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Contributive Injustice and Unequal Division of Labour in the Voluntary Sector

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Abstract

This article examines how the unequal division of unpaid labour within voluntary organisations can produce contributive injustice. Contributive injustice occurs when people are denied the opportunity to have meaningful work and the recognition associated with it. The unequal social division of labour affects people's opportunities to access complex and routine tasks, shaping their capacity to develop their own abilities, respect, and self-esteem, and hence the meaningfulness of their work. The study uses the moral economy of labour perspective to understand and evaluate how the unequal division of labour can shape people's capabilities and well-being. While the article is sympathetic to Eliasoph's symbolic interactionist approach to volunteering, which seeks to focus on the quality of civic engagement and public dialogue, it reveals this framework to have some shortcomings. This empirical study is based upon an analysis of 41 participants' volunteering activities.

Unpaid voluntary work is often viewed as being important in developing civic activism and making democracy work, as well as providing goods and services to meet the needs of vulnerable recipients (Eliasoph, 1998). But this neglects how work can also be a source of fulfilment, allowing volunteers to develop and exercise their cognitive and social capabilities and to make meaningful contributions to projects. As a form of work, people's experiences and meanings of volunteering are likely to be affected by how the division of labour is organised and institutionalised. Sayer (2011) writes, 'An unequal division of labour limits what some people can do and hence the extent to which they can

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develop their own abilities and find fulfilment, respect and self-esteem' (p. 17). Technical and social divisions of labour within charities (meaning the division of tasks within particular kinds of work and the allocation of volunteers to tasks) can produce some harmful and damaging effects because complex, skilled, varied, and creative tasks are often concentrated into a subset of positions, and people from privileged backgrounds and social connections are more likely to occupy these positions, leaving routine, deskilled, menial, and unexciting tasks to others. Gomberg (2007) calls the effects 'contributive injustice'. Contributive injustice occurs when people are denied the chance to have fulfilling and stimulating work, and the recognition and status associated with it.

Whereas some volunteers are able to hold core positions of command, decision-making, strategic planning and management, others occupy peripheral and less strategic roles, thereby affecting the meaningfulness and value of their contributions. What people are allowed to contribute in terms of volunteering can have effects on how they develop as individuals and how they view themselves and are viewed by others, thereby affecting their quality of life. Sayer (2011) also argues that the unequal division of labour strongly structures the social field, so that class socialisation, dispositions, and forms of capitals affect people's chances to obtain valued and prized positions. While some studies on volunteering (such as Dean, 2016) implicitly acknowledge that the unequal division of labour structures the social field, this article will make the link explicit. Drawing upon a qualitative study of 41 participants' volunteering activities, this article will examine the nature and quality of work volunteers undertake, and to what extent they regard their contribution as meaningful. It will also discuss how social class can give people particular advantages in accessing more complex voluntary tasks and roles. The article makes an innovative input to the literature on volunteering and work by exploring how the concepts of unequal division of labour, social field, and contributive injustice are intertwined.

Survey research provides some information on the prevalence of volunteering and the nature of the division of volunteer labour. Mohan and Bulloch (2012) report that in the UK, the 'primary civic core' represents 8.9% of the population, but contributes over half of volunteer hours, two-fifths of charitable giving, and just under one-quarter of civic participation. The 'secondary civic core' comprises about 27.1% of the population, and contributes 40%, 40%, and 50% of the activities, respectively. Only 15.4% of the population (the 'disengaged core') record no giving, volunteering, or associational participation at all. Members of the civic core are drawn predominantly from the most prosperous, middle-aged, and highly educated sections of the population. Musick and Wilson (2008) observe that volunteer tasks are stratified along vertical and horizontal dimensions. The former describes the division of tasks from simple and repetitive tasks, which offer little opportunity for creativity and discretion, to complex and varied ones, which allow for autonomy and decision-making. The latter examines social differences within strata, usually describing how class, gender, and ethnicity are likely to determine what types of task volunteers perform. Musick and Wilson (2008) note that survey data often find an association between occupational status and task assignment. Professional and managerial workers are more likely to help organise events, counsel, visit the sick and the elderly, and do clerical work. Unskilled manual workers are least likely to tutor or train, give presentations, give advice, serve on a committee, or do administrative work.

But as Musick and Wilson (2008) argue, a major problem with survey data on volunteering is that 'the conceptualisation and measurement of tasks is not guided by sociological theory but is largely substantive and intuitive' (p. 419). For instance, Low et al. (2007) classify volunteering activities according to categories such as 'raising, handling money', 'organising, helping run an event', 'transporting' and 'visiting people' (p. 45). Often, surveys do not classify activities according to more abstract categories, such as whether the work is complex or repetitive, skilled or unskilled, fulfilling or lacks purpose and excitement, whether it allows for significant decision-making, autonomy, and creativity or is dull and closely supervised, or whether it offers opportunities to achieve things and foster social relationships or is trivial and alienating. This article will depart from these surveys to provide a qualitative and analytical account of the nature of unpaid voluntary work that draws upon the concepts of unequal division of labour, social field, and contributive injustice.

The article has four sections. The first section will discuss two frameworks. Although the symbolic interactionist perspective to volunteering recognises the qualitative nature of unpaid voluntary, it misses how the unequal division of labour structures the social field within voluntary associations to produce contributive injustice. The moral economy of labour perspective provides a fruitful mode of inquiry to understand the importance of the unequal division of labour into tasks and roles of widely differing quality and the implications for the micro-politics of work and human well-being. In the second section, I will describe the research design and methods. The third section will analyse the data, examining the qualitative nature of volunteers' tasks and roles and their work in relation to class. In the fourth section, a discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks will be offered.

Theoretical perspectives on volunteering

The symbolic interactionist perspective

Neo-Tocquevillian scholars (e.g. Putnam, 1995) argue that in participating in voluntary associations, citizens can cultivate their skills and enlarge their circles of concern that are necessary to make democracy work. Ideally, volunteers gather as equals, learning to talk freely on a range of issues, to debate on common concerns, and to coordinate action together. In longitudinal studies, society's participatory democratic culture is interpreted as either declining or strengthening depending on the relative growth of voluntary associations, membership size, and members' time spent in groups. While Eliasoph (1998) agrees with Neo-Tocquevillian scholars that participation is important for a vibrant civil society and democracy, the quality of public dialogue and interaction within voluntary groups also matters. Contrary to popular expectations, volunteers can also learn to limit their imaginations to a small circle of concern, to narrow their social and political horizons, and to avoid talking politics, at least in public settings.

Drawing upon the work of Erving Goffman, Eliasoph (1998) examines how different social settings of interaction among volunteers affect political talk, engagement, and apathy. In her early ethnographic study of several voluntary groups in an American suburb on the West Coast, Eliasoph (1996) discusses the difference between backstage and

frontstage conversation in voluntary groups, and how volunteers create space for open-ended conversations and what obstacles they face. For instance, in meetings of a Parent Teacher Association style voluntary group, committed members hushed free-flowing public-spirited conversations, and avoided talking politics, believing open conversation was just rhetoric and would not accomplish anything positive. When a new member wanted to discuss the school's lack of response to reports about a teacher making racists comments, Nazi skinheads recruiting at lunchtime outside the schoolyard and a planned concert of the White Aryan Resistance in town, other members felt the group was not the proper channel to deal with these issues. Meetings largely focused on projects that volunteers considered 'do-able', such as fundraising and buying provisions for school trips (Eliasoph, 1997). The core members assumed that free-ranging discussion would undermine the group's main purpose of inspiring good feelings and showing that volunteers can be effective and make a difference. Outside of meetings, backstage, volunteers freely discussed controversial issues in a public-spirited way. Eliasoph (1998) notes that 'probably for most Americans, the public sphere is a dry and dismal place, from which intelligence, curiosity and generosity have evaporated' (p. 263).

Expanding the idea that people create contexts that either facilitates open-ended political conversation or avoids political talk, Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014) argue that volunteers and state officials learn to stage different kinds of talk and action, or styles of civic action, as they switch from one scene to another. Interestingly, Eliasoph (1998: 265) claims that her early ethnographic study did not find a relationship between civic engagement and volunteers' class positions. Her focus was on how volunteers in groups interpret institutional and structural conditions, and create contexts for the display and production of civic engagement, rather than their biographies, positions, and ideologies. As Eliasoph (1998) states, 'Instead, asking primarily how *individuals* adjust to *predetermined* contexts, I focus more on *groups'* processes of *producing* contexts' (p. 236).

In more recent works, Eliasoph (2011, 2013) recognises that civic participation can amplify pre-existing inequalities.[1] For instance, students at elite boarding schools can have more resources and connections than high-school students to access good internships and rewarding volunteer opportunities, such as 'voluntourism'. Elite students are in a better position to proudly show to others that they are independent, free-willed caring stewards of the world. Eliasoph (2013) explains that civic '[a]ssociations provide grounds for networking, thus increasing the power of the powerful' (p. 198). While some civic organisations, such as trade unions and self-help groups, can empower non-elites to think, speak, and make decisions for themselves, thereby nurturing participatory democracy, in most cases, lower status volunteers do not have an active or vocal role. Eliasoph (2013) argues that political ideologies, economic suppression, the shame of appearing in public lacking, and the inability to articulate and speak intelligently limit lower status volunteers' open-ended political talk and meaningful participation. They learn to create the appearance of apathy, and focus on smaller, more 'do-able' projects.

Eliasoph (2011, 2013) explains how social divisions and new funding regimes can affect the quality of civic engagement. She also offers some remarks on how leaderless and consensus decision-making structures contrast with rigid hierarchical structures. But she does not really examine how divisions between mental and manual unpaid labour within civic organisations can structure volunteers' opportunities to access quality tasks

and roles, or can shape their cognitive and social abilities. In analysing the quality of volunteers' dialogue and interaction, Eliasoph (1998, 2011, 2013) ignores how technical and social divisions of labour within voluntary organisations can affect people's authority and opportunities to discuss issues in committees and meetings, and to design and coordinate action. Moreover, as Musick and Wilson (2008) note, class, gender, and ethnicity are likely to affect people's access to complex tasks, which allow for creativity, autonomy, and decision-making. In failing to grasp how unequal divisions of unpaid labour structure the social field so that different social groups have unequal chances to engage in core tasks and roles (such as decision-making and strategic planning), Eliasoph weakens her own analysis, critique and ideal of people's interaction and dialogue.

There are other weaknesses in her framework. In offering a talk-centred study of voluntary groups and being dismissive of 'do-able' projects, Eliasoph (1996, 1998, 2013) bifurcates volunteering into two distinct spheres of public dialogue and work (or communication and production), valorising the former and denying the latter any intrinsic quality or value for human flourishing. But as Breen (2007) argues, production and labour can embody possibilities of self-realisation, creativity, autonomy, and self-esteem unavailable in other activities. Rather than treating dialogue and work as distinct spheres of activity, this article will show how voluntary tasks can vary in terms of their unity of conception and execution of work, thereby affecting their meaningfulness. Furthermore, whereas Eliasoph uses the normative standpoint of participatory democracy to evaluate volunteers' civic practices, this article will draw upon an alternative standpoint of contributive justice to evaluate unpaid voluntary work in terms of people's opportunities to develop and exercise abilities and the effects on their well-being.

The moral economy of labour perspective

While major social theorists (such as Habermas and Eliasoph) separate work and social action, viewing the former as a realm of technical and natural necessity and the latter as a realm of moral freedom and justice, Murphy (1993) argues that moral reason cannot be excluded from the realm of production. Sayer (2000) explains that the economy is also a 'moral' economy because economic structures and relationships (including divisions of unpaid labour in households and voluntary organisations) shape and are shaped by moral emotions, norms, rules, values, and beliefs. Rather than equating emotions with unthinking and thus irrational responses, Mizen (2015) observes that they are (fallible) intelligent and discerning commentaries on social situations and experiences. In addition to being an object of study, moral economy of labour is a kind of inquiry that explains and evaluates the nature of dignity and degradation of work, what kinds of work promote or diminish human flourishing, who accesses them, and what opportunities can be created for self-realisation at work. These aspects are discussed below.

There are two ways in which work can promote human dignity and flourishing. First, the unity of conception and execution of tasks can make work fulfilling and meaningful. Murphy (1993) writes, 'What gives skilled work its dignity, according to Aristotle, is that a worker first constructs in thought what he then embodies in matter; conversely, what makes unskilled work sordid is that one man executes the thought of another' (p. 8). Splitting planning and execution of tasks between different individuals can reduce the

capacity of work to be a source of well-being. Second, people have reason to value and seek complex and varied tasks over simple and repetitive ones because they are able to develop and exercise their cognitive and social abilities, and to gain satisfactions, achievements, skills, and excellences (i.e. internal goods) through sustained participation in specific practices as well as to obtain recognition, power, and status (i.e. external goods) associated with them (Breen, 2007; Gomberg, 2007). In contrast, routine tasks can stifle thought, imagination, and skills, offering little pleasure and esteem.

Given that most organisations lack the unity of conception and execution of tasks and have unequal divisions of work into tasks and roles of widely different qualities, only some people are able to access and undertake attractive kinds of work, leaving others to do unpleasant ones. Unequal social divisions of labour mean valued tasks and roles are scarce. This produces contributive injustice because only some get the opportunity to engage in rewarding work and to make meaningful contributions at the expense of others, who are left to do less exciting and interesting tasks. The former also get the chance of obtaining social recognition and self-esteem that are denied to the latter.

Murphy (1993) explains that the term 'division of labour' refers to two different operations: how tasks are delineated (the technical division of labour), and how workers are assigned to those tasks (the social division of labour). While the quest for efficiency can account for the former, it cannot explain the latter. The specialisation of functions in education, medicine, law, business, and other areas does not logically entail that specialists only perform skilled and complex tasks, while avoiding or passing on deskilled and repetitive ones to non-specialists. Although the unequal social division of labour is often justified and naturalised as merely reflecting differences in workers' abilities and aspirations, in reality, power and domination affect who accesses what kinds of work. Breen (2007) argues that the social division of labour is institutionalised through organisational and occupational rules, procedures, and norms in better or worse ways as a result of the disparity in power and control enjoyed by managers, specialists, and non-specialists.

Sayer (2011) draws upon Bourdieu's ideas on class inequalities and symbolic domination to explain that differences in ability, aptitude, and aspirations are developed long before young people go into work, so that class socialisation, embodiment, and capitals shape their expectations, motivations, and aspirations, leading members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups to normalise complex and routine work, respectively. Sexism and racism can also affect people's expectations, aspirations, and chances of getting esteemed positions (Gomberg, 2007). Sayer (2011) explains that the social field is strongly structured by the unequal division of labour into tasks of widely differing quality, and people use their class dispositions and capitals to compete and struggle for quality tasks. In his study on youth volunteering, Dean (2016) observes that middle-class young people had the habitus to play the game of volunteering with ease and comfort and to '"hoover up" good activities' using their cultural and economic capital to their advantage, whereas working-class young people lacked the habitus to play the game and missed out on quality volunteering (p. 109S).

The link between the unequal division of labour and the social field is implicit in Dean's (2016) study, but it needs to be made explicit to counter misconceptions that access to good activities merely reflects people's differences in class dispositions and cultural capital. For instance, in her study of volunteering in the National Trust, Harflett

(2015) argues that differences in personal interests and cultural taste for heritage or the countryside largely explained who volunteered, and that this accounted for the white, middle-class social profile of National Trust volunteers. But her analysis fails to explicitly examine how the social field is structured by a limited number of quality volunteering roles. Similarly, Macmillan (2013) suggests that the voluntary sector is a competitive and contested field of struggle in which people develop and deploy strategies of distinction to preserve and advance their position. While it is important to understand how symbolic domination occurs in the social field, people's ability to occupy quality positions is also shaped by the structural scarcity of these positions.

Sayer (2011) argues that merely reducing symbolic domination and discrimination would not have much impact on the inequalities in the availability of work of different qualities because they are partly an outcome of scarce quality positions. Unless there are rules and norms to equally share or rotate complex and routine tasks (as sometimes happen in democratic households and work teams), inequalities and contributive injustice will occur. Unequal divisions of labour are structural obstacles to equality and justice. As Murphy (1993) observes, 'If our real concern is for human happiness and welfare, then we should be more concerned about the distribution of challenging work than about the distribution of income' (p. 4). Modern theories of justice tend to focus on distribution and exchange, and are concerned with what people have, rather than what they do and the nature and quality of their work. The moral economy of labour perspective uses the idea of contributive justice to evaluate the effects of the unequal social division of labour on people's well-being.

To sum up, this study will examine the nature of contributive injustice in the voluntary sector. It will address the following questions: What was the qualitative nature of volunteers' tasks and roles? To what extent did they regard their work as meaningful? How did class shape their opportunities to access quality positions? Whereas several empirical studies (e.g. Laaser, 2016) have used the moral economy perspective to explore the changing nature of paid work in post-industrial societies, this article will extend the moral economy of labour analysis to unpaid work in the voluntary sector.

Research design and methods

The study initially used purposive sampling to recruit participants relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). Emails were sent to various local charity and public organisations asking donors and volunteers to contact the author. Several participants were recruited in this way. The author then used snowball sampling to recruit other participants who had the experience of giving time and money. Participants often suggested their friends, work colleagues, and fellow volunteers. Some participants were recruited through opportunistic sampling because they had particular experiences and social characteristics relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012). The author conducted 41 semi-structured interviews between 2008 and 2009, mostly in Kent, UK. The participants included public sector administrators, self-employed workers, homemakers, university lecturers, and retirees. Some participants were known to the author that allowed for greater rapport and probing (Bryman, 2012). The study was granted ethical approval by the author's departmental research ethics committee. At the start of the interviews, the participants

consented to be recorded, and were assured that the data would be anonymised and stored in password-protected files.

The sample consisted of 25 women, 15 men, and one transgender person. The participants were mostly white British. The study had seven retirees. It is sometimes difficult in empirical research to classify with precision participants' class position, because so much depends on the volume and composition of their economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital and their trajectory in the social space (Skeggs, 1997: 8–9). In this study, classification was determined through their family upbringing, education, and occupation. Some participants self-identified as upper middle, middle, or working class. Nineteen interviewees were categorised as working class, and were either unemployed or in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. They had left school with few qualifications or were mature university students, and their family life had been one of struggling to make ends meet. Sixteen interviewees were categorised as lower middle class, and mostly had semi-skilled or skilled employment. They had been to university, and were managing to cope financially. Six participants were classified as upper middle class, and were often in highly skilled or professional occupations. They possessed a postgraduate qualification, and had a comfortable lifestyle. The names of the interviewees have been changed to provide anonymity.

Some critical realists, such as Pawson (1996), argue that interviews are theory-driven, meaning that the researcher's theory is the subject matter of the interview, and the interviewee confirms, falsifies, or refines that theory. In the study, qualitative interviews were used not merely to collect detailed information about the participants' charitable and volunteering activities, but to test and refine the author's propositions and hypotheses about donations and volunteering. The interview questions explored how the participants understood their priorities, motivations and decisions about giving, and the various ways they organised and juggled different forms of work (including paid employment and unpaid domestic work) and education. The interviews, which lasted on average two and a quarter hours (ranging from one and a quarter hours to four and a half hours), covered a range of topics, including the nature of their unpaid voluntary work, donations, and informal giving, as well as their education, employment history, and family life. The majority of participants were or had been involved in regular formal volunteering, and many had donated regularly to charities or had given informal support to neighbours and friends.

Sayer (1992) and Blaikie (2010) note that critical realists tend to employ a retroductive research strategy, which aims to discover the underlying mechanisms that explain observed regularities in particular contexts. Retroduction involves developing a hypothetical model of structures and mechanisms that is assumed to produce observable or familiar events and objects, and then the analysis works back from the empirical data to possible explanations. The author adopted this strategy to postulate a hypothetical model of structures and mechanisms, which included the unequal social division of labour and class dispositions, to explain the participants' positive and negative experiences of volunteering. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The author read the transcripts several times to understand what themes were emerging, and how they related to the literature (Silverman, 2011). NVivo 10 computer software was used to manage the transcripts and to help with coding the data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Several key themes,

such as 'middle class', 'middle class emotions', 'working class' and 'working class emotions', were used to analyse how class related to more or less meaningful voluntary tasks and roles. The analysis revealed similarities and differences among the participants' histories of unpaid voluntary work, especially what kinds of work they did, and to what extent these were meaningful to them. Other themes, including 'reflexivity', 'sympathy', 'gender', 'religious rules', 'justice' and 'discourses', were also developed, but they were not used for this article. At the end of the labelling stage, the author wrote extended notes on each theme and interviewee to develop his analytic thinking (Rapley, 2011).

Unequal social division of voluntary labour

This section will examine the qualitative nature of volunteers' tasks and roles and their meaningfulness. It will also discuss who often had access to good activities. Because of lack of space, the article will not discuss donations or informal giving.

Good roles and meaningful activities

Murphy (1993) and Gomberg (2007) argue that combining conception and execution of tasks produces fulfilling work and contributive justice. In the study, some participants occupied roles that had a mix of tasks with different qualities. They performed both complex tasks (e.g. designing projects and managing activities) and routine ones (e.g. transporting and maintenance). For instance, William, an upper middle-class lecturer, established and managed two recycling projects: a computer recycling scheme, and a community recycling group. For the former, he described his role:

> I set up a formal computer recycling scheme which intercepted the computers before they got in the skips …. And had a little room and they got taken there by myself and I brought in other friends and other people heard about it. We looked at them, refurbished them, stripped them down, whatever and, for a nominal you know for what was a very good price, sold them on.

William set up the computer recycling scheme at his university while completing his doctoral studies. As a director, he made decisions and coordinated activities, having considerable autonomy, discretion, and responsibility. He also performed less skilled tasks, such as transporting disused computers from industrial estates and large companies. Soon after leaving the scheme, while working as a post-doctoral researcher, he set up and ran an online community recycling group, which allowed members to recycle unwanted goods. His role involved managing the website, moderating postings, and resolving disputes between members. He found the two recycling projects fulfilling because he was responsible for designing and running them, and they embodied his values of not wasting things and protecting the environment. In the sample, seven other participants also had established new voluntary projects and associations, including an independent primary school, a local naval museum, a school craft club, a local historical association, and a community temple. At the start, their positions often consisted of a mix of differing quality tasks. For instance, Terry, an upper middle-class business owner, was the chair of a local museum, and he initially did several tasks:

> Originally I was the chairman and I was working anything from you know a paint brush to riveting or caulking decks, moving things, large objects, etc. and then my time was taken up with planning or coordinating and managing and being the link with the dockyard and the volunteers.

Terry performed both mental and manual work, but later he focused on planning and management. Jaswant, a lower middle-class council manager, was one of the founding trustees of an independent primary school, and her tasks included fundraising, teaching, governing, and doing the day-to-day school administration. Rather than splitting complex and routine tasks between different individuals, these eight participants had a mix of both in their roles. Their work supported contributive justice.

Gomberg (2007) and Sayer (2009) argue that people who perform skilled tasks are likely to develop their own abilities and self-esteem. Many participants explained the creative, intellectual and technical aspects of their unpaid work. Kamela, an upper middle-class information technology manager, described the different ways she regularly helped at her village church:

> I did all of the desktop publishing for the church, which was good fun, you know, yeah, and of course quite good. Wanting to do more actual material and of course to make it more child friendly and family friendly you know, we have redesigned the whole church magazine … I enjoyed the technical side of it, you know I enjoyed the actual learning of desktop publishing and stuff like that, because I've always been quite good with computers, but that was a learning curve.

Kamela developed her creative and technical abilities as a result of preparing the weekly pew sheet and re-designing the church magazine. She found her work enjoyable and fulfilling. Her skilled work also helped to raise her profile in the local community. In the sample, 11 other participants also explained how their volunteering was stimulating and positively challenging. They learnt new skills and developed as individuals. For example, Geraldine, a lower middle-class postgraduate mature student, described most of her voluntary work over the years as 'sheer intellectual fascination'. She had volunteered as an outreach programme assistant for autistic children at a psychiatric hospital:

> It was the sheer intellectual fascination …. It was just fascinating, it was about how things tick, how it works …. You spend time around kids and what you're seeing is the psychological self as it—it's unfolding in front of you. And I was just like absolutely intrigued by that.

These 12 participants viewed their roles as stimulating and purposeful because they were able to develop their intellectual and cognitive skills. Breen (2007) explains that (paid or unpaid) work cannot be characterised in neutral terms because it has meaningful qualities that are important for achieving human well-being. As Sayer (2009) observes, tasks vary in their capacity to be meaningful and to achieve contributive justice because '[each task] differs in its qualities, in the skills and efforts it requires, and the interest or tedium it tends to generate' (p. 6).

O'Toole and Grey (2016) use the concept of 'thick volunteering' to denote how in some cases a dense web of social relations, especially familial and communal relations,

can make volunteering significant, especially when the work is dangerous. While some voluntary tasks lacked creative or technical challenges, many participants valued the social aspects of volunteering, so that loyalty, friendship, and belonging largely compensated for the lack of mental stimulation. For example, Jackie, a lower middle-class financial administrator, helped her mother, a school secretary, at school events by doing odd tasks, such as re-arranging chairs and tables and collecting money:

> My mum sort of worked as a secretary within the main office, I've gone over and sort of helped out with school fetes even if it's just been setting things up and helping putting all the chairs and tables away afterwards, you know. I will usually, in all fairness, at the request of my mum … just because it would be helping her out.

Jackie's tasks were ad hoc and physical, but she gladly supported her mother and her old primary school, motivated by feelings of care and attachment. Jackie's mother often recruited her husband, children, and friends to help out at school events. Eleven other participants also expressed the importance of family, camaraderie, and social belonging in making volunteering meaningful. At a local wildlife trust, Sandra, a working-class part-time administrator, enjoyed meeting friends and new people while walking and picking up rubbish and weeds through woodlands and along coastlines:

> Sometimes my daughters come along and friends, you know, it depends what they're doing. When I first went to [the wildlife trust] I didn't know anyone there, I was on my own but you just get into that. I think I'm quite sociable.

The camaraderie at the wildlife trust compensated for Sandra's simple task of cleaning up litter. This illustrates how people's experiences and meanings of voluntary work can be shaped by a social web of moral sentiments, norms, and rules, so that the latter can mediate and humanise the unfulfilling qualities of the former. Laaser (2013) explains,

> A moral economy framework enhances an understanding of the employment relationship as not only a thin, rational, economically based and often degrading relationship, but as a thick relationship that embodies on-going inter-and intra-organisational social and moral relationships between people which significantly shape the labour process and mediate its structures. (p. 102)

Bad and less meaningful tasks

Murphy (1993) and Sayer (2009) argue that cognitive abilities and self-development are likely to be stunted if people only perform repetitive and deskilled tasks, or are denied opportunities to combine planning and execution of tasks, thereby producing contributive injustice. Some participants felt frustrated and upset at the lack of autonomy and recognition in their voluntary work. Rosie, a working-class homemaker, was a voluntary classroom assistant at her daughter's school, but she felt the school was taking advantage of her. She was expected to attend school during the week to manage ill-disciplined pupils and to support general activities, but after 4 years, she was not given an opportunity to become a paid assistant:

I started off just doing the odd day and then I ended up doing it nearly every day. Just going in there reading with the children, helping with swimming, going on school trips …. It became a burden in the end, because the school expected me to be there every single day, if I didn't turn up even though it was voluntary and I didn't have to go in they would phone me and say, why are you not in today? And that, I began to feel a bit, resentful as well because there was other people that were going in there that was less qualified than me that weren't giving as many hours as I was, and they were being paid and they were getting employed and I wasn't offered employment …. [A]s time went on I began to feel that, I don't know if I felt that I wasn't good enough because other people were being employed.

Initially, Rosie enjoyed volunteering at the school because she was doing worthwhile outdoor activities, rather than being stuck at home. Furthermore, as a single parent without further and higher educational qualifications, she saw volunteering as a route to paid employment (Taylor, 2004). But over time, she found her tasks arduous and unsatisfying, having little discretion over her work schedule. The school teachers seemed to offload unpleasant tasks onto her, deeming her to be unsuitable for more skilled tasks or paid employment. She felt demoralised and resentful, doubting her self-worth and unable to see any potential for self-development. Gomberg (2016) explains, 'When some do relatively simple labour requiring little training while others carry out more complex tasks often requiring extensive prior training, inevitably a negative stigma attaches to the simple labour and the worker who does it' (p. 46).

Six other participants also felt their dignity and well-being had been undermined because they were unable to exercise meaningful control over their own labour, and lacked power and authority to make effective decisions and to plan and execute activities. Invariably, they performed simple and menial tasks. For example, Jasmine, a lower middle-class freelance information technology consultant, complained that her voluntary service at a spiritual community centre largely consisted of chopping vegetables, washing up, and arranging flowers:

It's a bit of a waste of my experience to think that my service has to be something menial …. I've a lot to offer, and I want to give that in a way maximises what the benefit can be from it …. I guess anyone with any sense can go to a kitchen and chop vegetables and things like that, wash up, but I have skills, a lot of experience.

These seven participants felt frustrated and dissatisfied about their contributions, and wanted to do something fulfilling and purposeful. They were often limited to executing other people's plans and commands, despite being capable of making a creative and strategic input. Ranjit, a lower middle-class bank clerk, only wanted to volunteer to design and maintain a website for his local charity if he could start and finish the project himself, rather than just 'working on a conveyor belt'. Sayer (2009) observes that the unequal qualitative division of labour within organisations produces contributive injustice, giving opportunities to some to engage in stimulating work at the expense of others, who are left to do less satisfying tasks.

Contrary to Eliasoph's (1996, 1998, 2013) approach to bifurcate volunteering into two distinct spheres of public dialogue and work, they are intertwined. In several cases, undertaking routine tasks produced lack of meaningful human connections of

fellow-feelings and social interactions, as Jackie explained when she was asked to knock on people's doors to fundraise for an animal charity:

> I think when I was knocking on people's doors and they were like, 'Oh yeah, fine got that here' and then you'd get the people that would be like, 'Whatever' then they'd perhaps see the envelope and you'd get in to an awkward conversation and you'd, kind of–I didn't enjoy that part and like asking for people for money.

Jackie's interaction and petitioning with strangers on their doorstep were fleeting, impersonal, scripted, and unpleasant, resulting in many of them being abrupt with her. Jackie had no control over her work, and she found the interaction largely limited to asking for money. There was little time to engage in a meaningful conversation or to debate about the charity's goals because she was under pressure to move on to the next house. Five other participants also described how their routine tasks resulted in limited social interactions and dialogue with fellow volunteers and recipients. For instance, Mike, a retired working-class religious worker, volunteered at a historical dockyard, cleaning and painting warships. It was menial work, and he worked alone much of the time. His conversations and interactions with fellow volunteers were minimal and polite:

> When I'm on [the historical warship], I'm dirty, I've got my coveralls are covered in paint, I can get pretty mucky, I usually say to somebody, they might be ex-Navy, 'Oh where do you come from?'

The quality of volunteers' social interactions and relationships to others can be shaped by what kinds of tasks they do, so that deskilled and repetitive roles offer no real opportunity to talk freely on controversial issues in public settings. Ironically, Eliasoph's (1998) normative ideal of an open-ended political conversation is more likely to capture the aspirations of volunteers occupying leadership, planning, and decision-making roles, such as trustees, committee members, and managers, rather than those doing simple and menial tasks lower down the organisational hierarchy. As well as producing contribute injustice, the unequal social division of labour undermines voluntary groups' participatory democratic culture.

Gomberg (2007) argues that the institutionalised nature of the unequal social division of labour in organisations can rationalise and normalise different patterns of interaction and dialogue, limiting people's expectations of active participation to routine roles. In the study, several interviewees knew of their formal rights to raise issues for discussion within their voluntary organisations, but often did not enact them, leaving strategic planning and decision-making to others, who occupied senior roles. For instance, Eve, a working-class part-time hospital porter, paid tithes to her local church, and trusted the pastor and the church elders to make decisions on how to use the church fund:

> It's up to the elders of the church and pastor John obviously, but if you see something or you've got an idea or whatever, then you can go speak to one of the elders or pastor John and say, so and so and so and so or I believe this blah, blah and they'll consider it. I don't have a say in where that money goes …. If you want to know where that money is going, you can go and ask and they'll show you everything, they'll get out all the accounts and everything for you to look

at. So, yeah, it's quite good in that respect. So no, I don't get a saying in where it goes, but I can look at where it goes.

Eve deferred to the commanding positions and knowledge of the pastor and the church elders, believing her own views to be unnecessary. Although she and other church-goers could have made suggestions and looked at financial accounts, the church hierarchy did not actively encourage them to do so. Eve seemed to be content not to exercise her voice, dutifully submitting to the will of the church and finding satisfaction in her faith in God. Four other participants also expressed how they often accepted the decisions and strategies of those in command without engaging in a public dialogue, believing them to be more knowledgeable and deft. Sayer (2009) observes that it is common for people to justify unequal contributions as a reflection of different abilities and skills.

Class and committee members

Sayer (2011) argues that the unequal social division of labour strongly structures the social field, so that class dispositions and capitals affect people's chances to successfully access and participate in valued positions. In the study, 13 upper and lower middle-class participants, including William, Terry, and Jaswant, were committee members. But a couple of lower middle-class participants felt their contribution on the committee was limited because they lacked enough cultural capital to adequately participate in meetings. For instance, Madeleine, a lower middle-class estate agent, had sent her son to an elite school on a musical scholarship, and she sat on the parents' committee, but found the experience very intimidating and upsetting:

> I always felt a bit of an 'oik' compared to the rest of the parents …. They were a different league to me. One was a [politician], one had spent his life writing or re-writing the works of [a musical composer] or someone …. I knew nothing really and they all knew exactly what they were talking about. I mean, you don't learn 20 years of music just sort of popping in-and-out to the Cathedral on occasions so I was never going to catch up, you know, so you always felt a bit of an outsider. So, while I was on the committee, you often felt that they don't give a shit about what I say because they know I don't know nothing! … I just wasn't really you know, my presence wasn't really relevant.

Madeleine's ability to contribute was constrained by other committee members, who felt she lacked the cultural knowledge to say anything of value. She struggled for recognition, and came to doubt her own self-worth and presence on the committee. Three other participants also explained how they or other committee members lacked skills and self-confidence to make meaningful contributions in meetings. Jimmy, a retired lower middle-class management training consultant, was on the committee of the local neighbourhood watch scheme, and believed that other committee members did not participate well:

> [W]e had a meeting last Tuesday and there was 15 people sitting around that table, eight of them never said a word all evening, and I think why are you here, what are you doing here, you haven't got any opinion on any.

These four participants described how meetings lacked equal and open dialogue, because committee members possessed widely differing class dispositions and capitals (cp. Eliasoph, 1997). Sayer (2012) observes that class inequality and symbolic domination do not only partly produce differences in people's contributions, but the latter also reproduce class dispositions and domination.

Several middle-class participants were asked to be on committees because of their social contacts and abilities. For example, Theresa, a lower middle-class personal secretary, became a governor at a primary school because the chair of the governing body had been asked by her to be a governor at another school many years early:

> [My friend] was chair of governors and she had a vacancy on her governing body and said would you, would you like to be a governor because she had been a governor on [my] governing body of [a grammar school].

Theresa and her friend had asked each other to join their respective school governing bodies, vouching for each other's character and abilities. In the sample, five other middle-class participants also described how they recruited or were recruited as committee members through personal and social networks. According to Low et al. (2007: 37), two-thirds of current formal volunteers got involved through word of mouth. People's social capital and networks affect their opportunities to access high-quality roles.

Skeggs (1997) argues that working-class identity is gendered. Whereas working-class women are likely to disassociate themselves from their own class background and desire to pass as middle-class, working-class men are likely to use class as a positive source of identity. In the study, three male working-class participants were committee members, partly driven by a sense of pride of their working-class life. For instance, Ron, retired and formerly a working-class dockyard worker, was the chair of a historical dockyard society:

> The [historical dockyard] society is not all dockyard people, only about 10% are, but they take a pride in the dockyard, as we should take a pride in the dockyard, and we want to educate people, and I find, as I'm ex-dockyard, I can probably educate our members on the dockyard, and give them a feeling of what it was like, you know, I mean the apprenticeship to the dockyard was qualified as one of the best in England, and it's all gone.

Ron started out as an apprentice at the dockyard, and had worked there for many years before it was closed down. He felt both pride and loss. He hoped that the historical dockyard society would educate others about the valuable contributions ex-dockyard workers made to the town and English heritage. In a post-closure context, Parry (2003) argues, 'Pursuing voluntary work enabled individuals to experience enhanced social contact in an environment where their efforts were valued and afforded respect and status' (p. 237). But while having working-class pride can allow some individuals to achieve prized positions, there is little impact on the structural inequalities in the availability of good tasks and roles. Sayer (2009) observes that getting rid of various forms of discrimination is likely to create 'just more diverse groups of winners and losers' without necessarily tackling the unequal social division of labour, or reducing contributive injustice (p. 17).

Sayer (2005) argues that genuine warmth, friendliness, pride, respect, and solidarity are likely to be constrained in organisations where social and organisational inequalities are glaring. In the study, it emerged that class emotions were partly a response to fellow volunteers' positions in organisations which gave them unequal opportunities to meaningful tasks, dignity, and recognition. In the study, a couple of middle-class committee members acknowledged that many non-committee volunteers performed unskilled and dull tasks, and it was their responsibility to keep their morale high and to motivate them. For example, Terry described how in front of dignitaries he would praise his fellow participants, many of whom were doing boring tasks, such as removing rust, cleaning and painting historical warships:

> [W]hen we bring [dignitaries] down, that I make sure that each person, you know I speak to them in front of [dignitaries], saying this person does this, this person does that, and has done a great job, and try and do my background about exactly what they've done and how they've done it and that's my job, to make sure that happens, that they get the pride, they get an award, or just a thank you really, and that probably means more to the guys and girls.

Terry ensured that the volunteers received proper recognition from the committee and important visitors, such as the royal family. He also wrote them personal letters and emails to thank them for their work. He hoped to instil some pride in the volunteers. His efforts also aimed to neutralise role differences, and to treat working-class and lower middle-class participants as equals and with friendliness and respect. But his behaviour could also be interpreted as middle-class condescension and guilt. In situations of unequal positions, pleasantries and compliments can bring about acceptance and accommodation to social and organisational inequalities that normalise class differences and unequal work. A couple of volunteers who cleaned and painted historical warships refused to be patronised by committee members and dignitaries, and wanted to be valued for their personal qualities, as Mike explained:

> I've talked to the Chief Executive, if he walked past me and I had a paint brush I would offer it to him …. I call him by his Christian name. I mean if I see [him] I really give him a rough time, but it's that friendship I think.

But as Sayer (2005) argues, warmth and friendship are likely to be constrained in workplaces where inequalities are glaring and 'opportunities for embarrassment loom large' (p. 175). Gomberg (2007) suggests that in order to achieve recognition and friendship in organisations, whether paid or unpaid work, everyone ought to have effective opportunities to access meaningful work, that is, to share as equally as possible complex and routine quality tasks. This would also produce contributive justice.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the nature of contributive injustice in the voluntary sector. This required investigating the qualitative nature of the unequal division of unpaid labour within voluntary organisations, and how tasks and roles of widely different

qualities affected people's opportunities to develop their own abilities and self-esteem, and the meaningfulness of their work. The study also wanted to examine how the unequal division of labour structured the social field, and the implications for contributive injustice. This meant exploring how class shaped volunteers' opportunities to participate in complex and skilled tasks and roles. In looking at these issues, the article aimed to make an innovative input to the literature on volunteering and work by exploring how the concepts of contributive injustice, unequal division of labour, and social field were intertwined.

The study found that among the sampled volunteers, there was an unequal distribution of good and bad, more and less meaningful activities. Many volunteers who engaged in complex, skilled, varied, and creative labour were able to develop and exercise their cognitive and social capabilities. They found their contributions to be fulfilling and stimulating, and obtained recognition and self-esteem associated with them. In several cases, volunteers were able to both plan and execute their tasks, making their work rewarding and purposeful (Murphy, 1993). In addition, some volunteers made friends and had a sense of social belonging, making their shared tasks also satisfying. But for volunteers who engaged in routine, deskilled, and menial tasks, the effects were mostly negative and harmful. Their cognitive and social capabilities were restricted, affecting their ability to have open and equal dialogue with others, or to cultivate friendliness, self-respect, and solidarity. The study also showed that class had significant effects on people's opportunities to access meaningful work (Gomberg, 2007). Most upper middle-class and many lower middle-class volunteers performed complex and varied tasks. But in some cases, lower middle-class volunteers felt that their participation in quality roles was constrained by upper middle-class co-participants, who believed them to lack knowledge and abilities. Many male working-class volunteers performed unskilled tasks, often lacking class dispositions and capitals to seek good activities (Dean, 2016). Although a few male working-class participants did become committee members, partly driven by a sense of class pride.

The article argued that in this study, contributive injustice was evident in the qualitative nature and structure of volunteers' tasks. First, while many volunteers performed good tasks, poorer quality ones were avoided or passed on to others. There was little evidence of volunteers and organisations wanting or having rules to equally share or rotate complex and routine tasks. When some people only do fulfilling tasks while others undertake mundane ones, contributive injustice emerges (Gomberg, 2007). Second, in most cases, there was a separation between mental and manual work, as volunteers either held decision-making and managerial roles, or had no control over the design of their work. The lack of unity of conception and execution of tasks meant that labour did not embody possibilities of self-realisation, autonomy, and self-esteem (Breen, 2007; Murphy, 1993). Third, the unequal social division of labour meant that the more satisfying types of work were concentrated into a subset of positions, and volunteers with significant cultural and social capital were more likely to access them. Class exacerbated the structural effects of the unequal social division of labour in the social field to produce capabilities inequalities and deficiencies among the participants, and hence contributive injustice (Sayer, 2012).

In conclusion, the moral economy of labour perspective examines and evaluates how the unequal division of labour can affect people's capabilities and well-being, and hence how contributive injustice can occur. Drawing upon this perspective, the article explored

what kinds of voluntary work promoted or diminished the quality of civic engagement, public talk, and human well-being. It argued that the participants' experiences and meanings of volunteering were affected by how the unequal social division of unpaid labour was organised and institutionalised. Whether unpaid voluntary tasks were fulfilling or unexciting depended on what degree of autonomy and responsibility the participants had over their own labour to make decisions about how to design and execute work. Furthermore, complex tasks were more valued and esteemed than routine ones because they helped to develop and exercise cognitive and social capabilities. Their understanding of volunteering was also shaped by 'thick' social and moral interactions and relationships that helped to mediate and humanise the dull and menial aspects of the labour process.

One of the key findings of the study was that the unequal social division of labour produced contributive injustice because most tasks split planning and execution of tasks between different individuals, and most organisations had unequal divisions of labour into tasks of widely different qualities. While some people were able to perform attractive tasks and roles, others were left to do unpleasant ones. The study also showed that the social field was structured by the unequal social division of labour, and that merely countering symbolic domination through less class contempt and more class pride had little impact on the overall structural nature of capabilities inequalities and deficiencies, and hence on contributive injustice.

The moral economy of labour perspective also offered some criticisms of Eliasoph's (1998) symbolic interactionist approach to volunteering. While Eliasoph's (1996, 1997) analysis rightly gives attention to the quality of civic practices and public dialogue within voluntary groups, it does not examine how the unequal social division of unpaid labour structures the social field, so that class socialisation, dispositions, and forms of capitals affect people's opportunities and authority to perform quality tasks and roles, and to engage in open-ended conversations in public settings. Although in more recent works, Eliasoph (2011, 2013) recognises that social inequalities and leadership structures limit participatory democracy and grassroots activism, she does not offer an explicit or extensive discussion on the negative impact of the unequal social division of unpaid labour. Finally, it is problematic to bifurcate volunteering into two distinct spheres of public dialogue and work and to valorise the former and to deny the latter any value for human flourishing. Although Eliasoph understands social justice in terms of participatory democracy, contributive justice is also a matter of importance for human well-being given that work is a source of meaning and fulfilment.

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