immediate community by overcoming cultural and racial divides. According to Tomaney et al. (2023), many post-industrial towns in England were originally built on 'moral communities' in the 1800s that relied on values of mutual obligation and community betterment. These values were materialised in social infrastructures (e.g. community halls)

built by workers, industrial employers and religious groups. The unmaking that these towns experienced through neoliberal policies and fiscal austerity has seen a silver lining through the repair and reconstruction that people who remained in these towns have carried out during the last 20 years. According to Tomaney and colleagues, this reconstruction, which sits outside the state, has been possible through strong local identities and place attachments built over time by people who remain in these towns. They are a historical legacy that is required to 'level up' regional disparities. In Britain, scholars tend to argue that the success of communities in finding agency to change their social reality will depend on whether communities accommodate to or resist the interests of privileged classes (Skeggs, 2011; Tyler, 2020). Either way is dependent on historical place attachments (Tomaney et al., 2023; Wills, 2017), but importantly as Virdee (2014) reminds us, these historical place attachments have also been shaped by migration.

Both Tyler (2020) and Hall (2021) show how the confluence of austerity and harsh immigration policies have not only cut the delivery of basic services such as housing or health, but also cut administrative support services that people use to redress and raise appeals against government decisions (such as the removal of public access to legal representation). Furthermore, new layers of administration (e.g. form filling) have been passed down to claimants. All the latter is exacerbated by shortages of public sector staff and poor training of the remaining staff, both results of austerity. The void left in the provision of these administrative services, which are part of the processes of making ends meet and which help people live without anxieties, is being filled by either charities or private corporations. These processes can form solidarity networks, that through care and conviviality, result in barter, multi-lingual collaborations or food banks within traditional workspaces (factories, warehouses) and non-traditional ones (streets, households) (Rogaly 2020; Hall, 2021).

These acts of solidarity are 'informal' in the sense that they fall outside the state's sphere of action; they sit at the margins or 'edges' (Hall, 2021) of the main economic spheres. Not only are 'capricious negotiations' and repertoires of hustle integral to survival, but also organic solidarity networks are important to counterbalance the state's 'stigmacraft' and the marketisation of communal care. Tyler's (2020) analysis of stigma shows the increasing intervention of charity organisations (e.g. Citizen Advice) to refer and advise people on managing debt, coping with child poverty, seeking employment, or navigating Universal Credit. Other alternative avenues that people have followed to make ends meet are informal loans (loan sharks) and housing arrangements (Etherington et al., 2021; Lombard, 2021). Through their hidden operations, these arrangements increase opportunities of exploitation and profit extraction, regardless of people's migrant status (Gago and Mezzadra, 2017, www.citizensadvice.org.uk). It is the exposure to precarity in its multiple forms that invites hidden and informal arrangements to take place.

Precarity and Informality: A Conceptual and Analytical Framework

I argue that precarity exposes informality in governance arrangements in which networks of solidarity can be created, but without necessarily pursuing inclusion and social change. The popular economies debates provide insights to begin developing inclusive social change. In this section, a framework is presented to explain the interrelationship between precarity, informality and popular economies and the relevance of the framework for more caring communities.

Scholars (Allison, 2012; Lazar and Sanchez, 2019) have argued that precarity is related to but not interchangeable with insecure labour because through unstable work, precarity spreads in multiple ways, destabilising daily life, family structure and identity. Because precarity is related to the generic instability of life (Schilling et al, 2019:1345), it can be studied in its multiple dimensions: material, existential and social dimensions (Allison, 2012; Bright, 2016). Studies on precarity in the global North have focused on conditions resulting from a general malaise as well as on conditions derived from changes in global labour markets and migration (Bright, 2016: 149). Lazar and Sanchez (2019), contend that labour precarity in the global North has centred on waged work compounded by the retrenchment of the welfare state, whereas in the global South the absence of both has pushed activists and (feminist) scholars to focus on unpaid work that reproduces everyday life, from the home environment, passing through the streets and neighbourhoods, to factories and non-traditional workplaces.

Although the differentiation between the global North and South that Lazar and Sanchez make is an acceptable generalisation, feminist scholarship in Britain has reached similar conclusions on the blurred boundaries between paid and unpaid work, especially in post-pandemic times (Hitchen and Raynor 2020, Segal, 2023). Skeggs (2011) argues that the precarity that the British working class has experienced since the 1990s shows how through everyday practice people learn to support each other and pass on useful knowledge. This has allowed people to find alternative values around care, loyalty, and affection to defend themselves against those values of market exchange (aspiration, production). Bright (2016: 148) argues that the social relations of support created through daily habits are 'precarity's denied other', they are 'neoliberalism's nemesis' as they provide a silver lining to prefigure an alternative. For Bright (2016), the precarity experienced over generations alerts people from the trauma experienced and motivates them to do something different. The trauma seen by British post-industrial towns has resulted from the 'slow violence' experienced several times in history (Emery, 2022) through, for example, the closure of coalmining pits and the loss of communities' social infrastructure, driven by the 'unmaking' of neoliberal policies and austerity cuts (Tomaney et al., 2023). The historical legacy of post-industrial towns chimes with Allison's point (2012) about the conditions of social change stemming from the conditions of precarity, which allows us to turn the discussion onto informality.

Informality is a contested concept which is commonly used in daily parlance as a categorical instrument to denote what sits outside the state and capitalist relations (Guarneros-Meza and Jenss, 2022). However, the long lineage of scholars (Das and Poole, 2004; Ledeneva 2018; Scott 1985; Roy, 2005) studying informality have found that the state is not precluded from participating in the informal sphere, and markets of goods and services are likely to

thrive in both regulated and unregulated environments. It is the role of the state and the relations it builds with other sectors of society that render the dialectical and mutual constitution between the formal and informal spheres.

The main characteristics associated with informality as a category are invisibility, negotiation, flexibility and ambiguity. Through focusing on daily practice, authors (Bayat, 2010; Tonkiss, 2013; Boudreau and Davis, 2016) acknowledge the creativity and spontaneity to which actors resort to cope or survive throughout their daily routines. However, creativity is accompanied by precarity and temporariness. Also, creativity straddles the divide between order and disorder and self-help and abandonment to build social capital and between exclusion and coercion to impose power relations (Tonkiss, 2013; Ledeneva 2018).

Authors studying the role of the state as a driver of informality have pushed discussions away from simple binary categorisations and have shifted understandings of informality towards its analytical power to study asymmetrical relations across material, institutional and cultural dimensions (Banks et al., 2019; Guarneros-Meza and Jenss, 2022; Marx and Kelling, 2019). Therefore, from informality describing unregulated economies in Ghana (Hart, 1973), the concept now encompasses broader understandings regarding a mode of governance; a way in which a place, city or country is governed (Ledeneva, 2012; Robinson, 2023:359). It also addresses how geopolitical relations are formed through colonial approaches of domination that have set normative hierarchies through patriarchal and racial standards set by Eurocentrism (Banks et al., 2019; Danewid, 2019; Kemp et al., 2022; McNelly, 2022; Yiftachel, 2009).

Colonialism has had a boomerang effect upon European countries through historical migration, capitalism and labour that are more recently experienced through precarious and informal forms of work (Lazar and Sanchez, 2019; Schaplan and Heyes, 2017; Schindler, 2014). However, as with the Immigration Act mentioned above, if we are not careful, colonial discourses can render migrants and 'informal' workers passive. Global South analyses provide a more enabling approach through the concept of popular economies, which acknowledges workers' creativity to survive and build unforeseen material (i.e. housing) and institutional (i.e. norms) alternatives (Cielo et al., 2023; Coraggio, 1998). Popular economies have developed as a critique to informal work as a category, while recognising that the boundaries between home, work and community are blurring as work precarity increases. Homes are becoming workplaces; multiple and flexible jobs are allowing people to combine domestic and non-domestic activities during the course of a day. Reproductive practices such as food cultivation and cooking are transcending the home environment through soup kitchens, community loans and credit systems, and different caring arrangements.

Like debates on precarity, popular economies underline the importance of historical mobilisations to build solidarity in communities that in many cases sit at the margins in geographical, political and administrative terms (Gago et al., 2023). The legacies of social movements, especially around work, have been considered invaluable to the popular economies literature. In Argentina, for example, the generational precarity experienced through structural adjustment policies and neoliberal austerity since early-2000s has been

key in bringing together unemployed workers and neighbourhood communities. The mobilisations have taken back control of traditional workplaces and created alternative workspaces where advocacy for labour, gender and racial rights are developed to achieve more inclusive cities. These debates underline that households, where work is not officially recognised, are more likely to be exploited by models of economic growth, which rely heavily on financialisaton, debt and exploitation of women and racialised people (Cavallero and Gago, 2021; Gago et al., 2023).

Hence, popular economies go a step further than precarity debates by underlining more openly the importance of the close interlinkage between paid and unpaid work and everyday life across gender and race. Through these links, communities learn to recognise the use value created through acts of care beyond the market or exchange value (Cielo et al., 2023; Schmid, et al., 2018). This recognition has encouraged three aspects: co-existing arrangements on the governance of territories (including neighbourhoods), feminist approaches that recognise daily social reproduction through more inclusive caring practices of place (e.g. community volunteering) as a fundamental premise of production, and acts of everyday resistance that challenge white, masculine and capitalist supremacies (Cielo et al., 2023; Halvorsen, 2019; McNelly, 2022).

The insights brought by debates on popular economies build upon critical approaches to informality in Europe, which already acknowledge the perspectives of various actors with different backgrounds interacting with one another across several spaces and temporalities (Haid and Hilbrandt, 2019; Jaffe and Koster, 2019; Lees et al, 2016:214; Lombard, 2023; Pill and Guarneros-Meza, 2020). By putting an emphasis on relationality, these European-based debates have decentred the role of the state with respect to 'its authority, power, distribution of justice and equity' and in doing so break with the traditional hierarchy in which formality (and its association with the state) is more desirable than informality (everything else that sits outside the state). 'Relationality recognizes not only non-state actors' negotiating capacity, claim making and 'quiet encroachment', but also state actors' contribution to informalization through mechanisms of toleration, instrumentalization, abandonment or repression' (Guarneros-Meza and Jenss, 2022: 4). What these European debates overlook is the inclusion of gender and race in the decentred relationality of the state and for which the popular economies debates are useful to consider. While the histories of social movements and their legacies differ between Europe and Latin America, the transcendence of the home is equally experienced as result of the global phenomena of precarious and informal work (Preece, 2019; del Rio et al., 2025). This aspect has been captured by community unionism in the UK, which takes into consideration the collective (unpaid) work that develops in everyday life in non-traditional workplaces (e.g. neighbourhoods) and the potential linkages to the principles of trade unionism on solidarity and rights (Holgate 2013).

The following sections discuss the invisibility and ambiguity that informality involves in practice. Invisibility will be depicted through practices that are rendered unseen or sitting at the margins. The ambiguity of informality will be addressed by hybrid arrangements (Coutard and Rutherford, 2016; Jaffe and Koster, 2019) that break with the dichotomy

between formality and informality in administrative procedures and organisational arrangements, in which mimicking practices across and between the formal and informal spheres unfold. In other words, how informal rules require a degree of standardisation vis-à-vis the zones of discretion that formal rules need (Newton, 2018). The case study also underlines popular economies' reference to unpaid (voluntary) work in the reproduction of everyday life through acts of care that cut across the boundaries between community and workplace. Finally, the case study offers a reflection on how debates on popular economies could provide opportunities for communities to organise differently around racial and migration divides to develop a more inclusive potential for social change.

Barnsley: A Case for Grounding Precarity and Informality Discussions

The case study presents how processes of state withdrawal, punitivism and hostility built over the past 15 years, have been accompanied by governance arrangements that bring charity organisations and community groups forward. Through the harm experienced, these groups have shown endurance and determination, but with finite capacities to maintain solidarity, care and unpaid work. The capacity to endure is linked to a combination of need, collective historical memory and identity related to coalmining, and an institutional setting that has helped decentre the role of the state in local service provision.

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough (hereafter Barnsley) is a case in which the four narratives mentioned above conflate. It is located in the English South Yorkshire combined authority or region. Overall, because of its history of coalmining and other related industries (iron and railways), South Yorkshire has suffered the negative economic impacts of deindustrialisation, such as unemployment, low skilled workforce, low capital investment and inability to retain business growth. The benefits of post-industrial economies have favoured Sheffield City over Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham, which are the four local authorities that form the region. Sheffield hosts the bulk of services around health, higher education and creative industries. Therefore, within a 'left behind' region in the north of England, Barnsley encompasses several towns and communities that are even more left behind than the regional economic centre. The formation of Barnsley's towns has a close linkage with coalmining. Many of these towns were built around collieries, hence community life and its sense of place have developed around mining relationships found in former mining welfare's infrastructure and adjoining local businesses and services. Barnsley also encompasses Barnsley Town and rural areas mostly located in the west side of the borough. The former is seat of the council's headquarters with a market-town history, which has benefited from the levelling up central fund (BMBC, 2022).

One way in which Barnsley has benefited from the post-industrial economy is through its concentration of new retail and business parks, many of which are warehouses, distribution and call centres. These workplaces are emblematic because they replaced mining sites from the 1990s onwards, forming nowadays an impressive corridor for the logistics industry given its primary location between motorways and roads connecting the south and north of England. Therefore, it is not surprising that employment in former mining and now logistics

areas in the borough is linked to precarious-type jobs identified by government: construction and maintenance, food manufacturing and social care. Moreover, fieldwork observations show how the voluntary and community and arts and creative sectors include a good share of unpaid workers, with low wages or work insecurity.

The effects of deindustrialisation have also ranked Barnsley over the last 20 years within the top 40 most deprived local authorities in England. In 2019 it ranked 38th with employment, education and health/disability being the most highly problematic across the seven domains of the national deprivation index (BMBC, 2019). This sociodemographic composition has been accompanied by the stigmatisation of left behind places, especially in the eastern side of the borough, where higher rates of anti-social behaviour, crime, unemployment and disability have been reported. As part of its 2030 Strategy, Barnsley Council aims to reduce the number of benefit claimants, youth and long-term unemployment, and high levels of economic inactivity (BMBC, n/d). This target responds to pressures from national government to reduce welfare claimant numbers; to overcome the 'broken Britain' narrative. Like other post-industrial towns, Barnsley has above the national average of incapacity-related claimants, a way to measure 'hidden unemployment' which the number alone of unemployment-benefit claimants cannot reveal. In 2022, Barnsley reported 5,910 cases of unemployment-benefit claimants, which rose to 12,700 cases when people in incapacity or income-support benefits were included (Beatty et al., 2022). This higher number shows the compounded relationship between health and income precarity of many individuals in the borough.

Over the last decades, South Yorkshire has been receiving new waves of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Sheffield, the most ethnically diverse local authority in the region, has been classified as a Sanctuary City (Mosselson, 2021); this solidarity has reached Barnsley through a series of support mechanisms provided by Barnsley Council and other local organisations with links to the Refugee Council and Migrant Action, both umbrella migrant justice-based organisations. History of immigration of Eastern Europeans can be traced back to the mid-1900s in the mining industry, and waves of immigration in the new millennium have consolidated community initiatives, such as the Polish Library. In the last decade, migration from the Middle East and Africa has become more prominent. Many immigrants and refugees are recruited in precarious jobs in the food, hospitality, gig and care sectors, while asylum seekers awaiting their permanent leave to remain are more likely to get involved in these sectors in more informal, hidden forms given their inconclusive migration status. Despite efforts for welcoming immigrants, exclusion, discrimination and acts of racism have been present in everyday practices of local governance, as discussed below.

The data presented are from the first phase of ongoing research, carried out between September 2023 and May 2024. The data are composed of 15 exploratory interviews with community workers (6), activists and trade union representatives (5) and local government officers (4). Names of interviewees have been changed to maintain their anonymity, but the pseudo-anonymity set in the research ethics has allowed organisations' names to be unchanged. Through several day visits, ten hours of observation in open spaces and

community events were carried out, focusing on practices that encompassed caring for others and work/ employability training activities. The data from the interviews and observation were recorded in fieldwork notes, comprising a document of 23,000 words. The notes were coded thematically based on four elements discussed in the theoretical section: informality's hidden or invisible interfaces, informality's hybrid arrangements between state and non-state actors, the instability of precarity, and the element of self-organising with its potential for social change through reproductive acts of care that debates on popular economies and, to a lesser extent, precarity underline.

Care as a way to overcome precarity

In my trips to Barnsley Town, I observed the tensions that residents experience between the efforts by Barnsley Council to catch up with other wealthier cities and the practices of care by the overall community to overcome social harm. On the one hand, I observed the reinvention brought by the regeneration of Barnsley Town – near the train station and Glass Works shopping centre. On the other hand, the destruction of the mining past -which led the borough to be classified as a 'left behind' area- was also perceived in art exhibitions, local magazines and old buildings. These tensions revealed the pride from being a former industrial area and the present enigmatic aspirations that Barnsley Council 2030 Strategy is pursuing. In the video of the 2030 Strategy, sports, heritage, arts and creative industries and small entrepreneurship are envisaged as drivers of economic development and job creation. However, it does not refer to warehouses/distribution centres or adult care as important sectors of local employment. In this video, the council overlooks the fact that post-industrial economies are also accompanied by precarious work and related informal arrangements that small entrepreneurship, apprenticeships and flexible working bring to the local economic growth (Capecchi, 1989).

In the local museum, artefacts donated by the community show the pride that some people had in contributing to the defence of Great Britian and its empire, not only through fighting in WWII, but also in providing the coal to keep homes warm and factories and trains running. The sense of pride perceived through allusions to the past, is accompanied by an increasing sense of individual care, care for others and care for place despite the neglect that some communities face. Individual care is observed through several advertisements in the library's screens such as how to keep warm during the winter months in a period in which energy prices were still high in Britain, or flyers about mindfulness and wellbeing sessions taking place in the library. Care for others is present in spaces such as the market's toddler play area and breastfeeding rooms as well as in the library's materials and facilities for elderly people with dementia. In the museum, a short video of women against pit closures presented their activism during the 1984-85 miners' strikes in organising networks of support and solidarity through food parcels and collections for the affected families. Interestingly, this practice has repeated itself with the many food banks and community pantries found during fieldwork throughout the borough as the high costs of living were hitting many households. Alongside the efforts to promote the high arts in Barnsley, efforts to engage local communities with the arts as a means to 'recover from social harm' were

also present; a photography exhibition in the local gallery had an annex representing the sense of place by local people with mental ill-health and disability.

Narrating part of these visits helps to outline the tensions that Barnsley residents experience between regeneration and caring for others after years of neglect and austerity. According to Schindler (2014), in cities or towns that face a seemingly contradictory present that results from deindustrialisation, creative survival approaches by municipal policies and the actions of local residents are important to uncover alternative ways for change. I observed that through practices of care these new ways for change can be identified. The modern history of Barnsley towns is accompanied by the trauma of mining closures and the subsequent unemployment and economic inactivity levels. The latter resulting in many cases from ill health and disability, which have been accentuated by changes in the welfare system. Acts of solidarity, especially through caring practices that contribute to social reproduction, were palpable through food banks, mindfulness activities, and general initiatives to help people look after themselves and others, as well as looking after the places in which they live (e.g. caring for green spaces). These acts of care indicate how the boundaries between the individual, the community and, as explained below, the workplace are blurred. However, these acts of care were not as noticeable in cross-addressing the needs of migrant and native groups.

Informality in Barnsley's area governance model

In my meanderings, I was surprised by the presence and recognition of the area governance model of Barnsley Council in its working relationship with charities, community groups and businesses at a ward (neighbourhood) level. Although in a first instance it would be implausible to categorise this model as informal, a detailed analysis through a precarity lens shows the contrary.

The area governance model is embodied by six area councils and their correspondent ward alliances (BMBC, n/d). Each area council is composed of elected councillors and a team of frontline community development officers (CDO) managing and coordinating daily activities. These activities are quite varied, but in general they include supporting community groups or individuals to deliver local services such as the maintenance of green spaces, local festivities, social activities for kids and elderly people, litter picking, and volunteering and employability skills. The ward alliances are formed by citizens who have been recognised as social leaders in their respective communities. These bodies decide and oversee the allocation of an annual fund for projects organised by members of the community. The amount of funding allocated to each ward alliance has been approximately £10,000 pounds throughout the last few years. According to my conversation with a council officer (online chat, November 2023), this model has borrowed some elements from community partnerships that were promoted during the national Labour administrations (1997-2014), which through their third-way politics spearheaded collaborative and partnership working mechanisms of neighbourhood policy-making. At that time, Barnsley had 16 community partnerships (Wells and Ardron, 2009:11), most of which disappeared during the austerity period that began in 2010. The positive results that community partnerships developed in terms of preventing and tackling the needs of the most vulnerable through working in

partnership with communities, inspired the design of the area governance model, which in 2023 celebrated its 10th anniversary. It has been a model that has fared well against the challenges of fiscal austerity and the withdrawal of EU funding. It has demonstrated the political commitment of Barnsley Council, across all political parties, to maintain the model despite it not being a statutory service, and so, more vulnerable to budget cuts. At the time of writing, new fiscal cuts had been announced, posing uncertainty on the extent to which this model would prevail. In my chats with a CDO, it became noticeable how the extent of the community support, such as paying a two-hour room hire for wellbeing activities, was beginning to be curtailed.

In a recent annual report of the area governance model (BMBC, n/d_b:1), Barnsley Council specifies that the areas councils and ward alliances aim to 'co-produce services using [local] people's knowledge'. This statement is important because the council officially recognises it is sharing responsibility of non-statutory services with community organisations and groups. This is something that is also recognised and praised by local charities I have encountered in fieldwork; from foundations such as the Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) to small charities providing employability and learning skills (i.e. The Forge, in Hoyland) and community groups such as the Big Local Community Partnerships in the towns of Thurnscoe and Goldthorpe, both funded by the National Lottery. Local Trust, a national non-profit organisation charged with supporting Big Local Community Partnerships across England, has been championing community devolution beyond already well-established English institutions such as parish councils and neighbourhood forums. In a recent report, Local Trust (2023) recognises Barnsley's experience as good practice to show how local authorities, despite feeling threatened by citizen participation, are seeking to empower communities. It states that, '[p]art of the motivation is cost saving, but there is also an imperative to improve outcomes by engaging and supporting local people to design and deliver services which meet better their needs and aspirations' (2023:18).

Therefore, what started 20 years ago as an initiative orchestrated by national government to work in partnership with communities, over time has become a discourse that has been increasingly championed by the voluntary and not-for-profit sector in England and is striving to work 'with communities' rather than 'for communities'. Slowly the provision of certain local services has been decentred, emphasising the relationality of informal hybrid arrangements.

In my conversation with a CRT officer, I learned about the Educational Learning Support Hub (ELSH), a charity organisation that provides English learning services free of charge to immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Barnsley and surrounding areas. The organisation has limited resources; most fundraising has come from local funders and businesses and state agencies, such as the council and South Yorkshire Police. It is run by its founder (an immigrant herself), three part-time assistants, and teaching is provided by a handful of volunteers, some of whom had previously benefited from the services provided by ELSH.

Limited resources have prompted ELSH to offer a non-accredited approach to English learning that is not ESOL-accredited (or informal).[2] Instead, ELSH has innovatively adapted its approach to English learning by following the ESOL curriculum but through a more flexible and practical approach to language acquisition. Although not formally accredited, ELSH issues attendance certificates and students feel more confident when navigating housing, healthcare, education and employment services. These skills help students to integrate more effectively into the local community, while building a community in and of itself through the socialisation and volunteering activities organised by ELSH. As a result, an empathetic learning environment where volunteers can relate to the experiences of other students and peers is created. In my chat with Ambar, I asked her if she felt valued by the community, to which she answered:

> Actually, I think just my volunteering is valued. And in my previous work in [company's name] was valued by people, not management…it was valued by my colleagues. (Barnsley, May 2024)

Ambar is a former ELSH student and now volunteer who also works in a local food factory known for its precarious labour practices. In telling me how she has helped an Afghan woman to learn basic English, she showed a caring approach not only to the ELSH community, but to her colleagues at work; specifically by making an effort to learn basic Romanian to communicate with the team she used to coach in the food factory.

In becoming a registered charity in 2019, ELSH received support from the area council CDO to bid for funding given the organisation's limited resources and the work overload of its staff. As I learned more about the work of this CDO, I also discovered that this officer organised a series of training courses for local people facing low confidence compounded with some type of disability and unemployment. Like ELSH courses, the confidence courses are not accredited, but instead they provide participants greater time-flexibility to accommodate to their needs in attending these sessions. The aim of these sessions is to encourage participants to feel more ready to get involved in a hobby, volunteering or finding a job. As the CDO aims to increase the scope of the training sessions, she has enlisted a few participants to volunteer in assisting her to run some of these sessions. Two of them began to replicate the social group sessions in the Worsborough library that originally the CDO ran in another venue. As fiscal cuts keep threatening the council's budget, this voluntary work has come in handy as these responsibilities have been off-loaded while helping participants to feel more empowered in working for their local community. At the time of writing, the CDO was helping these volunteers to constitute their community group into a registered charity.

What these two examples show is the organisational precarity in which they are embedded. First, both have sought to provide learning and skills to residents through informal arrangements; both initiatives, one as part of local government and the other as a civil society organisation, are finding alternative ways to help people navigate or overcome

[2] The certification of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) would imply for ELSH to incur in much higher costs given the fees involved in achieving student accreditation.

material and social precarity. Through their combined daily practices, they are creating a grey area that has been characterised by innovation and flexibility. Second, they must cope with scarce financial or funding resources, particularly ELSH. This organisation has found it difficult to secure funding given the mission it has in supporting people seeking sanctuary. Staff perceive that the hostile environment has rendered organisational discrimination more palpable in the funding applications it has submitted to foundations such as the Lloyds Bank Foundation. Acts of discrimination have been perceived in bureaucratic misunderstandings that could have been clarified with transparent eligibility criteria from the outset of funding applications. As a result, ELSH relies heavily on limited public funding that instrumentally seeks to build social cohesion with newly arrived immigrants and asylum seekers. Third, in both examples staff tend to be overloaded, given the limited resources to hire more staff, and when staff is present, they tend to rely on fixed term contracts. Although this was not the case for the CDO leading the training, it was for her colleague who supported participants in finding a job. Fourth, both rely significantly on the work of volunteers to implement or develop further the activities they are responsible for. However, volunteer work is an insecure source of work given that it is short-term and relies on the willingness and availability of people, something that is recognised in the two instances by their staff.

The unpaid element of voluntary work leads to another grey area, that of labour exploitation raised by the arguments of feminist scholarship and popular economies about the invisible and unrecognised value of domestic and care work (Cavallero and Gago, 2021). Both of which are essential to maintain economic productivity and waged work. Organisations such as the ILO refer to informal work as work that sits outside state and market regulations, the increasing precarity of transnational markets of workers in domestic and care sectors has revealed the limited labour rights existing under informal work more generally (Esguerra Muelle et al., 2022). The invisibility of domestic and care work can be compared to the invisibility of voluntary work that Barnsley experiences, insofar as the provision of local services such as those provided by ELSH and the area council team are off-loaded to communities without these being properly recognised. The services they provide, include a level of care that volunteers give by helping others in their communities, alongside the charitable work of local organisations and the council's contribution to public wellbeing. However, these services do not address labour rights, which have been key in highlighting gender, racial and disability differences in labour struggles against precarity.

Moreover, this voluntary work is not valued by all state agencies. The local council was more open in accepting its value, whereas national agencies were less so. The local Job Centre office run by the national Department of Work and Pensions is a case in point. Mike, one of the volunteers working with the area council CDO, told me how frustrated he was when the Job Centre officer told him 'you are doing too much [volunteering] and it would be better if you're having [sic] a full-time job'. For him it was incomprehensible how the Job Centre could not understand how essential voluntary work was; without it, Mike continued, 'how many retail and charity shops you think are there, how many people in charity shops? There would be none left! [sic]'. Mike's comment addresses the fact that in the centre of Barnsley Town at least five charity shops can be found in a 0.5-mile radius. For Mike, a man with

special educational needs and disabilities, finding a full-time job is difficult because the job options do not offer the caring opportunities that he enjoys doing as a volunteer. Surprisingly, the council has been making efforts to quantify the hours of volunteering that all area councils and ward alliances include in their annual activities, but it is unclear what further purpose this quantification will have apart from calculating the working hours equivalent in market value. Instead, what becomes more evident is the significance of voluntary work in a borough with high levels of deprivation and for which local governance relies on the ambiguities of informality to turn its fate around. It also raises questions about the extent to which the (local) state renders care work invisible and, as popular economies underline, whom is it carried out by.

Self-organising and lack of social change

In my reflections about solidarity and race relations that resulted from voluntary work in caring for place, I draw on the popular economies literature. This is relevant because fieldwork has shown how caring practices transcend the home environment into the community level and how unpaid work is significant in maintaining paid work in contexts of multi-dimensional precarity.

The networks of solidarity I observed in the borough mostly respond to community forms of organisation that have become institutionalised into a registered charity. That has been the case of ELSH and the initiative of the CDO to help volunteers to turn their efforts into a constituted charity. Similarly, the Big Local Community Partnership in Thurnscoe, originally organised as a bottom-up group, after the end of its 10-year funding from National Lottery, has decided to become a registered charity to generate and apply for public and private funding. These small and locally constituted charities are providing community services that create caring for place. They are community organisations which have become responsible for creating social spaces. They bring communities together through learning and employability sessions or gatherings for youth and elderly through social festivities. Other organisations like the The Forge in Hoyland, own and manage community infrastructure which, in turn, is used by other local community groups or small local businesses. All these examples rely on volunteering and unpaid work that build networks of solidarity. However, they have not been enough to develop more inclusive conditions for change, especially about labour rights and their increasing interrelationships with rights that lead to better wellbeing. This is relevant as increasingly the boundaries between work, home and community are blurring.

Popular economies in Latin America have rescued some principles of trade unionism, in particular opportunities to build solidarity and inclusion at the street and neighbourhood levels as a result of unemployment and precarious work. Although this contextual background is absent in Barnsley, there are dispersed unionism legacies that could help address precarity while integrating native and migrant populations. A case in point are the legacies left by the National Union of Miners (NUM), which led the historical 1984-85 coalminers' strikes in the UK. The NUM headquarters in Barnsley Town, remind passersby of the importance of the union in the place-making of the borough. The relationships it has

built with other national unions such as Unite (the largest private sector union in the UK) has prompted approaches to community unionism. In my conversation with Unite Community officers, community unionism was considered a viable alternative given the high levels of economic inactivity accompanied by work that unfolds in everyday life, including unpaid work for caring practices in the community (Holgate, 2013). The sense of community built around collieries and the employment culture that many former miners and their family members faced after pits were closed has been a reference to understand precarity in the region; in particular how living in a place over generations creates attachments to low pay and insecure employment (Strangleman, 2018).

Although efforts from Unite Community to strengthen community unionism have been ongoing since 2012, disorganisation and fragmentation in the field have been experienced in the South Yorkshire branch, mostly because of lack of resources (conversation with Unite officer, Leeds, February 2024). Yet, the contribution that Unite Community could provide to the efforts of local charity organisations is invaluable on topics such as un/paid work, volunteering and labour rights. For example, it is Unite Community who supports the Better Bus Campaign led by local activists, some of whom have close links with NUM and Unite. This campaign pushes for better local public transport, especially against unreliable times and bus-route closures, after years of neglect from private providers. These transport problems have a direct impact on the beneficiaries of local charities providing employability services, who are pressured by government to find a job but who cannot access them because bus times do not cover the night shifts that large retail and logistics firms require (conversation with charity staff, Thurnscoe, February 2024). Without good transport, the employability initiatives organised by charities are likely to be wasted. It is here where the efforts of Unite Community could be more targeted to help charity groups build a united voice and advocacy.

Another area of contribution could be in the efforts at addressing discrimination and racism against migrant workers. Unite Community has been active in demanding the ceasefire of the war in Gaza and in overcoming Islamophobia. These efforts could be more targeted at fighting racism encountered more locally. For example, ELSH staff have experienced racism and its premises vandalism (conversation with staff, Barnsley, February 2024) because they are known to support migrants and refugees, many from the Middle East and North Africa, whose links to the UK follow colonial relationships (Refugee Action, 2024). Although the police have been relatively effective in preventing violence against migrants, the activities organised by ELSH and other organisations in the Migrant Network in Barnsley prefer to remain off the radar of the town's predominant white-British population. For example, the secluded venue in which the weekly migrant hub takes place– where a wide range of services for immigrants and refugees gather weekly. In chatting with a volunteer at the hub, she underlined to me that seclusion was protection. But it could also be interpreted as seclusion feeding into migrants' marginalisation within the hostile environment.

Community unionism might be a vehicle to help overcome racial and colonial divisions. Unite Community was one of the key actors in organising anti-racist protests in Barnsley Town to counter the far-right group's threatening visit to Wellington House (premises of the

Refugee Council and other service providers) and the subsequent protest 8 August 2024 (phone conversation with ELSH). However, Unite Community's absence from the more grounded daily practices organised by the Migrant Network shows the lack of resources needed to build a more inclusive solidarity within communities' daily life. Without the grounded presence of community unionism, the solidarity that popular economies advocate for to overcome racial and colonial power relations is seriously halted.

Conclusions

The debates on precarity, informality and popular economies addressed by the paper have been helpful in developing a conceptual and analytical framework that decentres the relationality of the state, while emphasising the dialectical relationships of production-social reproduction in place-making of post-industrial towns. I have argued that precarity exposes informality in local governance arrangements. Through them, networks of solidarity develop but do not necessarily pursue social change. I incorporated the popular economies debates as a way to deploy such change given their insights on the effects of gender and racial exclusion upon precarity when boundaries between work, community and home are blurred.

This framework was helpful in studying the English context, which has been subject to four narratives identified as broken Britain, left behind places, take back control and hostile environment. These narratives tend to divide vulnerable communities into two main targeted groups: the native welfare claimants and the migrant other. Subject to further research, the paper illustrated how this division might be a reason preventing social change in a more inclusive and holistic ways. More specifically, the Barnsley case has shown how the caring practices of community volunteers are overlooked in the same manner as the traditional unpaid practices of care and domestic work. The caring practices of place-making are important, because through their mapping between the individual, community and workplace spheres, initial steps to overcome their invisibility in local governance arrangements can be approached.

In presenting the paper's framework, I also raised three ways in which the literature and debates of global Southern contexts have provided insights into studying precarious work and local governance in Barnsley. The first is the acknowledgement of state institutions and actors contributing to the categorisation and prevalence of informality through administrative and governance processes. In Barnsley this has been reflected in the council's area governance model. This model has shown how over decades, community and employability services have slowly decentred the local state either by default or by inviting other community groups and charitable organisations to take part in service provision. The area model is based on hybrid in/formal arrangements, which on the one hand rely on the standardisation of voluntary work. This work is mostly invisible to formal policy and openly unpaid. On the other hand, the efforts and work brought by these arrangements are embedded in a broader context of precarious work compounded with material and social precarity, which categorise the borough as being left behind. The findings show how

multiple dimensions of precarity create, in turn, organisational precarity experienced and developed by these community and charitable organisations. Equally, organisational precarity is experienced by the structure of the council and its initiatives of off-loading as a result of years of fiscal austerity.

Second, the paper has shown the role of the state spearheading when and how to make in/visible what is deemed as formal or informal depending on what it wants to achieve. On the one hand, Barnsley Council recognises the use/social value of voluntary work through, for example, its commitment to maintaining the model despite the pressures of austerity. On the other hand, the council contributes to work and organisational precarity of its post-industrial economy through its dependence on community volunteering and its related caring practices that communities develop in their everyday experience of place-making. At the national level, the state addresses the margins through a series of initiatives to tackle the regional inequalities found in the 'left behind places' narrative. However, it rejects recognising the importance of voluntary work (as the comment made by Mike) in building, maintaining and developing the social infrastructures needed to cope with and navigate the retrenchment of the national and local state.

Finally, the paper showed how non-state and vulnerable actors associated with informality are not passive. On the contrary, in the agency they hold, they find ways to challenge, albeit not always subversively, the status quo. The Barnsley case showed how, through the popular economies literature, it is useful to consider colonial approaches of domination. It is yet to be seen how the moral communities (Tomaney et al., 2023) in which many towns in the borough were historically formed – which held pride for the British Empire - clash or not with other values of solidarity brought by new waves of migration. Although most new arrivals are concentrated in Barnsley Town, other villages are also experiencing new migration of people who either live or work there and are becoming more active in volunteering activities that care for community. In these cases, the challenge lies in the acts of racism present in everyday administrative processes of public sector and local charity staff when registering and supporting immigrants or asylum seekers (Mosselson, 2021; Yuval Davies, et al., 2019), as well as the institutional racism found in, for example, the fundraising that ELSH encountered.

Inspired by popular economies, the paper suggested that efforts of community unionism might become a vehicle to help overcome racial and colonial divisions. Unite Community has thought of an alternative, but its absence from the more grounded daily practices shows that acts of compassion and solidarity, that the concept of care alludes to, are not enough to challenge racial and colonial power relations. As Segal (2023:201) argues, more 'feeling with people' rather than promoting a 'detached sentiment of pity' is needed in the daily politics of compassion and care. Building upon British feminist discussions, social reproductive practices have helped to overcome perceptions of passivity through caring for place to counter harmful policy discourses, but there is still room for further development when addressing race in communities of place.

References

Allison, A. (2012) Ordinary refugees: Social precarity and soul in 21st century Japan. *Anthropological Quarterly*, *85*(2), 345–370.

Banks, N., M. Lombard and D. Mitlin (2019) Urban informality as a site of critical analysis. *Journal of Development Studies* 56.2, 223–38.

Bayat, A. (2010) *Life as politics: how ordinary people change the Middle East*. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

Beatty C, S. Fothergill S, T. Gore et al. (2022) *The Real Level of Unemployment 2022*. Sheffield, UK: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University.

BMBC (n/d_a) More and better jobs 2021-2024: An employment and skills strategy for Barnsley, URL: https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/16993/employment-and-skills-strategy.pdf - accessed 12 April 2024.

BMBC (n/d_b) Area council and ward alliance annual report 2022-24, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, URL: https://www.canva.com/design/DAFqNKqJTZo/9-8Bqbg7JQ8ukBaypabhmw/view?utm_content=DAFqNKqJTZo&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink – accessed 12 April 2024.

BMBC (2019) Poverty in Barnsley: Preliminary findings IMD 2019, September, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, URL: https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/15794/imd2019.pdf - accessed 12 April 2024

BMBC (2022) Barnsley Levelling Up Bid, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, URL: https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/our-council/barnsley-2030/levelling-up-barnsley/ - accessed 8 March 2024.

Bright, N.G. (2016) 'The lady is not returning!': educational precarity and a social haunting in the UK coalfields, *Ethnography and Education*, 11(2), 142-157.

Capecchi, V. (1989) The informal economy and the development of flexible specialization in Emilia-Romagna, in A. Portes, M. Castells and L.A. Benton (eds.) *The informal economy: Studies in advanced and less developed countries*, Baltimore: John Hopkings University Press, 189-215.

Cavallero, L. and v. Gago (2021) A feminist reading of debt, London: Pluto Press.

Cielo, C., Gago, V. and N. Tassi (2023) Introducción, in V. Gago, C. Cielo and N. Tassi (eds.) *Economías populares una cartografía latinoamericana*, Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 11-54.

Coraggio, J.L. (1998) *Economía urbana: La perspectiva popular*, Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala.

Coutard, O. and J. Rutherford (2016) Beyond the networked city: an introduction, in O. Coutard and J. Rutherford (eds.) *Beyond the networked city: infrastructure reconfirgurations and urban change in the North and South*, London: Routledge, 1-25.

Danewid, I. (2020) The fire this time: Grenfell, racial capitalism and the urbanisation of empire, *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(1), 289-313.

Das, V. and D. Poole (eds.) (2004) *Anthropology in the margins of the state: comparative ethnographies*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Dwyer, P. (2014) Universal Credit, ubiquitous conditionality and its implications for social citizenship, *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 22(1), 27-35.

Emery, J. (2018) Geographies of deindustrialization and the working-class: Industrial ruination, legacies and affect, *Geography Compass*, 13(2), e12417.

Emery, J. (2022) Urban trauma in the ruins of industrial culture: Miners' Welfares of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, UK, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 23(5), 639-659.

Esguerra Muelle, C., D. Ojeda and F. Fleischer (2022) Forced Displacement, Migration, and (Trans)national Care Networks Practices of Urban Space Production in Colombia and Spain, in L. Peake et al. (eds.) *Urban Theory for Our Time: Rethinking social reproduction and the urban*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 215-235.

Etherington, D., M. Jones, and L. Telford (2022) Challenges to levelling up: Post-COVID precarity in "left behind" Stoke-on-Trent, *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.1033525

Federici, S. (2012) Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle. Binghamton, NY: PMpress

Gago, V. and S. Mezzadra (2017) A critique of the extractive operations of capital: Toward and expanded concept of extractivism, Rethinking Marxism, 29(4), 574-591.

Gamble, A. (2018) Taking back control: the political implications of Brexit. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(8), 1215–1232.

Guarneros-Meza, V. and A. Jenss (2022) Transformed Security Practices: Informalization in the Production of Hegemony and Place, International Journal for Urban and Regional Research, 46(4), 614-630.

Haid, C. and H. Hilbrandt, 2019 (2019) Urban informality and the state: Geographical translations and conceptual alliances, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(3), 551-562.

Hastings, A. G. Bramley, N. Bailey et al. (2012) Serving deprived communities in a recession, Joseph Roundtree Foundation, URL: https://www.jrf.org.uk/serving-deprived-communities-in-a-recession [accessed July 2023].

Hall, S. (2021) The migrant's paradox: Street livelihoods and marginal citizenship in Britain, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hart, K. (1973) Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 11(1), 61-89.

Halvorsen, S. (2019), Decolonising territory: Dialogues with Latin American knowledges and grassroots strategies, *Progress in Human Geography*, *43*(5), 790-814

Hincks, S. and R. Powell (2022), Territorial stigmatisation beyond the city: Habitus, affordances and landscapes of industrial ruination, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 54(7), 1391-1410.

Hitchen, E. and R. Raynor (2020) Encountering austerity in everyday life: Intensities, localities, materialities, *Geoforum,* 110, 186- 190.

Holgate, J. (2015). Community organising in the UK: A 'new' approach for trade unions? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 36(3), 431-455.

Jaffe, R. and M. Koster (2019) The myth of formality in the global North: informality-as-innovation in Dutch governance. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43.3, 563–8.

Johns, M. (2020) 10 years of austerity: Eroding resilience in the North, institute for Public Policy Research, URL: https://www.ippr.org/articles/10-years-of-austerity [accessed July 2023].

Jolly, A. (2023) Can participatory arts-based methodologies be used to create frameworks of knowledge that benefit communities in struggle in Merseyside?, Master by Research Dissertation, Edge Hill University.

Jupp, E. (2022) *Care, crisis and activism: The politics of everyday life*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Kane, M. (2023) The violent uncanny: Exploring the material politics of austerity, *Political Geography*, 102, 102843, 1-10.

Kemp, A., J. Resnik and T. Sharabi (2022) Urban governance of liminal legality comparing the incorporation of migrant children in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, *Political Geography*, 98, 102645, 1-12.

Lazar, S. and A. Sanches (2019) Understanding labour politics in an age of precarity. *Dialectical Anthropol*ogy, 43, 3–14.

Ledeneva, A. (2012) Sistema-Russia's informal system of power. In A. Ledeneva, C. Granville and P. Hanson (eds.), *Three views on modernisation and the rule of law in Russia*, Centre for European Reform, University College London. URL: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1346415/ (accessed 7 July 2020)

Ledeneva, A. (ed.) (2018) *The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality: Understanding social and cultural complexity*, London: UCL Press.

Lees, L., H.B. Shin and E. López-Morales (2016) *Planetary Gentrification*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Local Trust (2023) Trusting local people: Putting real power in the hands of communities, February 2023, URL: https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/trusting-local-people/ - accessed 12 April 2024.

Lombard, M. (2023) The experience of precarity: low-paid economic migrants' housing in Manchester, *Housing Studies*, 38(2), 307-326.

Marx, C. and E. Kelling (2019) Knowing urban informalities, *Urban Studies* 56.3, 494–509.

McNelly, A. (2022) Baroque modernity in Latin America: Situating indigeneity, urban indigeneity and the popular economy, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 41(1), 6-20.

Mosselson, A. (2021) Cities of Sanctuary in Environments of Hostility: Competing and Contrasting Migration Infrastructures, *Antipode*, 53(6), 1725-1744.

Newton, S. (2018) Conclusion: when do informal practices turn into informal institutions? Informal constitutions and informal 'meta-rules', in A. Ledeneva (ed.) *The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality: Understanding social and cultural complexity*, vol. 2, London: UCL Press, 474-477.

ODLME (2023) *United Kingdom Market Enforcement Strategy 2022-23*, March 2023, HM Government.

Pattison, J. (2022) "There's just too many": The construction of immigration as a social problem, British Journal of Sociology, 73(2), 273-290.

Pettifor, A. (2016). Brexit and its Consequences. *Globalizations*, *14*(1), 127–132

Pike. A. (2023) *Financialization of local statecraft*, Oxford University Press.

Pill, M. and V. Guarneros-Meza (2020) The everyday local state? Opening up and closing down informality in local governance, Local Governance Studies, 46(4), 542-563.

Preece, J. (2019). Belonging in working-class neighbourhoods: dis-identification, territorialisation and biographies of people and place. *Urban Studies*, 57(4), 827-843.

Refugee Action (2024) Asylum in the UK: A frontline for racial justice. URL https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/racism/ - accessed January 2025.

del Río, S., S.M. Hall, E. Ackerley and L. Fenton (2025) Austere life-courses and foreclosed futures: A relational geographical approach to work, housing, and family across austerity Europe, *Dialogues in Human Geography*, DOI: 10.1177/20438206251316005.

Rogaly, B. (2020) *Stories from a migrant city: living and working together in the shadow of Brexit*, Manchester: University of Manchester.

Robinson, J. (2023) *Comparative urbanism: Tactics for global urban studies*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

Roy, A (2005) Urban informality: Toward and epistemology of planning, American Planning Association, Journal of the American Planning Association, 71(2), 147-158.

Segal, L. (2023) *Lean on Me: A politics of radical care*, London: Verso.

Schaplan, J. and J. Heyes (2017) How close are formal and informal work? *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 37(7/8), 374-386.

Schilling, H., T. Blokland and A. Simone (2019) Working precarity: urban youth tactics to make livelihoods in instable conditions in Abidjan, Athens, Berlin and Jakarta, *Sociological Review*, 67(6), 1333-1349.

Schindler, S. (2014) Understanding urban processes in Flint, Michigan: Approaching 'subaltern urbanism' inductively, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 83(3), 791–804.

Schmid, C., O. Karaman, N.C. Hanakata, et al. (2018). Towards a new vocabulary of urbanisation processes: A comparative approach. *Urban Studies*, 55(1), 19-52.

Scott, J. (1985) *Weapons of the Poor: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Skeggs, B. (2011) Imagining personhood differently: person value and autonomist working-class value practices, *Sociological Review*, 59(3), 496-513.

Strangleman, T. (2018) Mining a productive seam? The coal industry, community and sociology, *Contemporary British History*, 32(1), 18-38.

Stride, G. and M. Woods (2024) *The state of local government finance 2024*, Local Government Information Unit, URL: https://lgiu.org/publication/the-state-of-local-government-finance-in-england-2024/ [accessed March 2024]

Tomaney, J., M. Blackman, L. Natarajan et al. (2023) *Social infrastructure and 'left behind' places*, Regional Studies Policy Impact Books.

Tonkiss, F. (2013) *Cities by design: the social life of urban form*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tyler, I. (2020) *Stigma: The machinery of inequality*, London: Zed Books.

Tronto, J. (2013) Caring Democracy: Markets, equality, and justice, New York: New York University Press.

UN-HRC (2019) Visit to the United Kingdom and Norther Ireland: Report of the special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/41/39/Add.1, April 2019.

Virdee, S. (2014) *Racism, Class, and the Racialised Outsider*. London: Macmillan/Red Globe.

Wells, P. and R. Ardon (2009) *Evaluation of the South Yorkshire social infrastructure programme, Report I: Partnership, voice, engagement and influence*, UK: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University.

Wills, J. (2017) (Re)Locating community in relationships: questions for public policy, *Sociological Review*, 64, 639-656.

Yiftachel, O. (2009) Critical theory and 'gray space': Mobilization of the colonized, *City*, 13(2), 246-263.

Yuval-Davis, N., G. Wemyss and K. Cassidy (2019) *Bordering*, Cambridge: Polity Press.